

AN EXAMINATION OF RELIGION

OR,

DOUBTS ON RELIGION

WHEREOF A CLARIFICATION IS SOUGHT IN GOOD FAITH

BY

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ALSO INCLUDED:

ON THE CONDUCT A GOOD MAN  
SHOULD OBSERVE DURING HIS LIFE

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ON THE CONDUCT A GOOD MAN SHOULD OBSERVE DURING HIS LIFE

# TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

In his celebrated history of the Enlightenment, Peter Gay wrote that even if this movement's radical thinkers had many differences, a "single passion" united them all: "the passion to cure the spiritual malady that is religion, the germ of ignorance, barbarity, hypocrisy, filth, and the basest self-hatred<sup>1</sup>." Gay continues that:

It is true that...the philosophes disagreed on their prescriptions for health...[but all of them] conceded to the deists that natural religion alone--a religion without miracles, priestly hierarchies, ritual, divine saviors, original sin, chosen people, and providential history--was tolerable and intellectually respectable. All other religions deserved to be extirpated: this was the meaning of Voltaire's slogan--which was also the slogan of the others--*Ecrasez l'infâme*.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the well-known "philosophes" of the Enlightenment were "not lonely innovators. Rather they were gifted popularizers"<sup>3</sup> of an already long tradition of freethought: Voltaire "invented nothing. He merely brought out into the open a battle that had been fought underground for more than half a century<sup>4</sup>." Maybe even longer than that: a post-, even anti-Christian deism had already been observed in the late 1500s; a poem called "The Deist's Quatrains" caused a stir among the courtiers of the French crown in the 1620s<sup>5</sup>. These pioneers opened the way for a flood of deistic manuscripts that circulated in the late 1600s and early 1700s.

Looking back from a future where atheism has become far more prevalent than its deistic rival, it's tempting to see the latter as a sort of lukewarm position held by people who irrationally refuse to let go of God, despite a claim to have embraced reason. This is a mistake that quickly evaporates upon reading some of the classic deistic texts, including this one, the anonymous *Examination of Religion*.

The *Examination* was one of the most widely circulated books in the Enlightenment, with 53 known copies currently identified in European libraries<sup>6</sup>. Despite such wide diffusion, or maybe because of it, the *Examination* was a protean fireball: it was often chopped up and re-divided, reorganized,

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (Norton: 1966), p. 373.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. The motto means to crush or destroy what is infamous, scandalous, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., 384.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., 385.

<sup>5</sup> My collection *God / Reason / Nature* includes a translation of this text.

<sup>6</sup> Winfried Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus* (frommann-holzboog, 2012), p. 468; Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 690.

added to and abridged. It was reproduced under 17 different titles<sup>7</sup>, and attributed to at least a dozen different people<sup>8</sup>.

Gianluca Mori's edition of this work<sup>9</sup> establishes the attribution of the work to César Chesneau Du Marsais, tutor to the sons of John Law and author of the article "Philosopher" in the Encyclopedia of Diderot and D'Alembert. Mori dates the work between 1710 and 1720. Voltaire gave it new life by including it in his 1765 anthology, *L'Évangile de la Raison*.

As for the content, the *Examination* presents one of the most savage and thorough attacks ever penned on the phenomenon of religion (in fact, at one point the author informs us that his purpose is to "destroy religion"). It opens by arguing that everyone owes it to themselves to investigate the basis of their own faith: surely, "the truth has no fear of examination"; there is no safety in keeping to one's native religion, since it's always possible that we're worshipping God in a way that offends Him.

Next comes a simple epistemology: we can only know things by faith or reason, and faith presupposes a prior reason: once we are convinced of the truth of revelation, but not until then, reason can keep silent. If there is a true religion out there, it must offer certain, convincing proofs so that we can surrender our reason to the faith. But none of them do.

This first part of the book (chapters 2-8) is destructive, leveling a devastating attack on revealed religion and the central articles of the revealed faith: the Bible, the ministry of Jesus, the Church and its councils, the Church Fathers, the martyrs, prophecy, the Trinity, and Original Sin.

The remainder (chapters 9-11) offers a positive replacement, a life-affirming, worldly deism. The book teaches a conscientiously de-anthropomorphized God: people make God in their own image, judge Him according to their limited conceptions: "Men ordinarily consider God as a great king, as a father, as a judge, ultimately, as a powerful man." In reality, God is "infinitely higher" than anything we can understand and couldn't care less about any worship from His creatures.

What about man, in this system? In a natural order, properly understood, there is also no free will. We are what we are because of particular movements of our "liquids" and organs. Everything we do is, whether we know it or not, done "mechanically", automatically, guided by forces we can't see. In the final analysis, only God is self-determining, not us. And when we die, "we will contribute to the order of the universe... Death is necessary to the order of nature". Just as "leaves fall, men die".

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<sup>7</sup> Ira O. Wade, *The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750* (Octagon, 1967), p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> Wade, op. cit., pp. 152-58. Several scholars accept the attribution, at least in part, to César Chesneau Dumarsais (1676-1756). See the critical edition by Gianluca Mori: *Examen de la religion ou Doutes sur la religion dont on cherche l'éclaircissement de bonne foi*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999 (pp. 23-81).

<sup>9</sup> Oxford, The Voltaire Foundation, 1998.

There is no connection between God and morality: nature is God's product; as far as He is concerned, all things are good: of course, there was no fall: we are, as it were, still in the Garden of Eden. We should not fight our natural urges, for "habitual inclination is the clear sign God gives us of His will." Ultimately, "there is...neither any punishment to fear, nor any reward to hope for, from God: there is, therefore, no religion." As for what is right and wrong on the "immanent frame", among humans: human interests, social norms, incentive structures, the inner life, and pleasure and pain are, or should be, sufficient to keep our behavior within proper bounds.

The *Examination* contains a unique chapter arguing against any role for religion in social cohesion: far from founding and maintaining the social order, religious dogma and practice (especially, for the author, the Catholic variety) are, in fact, toxic to human society: its hatred of the pleasures God ordained to encourage the reproduction of the species, its (hypocritical) preaching against ambition and wealth, contempt for trade (which it calls "the soul of society"), let alone its encouragement to the idle speculation of the monastery. Society can do well enough without all these things: it is based on reason, mutual affection and respect, while human sanctions and punishments are sometimes necessary.

#### On the Conduct a Good Man Should Observe During His Life

Also included is a closely related text, whose title is nearly identical to the last chapter of the *Examination*. "On the Conduct" had a narrower circulation than the *Examination* and it was never published. Scholars differ on the relationship between the two texts. For Ira Wade, it came first, and the *Examination of Religion* borrowed from it<sup>10</sup>. Others consider the text an expansion of the *Examination's* last chapter. Wade, again, calls it both a defense of freethinking and "the simplest expression of the deistic creed": all religions contain absurdity, and religious superstition is a worse offense to God than atheism. The author lingers on the point that atheism, as shown by the examples of so many professed atheists, is no barrier to virtue. Therefore, the reasonable man has the right to choose his own way, think for himself, and enjoy the good things in the world: his only duties are to honor God and live virtuously.

The research of Alain Mothu and Gianluca Mori on the "affaire Guillaume"<sup>11</sup> leads to the attribution of this text to the curé Etienne Guillaume, who composed a manuscript text containing excerpts from a great number of authors aiming to constitute a *Treatise of the three impostors*, of which he had heard but never managed to read. Of Guillaume's work, we now know only some fragments: *The mortal soul*, a *Preface to a treatise on religion* and *On the conduct a good man should observe*, this latter work being almost entirely composed of extracts from the works of Pierre Bayle.

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<sup>10</sup> Wade, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>11</sup> *La Lettre clandestine*, 12 (2003), pp. 311-379.

# AN EXAMINATION OF RELIGION<sup>12</sup>

## CHAPTER I. *WHETHER IT IS PERMITTED FOR EVERYONE TO EXAMINE HIS RELIGION AND WHETHER IT'S NECESSARY TO DO SO.*

1. We should be allowed, and it is, in fact, necessary for everyone to examine his religion: indeed, what, from the beginning of our life until the moment of death, could be of greater interest to us than the state we must enter after our days have come to an end? Our state during our life, whether happy or miserable, might end at any moment: we know that it will end, and the state we'll end up in after death has no borders but those of eternity. In our earliest years, we lack either the capacity or the force it takes to concern ourselves with anything but the present, whose impressions on us keep us from examining the future: this weakness leads us to believe those in whom we find the most enlightenment, and which is, in them, only a byproduct of experience; we see it as the effect of an understanding which is naturally more extensive than ours. They foresee the changing of the seasons, they take measures to safeguard us against them, etc. Religion promises us an eternal happiness and threatens us with an endless misery, according to how we behave in our life, behavior which it prescribes for us: can we, then, be so blinded that we won't examine the source of these promises and threats and its basis?

2. There is no doubting that all sorts of religions contain honest people; I appeal to the testimony of all who have traveled abroad. But if an honest Christian refuses to examine his own religion, how can he ask a Muslim to honestly examine his? The latter believes no less that his religion comes from God, who revealed it through Mohammed, than the Christian believes that God revealed the Christian religion through Jesus Christ. There certainly is injustice among men:

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<sup>12</sup> In translating this text, I first used the edition Voltaire published in 1765, and revised it according to the critical edition available online from the "Philosophie clandestine" project, available at: [http://philosophie-clandestine.huma-num.fr/phcldata/data/doc/ms85\\_Dumarsais-Examen.pdf](http://philosophie-clandestine.huma-num.fr/phcldata/data/doc/ms85_Dumarsais-Examen.pdf). The footnotes are mine.

each sect, each cabal thinks itself infallible, and refuses to apply to itself the objections it raises against others; prejudice doesn't even let us glimpse the danger of this reprisal.

3. The more the truth is examined, the better it is known; according to philosophers, examination and attention are a natural sort of prayer we offer to God, to move Him to help us discover the truth. If the Christian religion is true, an examination will only strengthen our belief in it. If it is false, then we should be glad to be rid of an error.

Religion is, it's said, a precious heritage which fathers have passed on to their children. If this legacy is not a big Nothing, a fiction, what do we have to fear in examining it? If it's a fable, why not recognize that what was delivered to us as something real, is only the product of our ancestors' imagination?

4. We only hold a belief, or a viewpoint, because of reason or prejudice. We hold it due to reason when we embrace it after serious examination, and on basis of demonstrative evidence. We hold it by prejudice when we embrace it by any other means; for example, when we believe that something is so only because our parents, our pastors, our teachers, or our friends have taught it to us and have told us that it was so.

What we believe by reason cannot be false if we have taken all due precautions in forming a sound judgment. What we believe by prejudice can be false or true, and we shouldn't believe either way without serious examination. Thus, when we believe a religion to be true without examination, simply because we were born into it, or because authoritative people taught it to us, we only believe it from prejudice. This religion might, therefore, be false; and even if we follow it in good faith, we are still under threat of the ultimate misery if we are in error and the other sects are on the true path.

If a Christian considers the miserable state of an honest Muslim who is only in his religion due to prejudice, the Muslim thinks the same thing about the Christian as the latter thinks about the Muslim. But, until the Christian has examined his religion, who can say that he isn't in the same miserable condition as the Muslim? What assurance do we have? Is it prejudice? Is it our good faith? But it's undeniable that the same prejudice and good faith are found in every religion.

The Christian is only flattering himself when he thinks that all other religions are plainly evil. In this, he is less honest than Scripture, which says that Jesus Christ appeared to be a madman to the Nations, and that the Jews regard him as their shame, *Gentibus stultitiam, Judaeis scandalum*<sup>13</sup>. All the other Peoples on Earth find us the least rational of all in matters of religion. The Pagans say that we worship a man, a piece of bread, and that we therefore have no advantage over them. The Turks accuse us of multiplying the Divinity. Finally, if we believe that they should embrace our religion, because theirs are full of impertinent things, they reply that nothing is more extravagant than what we call the Mysteries. Thus, since everyone only judges what is ridiculous in his neighbor's religion according to his own prejudices, it seems that nothing but an examination will reassure or disabuse us.

I therefore believe this examination to be not only useful, since it can disabuse us if we are in a false religion or strengthen us if we are in the true one: but, in addition, I find it necessary and indispensable, since we see nothing of greater importance to us than Eternity. An infinite number of men cry out to us, by their words and deeds, that we are in a false religion, that we will suffer eternally; and we are expected to remain calm and not even examine whether so many people are mistaken, or if we are the ones suffering from an illusion!

Let's examine for a moment how small the number of Christians truly is. The Earth has four parts: Asia, Africa, Europe, and America. We can nearly discount the Christians of Asia, Africa, and America; we also damn a portion of the Christians who aren't Catholic. Only Europe remains; the Turk occupies a part of it, the Muscovite, whom we also damn because he is schismatic, possesses a great Kingdom there; we also damn England, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, nearly all of Germany and a large part of Switzerland because they are heretics; how many heretics are there also in the states that remain? I don't pretend to conclude from this small number that we're wrong: but I maintain, if I'm speaking with reasonable people here, that this should, at minimum, encourage us to examine whether we're right. Are other men not, like us, the workmanship of God, and will our pride blind us to the point that we'll believe, without a proper examination, that we're the only ones that God will save?

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<sup>13</sup> “[We preach Christ crucified]: foolishness to Gentiles, a scandal to Jews” (1 Cor 1:23).

Besides, should I not be on guard in case I'm not in fact doing God's will? For, ultimately, before any examination, I have no assurance that I'm following it, and I must join David in saying, *Notum fac mihi viam in qua ambulem, doce me justificationes tuas*<sup>14</sup>; how could I, without this examination, discern between human fables and the Law of God? *Narraverunt mihi iniqui Fabulationes, sed non ut Lex tua*<sup>15</sup>.

In the world everything circulates, including religion. The Orient was the center of paganism; then that of the Christian religion: today it belongs to the Muslim one. The odd thing here, which relates to the subject of this chapter, is that the ancient Christians who succeeded the pagans, mocked that religion. The Muslims of today, who came after the Christians, ridicule them without cease, they mourn for them, they pity them. Is it the Muslim, or the Christian who's mistaken?

5. Man should act only by reason: even God only acts on us by this means; and the theologians agree that He enlightens the mind before He warms the heart. Faith comes by hearing, says Scripture, that is, faith comes to us because men tell us that God has revealed certain truths; faith therefore presupposes reason, and the latter of these should only fall silent when it is led to faith. That is, reason, which shows us that God is infallible, should convince us of the revelation, after which it should believe blindly. But, since God doesn't reveal religion to us by Himself, we should always examine whether what certain men offer to us is preferable to what other men also offer elsewhere. For men are not infallible, and since it's men who teach Revelation to us, it is certain, as the author of *De la Recherche de la Verité*<sup>16</sup> also notes, that "everything that men teach us is subject to our reason." "It isn't permissible to believe men on their words alone," says the same author; "it's insufficient proof to believe something, simply to have heard it said by a man who speaks with zeal and gravity. For, ultimately, is it not possible to utter falsehoods and inanity, in the same way as one speaks the truth, especially if one lets oneself be persuaded by simplicity or weakness?" Haven't all the authors of the different religions spoken in this manner?

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<sup>14</sup> "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; teach me thy statutes" (Psalm 143:8, 119:12).

<sup>15</sup> "The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law" (Psalm 119:85).

<sup>16</sup> I.e., Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715). The quotations that follow come from book IV in the book cited.

In matters of importance, we like to explain our behavior, we don't want to act haphazardly; why would we be any less demanding in matters of religion? Is there anything of greater importance to us than the state we'll be in eternally?

If we must bring no innovation into matters of religion, if antiquity is its defining characteristic, what should the Jews say in the face of the great upheaval which Jesus Christ tried to bring to their religion? This change was new at that time, it was never predicted by them: on the contrary, they awaited the Messiah under a different guise. Luther and Calvin changed the Catholic faith far less, and they were called innovators.

In the Christian religion, God is presented as a subtle sophist, or a fine trickster, since He is made to send His son *incognito* to a single people, and then judge the rest of humanity: *I have sent you my son, etc.*

6. Therefore, if we resolve to follow the will of God precisely in matters of religion, we should start by offering Him a sacrifice of our prejudices. Nearly everyone maintains, forcefully and zealously, things which they've been encouraged from childhood to venerate and be fond of; those things we learned from authoritative people, those we trusted, have made deep grooves in our brain; nature has connected certain thoughts to these grooves, and few of us can efface them and make new ones, which reason alone can do: pride, interest, and prejudice are three obstacles in religious matters which few can overcome.

He who is mistaken in good faith and who has no way to escape it, has an excuse: but shall we forgive those who refuse to make the effort or be diligent enough to inform themselves? Is it not alarming to see people who in all other matters are sensible, but when it comes to religion, fall serenely into impertinence, dressing in a certain way, making turns, U-turns, babbling, now loudly, now silently, trifling with a piece of bread, showing it, hiding it, climbing up on an altar, descending again, climbing a second time, etc.?

7. Those who say that they will lose nothing by staying in the Christian religion, fail to see that, in this way, they sin against this very religion, since it obliges them to believe, not to simply avoid risk by following it: but that one is obliged to follow it, and that those who don't follow it are

damned. Besides, people say the same thing in the other religions. The Turk says that he runs no risk by following the religion of his Fathers, which is that of nature, that the Christian risks everything by following a triplicate God, a God in a piece of bread, a God-man, in brief, many things opposed to the right lights of reason: that it would mean risking everything to follow a doctrine contrary to this light, which constantly comes from God. Therefore, one's religion must be examined.

8. Men have always been so cognizant of the need for a revelation to establish a religion, that all the founders of sects have boasted that God revealed to them what they taught to others. But if God revealed it to one of them, it would have cost Him nothing to reveal it to the others as well. God is present everywhere when He preserves, present when He reveals. To certain movements, certain impressions are connected; you receive nothing but the motions bound up with the impression that your religion is the true one; you can only believe this by examining the cause of these motions.

Unction is dependent on temperament; it's the prerogative of tender temperaments. Fénelon, the Archbishop of Cambrai, wrote with unction against Bossuet, the Bishop of Meaux. St. Jerome wrote with unction against St. Augustine, St. Paul against St. Peter. St. Cyprian maintained with unction that the baptism of heretics was worthless. Everyone believes they speak the language of the Holy Ghost: by what token can it be recognized? But most of the time, ambition is the decisive factor; we are men, don't we truly know how other men can be either impostors or dupes?

9. Everyone knows that religion is not uniform throughout the world. In the same climate, in the same city, we're taught in different spots, under the title of religion, dogmas which are different and completely opposed to each other. The ones taught in England are incompatible with those taught in Rome. The religion of the Chinese excludes that of the Persians; each society thinks itself infallible and calls down thunder on the religion of its neighbors.

It's hard to imagine a worse blindness than being blind in the face of such a pressing matter: we only have our good faith and the prejudice of education to reassure us. But is this enough to rest easy? Don't the other religions equally offer us examples of good faith, and an education which provides the same assurance? So, let everyone examine their religion, let them see that they are

free of the same error they find in their neighbor; for, in the end, the truth has no fear of examination.

But what a frightful detail, it's said, to examine which religion is the true one! There are more religions than nations; besides, we must be precise, judiciously critical, to discern the true from the false: this is why people get dizzy: but most of our errors and contradictions come from the fact that we argue about words before we've established their true meaning. And so, before we can see if our religion is preferable to the rest, let's establish what religion is, and what it means to believe: we may end up passing over a detail that frightens us.

All questions of religion come down to this: knowing whether God has spoken, and which truths He has revealed. This will be examined in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER II. *WHAT RELIGION IS. ON THE PROOFS THAT THE TRUE RELIGION SHOULD OFFER, AND THE CONDITIONS THAT THESE PROOFS SHOULD HAVE.*

1. Religion is the worship that men say that God requires them to honor Him with, by obliging them to believe certain things and to practice others. False religion refers to any worship of God by men, when God hasn't revealed or required it. *To believe* is to submit one's reason what God has revealed; thus, faith presupposes divine authority, and, consequently, to say that we must believe without reasoning is to maintain that we must suppose that God revealed certain dogmas to us, without examining whether it is true that God actually did reveal them, which tends simply to authorize all manner of religions. If it is of the essence of the true religion to be revealed by God, then there is no true religion if God has never revealed one. Thus, to examine whether there is a true religion in the world is to examine whether God has revealed a worship which He requires of men.

No truth is more obvious than this: that God cannot deceive us, not only because He is supremely good; but because it's a weakness to engage in deception, and God is free from every weakness. What sort of a farce would this mean God is performing? Every century has seen the production of new religions; each of which boasts of being the true one, the one God has revealed. Such inconstancy and variety are no less the product of God: He is immutable and incapable of deceiving anyone; and besides, He is all-powerful, no being does anything that's contrary to His will. Thus, all that is believed on the basis of divine revelation, is believed by God's own reason, and consequently, for reasons that are clearly more certain than any geometrical demonstration.

Divine authority is, therefore, the basis of faith. Thus, all the theologians teach, with St. Thomas, that the existence of God is not an article of faith that's presupposed, on the contrary, *non objectum fidei, sed scientiae*<sup>17</sup>, that one is already fully convinced of the existence of a being who is incapable of deceit, since, they say, when it is asked why you believe, the response is, because God said so; thus, faith presupposes:

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<sup>17</sup> "Not the object of faith, but of knowledge"

1. That God is known prior believing,
2. That one is convinced that He has spoken.

Ordinary people, who only act according to prejudice, fail to distinguish things of reason from things of faith, at times they inaptly submit faith to reason, as when they take the liberty of examining the substance of the Mysteries: at other times, without discernment, they submit reason to faith, as when they don't dare to doubt anything that their teachers and pastors have taught them.

Since, to distinguish true faith from all the errors, it must have no foundation other than itself, it can't have a more solid one than reason, of which God alone is the author; thus, reason should lead us to the true faith, and serve us by discerning it from the fables invented by human malice. But when reason has led us to faith, it should hold its tongue, or if it does speak, it should only tell us that it knows, with certainty, that it should submit entirely to faith. Reason knows God and examines with all the more certainty the truth of the revelation, as it sees that nothing is more dangerous than to mistake phantoms for revealed truths or revealed truths for phantoms; but when it recognizes that God speaks, it listens and falls silent.

2. We have said that religion is the form of worship which men say that God requires of them. God alone, then, should have revealed it to men, otherwise there would be no reason to claim that God asked it of us. The proofs for this Revelation shouldn't be dubious. God is too just to act otherwise.

I don't find that my reason, which constantly comes to me from God, inclines me more in the direction of one religion than another; thus, the truths of religion are not innate and metaphysical truths, perceived and known everywhere; rather, they are truths which depend on facts. They are also truths that I should not believe lightly, for fear of worshiping God in an unauthorized manner; thus, far from any need to believe blindly in matters of religion, it can be said that there is nothing which calls for greater circumspection and where one should be slower to give assent, and consequently, the proofs of the true religion should be clear, convincing, and simple.

3. If my religion can offer no proofs which don't also work for all other religions, proofs which are dubious, uncertain, not liable to discussion, then I would have good reason to mistrust and disbelieve all of them.

If God wants me to honor Him with a particular cult, it belongs to His goodness and justice to manifest it clearly to me. I can't resist this truth, I learn it from the nature of God Himself, who is infinitely good; and I would find it cruel to refuse clear proofs of His will, I who am eager to follow it, and who only seek and examine it for fear of being misled, and taking human illusions for truths, or taking truths for human illusions.

4. Everything that comes to us by human means is liable to error, since men are not infallible: *omnis homo mendax*<sup>18</sup>. God should not, therefore, make His truths depend on human traditions; He is too just to subject me to such an untrustworthy motive, and it might indeed be called cruelty for God to require men to submit on basis of what other men tell them, about a light which comes from Him, and which tells us the complete opposite of what men promulgate. See Charron, *On Wisdom*, ch. V, art. 8.

The proofs of religion should be clear because we have reason which, coming to us from God, cannot be bad. But when this reason opposes what men tell us about religion, we should not suppress this sure light in favor of mere probabilities. This would be an abuse of the most precious gift that God ever gave to man; we need proofs that are certain, free from all contradiction, before we submit to religion a light which comes to us from God; and which is so uniform in all men. The truth is free of any contradiction.

Far from being clear, the proofs of religion are the most muddled thing we know. And, if we're not convinced that the Christian religion is a pure invention of men, it remains impossible to know whether what the Roman Church believes today is the same thing that it believed in the past. All the books of Scripture and the Fathers have been subjected to the countless mistakes of copyists; certain individuals, such as Esdras and St. Jerome, have found it fitting to reform them at various times; even the Benedictines nowadays find it appropriate to produce editions of the Fathers. There were infinitely many different sects at the beginnings of the Church; when the Fathers

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<sup>18</sup> "Every man is a liar".

refuted certain Errors, they fell into the opposite extremes. Everything was a great jumble, therefore, none of all these fine things is the handiwork of God, who never changes, whereas the things men make are subject to change, like men themselves: an effect is never more perfect than its cause.

5. True religion should not rely on false proofs; God is immutable, all that is change cannot be suited to Him. The Christian religion has changed too often, in both worship and appearance, to have ever been inspired by God: Adam and the ancient Patriarchs honored God differently than their descendants, Moses changed the face of the Jewish people. Solomon brought even further changes, Jesus Christ made something completely different. St. Paul showed that God didn't want any more victims. Every century, each council has brought some new discipline, I might even say some new dogma; and this will readily be conceded by every honest person. No, all these changes are not the work of God, and only too easily reveal the hand of man.

6. The principal condition, or rather the true feature of the true religion, is that it doesn't give us a false idea of God. This condition is wholly absent from the Christian religion. Pure reason gives us a far worthier idea of God than the Christian religion. The latter always represents God to us as a man; it is supposedly an accommodation to our weakness when Scripture speaks this way. This is how they excuse the absurdity in the expressions used by Scripture, when it speaks of God: but this excuse will only satisfy the biased mind. If Scripture accommodates itself to our weakness, to help us grasp what we don't know by reason, if it gives me parables to explain the qualities, [meanings] of the word of God, that's fine: but I can't understand how it's an accommodation to my weakness, to speak of God in terms that are repugnant to my idea of Him!

My Reason tells me that God sees everything equally, that He is present everywhere, since He preserves everything; that, in order to preserve, He must act; that, to act anywhere, He must be present there; since action presupposes presence. In a word, God is everywhere, this I know; but Scripture, accommodating my weakness, tells me that God goes looking for Adam in the Earthly Paradise, that He calls out to him, *Adam, Adam, ubi es?*<sup>19</sup> that God takes a stroll there; that God has a conversation with the Devil about Job.

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<sup>19</sup> "Adam, where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9)

My reason tells me that God is a pure spirit; that if He were corporeal He would be divisible, while Scripture, adapted to my weakness, tells me that God has arms; it speaks of him as if of a man; and this is why some ancient Fathers, like Tertullian, maintained that God was corporeal and proved this from Scripture.

My reason tells me that God should not be subject to any passion, that He should have infinite foresight, and that He is eternally immutable; while religion teaches me that God, talking to Himself, pronounced these fine words, *I regret that I made man*<sup>20</sup>. that His wrath was not without effect: He destroyed man with the flood; and, as if He were unable to foresee that men would return to the same condition, He preserved a family which produced them again, just like the first ones. God is so weak, according to the history of the Christian religion, that He can't reduce man to the point He wants them, He punished them by water, then by fire; man remained the same; He sent Prophets, but man didn't change. Finally, He was obliged to send His only son and sacrifice him for man, and yet men remain the same. What ridiculous efforts the Christian religion has God making! This isn't all, my reason tells me in vain that God is omnipotent, that another will than His can't be fulfilled anywhere; the Christian religion gives an adversary for God who is nearly as powerful and great as God Himself. This is the Devil. Scripture and religion stage a perpetual Combat between God and the Devil, who always wants to steal His creatures: *circuit quaerens quem devoret*<sup>21</sup>, and he succeeds in doing so. No sooner had God created a man than the Devil enslaved him: at what great cost was God able to tear man out of the claws of his enemy! Even so, He only managed to tear a few away. He had to sacrifice His only son; and only then does He say, *nunc princeps hujus mundi ejicietur foras*<sup>22</sup>, now, behold, I am the master of the battlefield.

According to the Christian religion, we only sin because of temptation; the Devil tempts us: if God had wanted it, we would all be saved: He would have been spared the death of His son. He ought, being all-powerful, to annihilate the Devil. No more Devil, no more temptation, thus, no more sin, consequently everyone would be saved. God doesn't, therefore, want to save us.

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 6:7

<sup>21</sup> "Prowling around...as he looks for someone to devour" (Peter 5:8).

<sup>22</sup> "Now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31)

7. If God only put His son to death to satisfy His own vengeance, and because this son wished, due to his good nature, to assume the sins of mankind, I wonder if that doesn't completely reverse the idea reason gives us of God? Vengeance is a passion which can't be suitable for God.

Religion makes God perform the most absurd of farces. God gives us the commandments, the Christian religion teaches us that we couldn't keep them without the grace which God gives as He pleases, but that God can still punish those who don't follow them.

To go into greater detail, it wouldn't be hard to show that the Christian religion gives us a baser idea of God than any other religion has ever done. If the pagans hadn't multiplied their divinities and made their Gods so sensual, what reason would we have to criticize them? The Christians make God triple, unjust, weak, changeable, contradicting Himself in a hundred ways, whether as the author of grace, or as the author of nature. What can we conclude from all that, if not that the Christian religion was imagined by brains which were no smarter than those who imagined the other religions?

8. The proofs of religion are far from being clear, and it was far from being certain and well-grounded from the start, instead all we see is disturbance on all sides. The Christian religion was so shaky from its birth that, in fact, it was busy nursing many different sects in its bosom. We see that religion, far from having been more clear and well established in its beginnings, as it would have been if God had inspired it, it has instead been clarified over time; it has made the same progress as any other secular state: its first leaders were simple outcasts, and are now above all the princes, since they claim to have the right to command them.

I can't help myself from making an observation which is quite revelatory of the state of man in the Christian religion. When it's asked why Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the other first heads of the Church lived in an extreme poverty, so that they were even obliged to make a living for themselves, the typical response is that this was to teach men contempt for riches and pride. It's because, they say, preaching a doctrine which is completely opposed to common sense, it was necessary to convince the people, both by example and words. When one asks why the heads of the Church and the priests of this time preached to the masses, with an indefatigable zeal,

contempt for riches, while they seek them eagerly and scrupulously: in this do they follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ and the apostles? What reply can be given to that?

The next question is why Jesus Christ and the apostles didn't openly preach the mysteries of the Christian religion, why Jesus Christ kept his miraculous incarnation a secret, why the apostles and ancient Fathers didn't speak of the Eucharist, the reply is that they wanted to spare the people, by a wise tactic called economy. Ask again, why the cardinals and bishops, who are the heads of the Church, are so powerful and live with such splendor and magnificence. The reply is that this is to control the masses, who need to be imposed upon.

Say, if you like, that this different situation of the religion, this change in the conduct of its leaders doesn't show a different situation in the mind of the masses, which is always the same: but it shows a different situation in those who govern the Church, who, recognizing the folly of those who abandon their riches to live poor like Jesus Christ, do what they can to live like kings and princes, in an equally great debauchery and in an equally great splendor. Which is completely opposite to what they preach: but that's a flaw in men rather than religion. Jesus Christ and the apostles would have met with difficulty in making Princes: they were too aware of the absurdity of their mysteries to preach them publicly to any but those whose minds they were able to capture, and who couldn't turn back after going so far.

It's also asked, why are the mysteries preached publicly when they were hidden in the past? The reply is made that, since the mysteries are as well-known as they are, it would be pointless to try and hide them. What is certain is that the mysteries of the Christian religion were only revealed after a position of strength had been obtained, to back them up with force.

If God had dictated the Christian religion from the beginning, when it was closer to its origins, its mysteries would have been more public and well known; and they would have been publicized with greater confidence and liberty. Is it not absurd to say that the masses of today need all this splendor to keep them in awe; while in former times they were able to do without this; and that, on the contrary, the masses in our day are better able to handle the mysteries? Why have the masses, now accustomed to the mysteries, not also adopted to the modesty of their pastors? If the present-day masses are able to handle a destroyed God, a despised God, a God found in a piece of bread, a God who's exposed to all the insults of the worst sort of men, then, dear Prelates, have no fear, they will easily recognize you, even when you're not in the Prince's retinue. See

how he bows before his God, runs the streets in the hands of a poor Priest, who walks at all times, in all places, in all seasons. He will pay you all due respect when you return to walking as St. Peter did, since, after so many centuries, he's never failed to recognize his God, who has never changed His retinue.

We might well say that the pastors' disorder, ambition, softness, and lubricity is a manifest proof of the falseness of religion because it is certain that they should be better informed about it than anyone else. But if they truly were convinced of it, they would practice it, and since they don't practice it at all, it must have no persuasive proofs.

9. Religion should have been better determined at the beginning, since then it was closer to its source; this is why, in matters of religion, antiquity is always cited. New explanations are certainly allowed, but with this rule, *cum dicas nove, non dicas nova*<sup>23</sup>. However, there's no doubt that the Christians of our day, who are said to be more imperfect, are not, for all that, better theologians and know more dogmas than the ancient ones.

10. Today's morality is quite different from that of the past; our books of piety are of a very different taste. St. Paul, who boasted of being raptured up to the 3rd Heaven, and who should not have been unaware of the rules of morals, failed to give us, in fourteen epistles, even one essential piece of advice for contemporary spiritual life. Which ancient book commended the faithful to frequent the sacraments? Were they ever taught the conditions for a good confession, the preparations for Communion? Which book of piety in our days, though, doesn't cover all these things? Nothing in all antiquity is as worthwhile as the *Spiritual Battle*<sup>24</sup>, or the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*, these are [regarded as] real books of piety.

But, in all good faith, where does that leave us? What, then is our rule? Does religion change in every century?

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<sup>23</sup> Roughly: "While the expression may be new, the thing said be ancient".

<sup>24</sup> Lorenzo Scupoli (1530-1610), *Le Combat spirituel* (1589).

11. Despite the darkness that surrounds us in this world, and despite how little we know, what we do know for certain is that what is obscure, what we can't conceive of, has no right to our assent. It's not right to say: *why do you deny these mysteries, since so many things are beyond our grasp?* The fact that I can't conceive the mysteries of nature doesn't imply that there are any supernatural mysteries. I see that there are mysteries in nature, and I can't explain them. So, what I do have to confess in all frankness is that these mysteries exist, although I am unaware how they are performed, because the fact and the cause, so to speak, of these natural mysteries is certain. But I have no reason to make me believe that there are mysteries in the order of grace, and especially such a particular mystery such as the Trinity, the Incarnation; for, not only can I not conceive how they might be, but I have nothing to convince me that they exist.

12. That it's hard to be convinced, or to find certainty about the revelation of certain speculative truths, which are not necessary for salvation, matters little to me. But the proof of the truths that are essential for all men must be clear and easy, or there aren't any. If the explanation of religion is difficult, religion would be a proof of the intelligence and subtlety of men, rather than of their obedience and faithfulness.

"The certainty of faith", says the author [Malebranche] of the *Recherche de la Verité*, (theology agrees with him), "depends on this principle, that there is a God, who is not capable of deceiving us", and that God has revealed what He wants us to believe. So, I should not believe before I know if God has spoken. It would be very dangerous to have Him say what He hasn't said, thus I should only believe when I can no longer doubt that God has spoken.

My Reason tells me that God would only speak to men to compensate for the weakness of their knowledge, which would have been insufficient for their needs, and that whatever He failed to tell them is the sort of thing they can learn for themselves, or unnecessary for them to know.

In science, the plausibility of something is insufficient; demonstration is required. Why would we be content with mere plausibility in religion? Descartes refuses to believe what he sees, while it's only in religion that he covers his eyes. What a fine rationality! If we must cover our eyes in matters of religion, then which one should I embrace? All of them boast that they're the true one; to choose, we must be convinced by clear and evident proofs. If they have none, we must look for one that does; if I cover my eyes, how will I find it?

## CHAPTER III. *HOLY SCRIPTURE.*

1. The language of God should be worthy of Him. The clichés and inadequacies which fill Scripture truly show that it was made by men. Scripture must be incorruptible to be the rule of our faith, it should be written in a language intelligible to all, since all are indispensably obliged to know what God requires of them, and God should teach them before He has the right to punish or reward them. But Scripture is subject to error in every way, it speaks of God in a ridiculous manner, it gives Him a thousand weaknesses; it makes Him speak with the devil about Job, it is subject to the failings of copyists, who have ruined the meaning of many passages. The original Hebrew is full of equivocation: this is the nature of this sterile tongue's words. There are not only passages which the most standard and orthodox interpreters agree were corrupted; but some were even added. Now, if one passage is corrupt, how can I be sure that another one isn't? What guarantee do I have that the books of Scripture were dictated by the Holy Spirit? Jesus Christ didn't leave them to us: not a single book of the New Testament was begun during his life. Muhammad, at least, wrote the Qur'an.

2. The books of Scripture were not only composed by individuals at various times, but these individuals never boasted during their lives that the Holy Spirit had inspired them and dictated what they thought good to write down. What then! Just because a complete revolution took place in the imagination of St. Paul; because he decided to convert after the death of Jesus Christ, he who had dismissed the latter's supposed miracles; finally, just because he decided to write fourteen epistles to various groups; because, over the course of centuries, these epistles were preserved by those of his party, like an infinity of other books of the ancients, therefore I'll be forced to recognize these books as the word of God Himself, and I'll be thought insane if I believe none of it?

3. Doesn't the division of the books of Scripture into proto-canonical and deuterocanonical not show that it's only the whim of men that consecrated them at will? What? Men have only to declare that a book came from Heaven? Again, this will only happen after the book has been around for a certain length of time: for many centuries, it would have been seen as just another book, and then, suddenly, because it contains a useful passage to cite against new so-called

heretics, this book will be canonized and added to the list of books that were inspired by God! This is what happened to many books of Scripture, including the two last books of the Maccabees, since a few passages there have been cited to establish Purgatory. Truly, there is no folly that men aren't prepared to divinize: this is a sure way to gain mastery of the whole universe, to have the right to invent titles for oneself at will.

4. Not only should Jesus Christ himself have produced the books of Holy Scripture, and set them down during his life, but they should not have been vulnerable to the faults of the copyists, and should have some distinguishing feature, otherwise any sensible Indian can only see them as ordinary books. Such a miracle was more necessary and more reasonable than resurrecting the dead. These various wonders, if they're true, could only have been useful to the men who saw them, whereas this miracle would have been effective at all times.

5. The authors of the sacred books didn't present their books as infallible. In any case, they would always have been obliged to justify their mission, and the allegation that the Holy Spirit inspired them. But, far from having such pretensions, they left us their books to us as normal books and even as things written either for certain groups, or certain individuals. The lack of books, the need for authority, ultimately, a human motive is what divinized them. St. Luke wrote to Theophilus, saying in good faith that, since so many other men were writing books, he had the desire to compose one too: *quoniam quidem multi conati sunt ordinare narrationem, visum est mihi tibi scribere, optime Theophile*<sup>25</sup>; and far from boasting of any inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he says that he only wrote after he had been well informed about the matter.

6. Why isn't the language of Scripture natural? Why so many allegories and mysteries? This is, it's said, because allegories and parables belong to the taste and style of Orientals. In that case, Scripture isn't for us; it's only for them: is the Holy Spirit only of the Orient?

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<sup>25</sup> "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished among us...It seemed good to me also...to write to thee...most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:1, 3).

7. Scripture does give us, in a few places, a fine idea of God: the Qur'an also has its charms: but it also frequently gives us a rather unworthy idea of Him. It subjects Him to all manner of passions, especially resentment, regret, and vengeance. God regrets having made man. God speaks with the devil in the book of Job, He indulges in comedy, He looks for Adam in the earthly paradise.

Above all, He often lacks foresight, He makes and unmakes [his own acts] in many places. He chooses Saul and rejects him: what inconstancy! What light-mindedness! Read the story of Jonathan: God gets angry only because this unfortunate son, who was unaware of the vow made by his Father, ate a bit of honey<sup>26</sup>.

Scripture is full of contradictions, because the mind of man, its author, can't sustain itself and keep everything straight. It has God saying in one place that He doesn't punish children for their parents' crimes, and elsewhere that He will make them feel His vengeance until whatever generation.

8. St. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ will never be harmonized with St. Luke's. One evangelist says that Jesus Christ died at the third hour, the other that he died at the sixth. Father Mauduit says, in his dissertation on the Gospel, that this is due to an error in copying. Such an error is the most reasonable thing that can be said about this problem: the interpreters find it easy to recognize copyists' mistakes in Scripture, without realizing that they risk leading us to see Scripture like any other book, subject to the same limitations. If the copyists made mistakes about the facts, what keeps me from thinking that they also made mistakes with respect to the dogmas? And our belief ultimately depends on the imagination of the copyists?<sup>27</sup>

The Church Fathers sensed all these difficulties. They gave us rather ingenious explanations of Scripture. But, in the end, they agreed that a great deal of submissiveness and humility were necessary. But, the more respect one has for the divinity, the more we should avoid any chance of taking human fables for the word of God. I only criticize Scripture because I think I would do harm to the respect I owe my creator by making Him speak and act in a way that is so unworthy

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Samuel 14.

<sup>27</sup> The text edited by Voltaire adds: *their inattentiveness, or their malice?*

of Him. It is ridiculous to [think] that the selection of books inspired by God depended on human whim.

9. We read in the Old Testament that God spoke with the patriarchs. It is even said that Moses spoke with God: *sicut solet amicus loqui ad amicum, facie ad faciem et non in aenigmate*<sup>28</sup>. However, the New Testament has disabused us, it informs us that these conversations only occurred by the ministry of angels. The Holy Spirit, therefore, either didn't tell the truth in the Old Testament, or it's lying in the New one. If the ancients never spoke with God, they must have been mistaken; for they flattered themselves a great deal over having spoken with Him; however, they were only talking to angels, who received their adoration as God Himself.

Scripture teaches us that Abraham spoke with him many times, among others, that, at the age of 99, God appeared to him for the sixth time and gave him the commandment of circumcision as a sign of the covenant between them. Then, God having vanished, Abraham had himself circumcised with his son Ishmael, whom he'd had with his servant-girl Hagar, and his entire family, and ordered all his descendants to be circumcised as a Heaven-given law.

10. God is jealous, Scripture says. I don't want to criticize this expression here. But I will ask why the Catholics attribute to the saints, or seem to attribute to them, the perfections of God Himself, not to mention the worship by which they honor them? They address their prayers to them, as if the saints could see into the human heart. They didn't change their nature when they were made saints, and God doesn't share His immensity with anyone.

The Catholics always regard God as a King. Nobody goes straight to the king for a favor; you try to get it through the intervention of one of His favorites: so, it was necessary to give God some favorites, to address one's requests for favors to them, and obtain them by their intercession.

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<sup>28</sup> "Thus [God] is wont to speak like friend to friend, face to face and not in riddles" (compare Exodus 33:11: "And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend", along with Numbers 12:8: "...and not by riddles").

11. Is it not absurd that the least theologians of our times speak more precisely in matters of religion than the Scriptures themselves? It's a heresy to say simply and without distinction that Jesus Christ is less great than his Father; and yet this is how Scripture talks, and Jesus Christ Himself says: *Pater major me est*<sup>29</sup>. Is this not to lead the people into error? And were the Arians not right to maintain, on the basis of this passage, that Jesus Christ is inferior to God the Father? Scripture is full of turns of phrase which are unclear and quite contrary to sound theology.

12. We shouldn't be surprised if Scripture makes God converse with men, since it makes Him chat with the devil. These conversations are equally opposed to the idea of God. Will we never cease to see God as a king, as a father, as a ruler? God speaks only with Himself, He dwells in an inaccessible light<sup>30</sup>. When shaping us, He gave us all the organs needed for our actions. We can only act according to the rules of motion, of which He alone can be the author. What, then, might He have to tell us in these conversations, even if they weren't repugnant to our idea of Him? Nothing is more absurd than what Scripture says of Jesus Christ, that he was tempted by the devil, who put him on a high mountain, showed him all the greatness of the world and promised to put him in possession of it all, *si cadens adoraveris me*<sup>31</sup>. If we read a similar absurdity in the Qur'an, we would laugh at the Turks, and yet, among the Christians, it's the finest thing in the world.

13. Scripture tells us on one hand that God will damn us if we don't observe His commandments, and on the other that we can do nothing without His grace, *sine me nihil potestis facere; non est volentis, neque currentis, sed miserentis Dei*<sup>32</sup>. It is possible to conceive that God punishes us for not having done something that we couldn't do without Him? What, then? Will God tell us on one hand that we can do nothing without His grace, and on the other, He will do us harm if we haven't done something we can't do without him, and He will even issue tender reproaches against us and tell us that it wasn't His fault that He didn't give us all the necessary support? *Quid potui facere tibi, vinea mea, et non feci? Perditio tua ex te Israel?*<sup>33</sup> What a

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<sup>29</sup> "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).

<sup>30</sup> See 1 Tim. 6:16

<sup>31</sup> "If thou wilt fall down and worship me." (Matt. 4:9).

<sup>32</sup> "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

<sup>33</sup> What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? (Isaiah 5:4) with "Thy destruction is thy own" (Hosea 13:9).

contradiction! How well man makes himself feel amid all these inventions! When Scripture wants to show us the power of God and our dependence on Him, it tells us that we can't do anything without the special assistance of His powerful goodness, and when it wants to explain the justice of God to us, it casts all the guilt for our misery on ourselves.

14. If God has spoken to men, it was only to teach them what they couldn't find out by themselves. And so, Scripture should only teach us what is necessary to know for our salvation and what we could never figure out. How many futile things are found in Scripture? To say that God spoke to teach us the stories of Job, Judith, and many others that we could have learned from the historians! Is it not ridiculous to say that God took the trouble to speak, only to teach us all these histories?

15. Clarity is the principal quality which should characterize by a text which is meant for instruction, *ornari praecepta negant, contenta doceri*<sup>34</sup>. It is astonishing that the intelligence of man should have to compensate, in Scripture, for the intelligence of God; that Scripture should have to soften how He speaks; that it allows that things could be expressed better. I would ask whether venturing to explain Scripture isn't, in fact, a serious insult to God? If He has spoken, surely, He would have spoken properly, and if Scripture doesn't speak properly, and if it needs continual explanation, this is because it isn't the word of God. And, if I must believe the Scriptural explanations men give to me, it's no longer God who's teaching me, but men.

16. According to Scripture, God gives the rainbow as a sign of peace. What a fine thing for the ignorant Jews! Why, then, is the rainbow, seen at present by the wicked exiled over the seas, on hills and deserts, where there's often nobody to see it?

17. Cajetan has noted that, in second Kings<sup>35</sup>, the name Michal appears instead of Merab, as in the first book of the same history; St. Matthew was wrong, writing Jeremiah instead of

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<sup>34</sup> "With native clearness, and instructive ease" Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy, *De Arte Graphica*, line 29 (William Mason translation).

<sup>35</sup> This should be Samuel: see 2 Samuel 21:8, where some versions replace Michal with Merab.

Zachariah<sup>36</sup>, St. Mark likewise, when he assures us that a text he shares comes from Isaiah, when it's actually from Malachi<sup>37</sup>; and when he also writes that Jesus Christ was crucified at the third hour, since it was only at the sixth that he was judged by Pilate. St. Luke is wrong when he says that Cainan was the son of Arphaxad and Sale was the son of Cainan, since it's written in Genesis that Sale isn't the nephew of Arphaxad, but his son; and when it says that the cave Abraham bought was located in Sichem, since it was in Hebron and he bought it from the children of Hemor, son of Sichem, not of Ephron the Hethian, as Moses writes; and when it says that Hemor was the son of Sichem, since Genesis says the opposite, that Hemor was the father of Sichem and not his son.

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<sup>36</sup> Matthew 27:9-10

<sup>37</sup> Mark 1:2

## CHAPTER IV. *ON JESUS CHRIST.*

1. Jesus Christ was a man like Muhammad<sup>38</sup>. The lively imagination of the inhabitants of Asia and Africa contributes a great deal to lead them to fanaticism; this is why Jerusalem has been so fertile in producing prophets. A consideration of the behavior of Jesus Christ makes it impossible to believe that he was what they want us to believe he was. He came, it's said, to teach and save us; but he did neither of these things: he didn't teach us, he never converted anyone. He had twelve apostles: one of them betrayed him and the rest abandoned him when a powerful arm seized his person. Reality then defeated imagination.

2. Even supposing the possibility that God could become human to teach mankind, we cannot forgive Jesus Christ for failing so miserably in his duties. He effectively taught us nothing but a few moral opinions, which the pagans had taught before him in a more persuasive and clear manner. He taught no religious dogma; examine the principal truths of faith: Jesus Christ never said a word about them: not once did he preach the miracle of his birth, never did he mention the Trinity, the sacraments, or original sin. And yet, these are the four fundamental points of the Christian religion. In all honesty, it is plain that Jesus Christ didn't teach mankind, and that his journey is the most chimerical, even the most fruitless of any journey ever made. But men want miraculous and heavenly things.

3. God is so sparing with men, then, that he doesn't dare tell them who he is. Jesus Christ spent thirty years on Earth without ever daring to mention who he was, he was only emboldened during the last three years of his life. He has never yet spoken clearly. Jesus Christ, as a man, was indispensably obliged to say that he was also God. Otherwise, he misled men during his life, and especially during his thirty years of silence, and he alone bears all the guilt for the sacrilege people were committing by serving him with none of the duties owed to the divinity and by despising him at times. What, then! God comes to Earth but doesn't do anything there! But he became a human to do something. He left no memorials of his advent, no books, no traces. Do I

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<sup>38</sup> "Moses" in the printed version.

have to rely on a few biased people, who divinized and declared him God only some three hundred years after his death, at the Council of Nicaea (in 325)?

4. My reason, which comes to me from God, tells me that there is only one, that His nature is infinite, that there can only be one person with his divinity, but I'm told that there are three. But, to believe that to be so, the least thing I ask is for that the same one who gave me this reason, which shows me so clearly its impossibility, to tell me and assure me that it's true. He came to Earth to teach us this; but he didn't teach it to us at all. So, I shouldn't risk falling into idolatry on the word of a few men.

The Gospel says that Jesus Christ consummated his work before he died. But, nothing could be more imperfect. For, 1st, people are in the same condition they were in before the coming of this supposed Messiah. 2nd, Jesus Christ didn't establish any point of our faith; whereas he should have determined all of them in order to finish his work. For the Christian religion only reached its perfection many centuries after his death. But if God came to Earth precisely to teach this to us, he would have taught it to us, he would have attached an incorruptible character to it, which would have been sheltered from all human dispute and critique. None of all that: Scripture is full of allegories; Scripture needs interpreters and commentators. No, once again, this is not the work of God. 3rd, let's suppose, again, that God wished to teach us by men: He would have inspired them; on the contrary, Jesus Christ left the apostles in vulgar errors; this is entirely clear from Scripture. In fact, they were all subject to error, even after receiving the Holy Spirit: St. Paul accused St. Peter of error, and we may note, in passing, that both of them could have been preaching errors at the same time. But since they disputed on the facts of religion, there weren't, therefore, equally inspired by the Holy Spirit. 4th, each ecumenical council has taught us some new dogma, therefore, Jesus Christ didn't complete his work. No: so many contradictions are not the work of God.

5. Far from Jesus Christ having gone to the temple himself to preach the futility of the Jewish sacrifices, he did everything like anyone else. The Holy Virgin and St. Joseph offered sacrifices with him on the day of Purification. He went to the Temple on the good feasts to participate in the sacrifices with the rest of the people. God, who came to Earth to teach mankind, told them nothing and acted like the rest of them.

6. What is Jesus Christ, according to the Christian religion? He's the second person of the Trinity, who certainly wanted to become a man and humble himself unto death on the cross to satisfy the righteous wrath of his Father, to be the mediator between God and man, to efface the sin of our first father, and help us render, in the future, worship worthy of Him : *tot verba, tot errores*<sup>39</sup>. For, 1st, it can't be claimed that Jesus Christ wanted to take our sins upon himself to satisfy his Father, without admitting in Jesus Christ a different will from that of his Father: one is offended, the other is the victim. He thus doesn't have the same nature, for the diversity of will proves a diversity of essence. 2nd, there is no way to avoid thinking of the Father as a very ill-tempered fellow, and the son as a good-natured Child, who does all he can to pacify him: what weaknesses! What a character they make God play! 3rd. God couldn't have ordained the death of his son without ordaining the sin of the Jews who put him to death. How important it is to see all the consequences of a principle! 4th, mediation presupposes a mutual weakness between the two parties; so, we can't say that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man, without allowing an imperfection, not only in us, but also in God<sup>40</sup>. Christians often forget their principles and fail to see all its consequences: Jesus Christ has not reconciled us with his Father as with the first person of the Trinity, it's with God that he reconciles us: He is the mediator between God and us. And Jesus Christ is no less God than his Father is, therefore, he can't be the mediator with God, since then he would be mediating with respect to himself.

7. "Jesus Christ", says the author [Malebranche] of the *Recherche de la verité*<sup>41</sup>, along with many Church Fathers, "with a perfect knowledge of the maladies and disorder of nature, repaired it in the way most useful for us, and the worthiest of him, that can ever be conceived." How many prejudices are found in these words! To say that God repairs the disorder of nature is to say that God made nature badly. An artisan only repairs his work when there's an imperfection in it. If he'd done it right the first time, there would have been nothing to fix. Besides, what is the reform that Jesus Christ brought to the world? Men, whatever may be said, are the same as before. The pagan philosophers taught us a morality which was at least as pure as that of Jesus Christ: see Cicero's *On Duties*.

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<sup>39</sup> "So many words, so many errors".

<sup>40</sup> The version published by Voltaire adds here: *and without making us equal*.

<sup>41</sup> Book 5, chapter 5.

8. It is opposite to the idea of God, and ridiculous to say that He can be appeased by Sacrifices. In the sacrifice, nothing perishes as far as God is concerned. Men always judge God by themselves: when they are offended they are satisfied by vengeance, which weakens and sometimes destroys their enemies. But, believing that they offend God and wanting to Him to be only meekly avenged on themselves, they have thought they ought to sacrifice animals to Him in their place. But God demands the preservation, not the destruction of His work. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ smacks, besides, of something less worthy of God, and more opposite to all His attributes, than the pagan sacrifices.

Men have made Him play this role for more than four thousand years; they make Him demand animal sacrifices; after which they make Him say that these sacrifices are wholly futile, and that now He only wants the sacrifice of His Son. He had said nothing of this in the ancient law; the apostles published it in the new one: a fine way to take away from the masses the contempt they ordinarily feel for the executioner's victim!

The sacrifice of the cross is yet another true farce. Jesus Christ suffered as a man, *passus est sub Pontio Pilato*<sup>42</sup>. He died as a man. But it's an article of faith that, from the instant humanity was united with the Word, Jesus Christ was supremely happy. All the Fathers teach us that an almighty effort was required to keep the glory of Jesus Christ from bursting out upon the people, and that, far from the Transfiguration being miraculous, it was, rather, only a pause in the miracle. How could Jesus Christ then suffer on the cross? If he didn't suffer, how are we redeemed? If the reply is that Jesus Christ only suffered metaphorically, just as it's only a figurative statement in Scripture when God is said to repent, we'll soon find that the entire Christian religion has nothing real in it, that it is completely metaphorical, and consequently, that it consists only in the imagination of its followers.

9. God is made to do all that He can to save us: *quid potui facere*, etc.<sup>43</sup> He is made to take flesh, He is made to suffer. Alas! Had He wished it, we would all be saved, for the will of God

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<sup>42</sup> "Suffered under Pontius Pilate" (from the Apostle's Creed)

<sup>43</sup> "What could I have done" (Isaiah 5)

can't be inefficacious. God doesn't want to save us, or He's acting out a farce. The theologians will only ever resolve this difficulty with words.

If Jesus Christ had shown himself to the Jewish people after his supposed resurrection, all contestation would have ended. It's impossible to conceive that Jesus Christ remained for more than forty days on Earth after his resurrection and yet avoided the people. He came to Earth only to instruct mankind and to teach them his divinity. Nothing could have been easier: he only had to show himself to the people, who would certainly have recognized him. Isn't it ridiculous to say that he commanded his apostles to preach the resurrection and that they were its eyewitnesses? Why he didn't show himself? The masses themselves should have been the witnesses: only this would have convinced them of his divinity.

What manner of farce in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ! He had to die to be resurrected. He came in order to leave. If Jesus Christ came to make himself known, why didn't he do that? If he didn't come to manifest himself, why did he come? What good are three years of teaching? And again, what manner of teaching was this? Men are liable to make God perform these funny farces. They make the Virgin die formally and resurrect a few moments later: they make her rise to Heaven: but the formality of death was required. If Jesus Christ came to make himself known, why didn't he do so? If he didn't come to manifest himself, why did he come?

10. Does pain truly honor God more than pleasure? Why do we think that the pains suffered by Jesus Christ redounded to God's honor? Is God not the author of pleasure as much as of pain? Men's desire, their urge for reproduction, leads them, judging God always according to themselves, to admit the existence of God the Son, and even to flatter themselves that He made them in His own image and likeness.

11. Why did the apostles wait for the Ascension and Pentecost to preach the resurrection of Jesus Christ? They should have preached it while they could still say, *There he is!*

12. Jesus Christ did all he could to muddle the issue, he neglected the simplest means. The prophecies, it's said, had predicted that he would be born of a virgin. He was born of a virgin, they continue. But who could have guessed that? She had a husband. It is astonishing to find the Fathers claiming, in all seriousness, that this was to trick the devil. But if even the devil, with all his power, couldn't figure out that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, how can we expect the Jews to have guessed it? The prophecies were very obscure indeed, therefore, since the devil understood none of it.

Jesus Christ came to instruct an infinite posterity without addressing the multitude living in his own times. He didn't do this. For, what did he leave to instruct us? A Church, that is, men like us who at that time were only small number of highly irrational people.

This is, then, the human way in which Jesus Christ and the apostles began to introduce a new religion: they took it from the old one, *non veni solvere, sed adimplere*<sup>44</sup>, and yet, although everything was consummated at the death of Jesus Christ, and the Synagogue was sent to all the devils, nevertheless all the apostles and the first Christians went to the Temple to pray to God like the Jews: *Petrus autem et Joannes ascedebant in templum ad horam orationis nonam*<sup>45</sup>, and when they preached, they also said, *Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac, Deus Jacob*<sup>46</sup>.

13. We're told that the law of Moses was a law of severity, and the new law a law of charity: the example of Ananias and Sapphira proves the opposite. I can forgive St. Peter for the death of Ananias, but when Sapphira appears three hours later, why does St. Peter ask, *dic mihi mulier, si tanti agrum vendidisti?*<sup>47</sup> didn't he already know? Wasn't the example of Ananias enough? Is killing necessary under the law of charity? Instead, he should have told her, charitably: Dear lady, lie not, God has just punished your husband.

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<sup>44</sup> "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17)

<sup>45</sup> "Now Peter and John went up into the temple at the ninth hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1).

<sup>46</sup> "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob" (Acts 3:13).

<sup>47</sup> "And Peter said to her: Tell me, woman, whether you sold the land for so much? And she said Yea, for so much" (Acts 5:8).

## CHAPTER V. *ON THE CHURCH AND THE COUNCILS.*

1. The Church is only a human society. There are as many Churches as there are different religions. If you want me to regard the Christian religion as the true one, I ask you what characteristics it has, to expect such assent from me? If the Christian Church calls itself infallible, it should justify this characteristic to me. It can't be infallible without infinite knowledge; but, far from such knowledge existing in the Church, it's easy to find a thousand contradictions in its decrees: there are bulls of excommunication against those who said that there were antipodes. Then, more moderately, they say that the Church is not infallible as to facts; but only as to rights. But it's clear that this distinction comes from the weakness of the Church; they want it to be fallible in facts, since here it would be easy to prove it false: facts can be proved, whereas in rights, everyone has their own opinion.

The Church should be infallible in facts, since, here, rights are connected to facts. It's a fact that Jesus Christ came; it's a fact that the Holy Spirit descended. It's a fact that he dictated fourteen epistles to St. Paul; it's no more or less a fact that, as many evangelists as there were at the beginning, the Holy Spirit only inspired four of them. But if the Church is fallible on facts, then I have a right to doubt that there was a Scripture and a Jesus Christ.

The Church has no other manifest characteristic to set it apart from other types of assemblies. This characteristic was a necessary one. Aren't men equally the handiwork of God? What vanity; or rather, what folly to believe that He has more love for these than those? According to this system, one must necessarily think of God as one of those blind mothers with an irrational preference for certain children over others.

2. What kind of pride it is to believe that God has chosen us to be His particular people! Do other peoples lack the same relation with Him? God's supposed choice in favor of the family of Abraham to form the entire Jewish nation is another strange effect of the pride of this people. The origins of all monarchies always have something miraculous in them, Heaven is always involved.

3. Many orders in the Roman Church accuse each other of corrupt and heretical doctrines. All of them fail to agree on the location of the authority to declare and issue doctrine, whether it's in the Pope or in the general council, and whether it's in neither of these considered independently, or in both together. But, even if all that were settled, how many difficulties would still remain! The Church claims the glory of being Catholic, that is, universal. But, it's only a small assembly with respect to all those who are outside its bosom, and Jesus Christ called it a *pussilus grex*<sup>48</sup>.

An honest Indian comes to Europe, raises his voice and asks: who will assure me of the divine revelation? Who among you will claim infallibility? The Roman Church appears: "I am the one", it says, "who is infallible." The Indian prepares to give it a hearing; but first he asks what proof it can give him of the infallibility by which it flatters itself. "That would be Scripture", replies the Church. "But what is Scripture?" asks the Indian. "It's a book inspired by God", responds the Church. "By what sign shall I know this?" says the Indian. "You must take my word on this," the Church adds. If the Indian is as sensible as he is honest, would he have any further questions?

4. Errors are not formed all at once. Likewise, the Church was only established gradually, and the mysteries were previously fewer in number than those we have today. God wouldn't have acted this way, if He had revealed a doctrine. The progress of the Church is fully human: first, the masses were seduced, where there was no printing, where imagination alone held sway, where the most extravagant visions got a hearing. A diversity in opinions was to the taste of the age; at first opinion was swayed by a disinterested appearance, and by a miraculous sort of doctrine. Far from refusing a religion contrary to their senses, the crowd embrace it because of that very characteristic; if it weren't repellent to the senses, it wouldn't be in any way miraculous. Whatever approach is taken with it, the masses need the miraculous, whether by favoring the senses, or by not favoring them. They love whatever seems higher than themselves, and they think they are raised up when they're told things for which they have no sense impressions. It is true that a crucified victim was offered to them: but they were told that this crucified victim had performed miracles, that he had been resurrected, gone to Heaven, that he was God, that it was only for them that he had been reduced to this deplorable state. This is how the compassion and credulity of the masses was won; they are incapable of reflection and examination.

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<sup>48</sup> "Little flock" (Luke 12:32).

The preachers spoke zealously; the death they suffered, with courage, aroused the pity and confidence of the masses; the veneration given to the martyrs flattered their vanity. A few intelligent ones did embrace this religion later on, either by inconstancy or by a desire to be different from others, or by a certain desire to be admired in a new faction; or, finally, because they could sense the absurdity of their natural<sup>49</sup> religion. Often the fear of one evil leads us to a worse one. But when, in given circumstances, for example, by the desire to win a battle, kings have promised to embrace the Christian religion, when this promise spurred their ardor in combat, so that the soldiers were animated by their example; and their enemies, surprised by this new vigor, have been defeated; in the end, when the kings did become Christians, their peoples followed them eagerly. Then the Church became powerful, and gradually set aside this poor exterior, which it had kept with respect for the masses. Its leaders thought they should live like kings, who, by embracing their doctrine, submitted to their whims. Ultimately, the Church was able to seize control of Rome, and now it flatters itself with the right to command the whole universe.

5. There is nothing of which the overheated imagination is not capable. Sorcerers believe they truly attend the sabbat. St. Paul, when he happened to have been thrown from his horse, thought he heard the voice of Jesus Christ asking him why he persecuted his disciples. Fear made him hear what he didn't hear, and the persecutor became an apostle, and may well have preached the Gospel in good faith. His overheated imagination made him believe, later on, that he was raised to the third Heaven. He even flattered himself that Jesus Christ personally taught him; he boasted of this among those of his party who saw him as one of its principal heads. Thus, he who, during the life of Jesus Christ, was never curious enough to investigate even one of his supposed miracles, was suddenly converted by a fall; thus, he transformed the shame of bad horsemanship into a miracle.

6. There has never been any absurdity that didn't have its followers, which should humble those who are flattered by human approval. The religion of the pagans once covered the face of the Earth; it's still extant in the vast regions of the Orient.

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<sup>49</sup> i.e., their native or original religion.

Let me convince a dozen people that it's not the Sun that brings daylight, and I fully expect that entire nations will soon embrace this opinion. As absurd as a thought may be, it only needs to be entertained for a certain period: once it's become ancient, it is sufficiently proved.

There was, on mount Parnassus, a hole that produced a stream of air which made goats dance, and which went to one's head. Perhaps someone who was intoxicated by it started talking without knowing what he was saying; and happened to emit something true. Immediately they thought there was something divine in this stream of air, that it contained knowledge of the future. They began to approach the hole with respect, ceremonies gradually sprung up. Thus, the Delphic Oracle was born. And, since it owed its origin to an intoxicating stream of air, it was absolutely necessary for the Pythian to enter into a trance before prophesying. As soon as one oracle had been established, a thousand were not long in appearing. If the Gods can really speak there, why not here? The masses, struck by the miraculous aspects of the phenomenon and eager for some utility they hoped to gain from it, wanted oracles to spring up everywhere, and when they could be regarded as ancient, it was even better. In addition to all that, in the age of the first institution of both gods and oracles, ignorance was far greater than it was in later times. Philosophy had not yet been born, and the most extravagant superstitions met no resistance and spread everywhere. It is true that what is called "the mass of the people" is never much enlightened.

7. The Church is completely in control of faith, and only submits to Scriptural authority in appearance: the Church, having added and diminished the ancient form of worship at will, found an expedient by which it could support itself without clashing with Scripture: to say that the Church is subject to Scripture, and simultaneously teaching that it's the Church's role to interpret Scripture. Thus, Scripture can say only what the Church wants it to say; and Scripture has only an empty, ceremonial title, while the Church has supreme power and absolute independence: in this it's like the royal ordinances of the King's Council. It's not only up to Christians to read and examine Scripture: the Church will read and examine it for them, and it will tell them that what it teaches comes from Scripture; and it's your job to believe it, otherwise you'll be damned; what a fine expedient of the Church to get you to follow its teachings! Thus, it claims to be judged only by Scripture, as interpreted by itself: a person submits to a law, but they want no one else to interpret, examine, or even read this law. Scripture is therefore completely subjected to the Church, since it is subject to tradition, which is completely dependent on the Church.

8. How miserable were the rich in the beginnings of the Church, and according to the Gospel! How blessed they are today, according to the practice of the Church! For, truly, when a rich person dies, the whole Church prays for them, and puts on mourning clothes: the priests cry themselves sick, candles are not spared, masses are said everywhere, and all this for money. And, as if the sacrifice of Jesus Christ were insufficient one time, it's re-played thousands of times. When a poor man dies, a miserable wooden cross comprises his entire funeral, he's tossed into some corner of the cemetery, without the least prayer for his soul: he had no money to buy one: that explains everything. Taking cash in return for prayers for the dead, and making a great profit from an error, is an impious imposture, and a sacrilegious imposition, which is forced on an ignorant and blind population.

9. The Councils are a proof of the falseness of religion. For, what is a council? It's an assembly of men who, after much arguing, agree that they'll propose to everyone else this or that proposition as a truth that God has revealed. It therefore depends only on the fancy of men to declare what the revealed propositions are. Are we reasonable in giving to men such an authority over our reason? No, since the Christian religion should have been settled on every point. Everything should have been determined by the Messiah: the opposite constitutes a proof of human weakness, which can't foresee everything. If the Holy Spirit predicted the councils, as they claim, there would not be so much intrigue or so many disputes, and they wouldn't last as long as they do.

Why should the Holy Spirit be more present in a general council than a national council? Is a nation of less interest to it? How many people are needed, then, to attract its attention? Why, then, did Jesus Christ say, *where two or three, etc.*<sup>50</sup> The ancient Councils aren't worth one of our clergy's assemblies. Yet, the former were infallible, and the latter aren't.

Since God always acts by the simplest means, why is He sought in so many mysteries? He takes the trouble to incarnate Himself and teaches nothing to us. He was with his apostles, and he left them as stupid as they were before. The councils, i.e. men, instruct us in what we should believe, after much argument among themselves, before being able to agree on anything. Often, too, as

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<sup>50</sup> Matthew 18:20

a way of sparing us, they explained themselves in an equivocal manner that favors both parties. Is that how God speaks?

10. The inspiration, or the assistance of the Holy Spirit in the Church, is sheer imagination. If the Holy Spirit inspired the Church, it would never have excommunicated those who taught the existence of the antipodes; we wouldn't see so many mutually contradictory bulls; we would have never seen two Popes excommunicating each other; and funnier still, saints belonging to each of these Pope's parties. There would be no heated and stubborn arguments in the councils if nothing happened in them without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we wouldn't find in the Church all the same weaknesses found in every other sect.

11. It's the pride of savants that introduced so many new and thorny questions into the Church and obliged the masses to receive their views as ancient revelations, although none can be traced back to antiquity. It was greed and ambition in certain others that introduced the dogmas which promoted their temporal interests. The court of Rome inspires respect for indulgences and exemptions: if people stop buying them, you'll be taught that God exempts nobody from His law or from what the Holy Spirit has dictated to its Church.

## CHAPTER VI. ON THE CHURCH FATHERS AND THE MARTYRS.

1. Posterity consecrates the monuments of antiquity, and we naturally feel a certain respect for what existed such a long time before us. How many capable men have written in our day with greater erudition, eloquence, acuity, power, and precision than men like Augustine and Jerome? Nevertheless, if we ask to the common man to compare Augustine to a few of the moderns, how many would it take to outweigh him in the scales?

But the Fathers were men like anyone else, their writings are full of errors. Even speaking as a Christian, they all suffered from some erroneous opinion or another: St. Cyprian maintained that the baptism of heretics was futile, St. Jerome and St. Augustine entertained cruel disputes on the facts of religion. The oldest Church Fathers were apostates to their ancestral religion; they introduced into the Christian religion the errors of their philosophy and most of the customs of paganism. A revolution of the imagination in a time full of sects, where men boasted of their party affiliations, was the efficacious grace of their conversion.

2. The Fathers of the Church didn't speak with precision and mental accuracy. They always expressed themselves in an oratorical and allegorical style. Allegories please the people, they amuse them and draw their admiration. The taste and genius of the age is always followed. When allegory was in fashion, everyone used allegories. But, once again, allegory is only a figure of the imagination, which proves nothing.

The common man who naturally feels respect for what is old, regards the ancient Fathers as extraordinary men who had commerce with the Holy Spirit, just as he believes that the Patriarchs held conversations with God. In this, the masses show a negative self-image; they don't know that God has no preferences for particular persons, as Scripture puts it. All men are equally dear to Him, He is our common Father: He no more conversed with the ancients than with us. Scripture doesn't say about the angels what the Fathers claim, especially Denys in his *Hierarchy*. Where did he get so many fine things?

3. An overheated imagination is the cause of martyrdom; to be persuaded on this point, you only have to pay attention to the fact that there has never been any religion that didn't have its own martyrs. The heads of religions tend to die violently. All heresies have had their own saints, who suffered death to defend them. Those whom we call fanatics in the Cévennes<sup>51</sup> are considered martyrs in Holland and England. Moving letters are written to encourage them in their faith. Everyone judges things according to their own situation and prejudices. Most of those who go to Japan to suffer martyrdom, are unprepared to respond to any question that might be put to them by a sensible Indian. Nevertheless, they die to maintain their religion, which goes to show that it's enthusiasm, not reason, that guides them.

4. By dint of hearing something said, or seeking to persuade someone of something, one comes to believe it as well, especially if one is born with a strong imagination, as they were in the lands of the ancient Christians. Finally, the conduct of others is no rule for us. If the martyrs died, they had their reasons: I would die like them if I were convinced. But, since I can't conceive the motive for their martyrdom, which can only have been caused by their imagination: and since this proof is also dubious because I see martyrs in all religions, I won't conclude that the Christian religion is the true one because of its martyrs. The Church Fathers said that it was the cause, not the ordeal that made the martyr; and it's an axiom of religion that *causa martyrem facit, non poena*<sup>52</sup>. So, when one concludes that the Christian religion is true because it had martyrs, it's simply begging the question.

Since we know that the first Christians only joined their religion due to enthusiasm and since there are martyrs in all the religions, even the most extravagant ones, as in the Indies, and even in our time, in the Reformed religion, which was driven out of France, we should find a certain characteristic that would distinguish true martyrs from false ones.

5. Martyrs are far from proving the truth of religion; on the contrary, they are so many testimonies of its falsity. For, it is insulting to God to say that He delivers up to the final ordeal those who believe what He has revealed. Besides, the martyrs show that religion was ill-established, and revelation ill-attested, since at the same time there were men of good faith who

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<sup>51</sup> I.e., those who took part in the Protestant uprising of the *Camisards* in the Cévennes region in 1702-05.

<sup>52</sup> "The cause is what makes the martyr, not the punishment".

believed, says the Gospel, they were doing a great service to God<sup>53</sup> by killing the wicked, impostors, perturbers of the public peace, when they had martyrs killed.

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<sup>53</sup> John 16:2: "Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

## CHAPTER VII. *ON THE PROPHETS AND PROPHECIES.*

1. The future is completely hidden from men, because, since it doesn't exist yet as far as they are concerned, it cannot penetrate their minds in any way; and besides, that which is not, which has no properties, can't be known by men without the revelation of Him by whom all exists. Not only do men ignore the future, but it is completely hidden from every created mind, and this for the same reasons. Thus, it's a mistake to think that the devil revealed the future to the pagans, and that he still inspires those who are called sorcerers. None of that is possible. They're only phantoms of a blind human imagination. The Jews were right, therefore, when they challenged the pagans to declare the future to them: *annuntiate nobis futura, etc.*<sup>54</sup> But let's see if there were any men among the Jews who had this knowledge.

To start, I observe a great confusion, a great trouble, mistakes, and eternal allegories in all the prophecies; and it is surprising that our modern theologians are still disputing about the meaning they should attribute to them. Indeed, the meaning of the clearest prophecies is not yet determined, either among the Jews, or among the Christians, as I'll soon show. Where, then, is the marvelous nature of the prophecies, if they are full of obscurity? what, then, is the characteristic that sets them above the pagan oracles? For, ultimately, there are prophecies everywhere, men have always loved marvelous things: the keener their sense of weakness, the more they want to escape it with miracles. Ultimately, the prophecies, to make some impression on minds that are sound and free of prejudice, should be clear and unencumbered by any ambiguity.

2. If the prophecies had been clear, the Jews, to whom they were addressed, would certainly have been converted, when they saw their fulfillment. The prophets, it's said, seem to be the evangelists of Jesus Christ. The Jews were always meditating on these prophecies. This Jesus Christ, so clearly heralded, arrives among them, remains there for thirty-three years, and the Jews fail to recognize him. They even maintain that their prophets never referred to him. Who, then, should be better able to handle the prophecies than those who spoke and understood the natural language in which they were written, and who have always been their auditors? It is the Catholic

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<sup>54</sup> "Tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods" (Isaiah 41:23).

Church, then, that should determine their meaning? It would therefore be the judge of its own case! Let it forge itself titles all it likes, they will satisfy its own imagination, but they will never convince my reason.

Anyone who reads the prayers of the Church will find that it takes a full liberty of interpreting the prophecies as it pleases, and passages from Scripture. It's even claimed as an article of faith that the Church has this authority. These allegorical interpretations, which prove nothing, and which depend only on the mind of the allegorizer, are repugnant to the reason of a sensible Indian, rather than convincing him. But I find it even more remarkable that the Church adds to the Scripture as it likes. David said, *Dominus regnavit, decore indutus est*<sup>55</sup>, and the Church says that David said to the nations, *Dominus regnavit a ligno*<sup>56</sup>; which is false. *Impleta sunt quae concinit David fidei carmine, dicens in nationibus: regnavit a ligno Deus*<sup>57</sup>. David never said these words, no matter which version you're reading.

3. Scripture teaches us that Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, opened the minds of his apostles to give them understanding of Scripture: *tunc aperuit eis sensum, ut intelligerent scripturas*<sup>58</sup>. If such a miracle was required to understand the prophecies, then they're useless, since natural reason couldn't understand them; and God would do better to turn us all at once, miraculously, over to the Christian religion, than to make us walk by all these gradual slopes. But what am I saying? It's not God who acts so irregularly, it's men who always have Him act like them.

4. I won't go into great detail to show that the prophecies are perfectly obscure, that everything about them reeks of Asiatic enthusiasm and Chaldean mysteries; that what appears clear according to the Vulgate has a completely opposite sense in the original text, which is the only one the Holy Spirit revealed: that what we are now told is a prophecy was a naturally occurring event, and which bore none of the characteristics of prophecy; that it is, therefore,

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<sup>55</sup> "The Lord rules. He puts on majesty as if it were clothes" (Psalm 92/93:1).

<sup>56</sup> "The Lord reigned from the tree".

<sup>57</sup> From a Medieval Hymn: "Fulfilled is now what David told / In true prophetic song of old, / How God the heathen's King should be; / For God is reigning from the Tree.", Hymn 84 in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1867) p. 102.

<sup>58</sup> "Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

ridiculous to urge me to see the Jewish people as a wholly prophetic people. God has demanded no such thing of me, and that will lead me to find the religion of Muhammad in the conduct of the Jewish people. If David, in his later years, asks for the natural heat of the prettiest girl of his people, to warm himself, St. Augustine and the other Church Fathers have no right to oblige me to see this action as a prophecy of the union of Jesus Christ with the Church, and of the purity of the Holy Virgin.

5. I won't pause to show that God doesn't act allegorically, that allegories prove nothing, that allegory is a figure which has no reality but in the imagination of its author, especially in such a serious matter as religion. Allegory is completely banished from demonstration, and from all discourse which should only convince the mind. I will only examine here the prophecies which are most bandied about, and which are said to be the clearest of all. Let us see.

Jacob, before dying, brought all his children around him and gave all of them his blessing. When Judah's turn came, he told him, *non auferetur sceptrum de Juda, donec veniat qui mittendus est*<sup>59</sup>. And, they say, the scepter was indeed taken from Judah when Jesus Christ came; therefore, this prophecy was fulfilled: Jesus Christ is he who was to be sent. To start with, it is certain that the Jews understood the Hebrew word differently which we translate as *scepter*. Some say that the Hebrew means persecution, tribulation, and that Jacob was telling his son that the Jews would always be persecuted until the coming of Him who would deliver them from all their troubles. Some have even claimed that these words were fulfilled in the person of Moses, and that Jacob only told his children that they would always be persecuted in Egypt, until the coming of the one who would deliver them from their slavery.

The Catholic Doctors, all of whom want us to translate the Hebrew word as *scepter*, find no better agreement on the meaning of this passage. Their dispute turns on what should be understood by *Judah*.

Some say that it means the whole Jewish people; and that the scepter was not truly taken from this people until the Romans gained mastery over Judea; others say, on the contrary, that this word can't reasonably refer to the Jewish people, and that it must refer to the tribe of Judah in

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<sup>59</sup> The scepter will not depart from Judah...until he whose right it is comes (Gen. 49:10).

particular; since, they say, Jacob claimed to be giving a special blessing, to note a characteristic peculiar to each of his children. They add that if one wishes to understand this word *Judah* as meaning the whole Jewish nation, it is obvious that the scepter was taken away many times by their enemies, and especially during the Babylonian captivity, without the Messiah having come. But, they say, if there was a time when the scepter was taken from the Jews, and when the Messiah hadn't come, then this sign is too dubious to be a true prophecy.

The first side says, on the contrary, that the word tribe of Judah can't be interpreted unambiguously, since, they say, it is evident from history that the scepter passed into other hands, without the Messiah having come. The Jews were ruled by judges, Saul was not of the tribe of Judah. *postulaverunt regem et dedit illis Saul filium Cis, virum de tribu Benjamin*<sup>60</sup>. The kingdom had been divided, and eleven whole tribes had ended up with only one king between them. Long before the advent of the Messiah, the Jewish people was governed by pontiffs, and everyone knows that the pontiffs were of the tribe of Levi. The Maccabees were not of the tribe of Judah; thus, they say, it is more reasonable to understand this word as referring to the entire Jewish people; and if it's true that this nation was in captivity, it is certain, they say, that even in captivity it was always ruled by the pontiffs of the nation.

It might be rejoined that the New Testament seems to say that, although Herod was the king of Judea, the Jews were still governed by the pontiffs. Everyone knows what happened at the passion of Jesus Christ: the principal motive the Jews had in putting him to death was that they feared that the Romans, hearing that a disturber of the peace was among them, might take away what authority they still retained: *venient Romani et subvertent gentem nostram*<sup>61</sup>. He was led before Annas and Caiaphas, the scepter wasn't, therefore, completely taken from the Jews. Ultimately, however you look at it, an honest mind can't make this prophecy accord with the times when Jesus Christ came.

6. Everyone took it upon themselves to prophesy among the Jews; no sooner was Saul chosen as king than he also began making prophecies. Ultimately, every prophecy which is mistaken has no more power to convince us than the Quatrains on the front of certain almanacs.

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<sup>60</sup> "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin" (Acts 13:21).

<sup>61</sup> "The Romans will come, and devastate our nation" (a rewording of the Latin Vulgate of John 11:48).

7. Mystery is usually a sign of error, or weakness; the truth is clear. What reason might the Lord have to dictate obscure prophecies, since He only gave these prophecies, as everyone agrees, as a convincing proof of religion!

8. Virgil wrote an eclogue in praise of Pollion. He said that under his consulate a thousand miracles were witnessed. All the Christian commentators have considered this eclogue as a prophecy of the advent of Jesus Christ. Surely Virgil didn't believe he ever had the honor of finding himself ranked among our prophets or having Isaiah and Jeremiah as colleagues. The prophecies of the latter relate to Jesus Christ as much as the former's Eclogue. We might apply to Jesus Christ what Virgil said of Pollion: we might also apply to him what the ancient prophets said on various occasions; allegory applies everything to a thousand different objects; but once again, it proves nothing. Many of such applications can be found in the epistles and the gospels. What Scripture says about eternal wisdom, is quite ingeniously applied by the Church to the Holy Virgin. The lamentations Jeremiah once made about the captivity of Babylon are applied to the final destruction of Jerusalem. Everything that, with the Jews, had a literal application in its time, is redirected by allegory to the new Church. And, to end with a remarkable flair, they have applied to Jesus Christ and the Church the filthy encounters between Solomon and his mistress. I'd gladly share a few lines here: but those who want to judge for themselves need only to read the Song of Songs.

9. What, again, are these supposed weeks of Daniel's, after which the Messiah should come? They can be applied any way one likes: the Church says that they are weeks of years, but for my part, I say that they're weeks of months, of centuries, etc. The prophet didn't explain himself, because he knew nothing about it, he spoke as a man. If God had dictated prophecies, they would have had a character of clarity which would have distinguished them from the other dubious ways of divining that men use. The soothsayers discovered the art of masking their weakness under appearances of fanaticism. They no longer speak the language of men when they are on the sacred tripod: but God, who is supposed to have made only these prophecies for men, would have spoken with a simplicity worthy of Him, and proportionate to the light He wanted to give us.

10. There is, in the jumble of prophecies, a miraculous aid, which pleases men; the figuring out of enigmas. The enthusiasm of the prophecies is fully human and just like that of the ancient pagans, and of the women transported on the holy tripod. God doesn't act like a madman, doesn't fall into a trance, doesn't use metaphors. Once again, the prophecies should be clear and simple to be persuasive.

11. The prophecy *ecce Virgo concipiet*<sup>62</sup> can't be a sign, for the Jews regarded the Holy Virgin as a normal woman. She had a husband; who might have guessed that she never made use of her conjugal liberty? On the occasions when the prophecies were given, they all had, to the letter, a literal sense that's far different from that of Jesus Christ.

When Xerxes fell on Greece with all the forces of Asia, the Athenians consulted the oracle of Apollo. The Pythian's response was that Minerva, the protectress of Athens, tried in vain, by all sorts of means, to pacify Jupiter's wrath; but that, in favor of his daughter, he did indeed wish to grant the Athenians to be saved in the wooden walls; and that Salamis would see the loss of many children, dear to their mothers, whether when Ceres was dispersed, or when she would be gathered. At this, Oenomaus completely loses respect for the oracle<sup>63</sup> of Delphi.

The combat of the father and daughter suits the Gods well, what a fine thing it is to find such opposite inclinations and interests in the Heavens. Jupiter is enraged against Athens, he brought against it all the forces of Asia. But if this was the only means available to him to harm it, if he no longer had his thunderbolts, if he was forced to borrow extraneous forces, where did he get the power from to bring so many enemies against this city? After that, however, he allows them be saved in the wooden walls. On whom then, does his wrath fall? On the stones? What a fine soothsayer! You don't know which children Salamis will lose; whether Greek or Persian. It must be one of the two armies: but don't you at least know that your ignorance will be noticed? You conceal the time of the battle under these fine poetic expressions: *when Ceres will be dispersed, or when she will be gathered*. You want to dazzle us with this pompous language; but is it not obvious that a battle will occur either at the time of sowing, or reaping? It obviously won't happen in Winter. No matter what happens, in this way you'll come out ahead: If the Greeks lose the battle, this Jupiter

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<sup>62</sup> "Behold, a Virgin will conceive" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

<sup>63</sup> Some versions have "god".

whom Minerva implores will have been inexorable; if they win it, Jupiter will finally have let himself be moved. You say that they flee into the wooden walls; you are advising, not auguring: I, who know nothing about auguring, might have said as much. I'd have judged well that the effort of war would have fallen on Athens, and that since the Athenians had ships, most of these would be put to sea<sup>64</sup>.

The Christians escape the in the same way, whether God punishes or rewards the good and the wicked; or when they pray but don't obtain the effect of their prayers, despite the promises of Jesus Christ

One of the things that shows that the oracles were only too human is the ambiguity of their responses, and the skill developed in lining them up to all the events that could be foreseen. St. Paul said, more than 1700 years ago, that Antichrist was on his way, and we're still waiting. *Resuscitans Jesum sicut et in Psalmo secundo scriptum est, Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te*<sup>65</sup>. Isn't the prophecy clear in proving the generation of the word? This prophecy is also cited: *ego hodie genui te, et rursum ergo ero illi in Patrem, et ipse erit mihi in Filium*<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> This is from Oenomaus of Gadara's lost text "Detection of Deceivers", partially preserved in quotations from Eusebius of Caesarea's *Preparation for the Gospel*, book V.

<sup>65</sup> "...By raising up Jesus, as it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'" (Acts 13:33).

<sup>66</sup> "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" (Hebrews 1:5).

## CHAPTER VIII. *ON THE TRINITY AND ORIGINAL SIN.*

1. We have seen that one of the conditions of a good religion is that it should not give us a false idea of God, since otherwise God would be contrary to Himself; all the more so as the natural idea that we have of God can only come to us from Him, however this is meant. But if He were to give us, by revelation of Himself, an idea contrary to the one He gave us by reason, then His actions would show a contradiction we know He is incapable of. Now, the Trinity is completely opposed to the idea that nature gives us of God: therefore, this supposed Trinity is a vestige of paganism. Reason shows us that God is an infinitely simple being; thus, He is not triple, since if He were triple, however this is meant, we might consider a being that's even simpler than He, that is, one which wouldn't be triple in persons.

2. The divine emanations, or rather the three supposed persons of the Trinity, are nothing but the various aspects, under which the more capable among the ancients conceived of a single and selfsame God. Plato, who didn't dare teach publicly the unity of a God, considers him as good, wise, powerful. He makes three totalities from these three aspects: Goodness, Wisdom, Power. The ancient Fathers, all of whom were disciples of Plato, imported this doctrine into Christianity, and made three persons from three qualities, which are only suitable for a single and selfsame God.

3. The more opposed the Trinity is to reason, the clearer the proofs that are required to convince us that God revealed this mystery. I repeat it once more, so that I never have to say it again: I'll confidently believe what God reveals, because I know that God can't deceive me; but I must first be given a clear proof of the revelation.

4. Words are only so much beaten air when they mean nothing: parrots are made to talk. Anything that's based on words only, and not on true ideas, is of no value. This is why we pay no attention to word games, mistakes, false cleverness. But the entire system of the Trinity is based only on words void of meaning: generation, procession, person, hypostasis, etc.

5. It's said that the ancient Fathers were sparing in what they said of the divinity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit; as if God felt some kind of shame about manifesting Himself to men, supposing that he wanted to; and as if Jesus Christ hadn't said that he would be ashamed before his Father with respect to those who had been ashamed to confess him before men<sup>67</sup>. But no, if the ancients didn't mention the divinity of Jesus Christ and even less that of the Holy Spirit, it's because they knew nothing about it. Indeed, why wasn't the same consideration made in the following centuries? Were they less nervous about inspiring polytheism? And these poor catechumens to whom the Fathers of the later centuries taught the Trinity, weren't they weak and new in the faith?

6. God is too just to punish Children for the sins of their fathers, which is also said in Scripture. Indeed, there would even be no sin if there were no Law, says St. Paul. But, he says, how can anyone know there is a law, without being taught? I ask, on the basis of these passages from Scripture, how can children be guilty, when God has prescribed them nothing before they were born?

7. Men always judge God by themselves. They have no other means than pain to punish those who offend them: therefore, they consider pain a punishment. So, when they feel themselves suffering, they become convinced that they have committed some crime or another, which has brought their suffering on them; and since they see that people endure suffering before being able to do anything; and that, consequently, people couldn't deserve suffering on their own account, they imagine that someone else must have brought it on them, and find no man better suited to this than the father of all men. Thus they find, by tracing backwards, the source of their misery; they are so used to these conclusions that, when they see a family that's fallen on hard times, whether through the loss of property, or some illness transmitted from father to son, they regard these occurrences as the effects of some particular sin; thus, as they find they're all subject to universal ills, such as cold, heat, and death, they imagine that their common Father bestowed all these fine gifts upon them.

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<sup>67</sup> Luke 9:26

They are not only content to say in general that their father sinned: they have sought to determine the particular quality of the offense. And, when the error couldn't hold for long, some said that this first father, who was called Adam, had eaten an apple against God's orders; others have said that he was called Prometheus and that, having stolen fire from heaven, the gods sent Pandora with a box full of all the evils we now endure. Those who know anything about the ancient world, and who are above being deceived by prejudice, will agree that the pagans didn't steal anything from the Jews on this point. The books of the Jews only became known to the pagans after the Septuagint version was made. We can affirm that they didn't know it well at that time; in these times before printing, books weren't all that common, especially large ones like the Bible. But it's certain that the fable of Prometheus was spread throughout paganism before the Septuagint version appeared. The most ancient Greek authors mentioned him.

But pain is not a punishment. If pain were a punishment for the sin of our common father, it would follow from God's justice that this punishment would be equal in all men, since they would all have sinned in him equally. However, nobody will disagree about the inequality in the punishment, even in children. Some are born blind, others lame, others mute; not only are the ills of the body very divergent among men, but also their lust and ignorance; thus, it's said that the punishment for sin comes to us in varying quantities.

If pain were a punishment, pleasure should also be a reward; but on this point there is no agreement. What's the origin, then, of pleasure and pain? This is not hard to figure out. Pain is a warning given to us by the author of nature to make us avoid, by sensations, that is, by the shortest path, things that can harm our body. When we're near a fire, we would have to make extensive calculations to know whether it is or isn't suitable to us. We would have to know the nature of fire and the present disposition of our machine. We'd have to have keener eyes than we have: sensation cuts right through all these discussions. When we're cold, fire gives our blood a suitable motion, and then we're content to approach it. If we're hot, the fire increases the motion of our blood, we feel uncomfortable, we move away from it, and all of this happens mechanically and by pleasure and pain; pleasure is as useful to us as pain, whether for our own preservation, or for that of society. For it is certain that our own particular preservation and that of society are the two moving parts, as it were, of all that happens in the world, with respect to us.

But, not to stray too far from our subject, how many things do we do which are useful to society, which we wouldn't do without pleasure and pain? The pain caused by contempt, the pleasure

occasioned by praise, bring thousands of blessings to society. It's pain, once more, that leads us closer to fire, when this proximity is necessary, it's pleasure that keeps us there. It's pain that drives us away, after we've been led there. Pain and pleasure are what lead us to seek nourishment. Finally, even a little consideration will show us that pleasure and pain are neither rewards nor punishments; and that the author of nature could find no shorter path to help us avoid the evil, and to lead us to the good, not only with respect to us; but also with respect to society. Which should show us that we act far more mechanically than we think.

8. The disorder of nature, and God's amending that same nature, would reveal an imperfection in God; only what is made badly can be amended. Man is not corrupt. There is no way to claim this without attacking the infinite wisdom and power of its author. Man is as he is because of his nature. Nature is the order that God has established, which, consequently, can't be a bad one. Man can't be amended without this entailing great difficulties. Would the Earth be big enough to accommodate everyone if they didn't die? And what would become of each of us in particular? Make no mistake: death is necessary for the order of nature, and it's not as horrible as people usually think: God knows what will become of us: we will contribute to the order of the universe. We can be quite sure, though, that we will never become embers in Hell.

God is omnipotent: His omnipotence isn't meant to produce contradictions. Now, according to the nature of matter, man should be as he is and he can never be otherwise: the nature of matter was determined before the supposed sin of man, and this nature of matter is only the way it is because of the will of God. Thus, man is only as he is due to the nature of matter. Indeed, matter is divisible and penetrable: the more solid divides the less solid. All matter is subject to the rules of motion; man is, therefore, essentially mortal, since, having a body, he is divisible, and it's false that sin caused the death of man, and the other drawbacks that afflict us. If we wished to meditate seriously on our condition, we would see that all our supposed unhappiness depends only on our imagination: we want to dominate others and we think we're unhappy when we lack something to elevate us. For this we need riches, and we consider ourselves unfortunate when we lack them.

9. Where can our supposed inclination to evil come from, which is said to be an effect of the sin of our first Father? It either comes from God, or from ourselves, or from other Creatures. 1st. It can't come from God, because God does no evil. It can't be said that God gave us this

inclination to punish us for the disobedience of our first father; such an inclination would be a fine punishment, not only because we enjoy following it; but also because God can't punish us by giving a bad urge. What concept would this give us of God Himself? 2nd. It can't come from ourselves: we can neither create ourselves, nor give ourselves inclinations, nor absolutely get rid of the ones we have. If we had such a power, we would amend ourselves at will. Finally, if it came from ourselves, it wouldn't be found in all men. 3rd. Creatures certainly can be the occasion that leads us to actualize our faculties; but as they are outside of us, they can't give us either faculties or inclinations.

Therefore, we have no bad inclinations: all our urges are good, coming as they do from God. We sometimes misuse them with respect to creatures: but the circumstances which lead us to find such usage bad, ultimately change nothing; and that which we call a bad urge is an instinct that God gave us, which initiates all our actions, whether for our own preservation, or that of society.

The very same drive which is said to be a bad one in us is observed in the other animals: thus they bear, along with us, the punishment for our crimes. It is irrational to pretend that, because man is fancied to have headship over the animals, they must have been made to feel the effects of his misconduct. Nature, when interrogated, makes us feel the absurdity in such a grotesque thought. The animals, therefore, must have been quite astonished to see the order of the universe change suddenly; for they were created before us. The animals, on the contrary, never should have had to suffer for human weakness; and man would certainly have been punished all the more at the sight of animals exempt from his sufferings.

God, being omnipotent, can do what is best and most advantageous for us; since He is infinitely good and wise, we should not doubt that He has done this: what our imagination finds bad, is good and wisely ordained. When we know the Lord better, we will esteem His handiwork all the more. The infinite goodness of God would not put man into a position where he could offend Him and be lost.

10. What is corrupt nature? Is it in a different state than it's always been in? Might the essences, the rules determined at the moment of the creation, have been altered? If man loves to feel and be moved in a pleasant manner, this is due to his nature, and it's not an effect of sin.

How might Adam have found pleasure in eating the forbidden fruit, unless it was so ordained by nature, that the chewing of it would be pleasant and determinant for him?

Julian the Apostate only reigned for two years: the brevity of his reign is considered a punishment from God. He wanted to destroy Christianity. Jovian succeeded him, and began, instead, to zealously destroy paganism and establish Christianity: he only reigned for seven months. Surely, that was the sort of fellow the world needed to establish Christianity! Was it a punishment? Was it a reward? It can't have been a punishment, since he was only busy in good deeds; it can't have been a reward, since he didn't complete his work.

11. If everything obeys the established rules of motion, if man's body only moves in conformity with these rules, then how can God punish us? Can we disobey them? *In ipso vivimus, movemur et sumus*<sup>68</sup>. How will He judge us? He would have handed man weapons only to kill himself, to give him just enough liberty to offend God. To say that the sin of Adam was necessary for a greater good is to make God dependent on something other than Himself<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

<sup>69</sup> Lucretius, Book 6, beginning: *Why doesn't thunder fall on the impious?*

## CHAPTER IX. ON THE IDEA WE SHOULD HOLD OF GOD. THAT HE HAS NEVER REVEALED TO MEN A PARTICULAR CULT, BY WHICH HE WOULD WISH TO BE HONORED.

1. My reason tells me that God is the most perfect of all beings; He should eminently contain all the perfections we observe in creatures, since He alone can be the author of these perfections. But let's be careful not to attribute to God perfections which are only perfections relative to us. Men ordinarily consider God as a great king, as a father, as a judge, ultimately, as a powerful man. All such comparisons will always be defective: God is infinitely higher than what is suitable for man.

When men think of God as a king, they say that He does everything for His own glory, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*<sup>70</sup>; however, the concept of glory cannot be suitable for God. Glory is entirely respective, that is, glory only exists in the imagination of others. To pursue glory is to wish to appear great in the imagination of others: therefore, glory, in whatever sense we attribute it to Him, can never be suitable for God, who is infinitely higher than the imagination of men, His creatures. It is, therefore, absurd to say that God rewards in Heaven to show His goodness, that He punishes in Hell to show His justice: who are the spectators to whose esteem God appeals when rewarding or punishing? It can't be said that God acts to show any of His perfections in particular, without saying that He desires the admiration of a being equal to Himself; and without claiming, without realizing it, that God hasn't always been happy, since there was an eternity when God lacked the satisfaction of publicizing His infinite merits; for before the creation of the world, He was all alone.

2. It's a principle of religion that one should not act amid doubts: thus, when I am not assured that the religion of my fathers is true, I shouldn't risk worshipping God in a way that He might abhor.

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<sup>70</sup> "To the greater glory of God"; the Jesuits motto.

3. We can analyze creatures relative to God and relative to themselves. All creatures are good with respect to God. Scripture says: *vidit Deus cuncta quae fecerat, et erant valde bona*<sup>71</sup>. They are entirely dependent on Him; it's inconceivable that something might happen in the world contrary to the will of God, and to the rules He established in the creation, of which everything that happens is only an outcome and a product. Nothing, consequently, can be bad with respect to God; there is, therefore, nothing to reward, nor to punish. Only evil is punishable, and there can't be any with respect to God; and only good deserves a reward; and there can be in the world nothing good but what has God for its author. There is, therefore, neither any punishment to fear, nor any reward to hope for, from God: there is, therefore, no religion.

Creatures, considered by themselves, that is, by the different relations existing between them, can harm and bring pleasure to each other; certain things are suitable to the nature of man, others harm him. Thus, intelligent creatures should be led, through fear of punishment, not to harm each other, and they should even be stimulated, through reward, to be useful to each other, because they can harm each other due to their different situations and their particular natures. But, as there is nothing which interests us as much as our own preservation, and since, by the rules of the author of nature, pain drives us away from what harms us, and pleasure draws us to what suits us, we should, by the pain caused by punishment and the pleasure caused by reward, stimulate in sensitive creatures all the motions which are suitable to us.

It's by this art that animals are trained to do so many surprising things. Those kings who have done the same thing have always enriched their states with a thousand new inventions, everything has flourished in their times. Thus, a viper who wounds a man, or a lion who eats him in a forest, only offend man; let him get his revenge on them, let him destroy them, if he can: they are evil with respect to him; it's up to him to defend himself from them; but they are good as far as God is concerned. Thus, God gave to all creatures natural weapons to defend themselves from those who might do them harm. In the same way, a thief harms society, he destroys the order and security which must exist among men, he's a viper who wounds them. Let men punish him, let them cut him off from society, like a disordered machine; but the Creator, who made him, has nothing to punish him for. We only act, once again, according to the determined rules of motion; our muscles are determined to move by causes which don't depend on our whim, whatever

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<sup>71</sup> "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed" (Gen. 1:31).

illusions the common man may form on this point, and God would have no more reason to punish us for having stolen something than for having turned insane. For the author of nature, who created all things, left to man the power to acquire power for himself, since he did these things for his utility; he put pleasure and pain in him, because these two things are also necessary for him. Thus, a thief who steals does both good and evil: he does good with respect to himself and evil with respect to others, and nothing with respect to God. Therefore, it's men whom he offends against, and not God; therefore, it's up to men to punish him, since he offends them, and he sins against the rules they have established, and God has nothing to punish him for.

Men always want to judge God by themselves: they punish, they reward: they believe that God punishes and rewards as well; and it seems, on the contrary, to belong to the nature of God, and to a true perfection in Him, to be unable to do either. Under an infinite and omnipotent being, nothing should occur that is beyond His sole will, concerning which God owes us no explanation, and which is impossible for us to ever know: God, therefore, could only punish and reward Himself.

4. It's of the essence of God to do what is most perfect. Now, just as it's an imperfection to be able to offend God, it belongs to the goodness and wisdom of God to put man into a situation where he can't offend Him to his own ruin; and we should not raise the question if God did so. If God had demanded a particular form of worship from us, by which He wanted to be honored, He would have revealed it from the beginning. It's ridiculous to say that God manifested himself in different ways, in various times, that He called men slaves in the ancient law, that He calls them children in the new one: it's the imagination of men that varies, but God never changes. It is absurd to say that God allowed certain things at various times, *ad duritiam cordis*<sup>72</sup>, and that he decided to forbid them at other times. Men have always been the same: now it's said that they are ever more perverse, and then that they're more perfect than the ancients. They want it to have been permissible for the ancients to repudiate their wives, *ad duritiam cordis*, and then for the Pharisees of Jesus' day, and the Jews of that time, imperfect as they were, to have no need for such condescension; they were, therefore, more perfect than their fathers. It's as true as ever that the prerogative of error is to be ever-changing.

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<sup>72</sup> Because of [your] hardness of heart" (Matthew 19:8).

5. There are some philosophers who claim that we see all things in God, that He gave us innate ideas of the first principles, and that this is the only reason why everyone in the universe agrees that the whole is greater than its parts. I won't try to refute this fanciful notion here. I won't ask them why certain things require so much attention and others less, nor why everyone sees so few things in the same way; if it's in God that an honest Muslim sees that his religion is true, and why, after long and sincere attention paid on both sides, people haven't ceased to think differently. But I would ask them: why didn't God give us innate ideas of a certain religion? Was it more important to teach us that the whole was greater than its parts? Wouldn't the senses and experience have taught this sort of thing to us? The merits of faith would be the same, the certainty of the revelation could only increase it: it would still be a matter of belief and practice. For, I don't demand that God should give us an idea of the substance of the mysteries, nor that He should explain them to us, this would be the end of faith; but I only ask Him to give us a certainty of His revelation. God is too just and too good not to have done this, if there were indeed any true religion in the world.

The belief in a God is far from being the effect of chance, or politics, even less of ignorance, since it is found in all men. If God had revealed any articles of religion, they would enjoy the same prerogative. It is far from the wisdom and goodness of God to demand of man anything beyond what he is capable of doing, that is, beyond his sincerest efforts. But, if there are men who do now or ever have been unable to find certainty about the revelation, this is a sure proof that such a thing isn't to be found.

We have only two ways to know the will of God: reason and revelation. Why is reason more or less present in all men, while so many remain ignorant of the revelation, and why have there been so few who are said to be its witnesses? Effectively, it's because reason does indeed exist, while there never has been any revelation.

6. We think we act voluntarily when we act by passion, we think that we are thinking freely while we're dreaming. A madman believes he freely does whatever he likes; and we believe we act freely in our ordinary actions. However, a certain movement of liquids, or a certain disposition of the organs makes one man passionate, another wise, and another man insane: nature is uniform. To suppose man free and self-determining is to make him equal to God, it's doing what

God Himself can't do. Determination is an action; now, if man could determine himself by himself, he might then act by himself, he would be God and could be a creator. Why couldn't man determine himself with respect to certain actions only? Man should act in a general and uniform manner, i.e., his actions should have the same cause: if certain mechanical actions occur in him, then all of them happen mechanically; and if some are done freely, then they are all done freely.

The will of man only desires this or that because it is determined to do so: it is led to what it finds good; it can only love what is good. Thus, it can only be determined, and it must feel the impression of good and evil likewise. The clock only works when it is wound: shall we say that we shouldn't wind the clock? Thus, although man only acts as he is predetermined to act, man must still be wound up, determined according to our interests: the fear of punishment keeps him from harming society, rewards attract him. Nature is uniform in the universe; everything here is subject to the same vicissitudes: leaves fall, men die.

7. Three objects of religion: God, our neighbor, and ourselves. God is the only proper and true object of religion; the others are those of society. If I seek to destroy religion, I only wish to destroy a form of worship that God has never revealed to men, and which He doesn't require from them with respect to Himself. But I don't consider it a terrible thing that religion subsists with respect to us and our neighbor; that relates to society.

There are some things we only know through ideas, which I call ideas of resemblance. For instance, before I ever went to Rome, I only knew Rome by ideas of resemblance. In the same way, we only know God by an idea of resemblance.

Everything is relative: victory is good and bad; an executioner is good and bad; a thief does good and evil. How many families are lost and devastated among our enemies, while the same event makes us light joyous bonfires! A thief does good with respect to himself, increasing his own means; he does evil with respect to society.

If there is a God, it's said, He must also be worshiped. Scripture teaches us that the world is not eternal: there was once a God without any worship whatsoever. The animals did nothing to worship God: if man didn't exist, there would have been a God, and creatures, but no worship.

8. Three things show the falseness of religion: 1st, the falseness of its physics. 2nd, the false idea it gives us of God and human liberty; 3rd, the lack of connection between the means it prescribes to us, and the end of these means.

If men didn't know how to write, if they weren't aware of this medium, and which they didn't always have, and which God never taught them, how would they know the various points of religion? Is it conceivable that God makes religion depend on an art which hasn't always existed, which is less ancient than religion, and which is still unknown to an infinity of peoples? Since this is the only way religion can be learned, how can someone born deaf learn it? Since he has no religion, he must be damned.

If the Christian religion had found men in the state of reason, it would be astonishing if it had ever took root; but since it found them in crude errors, one error was discarded in favor of another; just as passions circulate in the heart. With a proper understanding of man, nothing is surprising; he is vulnerable to novelty, and often embraces without thought, only because he loves novelty. Those who heard the apostles preach were strongly inclined to credulity.

The Christian religion gives us a false idea of God. For human justice is an emanation from divine justice, and it should, in itself, be of the same nature. But, according to human justice, we must criticize the actions of God with respect to his son, Adam, the nations who have never heard the gospel, and children who die before baptism. Thus, in ancient times the Christians knew how to outwit God, by delaying their baptisms as late as possible: then baptism effaced all sins and they went straight to heaven.

The Christian religion has been contradicted and reformed by clever Christians; but they have been regarded as impious men and heretics. God is not for man: this would make man nobler than God, since God would exist for him. Man is not for God, because God needs nothing: man was made because God wanted to make him<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> The printed edition continues this sentence: "just as He made all other creatures, both animate and inanimate".

9. The state of weakness in which man clearly finds himself in the final moments of his life, must mean that he can no longer act, and consequently merit, anything. And, since we think he's immortal, we say that he will then undergo his judgment.

Remorse proves neither the divinity nor religion, remorse is only an internal feeling. Now, our internal feelings prove nothing except that we feel and that we exist. Remorse only comes from prejudice: if we were exempt of prejudices, we would be exempt from remorse. Remorse comes only from the education and a particular disposition of our organs. If remorse had another cause, if it were a proof of something that exists outside of us, independent of us, it would be the same in all men, and would be caused by the same actions. But some feel remorse for doing things, while others never feel it. For example, a Christian would feel no remorse for despising and trampling on the Qur'an, and a great amount of it for trampling on a crucifix, just as a Turk would feel none for trampling on a crucifix and would feel a great deal for despising and trampling on the Qur'an.

Therefore, remorse only comes from prejudice. Finally, remorse would exist permanently, at all times: before the deed, in the deed, no less than after the deed, – but this is not so. But when our machine is drained of the spirits that were agitated in all the passion, then the old ideas reawaken, easily make an impression, and cause remorse.

## CHAPTER X. THAT THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IS NOT NECESSARY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY, THAT IT TENDS TO DESTROY IT, AND THAT IT KEEPS FEWER MEN WITHIN LEGITIMATE BOUNDS THAN IS USUALLY THOUGHT.

1. If religion were necessary in the world, and if we all had to live in the one we were born into, then clearly God would have given some certain and clear sign of this. The vicissitudes of human affairs, the change of languages, would have led God's justice and goodness to leave us an invariable mark of the truth of religion. We'll never be able to guess God's will if He doesn't clearly show it to us; and one of the strongest proofs that God never revealed any religion is the fact that religion needs to be proved, which should not be the case.

Religion is, properly speaking, only the worship we owe to God, such as hearing Mass, frequenting the sacraments, believing in the Trinity, the Incarnation, etc. Civic life is quite independent of this worship, thus, it's possible to fulfill all the duties of a good citizen and a good friend, in brief, of a good man, independently of the worship we supposedly owe to God. It is true that men who selfishly want everyone to fulfill, for their benefit, the duties required by society, have linked these duties to those of religion, and have claimed that part of the worship of the divine consists in fulfilling the duties and obligations of citizenship: in this way they multiply the motivations driving us to be useful to them. This policy is judicious, even if it's selfish, but it is not true, since ultimately, it's still necessary to show that God has indeed revealed this was the sort of worship He demanded from us.

If we had no biases we would see that the Christian religion does great harm to civil society. Only those who practice it ignorantly, or who don't think consistently, can form any other idea than this. The egregious contempt that the Christian religion prescribes for wealth is entirely destructive of trade, which is the soul of society; the mere desire to become rich is enough to fall into the demonic nets, according to Scripture: *qui volunt divites fieri, incidunt in laquaeos diaboli*<sup>74</sup>. Still,

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<sup>74</sup> "They that will be rich fall into temptation and the devil's snare" (1 Tim. 6:9, with slight modification).

it's this desire which unites all nations and individuals into an amazing, providential order. If you take away this desire from the universe, in what state of sleepy immobility would you let it fall?

2. The Christian religion also criticizes the desire for knowledge and all manner of curiosity. To what depths of ignorance would this principle not lead us? It also criticizes all fondness between the sexes, and if some can't keep themselves under control then marriage is required. But no conversations, no spending time with those of the opposite sex; if no offense is committed in such encounters, the risk remains: *qui amat periculum in illo*<sup>75</sup>. Such conversation is not, therefore, allowed on any but special occasions. How many inimical consequences for civil society come from this principle! How many mismatched marriages! And what might then be said of the author of nature, for having given us urges for which He would condemn and punish us? Can God be considered as exercising justice after that? Why did He give us such urges if He meant to keep us from following them? Can He really be made to act so unwisely? But what can be said, in light of the fact that the Christian religion sees marriage as a state of imperfection relative to celibacy? Simply read what St. Paul and the Church Fathers say about this: you'll find that Christians should be ashamed to marry. And what would become of civil society without marriage?

Ultimately, the Christian religion condemns everything that satisfies the senses, and wouldn't have us follow our own will in any matter. This will of one's own is thought to be the fount of all evil; all greatness is true lowliness. In the end, all that is called worldly splendor is condemned by religion, which tells us that everything in the world is *concupiscentia oculorum, concupiscentia carnis, superbia vitae*<sup>76</sup>. But what does civil society require which isn't in one of these three? I know that, in the distinctions with which we pay superficial minds, we think we can exculpate the Christian religion for the abuses I'm criticizing here. Religion, they say, only blames our attachment to science, pleasure, wealth, and splendor, without blaming all these things in themselves. But truly, if I'm forbidden from wanting something, how can I ever seek it? And if I don't seek it, what will become of society? But, they say, we should seek them for their usefulness, and not for the things themselves. Without examining whether this last excuse is contrary to the heart of the doctrine, why does the Christian religion say that the most perfect state is that in which one deprives oneself completely of all things? And why does it tell me that I should do all I can to reach this perfection which is as spiritual as that of God Himself, who has abandoned

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<sup>75</sup> "The sinner will heap sin upon sin" (Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 3:27).

<sup>76</sup> "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

everything in this world to embrace poverty? *Estote perfecti, sicut pater vester coelestis perfectus est*<sup>77</sup>.

3. Those who aren't strong enough to shed their prejudices, and who assume the truth of principles without examining them, draw great conclusions from the morality of religion: they embrace the monastic life, that is, they separate completely from civil society. This is very culpable, if we think according to the order of nature and society; it is very regular, according to the rules of the Christian religion. The latter prohibits us from following our own will, monks make a vow of obedience; it prohibits sensual pleasures, above all those which the divine author Himself stimulates on the occasion of the impressions which one sex makes on the other, whether by simple presence or by a closer union; monks make a vow of chastity and even sometimes destroy their own body by criminal austerities; it prohibits all love of splendor, all drive for wealth, monks make a vow of poverty. What amount of praise do they not receive in the world, especially if they've abandoned great wealth, or renounced an illustrious birth to embrace this state? Could anything be more inimical to civil society? And does nature cede like this to human imagination?

Monks, these supposedly voluntary poor, are not only useless to civil society in their adopted lazy lifestyle, but they truly harm it. Since they make a vow of poverty and they only get fed by the public for the trouble they take in doing nothing at all, they necessarily steal from the poor whatever people in their naivety give them, in their purchase, with temporal treasures, of the imaginary treasures of indulgences. What best shows the illusion found in this conduct of the monks is the way it seems that exactly the same ones who embrace this state in good faith, only make a vow of poverty for the sake of greater ease and more wealth. Most of them are housed magnificently: the ancient orders have acquired vast possessions, the poor hermits of the order of St. Bruno (which is the denomination they use in their contracts) are powerfully rich, to say nothing of the religious of the order of St. Benedict, the Jesuits, and the others whose number is infinite, most of which, on pretext of religion, wield a shameful tyranny over the ignorant and stupid masses; and one might rightly say that they are more powerful than the sovereigns themselves (the Inquisitions of Italy and Spain). Thus, it may be said that the community in general doesn't practice disinterestedness. We see this in the poverty of [civil] individuals, while the monks are

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<sup>77</sup> "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)

enriched while making a vow of poverty, and if that continues I fully expect to see them becoming richer than the sovereigns, and even that they'll someday seize upon sovereignty itself.

4. All Christians should aim at perfection, *estote perfecti* etc., says Jesus Christ. But since virginity, according to the Christian religion, is more perfect than marriage, it follows that all Christians should aim at virginity: they are also exhorted to this. Who fails to notice the falseness of this principle, so contrary to nature, and to the purpose which reason tells me God had in creating man, that he should multiply? But if the whole planet were Christian, and all the Christians followed this principle, what would be the result? The end of the world. Doesn't this aim at the destruction of the species? Consider the praise given to St. Alexis for having abandoned his wife on the very evening of his wedding, to live like a derelict in his father's house? He's considered a great saint, he's regarded as a wonderful example to imitate. If Christendom imitated him, what would become of society? The people love whatever seems to be above their nature: virgins are praised, because this state is commonly regarded as very difficult and unusual.

How inimical it is to civil life to live alone, to take one's food through a little hole, as if it came from Heaven! In brief, how harmful the life of monks is to society! If everyone lived separately, without any company or social interactions, it would be impossible for them do any good. But there is better reason to think that being mutually useful and fulfilling the duties of a good citizen is to fulfill God's purpose in placing us in the world. Therefore, properly understood, the monastic state is the most imperfect of all states. The people judge here, once again, by the trouble met with in disobeying one's natural inclinations, while surely the opposite is true, since this habitual inclination is the clear sign God gives us of His will.

It is to mistrust the will of God and His concern for His creatures, to believe that monks are required to pray to Him for other men; for, aside from the fact that monks don't pray all that often, the masses also pray to Him. Monks are men like anyone else: they have no special characteristics other than what the imagination gives them, and what their odd and ridiculous clothing has brought them, but they are like anyone else in the eyes of God. If it's true to say that God requires us to pray, it is certainly more agreeable to God for us to pray directly to him, than to pray to Him via a third party. But the masses always want to judge God like a king. Cities pay pensions to certain courtiers to protect them from the sovereign; the masses behave in the same way: they pray on

Earth to Saints they believe are in Heaven, they give them gifts, and even maintain monks to protect them from God.

5. The Christian religion detaches us too much from our present felicity: it wants us to relate everything to a future happiness, about which we know nothing. However, for the sake of civil society, we need to be made happy in this world, because it seems, given the ways of the author of nature, that He had in mind the felicity of men in general rather than of some individual or other. We should all be informed about this purpose and study how to be mutually happy. If we look closely at what goes on in the world, we'll see that this purpose, well executed, is a sure path to our own happiness: the author of nature seems only to have given it to us for this reason. Those who are only good to themselves are usually miserable; this misery is a goad used by Providence to bring them out of a state that's useless to society: the more useful a state makes us, the more it enriches us. Self-love, humanity, and ultimately, nature will restrain us and, indeed, do restrain us more than religion. Just consider your own case: vanity, ultimately, the passions restrain people and lead them to do everything. Nobody has yet managed to do evil as such, and we shouldn't give the common people any reason to confuse us with the wicked.

6. The Christian religion is the tomb of reason. It keeps us from making progress in the sciences: *captivantes intellectum*<sup>78</sup>. Ultimately, religion tends to make us miserable in this world, for the sake of another life which it promises to us. In a word, to be a perfect Christian; one must be ignorant, believe blindly, renounce all pleasure, honors, wealth, live alone in a desert, abandon one's relatives, one's friends, keep one's virginity intact, in brief, do everything that's against nature, give all one's wealth to the monks. Having so done, you're certain, according to their promises, to go straight to Heaven.

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<sup>78</sup> "Bringing the intelligence into subjection". See 2 Cor. 10:5.

## CHAPTER XI. *THAT THERE IS A SUPREME BEING, AND THE CONDUCT THAT A GOOD MAN SHOULD OBSERVE IN LIFE.*

1. I can't consider the beauty, order, and harmony of all the parts of the world without concluding that the world, along with its component parts, was produced by a being who is wise and all-powerful, even if matter were eternal. How many marvelous things do we not admire in the world! The ebb and flow of the sea, the nature of fluid bodies, light, colors, the circulation of blood, the interplay of each part of the bodies of animated creatures, and the amazing harmony of all of them together; all these things would exhaust the human mind before it ever imagined their true cause. If it takes so much attention to disentangle them, what kind of wisdom must have been needed to invent them! There's not a single plant whose structure isn't an amazing piece of workmanship, requiring even more knowledge in its author. After this, is it still possible to think that the universe is a product of chance? Call it eternal if you like, you'll still meet the force of this argument.

The preservation of the world is no easier than its production: time, which consumes all things, the action which continually destroys all instruments, would ultimately degrade and ruin any clockwork if an infinite wisdom hadn't provided for all occurrences and weren't continually maintaining the regular movements which it alone can have impressed on matter, incapable of moving itself. Don't the visible stars, and their continual and regular motions, not convince us of the power and existence of a supreme being? But when a mind that has been enlightened by astronomy carefully observes the exactness and regularity of these vast bodies in their revolutions, it doesn't matter which system one embraces, one must have recourse to an intelligent cause that produces the regularity of the movement of these stars, which regularity is so useful to the Earth.

2. Even the stupidest of men is convinced that every effect has a cause, and that a huge effect presupposes a cause of immense virtue; universal agreement allows no exceptions here. There is no people or individual who fails to recognize a cause of everything. Now, the cause of intelligent things is the effect of a perfect intelligence; a product of an amazing structure, where the positioning of the parts relates to a purpose, must surely be the effect of an intelligent cause. Here, then, we have recognized an intelligent author. The same common sense dictates that no

other cause could have restricted or limited the perfection of that cause; that it is, therefore, unlimited. Behold the author of the world, recognized as an infinite being; wisdom, goodness, power, justice, in brief, all the perfections, are contained in this infinite being, and it is hard to conceive that it is infinite but not unique.

3. It's this supreme and infinite being whom we call God, it's He who has given us reason as our guide, which is found in all men. Provided we follow it without bias, we can never be deceived, God's providence had to use it this way. Why, then, shall we submit this light, which is natural and consequently given by Him, to the tyranny of another man's? How can I be sure of which way to go, if I'm following another man's light? My reason can err, I agree, but isn't other men's reason not subject to the same failings?

An honest man should not give his assent to words whose meaning he doesn't understand; he must also be on guard whether what is said agrees with the right lights of reason. For, when he conceives that it doesn't agree, it is impossible for him to submit to it, or to consent to something that is repugnant to this light.

Although many things are superior to our reason, nevertheless, they aren't seen to clash with any of those clear and evident principles which are engraved in our minds: we are incapable of conceiving that the smallest particle of matter can be divided eternally; still, it's far from contrary to our reason, since it convinces us that it's true, although we don't understand how. There are other things which are directly contrary to these clear and evident principles which our reason finds in its own nature: for example, that a part is equal to the whole. This would mean renouncing the clear ideas of reason and intelligence, on which the certainty of all we believe, or know, is based, such as the first principles without which we could have no assurance, if we believe such things.

This is why we know that nothing could be harder than what God has already done in the creation of the world; from which we should conclude that God can do whatever is possible. And this is what we should mean when we say that God is omnipotent. But certainly, nobody would maintain that God can do things which either imply contradiction in themselves, or which are formally contrary to His nature and His attributes. This is, however, what the Christian religion makes him do; and any honest man will agree. The immutability of the God's counsel is necessarily entailed

by His wisdom. Anyone who changes their mind or repents of something, reveals that their foresight is imperfect and that their wisdom is defective: God is not susceptible of any imperfections.

4. There are people who don't believe in the Christian religion because of their debauchery or impiety: such men as these can never be good. Since, from their childhood, they have only been told not to do evil through a fear of Hell, once they lose their fear of Hell, they lose all their inhibitions: see Charron, *On Wisdom*, book 2, articles 28 & 29. But there are some who don't believe in the Christian religion due to their reason, and these are very good men: the spirit of order animates them, and reason persuades them by this spirit of order, how important both honor and probity are to them. There should naturally be more probity in those who are convinced by reason of the falseness of the Christian religion than in a Christian. Confession authorizes crime by the assurance of receiving absolution for it: crime becomes easy to commit, when there is hope for forgiveness, whereas the man of order finds no way to escape blame for his failings.

5. Some actions are essentially and eternally good; and the sort of thing a good man should practice, such as recognizing a God, not doing to others anything he wouldn't want them to do to him. From which I conclude that opposite kind of actions are essentially bad.

The sure proof by which we should recognize whether we love God, is to see whether we feel a firm and constant resolution to obey Him. Thus, we should have no guide but reason, which we get from Him, and when it has recognized that He is speaking, it should hold its tongue and listen.

The internal respect we have of God should consist in a suitable knowledge of His being and His attributes, and our external respect should be shown in the way we do everything we find suitable to His excellence and to our dependence on Him.

Since, therefore, God is the creator and master of all things, we should also use all of them in the ways He intended, and use them for the purposes He had in mind while creating them, to the extent that, using the reason He gave to us, we're able to know His plans and goals. Therefore, we must never abuse these things, nor use them to excess to the detriment of our health, nor disturb our reason, nor become, in any way whatsoever, an obstacle to our duty.

Likewise, since God made many things for the use and service of all men, it is not right for these things to accumulate in the hands of some superfluously, while others lack what they need to live.

Man is not made to be lazy: he must be occupied with something, and society should always be his goal. God does not propose the happiness of certain individuals, but the general good and felicity of all men. Thus, men should provide services to each other, whatever their differences may be, because there is nobody, as great and elevated as he might be, who might not at some point need the help and friendship of the poorest. Thus, all should be of assistance to the rest. Faithfulness and sincerity are essential to society: everyone can benefit greatly from this, and it contributes much to make them mutually happy. We should love others like ourselves, as sincerely as ourselves, that is, we should always do to others what we judge reasonable for them to do to us, if we were in their circumstances, and they were in ours. He who is duty-bound to do something, also has to prepare himself to fulfill it, and to use all means and instruments necessary to accomplish it successfully.

This is the conduct which a good man should observe in life; it's the sort of conduct which the greatest men of antiquity followed. These moral feelings of Plato and the other pagans is as pure as the Christian one. The latter only practice it because they're taught that it's God's wish and command; the former, on the contrary, only practice it because reason and nature inspire it. Didn't Jesus Christ come, then, to reform nature, which we're told was corrupted at that time? These feelings of morality are not of a corrupted nature, and Jesus Christ and Scripture don't teach us even one point of morality which wasn't taught and practiced everywhere.

What, then, is this corrupt nature? The examples of so many wise pagans show clearly that they had a considerable knowledge of a supreme being, and an impressive power to do what reason taught them was good. Did they have any law other than what reason naturally inspired? No, but it's a fact that reason and nature are the handiwork of God, and religions are the handiwork of men.

6. Here, then, are the doubts I propose, not as a person who is stubborn, biased in his views, and who thinks himself infallible, I know only too well that my reason might err; but as someone who follows the lights of this reason which comes from God, who speaks with sincerity

and in good faith; and who seeks a clarification. And I insist that I'll submit without stubbornness, when I'm shown where I'm mistaken, and that what I've advanced is false. O my God, speak, your servant heareth, *notam fac mihi viam in qua ambulem*, as the Prophet says, and I will follow it with all the submissiveness and all the respect I owe to my creator and sovereign master.

END.

# ON THE CONDUCT A GOOD MAN SHOULD OBSERVE DURING HIS LIFE<sup>79</sup>

1. Some acts are eternally good, and these should be practiced by a good man, such as recognizing a God, only doing to others what he would want done to him; all the rest are bad: the sure sign by which we can know if we love God is to see whether we feel a firm resolution to obey Him; therefore, we should have no guide but reason, and when it speaks, we should listen and keep silent. The interior esteem we should have towards God must consist in a knowledge suitable to His state and His attributes, and our external respect should appear in the practice of what is in conformity with nature, and with our dependence on Him.

2. Since God, therefore, is the creator and master of all things, we should also use all of them for the uses for which He made them, and use them for the purposes for which He offers them, all the more as, since He has given them to us, we're able to see His aims and intentions: we should never abuse these things, or use them to an excess which is unhealthy or upsetting to our rationality, nor be in any way whatsoever an obstacle to our fulfilment of our duty. Likewise, since God made many things for the use and service of all men, it is not right for these things to accumulate in the hands of certain men to a superfluous degree, while others lack what they need to live.

3. Man is not made to be lazy, he must be occupied with something or other, and always aim at the good of society. God does not aim only at the good of certain individuals, but at the general good and happiness of all men: thus, men should be useful to each other in the present, despite any differences between them, since nobody is so great or so elevated that he might not one day require the help and friendship of the poorest of all people: thus, we should help each other;

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<sup>79</sup> My source for this translation was the pdf hosted by the "Philosophie clandestine" project, a collaboration by many institutions, at the url: [http://philosophie-clandestine.humanum.fr/phcldata/data/doc/ms39\\_de\\_la\\_conduite\\_2.pdf](http://philosophie-clandestine.humanum.fr/phcldata/data/doc/ms39_de_la_conduite_2.pdf). It has also been published by Antony McKenna: "*De la conduite qu'un honnête homme doit garder pendant sa vie*, édition critique d'un manuscrit clandestin du XVIIIe siècle", *Lias*, 14 (1987), p.229-256; manuscript: Mazarine 1194, where he indicates the main sources of the text in Pierre Bayle's works.

loyalty and sincerity are essential for society: all men can derive great advantages from this, and it does much to make them all happy.

4. We should love others like ourselves, that is, we should always do for others what we judge reasonable that they would do for us, if we were in their circumstances and they were in ours.

5. He who is obliged to do something by duty is also obliged to prepare himself to perform it, and to use all necessary means to achieve it. We should be convinced that all the operations of the mind by which we're able to acquire certain perfections are virtuous, and that our entire contentment consists only in our inner witness of this perfection.

6. We should consider that, since the body is subject to an infinity of alterations which destroy and corrupt it, and since the mind is always the same and is alone capable of making us happy during this life, by the knowledge it acquires daily, we should prefer the satisfaction which comes to us from the goods of the mind ahead of those we receive by the goods of the body. We should examine the true value of the perfections, both those of the body and those of the mind, the acquisition of which can depend on us, and which can make us happier, in order to employ our care to acquire them: if fortune contravenes our plans, keeping them from coming to fruition, at least we'll have the satisfaction that nothing was lost by our own fault, and we will not fail to enjoy all the natural blessedness which it has been in our power to acquire.

7. We should not bitterly resent fortune for sometimes mocking our plans. Our desires should not be anxious and rushed, since these are the only desires that ruin one's blessedness; although the pleasures of the body are far inferior to those of the mind, we should not, however, reject them when they don't disturb our reason, but content ourselves not to rush after them; nor should we seek to get rid of our passions; they doesn't depend on us, but we should use them with moderation, and try to make them a part of our happiness. We should think of everything that happens in the world, and which doesn't depend on us, as events represented on a stage, where we can only watch from the audience, without participating above and beyond the obligations of charity and friendship, which will not disturb our joy. Finally, all religions are indifferent with respect to the love of public peace and tranquility: we must fall into line with whatever way of serving God has been received by custom or authorized by the magistrate, each in their own country, without much inquiry about whether it's Christian or Jewish, pagan or Muslim: it's sufficient to revere God and live virtuously.

8. There are some who don't believe in the Christian religion because of debauchery and impiety; such can never be honest people: since, from their birth onwards, they have only been taught not to do evil by a fear of Hell: the moment they lose this fear, they no longer fear to do evil. But there are some who don't believe in the Christian religion by reason, those are honest men; the spirit of order makes them act, reason persuades them how important it is for them to have honor and probity; and these are more present in a man who is convinced of the falseness of the Christian Religion than in a Catholic. Confession authorizes crimes by hope of absolution: they are done with greater impunity when forgiveness is sure in coming, whereas the man of order finds no help in being forgiven for his failings.

9. It's vain to object that it would take away all the supports of virtue; that it would loosen the bridle on human corruption to embrace no religion, that there would be no more safety in the world, or crimes committed by those who thought they could hide the knowledge of their actions from human justice; that it would open the door to all manner of disorder to say that souls are mortal and will be destroyed.

10. But why, then, aren't all the Socinians wicked people? Why are there no sects which, with respect to morals, are closer [than the Socinians] to the much-lauded simplicity of the first Christians? They are infinitely more exact than the rest of Christendom in forbidding vengeance and renouncing worldly honors. They don't need any softening or figurative explanations in the Gospel texts which relate to morals. They have returned to the severity of the primitive church, which does not approve that men should complete semesters in the magistracy, or play any role in the death of their neighbor.

11. Why did the Manicheans, despite their belief in two principles in nature, observe the Gospel more strictly than Catholics? Why did they, until the thirteenth century, preserve the purity of their morals? Why were the pagan philosophers incomparably wiser than the Christian ones? Why do we find many professed atheists to be better people than Christians, such as Hippo, Theodorus, Nicanor, Euhemerus, and others who lived in a manner above reproach? Their good lives seemed so admirable to Clement of Alexandria that he thought he should refute the accusation of atheism that had been raised against them; but he's mistaken: Cicero, Plutarch, Diogenes Laërtius are so clear on this point that no amount of quibbling can stand against testimonies of this nature. Cardano tells us that those who maintained that the soul dies along with the body are, due to their

principles, better men than the rest: certain passages in Pliny seem to show that he didn't believe in God; but, nevertheless, he wasn't a pleasure-seeker. Nobody was more dedicated than he to honest business, worthy of an illustrious Roman: he seeded through his works not only much wit, but also judicious reflections, which show a clear and profound understanding of morals.

12. Was not Epicurus, who openly denied the Divinity and Providence, one of the most orderly of all philosophers in the conduct of his life? That's how Seneca speaks of him, even though he belonged to a sect filled with animosity against the memory of this great man. St. Jerome speaks highly of the frugality of the same Epicurus and uses him as a foil against the debauchery of the Christians, to attack them all the more forcefully. We learn from Diogenes Laërtius that Epicurus lived so soberly that bread, water, and vegetables were all he lived on: the same author reports that he had so many friends that whole cities wouldn't have been large enough to contain them: people came to him from all the cities of Greece and Asia; even Egypt sent disciples to him. Cicero said that it was impossible to admire too much the unity and mutual charity of Epicurus' disciples.

13. After that, can anyone say that those who deny Providence, and who set up their own satisfaction as their ultimate goal, are incapable of living in society; that they are necessarily traitors, rogues, poisoners, thieves, etc.? Aren't all these fine declamations destroyed by this one passage from Cicero? Doesn't factual truth like this give the lie to a hundred speculative arguments? Look at Epicurus' morality about the duties of friendship, it has been unailing across so many centuries; while even the most religious sects were full of quarrels and partiality, that of Epicurus enjoyed a profound peace. The brass statues set up in honor of this great philosopher, the large number of his friends, the unbreakable loyalty of his disciples, and the perpetual succession of his school, are sufficient signs of Epicurus' uprightness. Diogenes Laërtius and Gassendi teach us that, at the moment when literature began to flourish once more, the main attention of the critics was to restore the honor of Epicurus, who had been under attack during the barbarity of the preceding centuries; and they cite many of the most distinguished of all savants who openly took up his defense.

14. Since those times, what a cloud of panegyrists has stepped forward to praise this philosopher! Men like La Mothe Le Vayer, Saint-Évremond, Du Rondel, etc. Each of these writers worked diligently to restore Epicurus to honor: indeed, what moral precepts did this philosopher not teach? Did it not include all the duties of civil society? How far did it not push submission to the ruling powers, which is so important for the public? How somberly did Lucretius, his faithful follower, not

speak of virtue? What could be better than the moral sentiments that he scattered throughout his poem? Didn't Horace, who imitated him, make a point of saying that he believed in no Gods other than those of Epicurus?

15. Panaetius, the head and ornament of the Stoics, who, according to St. Epiphanius, was an atheist, or at least denied the immortality of the soul, was an excellent moralist, his book on duties was the model of Cicero, whose work surpasses them all: it has been called the Gospel of Natural Law.

16. Pomponius Atticus was a famous Epicurean: and yet, he was one of the best men of Antiquity, and nobody was better informed than he about the duties of morality. Diagoras, who was called the atheist *par excellence*, dictated beautiful laws to the Lawgiver of Mantinea. Stilpon, another celebrated philosopher, although an atheist, was able, through the study of philosophy, to correct his bad temperamental inclinations: can anything greater and more amazing be seen than what is said of him by Plutarch and Athenaeus: his indifference to the loss of his property during the pillaging that followed the ruin of his country; his advice to Demetrius Poliorcetes to inspire in him humanity for men, which so touched this Prince that he wanted to compensate him for his losses, and who replied that he had lost nothing, since neither his knowledge nor his virtue could be taken from him?

17. The sect of the Sadducees among the Jews, who openly denied the immortality of the soul, was composed of better men than the Pharisees, who prided themselves on their observation of God's Law.

18. It's known that Turkey hosts a large sect of atheists, most of which are Kadis<sup>80</sup> and the most learned among those of higher rank, and who by principle practice all the rules of humanity and society, to the utmost strictness of the Gospel.

19. If we cast our eyes on the relations given by the historians of the country of the Caffres<sup>81</sup>, we'll find that they are atheists, although divided into many societies, each under a single leader, with laws and punishments for infractors: the same thing is said of the Mariana Islands. We also have the Aborigines in Italy, and the Gaetuli and Libyans in Africa. The inhabitants of the Antilles and

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<sup>80</sup> I.e., officials or administrators in the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>81</sup> I.e., southern Africa (the term later became a racial slur).

some Canadian regions, although atheists according to historians, refrain from harming and insulting each other, each of them living in peace, content with his own goods and giving each other assistance.

20. Mr. de Thou informs us that Jacques Corbinelly, a relative of Catherine de' Medici, was a man of literature and good counsel, upright, and incapable of the least cowardice; this was a characteristic of the ancient Romans; a disinterested courtier who never flattered his prince, telling the truth boldly, a friend and patron of men of letters; what is odd here, says Mr. de Thou, is that nobody knew what were his religious beliefs: which were only those of a good man. What should we make of the Chancellor de l'Hôpital, the most somber and austere man of his age, who was thought an atheist and a man without religion, according to the accusation of Beaucaire de Péguillon, then bishop of Metz, who says so plainly. Lucilio Vanini, burned in 1619 at Toulouse for atheism, had always been very regular in his morals.

21. Saint-Évremond informs us that Mr. Desyveteaux, the tutor to Louis XIII, died as he had lived, without any hope of another life, and that, when he was about to die, he asked for a saraband to be played, so that his soul would pass *allegrement*: he had always been thought a wise and famous Philosopher.

22. Who was more upright than the famous Hobbes, that Englishman who, in the last century, was publicly considered an atheist: even though he believed everything was corporeal, he was no less a good friend, no less civil or dutiful, he lived to the age of 91, and died with the same views in 1679.

23. Benedict de Spinoza lived a life that was beyond reproach, taught nothing but virtue, and many good principles on the duty of a good man. All his conversations were edifying, he never swore, nor spoke irreverently of God, nor did he worry about wine, fine meals, or money, he only cared about studying, and spent the better part of the night at it, his life was that of a true solitary figure, he even sequestered himself in a certain way apart from humanity: a volume could be written on his virtues and the marks of disinterestedness and magnanimity he displayed throughout his life, gathered by Kortholt, professor of poetry at Kiel, during a trip he made to Holland.

24. In our days, Matthias Knutzen, a native of the country of Holstein, taught atheism in public and traveled everywhere to gain disciples: he made all of human duty consist in these three great principles he taught: to live honestly, to harm none, and to give each their due<sup>82</sup>.

25. To summarize, all the Philosophers who have denied Providence, and even the existence of God, have always been orderly and have never dogmatized in favor of crime: on the contrary, they make a point of following the morals of their country. Thus, the *Lettres de la Chine*, which are irreligious and know no Divinity, demonstrate no less than the most pious of men the principles of nature. If you forget all about religion, you'll still think that a circle is not a triangle, that a sophism is a bad argument, that the conclusion of a syllogism is true if the first premises are true, that it is worthy of man to adapt himself to reason, etc. Who can prevent a man without religion from judging that it's evil to betray his friend? The usual illusion is to imagine that men only think of an action as ordained by a Supreme Lawgiver who promises a reward to all those who do it, and threatens those who don't do it; without which they would never take the trouble to carry it out, and would pay no more heed to it than the opposite deed: the conscience of an atheist is more delicate and preferable to that of the devout: for, what can we understand by conscience except a judgment of the mind which stimulates us to do certain things because they are in harmony with reason? Is it impossible, then, for an atheist to have a conscience? Natural taste, the desire for praise, the love of truth, are all sufficient to stimulate the understanding! Why could these not also serve in the perfection the will?

26. If there are certain, immutable rules for the operations of the understanding, are there not also some for the acts of the will? The rules of these acts are not arbitrary; they come from natural necessity and impose an indispensable obligation; and, just as it's a failing to reason contrary to the rules of syllogism, it's also a failing to want something without conforming to the rules governing the acts of the will. The most general of these rules is that man must desire that which aligns with right reason, and that whenever he wants something that doesn't align with them, he is departing from his duty: no truth is more evident than that it is worthy of rational creatures to conform to reason, and unworthy not to conform to it.

From which it follows that a man who knows that it is consonant with reason to honor his father, to observe the conventions of a contract, to help the poor, to be grateful, will also know that those

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<sup>82</sup> See my eBook, *The First Atheist*, for Knutzen's writings in English.

who practice these things are praiseworthy and that those who don't practice them are blameworthy: therefore, he will see that virtue contains a natural and inherent goodness, and vice contains the same kinds of evil, and that virtue and vice are thus two kinds of qualities which are naturally and morally different: This is why, in the golden age, men did what was good by their own inclination, without the being obliged by the fear of any punishment, which led a Lutheran Doctor (Johann Lauterbach) to say: *Etiam si deum omnesque homines celare possem, tamen nihil contra justitiam facerem*<sup>83</sup>. Did Plutarch not refute Colotes the Epicurean, who had said that, without laws and magistrates, men would consume each other: no, he claims, men wouldn't cease to practice virtue, due simply to its excellence<sup>84</sup>.

27. Christians have a certain worldly honor, which is entirely against the spirit of the Gospel. Isn't this honor, of which our braggards are so jealous, completely at odds with the law of God? Wouldn't a soldier who had abandoned everything for the sake of religion, and who had to choose between offending God by taking revenge for a slap, or being thought a coward if he refused to do so, rather avenge himself? We all know that he'll find no peace if he doesn't take revenge for the insult, and that he'll risk eternal damnation if he is killed, or lose his property and wealth if he happens to kill his opponent? Where did the Christians get this point of honor which they idolize so much, and to which they sacrifice everything else? Consider all the ideas of decorum found in Christendom, you'll be at pains to find two or three that came from Religion. These ideas are, therefore, a product of nature. Thus, those who have no religion can act in complete good faith, whether it's in business, helping the poor, fighting injustice, being faithful to their friends and despising insults, even renouncing the pleasures of the body, without harming anyone. The opinion of the immortality of the soul doesn't keep people from trying to immortalize their name: we can see this in Caesar, who didn't believe in it: there is, without a doubt, something more solid in the love of glory, i.e., the pleasing imaginations which come to the mind, presenting it with all the future centuries, full of what one will have accomplished.

28. Who would dare deny that ideas of honor are not the strongest ones that [put a stop to] the torrents of lasciviousness, who would dare maintain, generally speaking, that the laws of religion are a more effective remedy than the other? If the Law had more power over women than ideas of honor, would we find so many of them aborting their children? And yet, is any crime so

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<sup>83</sup> "Although I can hide from the eyes of God and men, nevertheless I will do nothing contrary to justice" (See Pierre Bayle, *Réponse aux Questions d'un Provincial*, part III, ch. XXIX. 1737 ed., p. 987).

<sup>84</sup> See Plutarch, "Against Colotes", in his *Moralia*.

enormous and contrary to nature? They are convinced that, by losing their child, they commit a crime as atrocious and detestable in the eyes of God as the deeds of those who steal and kill: they are convinced that they steal eternal life from their children, and cast them into Limbo, where they will suffer the punishment of being deprived of God's sight for all eternity. This conviction raises their crime to an unimaginable degree of atrocity, and yet they commit it despite Religion and the penal laws, only to keep their share of human honor: therefore, this honor has more power over them than the instinct of conscience, and all the divine laws: it even has more power than the fear of death, since by this crime they risk the ultimate torture: What could be more convincing to prove the domination of the idea of honor and the imperious force it has over our souls? Can anyone deny that it, alone, is capable of keeping impurity within its proper limits? A certain madrigal could be quite suitable here:

*Toi qui meurs avant que de naître, etc.*<sup>85</sup>

(Madame de la Suze.)

29. Besides, man doesn't always act consistently with his nature, or according to his principles: the Christians provide us with plenty of proofs: Cicero noted this with respect to many Epicureans. "They live better", he said, "than they talk, while others talk better than they live": a similar remark was made about the Stoics, who, although believing in an inevitable fatality, still lived as if they were the complete masters of their fate. When it was objected to Epicurus that there was no reason to worship the Gods, in light of his belief that they did neither good nor evil, he responded that the excellence of their nature was a sufficient motivation to revere them. Seneca said that, according to this doctrine of Epicurus, it is, therefore, true that reason allows, without the help of Religion, the idea of piety which makes us love God, and that we obey His laws only because of His infinite perfection.

30. Mahomet Effendi, who was executed in Constantinople in the last century for dogmatizing against the existence of God, refused to retract his statements, even though this would have saved his life: he said that, even though he had no reward to hope for, the love of truth obliged him to suffer martyrdom. Vanini, whom I've already mentioned, never wanted to confess his error, although by so doing he could have diminished the torture that was inflicted on him. Cartinius<sup>86</sup>, the famous Epicurean and co-assassin of Julius Caesar, could have lived in an abundance of

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<sup>85</sup> "You who have died before you were born"

<sup>86</sup> I.e., Cassius.

riches and honor, had he chosen what was useful over what he thought was right: he could have received anything from that Emperor through flattery, and defending the interests of the usurper; but he preferred the glory of liberating his country. Imbued with this idea no less vividly than the Stoic Brutus, he pursued it through a thousand difficulties, and sacrificed his fortune to it, along with his peace and his very life.

31. Atheism, therefore, leaves man with all the sentiments of philosophy, which can guide him to moral virtue, although religion plays no part in it. On the contrary, superstition takes everything out of its due rank, and rises to absolute monarchy in the minds of men. The times most inclined to atheism were those of Augustus, which were still kept peaceful for political reasons. The different sects of Philosophers never disturbed the public peace of Athens: each maintained its own views, and refuted the others, and their dissertations were often about Providence and the *Summum Bonum*: however, as the Magistrates allowed all of them to teach their own views, and as they didn't force anyone to incorporate into any sect against their wishes, the Republic allowed nothing to alter this diversity in views: but where superstition slips in, the confusion of social authorities necessarily follows. Anacabris<sup>87</sup>, returning from his long travels to Scythia, was killed by his own brother Paulus, on pretext that he had made a sacrifice in the Greek manner, and despised the religion of his fathers: It was on religious grounds that the Tauri immolated to their Gods all who were cast on their shores by a shipwreck: Similarly, the Carthaginians immolated their own children as chosen by lot, and the Gauls sometimes sacrificed men: it was the custom in Persia to bury people alive. It wasn't without good reason that Lucretius rejected every kind of religion, and when he was told that he was opening the door to impious deeds and crimes, he felt obliged to justify his sentiments and maintained, on the contrary, that Religion itself is what most often brought men to acts of impiety and the most heinous of crimes:

*Illud in his rebus vereor, forte rearis*

*Impia te rationis inire elementa, viamque*

*Endogredi sceleris ; quod contra, saepius olim*

*Religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta. etc.*

*Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> I.e., Anacharsis.

<sup>88</sup> "I fear perhaps thou deemest that we fare / An impious road to realms of thought profane; / But 'tis that same religion oftener far / Hath bred the foul impieties of men / ...Such are the crimes to which Religion leads." Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, l. 81-84 & 101 (William Ellery Leonard translation).

32. What didn't the Jews do, for religious reasons, to the inhabitants of the Promised Land? Did they spare any man, woman, or child? The same principles brought about their complete ruin and the desolation of Jerusalem by the Romans, who avenged themselves of the cruelties they had wrought upon their subjects. In the times of Emperor Hadrian, they put to death more than a hundred thousand men in Libya, and even more on the Island of Cyprus.

33. How cruel were the Pagans against the Christians, even assuming [true] those oracles commanding them to exterminate them: they thought they were doing a great service to their Gods, and in this way appeased them, thinking as they did that this sect was their enemy: they praised their emperors who issued severe edicts against them: if they had only relied on their natural lights, how many innocents who had been put to death, poisoned, banished, or ruined, would have peacefully enjoyed their existence?

34. Now let us examine this fine Christian religion, which has outdone all the others in cruelty. How violent it has been, in turn, to the Pagans, to make them embrace the new religion. Did the Teutonic knights not execute, in Prussia, everyone who refused baptism? How much blood Charlemagne spilled in Germany to abolish the pagan religion! And what manner of murders and brigandry did the latter inflict, in turn, against the French under the Norman invasion, who, burning with the desire to avenge their Gods, made continual raids for a whole century, making their rage felt principally on the priests and monasteries? It was as much their zeal against the Christian religion as their inclination for booty and brigandry that drove them to do these things.

35. In sum, it's impossible to communicate how much violence was used by Christianity, since the conversion of Emperor Constantine, whether to extirpate idolatry or to suppress heresy. A good man can't read this history without being horrified: how many disturbances, revolutions, and wars have agitated Europe for more than 1500 years, and all of it caused, or at least leavened, by religion! And what sorts of brutality have the Catholics and Protestants inflicted on each other in the religious wars! How many wars have the Jesuits wrought upon Abyssinia, Japan, and China, on religious pretexts? Was it not, again, the same pretext which led the Spanish to drive out of their country more than a hundred thousand Jews and nine hundred thousand Moors, led them to establish the cruel Tribunal of the Inquisition, and to exterminate, in America, so many millions of inhabitants? Hasn't France followed the same policy against the Protestants?

36. What a strange token of love and zeal for the salvation of souls it is to pursue, with steel and fire, those who hold different religious opinions from us, and forcing them to change theirs. Should we not see all these insane zealots as monsters: only reason and demonstration have the power to change men's opinions. It is futile to use physical suffering in this pursuit: the sort of man who would only be somewhat vindictive without religion, becomes a tiger when a false zeal takes over his conscience. *Cruenta religione imbutus animus non est sui juris, nescit quiescere*<sup>89</sup>. All manner of slander and violence become permissible, no outrage is out of bounds to promote one's own sect above the rest: it's considered a commendable act of charity to take infinite trouble to gain control of the world, and trouble all of humanity with continual wars under the pretext of their good or their salvation: boasting of committing all manner of outrages, on the pretense of reforming morals and purifying religion in fulfillment of God's will; as if being unjust, barbaric, and treacherous were a sign of divine calling; as if supreme piety consisted in spilling human blood. Would it not be better to have no religion at all, than to have such impious zeal?

37. Religion sows division even within families, arming brother against brother, husband against wife; reason, respect for the public, human honor, the ugliness of injustice, will keep a Prince from harming anyone. But one who thinks he can advance the kingdom of God by exterminating false religions and heresies, and earn a higher degree of glory in Paradise after being showered with praise on Earth: this severity is, in good Catholic theology, called *Crudelitas nobilitata religioné*<sup>90</sup>, a Prince like that, I say, will trample on all the rules of morality.

38. If Julian the Apostate had been an atheist, he wouldn't had made such constant slights against the Christians; he was so besotted with the superstitions of Paganism that Ammianus Marcellinus says that if he had returned victorious from his expedition against the Persians, he would have depopulated the Earth of cows from all the sacrifices he would have made.

39. On certain days of the year, the Turks solemnly curse Christians: on principle, they believe they are under no obligation to keep the treaties they have made with them, when, by breaking them, they aim at the enlargement of their empire and the propagation of their religion. Haven't the Jews been criticized that, as a matter of conscience, they refused to show trails and springs to any but those of their own religion, and that they considered it a good deed to do harm to Christians: haven't they been accused that, through hatred of the Christian Religion, they crucified

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<sup>89</sup> "A soul imbued on bloodthirsty religion is not its own master, it knows no peace."

<sup>90</sup> The "cruel nobility of religion"; the author is quoting from Bayle, *op. cit.*, ch. XX, p. 954.

children to insult Jesus Christ? In the Annals of the ancient monasteries of Burton we find that, in 1255, Jews, assembled from all parts of England in Lincoln, crucified a nine year-old boy; but, whether this is true or not, we can still be sure that the aversion of Jews for Christians is an article of their religion; their prayers are so many imprecations against Christianity, which they ask God to extirpate, calling it the kingdom of Esau, the wicked kingdom, the proud kingdom: they have made their hatred against all men of the universe into a religious dogma. Besides, we read in the Talmud that the best man found among the nations must be killed.

40. The Inquisition among the Catholics wanted books to be purged of prefaces, dedicatory epistles, and, in general, anything that might honor those who were separate from the Roman communion, including princes. This is why the expurgatory indices require that if some historian has said “on such and such a day was born Christopher, the illustrious duke of Würtemberg”, *praeclarus dux Wirtembergensis*, the term illustrious, *praeclarus*, must be erased, which, however, is so insignificant that any and every pupil is called that: they also efface, in the same way, all the titles like *Vir clarissimus*, *reverendus*, etc., which are given to Doctors.

41. Bellarmine was so convinced that the Orthodox could never bring themselves to praise a heretic that he positively states that it has never happened. Most of the theologians take pride in inspiring and stirring up a pious hatred and a holy terror of heretics, whom they call God’s enemies: they enrich their sermons with epithets; “that miserable heresiarch Calvin” is something a preacher never neglects, to inspire the same indignation in his hearers: is such conduct really in keeping with the Gospel and the laws of civil society? The Council of Constantius, along with most of the Doctors, claim that faith should not be kept with heretics; but the problem in Christendom is knowing which of so many sects are heretics: each side pleads its own cause, and decides, in its own favor, that the others are heretics; they ruthlessly damn each other, and, not content to excite and hasten divine vengeance against each other, they execute, as best they can, the sentence of damnation, which it is only right for God to pronounce. It’s by these cruel principles that the judges, having condemned a man to death for embracing the Reformed faith at La Rochelle, also commanded that the wooden clock he had made, which was amazing in its workmanship, should be burned by the executioner: the sentence was carried out, *tantaene animis coelestibus irae*<sup>91</sup>. These same principles produced the ordinance, in the canons of penitence, that a man who has eaten with a Jew should fast on bread and water for ten days.

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<sup>91</sup> “Can the gods feel such anger?” (Vergil, *Aeneid* 1:8).

42. Isn't there something laughable in all this Catholic and Spanish rodomontade? It was the custom in a certain city in Spain, whenever people entered or exited the church, to spit on the statue of a black man seated on an ass beside the door: once, when an ambassador from Morocco was in this city, having noticed this vain ceremony of the people, he asked the King what this statue represented. He responded: "Muhammad the prophet of the Arabs." "That cannot be", responded the ambassador, "since our prophet only ever rode on camels: it must be a figure of your Messiah, who is said to have rode on an ass." The King, upset and embarrassed by this response, consulted the bishops and doctors, all of whom concluded that the Ambassador was right, and had spoken correctly: therefore, instead of continuing to insult the statue, they built it a chapel, burned incense to it, and paid it divine honors, falling into the opposite extreme, making a God of something they previously considered as wicked as a Devil: an example of the changing mind of man.

43. The Czar of Moscow is so horrified by Roman Catholics, whom he regards as mere Pagans, that when the ambassadors of this Religion have the honor of kissing his hand, he always keeps a bowl and pitcher near to hand, to wash himself as if their touch desecrated him: where can the motivation for such a quirk come from? Religion.

44. Are consciences of such a nature not more fearsome than irreligion? How can we ever trust people who think they're absolved of their oaths and the laws of equity, even those of humanity, to those who are not of their religion? Doesn't this couplet apply:

*Quel lion, quel tigre égale en cruauté  
Une injuste fureur qu'arme la piété?*<sup>92</sup>

Nature, humanity, piety, and reason fight, as it were, in unison in a father's heart against the temptation to strangle his little children: an idolater of Moloch<sup>93</sup> could have won a victory with this support, but religion intervened, he trampled on nature, humanity, equity, and reason.

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<sup>92</sup> "Which lion, which tiger can match in cruelty / An unjust wrath giving such strength to piety?" (Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Satire XII Sur l'Equivoque*).

<sup>93</sup> The manuscript has "Molvets" here.

45. Simply read all of ancient and modern history, you'll learn that the fanaticism of religions is the only source of all the wicked men who have murdered and poisoned the Kings and the great men, and that the pretext of an eternal blessedness in Paradise, offered to their hope, has been one of the strongest motives to win their determination, without any fear of the ways human justice might punish them: but, we read of many defenses of these scoundrels by learned Doctors, some of whom have even become Saints.

46. I leave it to the rational man to choose among all religions the one that seems best to him: but let none be the cause of trouble in his life, and let him conform externally to that of his country for his own tranquility and the repose of his life, without disputing or despising the others, since each can point to nonsense in the others, and since they contribute nothing to make the truly good man.

END.