

VOLTAIRE AND THE SOCINIANS

VOLTAIRE AND THE SOCINIANS

By

ROBERT EDWIN FLORIDA, MECH. ENG., B.D., M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

May, 1973

© Robert Edwin Florida 1973

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1973)  
(Religion)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Voltaire and the Socinians

AUTHOR: Robert Edwin Florida, Mech. Eng. (University of  
Cincinnati)

B.D. (Tufts University)

M.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor George P. Grant

NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 387.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This dissertation answers two questions: Why did Voltaire have such a consistent interest in and high regard for Socinians; and did Socinianism have any direct influence on his thought? To treat these questions, first, late seventeenth and early eighteenth century French language sources were used to outline the history of Socinianism and to show what Socinians were thought to be in Voltaire's time. Then Voltaire's life and works were carefully examined for evidence of Socinianism. The most important works for this were the Correspondence, the Lettres philosophiques, the Essai sur les moeurs, and the Dictionnaire philosophique. The study concluded that Voltaire used Socinianism primarily as a weapon in his battle against Christianity and that Socinianism had no direct influence on his religious convictions.

A topic treated in considerable detail from both published works and manuscripts was the question of Socinian influence in mid-Eighteenth century Genevois Calvinism. Voltaire, d'Alembert, and the other philosophes were, it would seem, correct in attributing Socinianism to the Genevois of this era.

#### A NOTE ON QUOTATIONS

In general, all quotations in this study are reproduced as they appear in the cited sources. Two consistent exceptions to this rule are that the ampersand has been replaced by "and" or "et", and the modern "s" supplants the ancient. In most cases, abbreviations which have their terminal letters printed or written above the line in the original have been reproduced in a single line; for example, "M<sup>r</sup>" ordinarily becomes "Mr". "Sic" is used only to indicate a modern writer's (or printer's) error in a language other than that of his text. Since it adds to the understanding to know the context of Voltaire's letters, and since it aids one in referring to the various editions of Voltaire's letters, I have included the dates and addressees in citing the Correspondence.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	A NOTE ON QUOTATIONS	iii
I	SOCINIANISM	1
II	SOCINIANISM INTERPRETED (1680-1715)	47
III	VOLTAIRE'S RELIGION AND SOCINIANISM BEFORE HIS ENGLISH EXILE	80
	A. Childhood and Youth	80
	B. Literary Success	87
	C. The Netherlands, 1722	93
	D. The Road to England (1722-1726)	99
IV	VOLTAIRE IN ENGLAND	112
	A. The Visit	112
	B. Contacts with Socinians and Socinianism	116
	C. Other Contacts with English Religion	125
	D. The <u>Henriade</u>	129
	E. Summary	138
V	SOCINIANS IN THE LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES	139
	A. Introduction	139
	1. The Writing of the Lettres Philosophiques	139
	B. The Socinians	147
	1. The Rehabilitation of Heresy	147
	2. Locke and Newton	155

	C.	The Seventh <u>Lettre philosophique</u> , "Sur les Sociniens, ou Ariens, ou Anti-Trinitaires"	159
		1. History of Socinianism	159
		2. Terminology	165
	D.	1734: Voltaire a Socinian?	172
VI		VOLTAIRE AND SOCINIANISM: THE QUIET YEARS (1734-1754)	176
	A.	Diffused Influences	176
	B.	Explicit References	183
	C.	Conclusion	186
VII		VOLTAIRE DECIDES THE SWISS ARE SOCINIANS (1754-1756)	188
	A.	The Road to Switzerland	188
	B.	Geneva and Voltaire: the Beginnings	191
	C.	Voltaire and Lausanne	227
VIII		QUARRELS ABOUT SOCINIANISM AT GENEVA (1756-1758)	235
	A.	L'Ame Atroce	235
	B.	The <u>Genève</u> Article in l' <u>Encyclopédie</u> and some of the Turmoil that Accompanied its Publication	265
IX		LATER REFLECTIONS ON SOCINIANISM IN GENEVA (1758-1777)	290
	A.	Rousseau (1758-1759)	291
	B.	D'Alembert (1759)	301
	C.	Vernet	304
	D.	Rousseau and Vernet (1764-1766)	315

	E. Charles Bonnet	320
	F. Voltaire (1759-1777)	324
X	VOLTAIRE AND SOCINIANISM OUTSIDE GENEVA (1758-1778)	342
	A. General Summary	355
XI	APPENDIX A: GENEVOIS LETTERS FROM THE AME ATROCE AFFAIR	361
XII	APPENDIX B: EXTRACTS FROM THE DUPAN- FREUDENREICH CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT THE GENEVE ARTICLE CONTROVERSY	366
XIII	BIBLIOGRAPHIC ABBREVIATIONS	369
XIV	BIBLIOGRAPHY	
	A. Bibliographies	371
	B. Works Cited in this Study	371
	C. Selected Works Consulted but not Cited in this Study	383

I

SOCINIANISM

Voltaire, in 1773, was the patriarch of European letters, perhaps the writer with the most influence on his contemporaries that history has ever seen. He was at this time, as he was throughout his life, engaged in a prodigious number of literary projects. He was also busy improving his estate at Ferney and finishing up some extended litigation; and, as had been true for some forty years, he was plagued by his failing health. Yet in spite of his many burdens, the great old man took interest in the fate of an obscure Polish sect of Protestant heretics--the Socinians.

On 13 February, 1773, he wrote to Catherine II, empress of Russia, to ask her to relieve the oppression of the Socinians in Lithuania:

J'espère même que les Sociniens auront bientôt en Lithuanie quelque conventicule public, où Dieu le père ne partagera plus avec personne le trône qu'il occupa tout seul jusqu'au concile de Nicée. Il est bien plaisant que les Juifs qui ont crucifié le Logos aient tant de sinagogues chez les Polonais, et que ceux qui diffèrent d'opinions avec la cour romaine sur le Logos ne puissent avoir un trou pour fourer leurs têtes. (Best. 17131)



Catherine now had the power to make reforms in Lithuania as Poland had recently been partitioned, the eastern territories going to Russia and the western to Prussia.

Unfortunately, Voltaire's letter was at least 113 years too late to help the Socinians in Lithuania; they had been extirpated in all Polish lands in 1660.<sup>1</sup> From his earliest serious discussion of the Socinians in the Lettres philosophiques (1733/34),<sup>2</sup> Voltaire had consistently made this error of believing, or hoping, that there still were Socinians in their homeland. In light of the general lack of reliable information from Eastern Europe, his hope--or error--was understandable. Less understandable was that he consistently wrote about Socinians at all. Yet they recur again and again in all periods of his career.

Even more surprising, considering Voltaire's proverbial scorn for organized Christianity, was his usual tone of high praise for Socinians. Note, for example, the tenor of this letter of 8 November, 1773, to Frederick II, king of Prussia, where he suggested that the Socinians of western Poland, if any survived, be re-established:

Tout ce que me fâche c'est que vous n'établissiez une église de Sociniens comme vous en établissez plusieurs de jesuites. Il y a pourtant encor des Sociniens en Pologne, l'Angleterre en regorge, nous en avons en Suisse. Certainement Julien les aurait favorisez. Ils haïssent ce qu'il haïssait, ils méprisent ce qu'il méprisait, et ils sont honnêtes gens comme lui. De plus ayant été tant persécutés par les Polonais, ils ont quelque droit à votre protection.  
(Best. 17532)

---

<sup>1</sup>  
Infra, pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>  
Infra, Chapter V, Section B.

Nearly all of Voltaire's references to Socinians regarded them warmly as colleagues as did this letter. But, again, the letter was far too late; there were no Polish Socinians for Frederick to protect.

"Why did Voltaire have such a consistent interest in and high regard for this Protestant group?", is the central question of this study. Also to be examined is the question: "Did Socinianism have a direct influence on his thought?" These are important simply because Voltaire is one of the central figures in the intellectual history of the modern western world. Furthermore, as Paul Hazard noted in The European Mind (1680-1715), "Socinianism" occurred quite often in the writings of the period immediately preceding that movement conventionally called the Enlightenment,<sup>3</sup> and interest in the Socinians continued throughout the Enlightenment as it did in Voltaire's work. Through studying Voltaire's relationship with Socinianism, the larger problem of the role that Socinianism played at this time in Europe's transition from a primarily traditional Christian Civilization to the Europe of modernity will be adumbrated.

As Voltaire was born in 1694 and died in 1778, his career as a philosophe was practically conterminous with the Enlightenment. His formal education ended in 1711 while Louis XIV still reigned, and thus lay entirely in that critical period from 1680 to 1715 which Hazard marked off as "la crise de la conscience europeene."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Hazard, European Mind, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>The French title of The European Mind.

Therefore, before beginning the major part of this study, which is a thorough consideration of Socinianism in Voltaire's life and writings, an historical description of what the Socinians were, or were thought to be, in the early years of the eighteenth century is essential. This will help explain why they captured and held Voltaire's attention and will review the documentary sources on Socinianism available to him.

Hazard, who emphasized that Socinian thought was one important factor in undermining the old faith, posed our question: "But what precisely do we mean by a Socinian?"<sup>5</sup> And in answering it, he reviewed several judgments on Socinianism by the leading French controversialists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. However, these judgments, while important contemporary interpretations of Socinianism, do not, in fact, constitute a precise answer to the question. For this we must turn to the excellent French language historical accounts of Socinianism of this period which were, of course, the probable sources of Voltaire's information about the Socinians.

First was Pierre Bayle's Dictionnaire article, "Socin", which appeared in three editions from 1697 to 1720; second was the two-volume work by the Jesuit Maimbourg, Histoire de l'arianisme, which saw several editions in the 1680's. The third work to be considered is the Histoire du socinianisme, divisée en deux parties

---

5

Hazard, European Mind, p. 95.

(1727), published anonymously by a Franciscan, Père Anastase,<sup>6</sup>  
 the best history of the Socinians to appear before the middle of  
 the present century.<sup>7</sup> Anastase's work falls outside the period  
 of crisis of 1680 to 1715 and outside Voltaire's college years.  
 Yet, since it is, in fact, the definitive summing up of this  
 era's French language discussions of Socinianism, it is a very  
 valuable source for our purposes.

Also worth consulting is Moréry's Dictionnaire articles  
 "Arianisme", "Socinianisme", and "Unitaire", published in several  
 editions around 1700. The brief historical review of Socinianism  
 to follow will be drawn primarily from these four sources. Since  
 there were no French Socinian works from this period, it will be  
 necessary to draw from other sources to present the Socinians'  
 view of themselves. Furthermore, when correction or amplification  
 is necessary, modern sources will supplement Bayle, Maimbourg,  
 Anastase and Moréry.<sup>8</sup>

---

6

Barbier, Dictionnaire, II, col. 793; see also the  
Dictionnaire de biographie française, II, pp. 774-775.

7

E. M. Wilbur's A History of Unitarianism (1945-1952) is  
 the best history of the Socinians. G. H. Williams's The Radical  
 Reformation (1962) is valuable for the years before 1580.

8

A footnote about footnotes: in the history to follow,  
 that material about which the seventeenth and eighteenth sources  
 as well as the modern are in agreement will not be further  
 annotated.

Père Anastase's Histoire begins by asserting the antiquity of Socinianism. "L'Origine des Sociniens est plus ancienne que l'on ne le suppose ordinairement. On peut dire qu'elle a commencé dès les premières siècles de l'Eglise, dans les Hérésiarques, que s'éleverent contre la Trinité . . . la Consubstantialité . . . la Divinité de Jesus-Christ, etc. . . ." Maimbourg's weighty Histoire de l'arianisme devoted eleven and one-half of its twelve livres to the ancient Arians, which left fewer than forty pages for the modern heretics. He began his discussion of the current movement by observing that the Arians had existed (sometimes flourishing) in the barbarous areas of Christendom from around 320 to 660, and:

après un intervalle de près de neuf cent ans, il fut renouvelé le siècle passé par les nouveaux Ariens, ou les Trithéites et Antitrinitaires, qui se sont enfin confondus avec les Déistes et les Sociniens de nostre siècle.<sup>10</sup>

Moréry, whose article "Arianisme" was evidently plagiarized from Maimbourg, altered the last phrase to read "par les nouveaux Ariens, ou les Trithéites et Antitrinitaires, qui se sont confondus avec les Unitaires et Sociniens du XVII. siècle." Moréry, too, then immediately moved to the history of these supposed revivers of the old heresies.

---

9

Anastase, Histoire, p. 1. See also ibid., p. 8: "nous ayons établi, que les Sociniens ont pris leur origine des Hérétiques, qui ont divisé l'Englise dès son commencement."

10

Maimbourg, Histoire, II, p. 450.

11

Moréry, Dictionnaire, I, p. 251.

Both Anastase and Maimbourg, then, imply a continuity between the ancient rejectors of orthodoxy and the post Reformation figures who also parted from the doctrinal norm. Both of them, however, emphasize the dormancy of the heresy for several centuries and do not try to show any actual historical link between the ancient Arians and the later heretics.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, there is no such link.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, as Anastase pointed out, the "Sociniens d'aujourd'hui" recognized the ancient heretics as their forefathers.<sup>14</sup> This recognition was due to doctrinal similarities rather than to any claim of participation in a continuous tradition. The latter day heretics were pleased to discover their ancient predecessors but developed independently of them.

Only two paragraphs into the history, and we are already nearly overwhelmed with unexplained terms: "Ariens, nouveau Ariens, Trithéites, Antitrinitaires, Unitaires, Déistes, Sociniens"; and there were many more. As Anastase noted, at the beginning of the Reform, the subjects of his history were called:

Ebionites, Samosatiens, nouveau Ariens, Sabelliens, Photiniens, Trinitaires, Unitaires, Antitrinitaires, Déistes, Trithéites. Quelque tems après les noms changerent; il les appellerent Pinczcowiens, Racoviens, Sandomiriens, Cujaviens, Frères Polonois, et aujourd'hui Sociniens, Monarchiques, Arminiens, Mennonites, Tolerans et Latitudinaires.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Anastase, Histoire, p. 8. See also Maimbourg, Histoire, I, p. 450.

<sup>13</sup> Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, chapter 1. Bayle, in his Dictionnaire, does not emphasize the connection between the two eras.

<sup>14</sup> Anastase, Histoire, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

All these terms refer to men who opposed the doctrine of the Trinity as formulated at the Nicene and later Ecumenical Councils. Some, like "Arien" and "Photinien", were names of ancient heresies used again for post Reformation heretics; others like "Pinczowien" and "Racovien" were derived from the place names of centres of un-orthodox Christians. By around 1700, "Socinien" and "Unitaire" were the general terms most used in French for referring to all such movements of the time. "Arien" was still used but usually to refer to those who adhered to the distinctive Christology of Arius, the fourth century opponent of Nicea.<sup>16</sup>

To avoid terminological confusion, this study will follow G. H. Williams in using "anti-Nicene" as the general term to designate all the particular dissenters from the orthodox Nicene position. The stylistic instinct to regale the reader with a feast of synonyms will be repressed in the interests of uniformity in terminology. As Williams argues, this term not only avoids the revelatory choice between "anti-Trinitarian" and "Antitrinitarian" but also implies the common "objection to the ultimately Greek philosophical terminology [of the doctrine of the Trinity] enforced by the authority of the Roman Empire and Constantine."<sup>17</sup> For the anti-Nicenes opposed the two major results of the Council of Nicea:

---

<sup>16</sup>  
"Socinian, Unitarian, and Arian" were the equivalent English terms.

<sup>17</sup>  
Williams, Radical Reformation, p. 319.

the triumph of non-Biblical terminology for the expression of Christian doctrine and the triumph of Roman policy in the entry<sup>18</sup> of the power of the magistrate to enforce Christian teachings. While "anti-Nicene", as a broad term, necessarily ignores the enormous differences between the ancient and post Reformation opponents of Nicea and the differences amongst all the specific groups in both eras, it is a good term in that it includes the most important similarities of all these specific persons and movements. Furthermore, as suggested by his letter to Catherine, Voltaire shared the anti-Nicene view that Nicea marked a bad<sup>19</sup> turning in the history of Christianity.

What was it that led anti-Nicene movements to reappear so many centuries after they had withered away? Our seventeenth and eighteenth century historians addressed themselves to this question and concluded that the ferment of the Reformation opened all accepted Christian truth to question--even the nature and office of Jesus. This questioning, they argued, followed directly from such of Luther's principles as sola fide, sola scriptura, and the priesthood of believers. Père Anastase noted that some went so far that:

enfin ils ne voulurent aussi avoir d'autre religion  
que celle que leur genie particulier pouvoit leur

---

18

Cochrane, Christianity, ch. VI, and Voeglin, Politics, pp. 97-106, both show that these two aspects of Nicea were intimately related.

19

Supra, p. 1. See also infra, pp. 135 and 351-352.



inspirer sur la simple lecture des livres sacres,  
 et ne rien admettre dans leur créance, que ce que  
 l'écriture leur marqueront d'une manière claire et  
 sans réplique.<sup>20</sup>

Since terms like Trinity and consubstantiality did not appear  
 in the New Testament and were not immediately inferrable from the  
 text, these freethinking Protestants became anti-Nicene heretics.

Anastase well understood the starting point of the anti-  
 Nicene theologians. Denying the authority of the Church traditions  
 and councils, they relied on their own understanding of the simple  
 sense of scripture as their sole authority in faith. That is,  
 they began with a common-sense exegetical principle. Fourth  
 century Arianism too has been described as a heresy of common  
 sense,<sup>21</sup> but while the common sense of late antiquity was Neo-  
 platonism,<sup>22</sup> common sense for the sixteenth century anti-Nicenes  
 was critical, philological, anti-scholastic humanism. Thus, when  
 in this study post Reformation anti-Nicenes are described as  
 "reasonable" or "rational" or when their "reason" or "common  
 sense" is referred to, these terms refer to their principle of  
 exegesis; for their bedrock Biblicism was an act of faith--outside

---

20

Anastase, Histoire, p. 9. For similar understanding, see  
 Maimbourg, Histoire, II, p. 467 and passim; and Moréry, Dictionnaire,  
 IV, p. 403.

21

Cochrane, Christianity, p. 235.

22

Ibid., ch. 6 and Gwatkin, History, I, ch. 5.

23

the scope of common sense.

In the first half of the sixteenth century, nearly all the anti-Nicene pioneers were first-rate humanist scholars, who, inspired by Protestant freedom, turned their scholarly tools to the work of criticising all Christian fundamentals except the principle that the Bible was the received word of God. Most of them were Italian with a concentration of Venetians,<sup>24</sup> who scattered all over Europe after the establishment of the Roman Inquisition in 1542.<sup>25</sup> In 1529, Catholics and Protestants alike agreed at the Diet of Speyer "that . . . every anabaptist and rebaptised man and woman at the age of reason shall be condemned and brought from natural life into death by fire, sword, and the like."<sup>26</sup> This

23

---

The sharp edge of rationality turned back to cut the Biblical roots in the last stages of Socinianism (*infra*, pp. 42-43). This definition of "reason" correlates well with the kind of critical reason that obtained in the Enlightenment. See Hazard, *European Mind*, pp. 119ff, and *European Thought*, pp. 27ff; see also Cassirer, *Philosophy*, pp. 5ff and 2/5, and Gay, *Enlightenment*, pp. 130ff, for discussions of how the eighteenth century philosophers conceived reason.

24

Anastase, *Histoire*, pp. 12-14 and *passim*. Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, *passim*, Maimbourg, *Histoire*, II, 455-468, and Moréry, *Dictionnaire*, *passim*, also note that the early anti-Nicene figures were highly cultivated and were chiefly Italian.

25

Williams, *Radical Reformation*, pp. *ii* and *passim*. Other Roman Catholic states already closely policed the theological life of their subjects.

26

*Ibid.*, p. 238.

edict immediately went into effect throughout the Holy Roman Empire and, while specifically addressed to suppress the anabaptists, was soon used to persecute any Christian who was suspected of unusual views.

Thus, after 1542, most of the Continent was closed to theological radicals. They were faced with the alternatives of dissimulation, recantation, migration to the East or to Switzerland, or martyrdom. Even Switzerland after the execution of Servetus in Geneva in 1553 was unsafe; thus, the first anti-Nicene churches appeared in Eastern Europe. Servetus<sup>27</sup> (c. 1511-1553) was a Spanish Renaissance man who had the misfortune to be apprehended in Calvin's territory after publishing the groundwork for a systematic anti-Nicene theology. Since some two hundred years after the event, Voltaire quarreled with the Genevans about their burning Servetus, Servetus's history will be treated as a later point in this study. At this point the history of organized anti-Nicene Christianity before the eighteenth century will be considered in those two countries where churches were established: Transylvania and Poland. Transylvania, at the time of the Reformation, was subject to a complex and chaotic tangle of political, ethnic, and religious forces--both internal and external. At the beginning of the eighteenth century its religious history was not clearly

---

27

Anastase, Histoire, pp. 213-229; Moréry, Dictionnaire, I, p. 251, IV, p. 403.

understood,<sup>28</sup> and today the historical problems are not fully  
 resolved.<sup>29</sup>

One thing is certain: in the period from 1567 to 1569, the Transylvanian Calvinists were embroiled in doctrinal disputes, which after several synods saw the anti-Nicene party form a separate church in 1569. Politically, this was possible as Transylvania had an official policy of toleration dating from 1557, which, though it originally recognized only the Lutherans in addition to the Catholics, was expanded to include each new sect as it appeared. The country could not survive Hapsburg, Polish, and Ottoman intrigues if it was torn by internal religious conflict, so toleration was necessary.

The new anti-Nicene church, which came to be called Unitarian, was led by Francis David who had successively been a Roman Catholic, the general superintendent of the Lutherans, and the head of the Calvinists. Dr. Giorgio Biandrata, an Italian anti-Nicene refugee and the court physician, was Francis David's close collaborator in theological controversies. Doctrinally, they were quite in accord with their Italian forebears in that they acknowledged only the authority of scripture as interpreted by each believer's natural

---

28

Anastase, Histoire, Part I, ch. 13-16 and 27, deals with the Transylvanian anti-Nicenes; Maimbourg, Histoire, II, pp. 455-461, treats the establishment of the Transylvanian anti-Nicene church; Moréry does not mention them in his Dictionnaire; and Bayle only has a passing comment (Dictionnaire, III, p. 2608.)

29

Wilbur (Unitarianism, II, ch. 1-6) traces the religious history of Transylvania in the sixteenth century. Williams, Radical Reformation, ch. 28, is another treatment of this era. See ibid., p. 708, n. 1, where Williams very pertinently warns that in matters of great import and in small details authorities and sources in this field are in frequent disagreement.

reason, which led them to deny the Nicene doctrines. The final debates that led to the rupture of the orthodox and the anti-Nicene Calvinists also converted King John Sigismund II to Francis David's point of view, and two years later, in 1571, the anti-Nicene party was granted official toleration. Only one day after the close of the Diet that extended legal protection to the anti-Nicenes, King John Sigismund II was injured in a carriage accident and died after two months. So the church of Francis David had secured its official status just in time.

Under King John Sigismund II, Transylvanian Unitarianism had its two years of glory. With royal patronage and the use of the royal press, the movement flourished intellectually and organizationally. King Stephen, John Sigismund's Catholic successor, rigorously upheld the various edicts of toleration and the protected status of the anti-Nicene church, but within a year had forbidden them the use of a press. And at the Diet of 1572, King Stephen decreed that any anti-Nicene found making innovations in the faith of King John Sigismund II would be open to prosecution. That is, the anti-Nicene church would be protected only so long as it remained precisely as it had been in 1571.

Francis David chafed at this restriction as he came to believe it was unscriptural to offer any worship to Jesus and desired so to preach and teach officially. Dr. Biandrata, still the court physician, knew the dangerous mood of the authorities and tried to convince

Francis David to be still. To this end, Biandrata called his countryman, Faustus Socinus, to Transylvania to try to show Francis David that there was nothing wrong theologically in the worship of Jesus--even though Jesus was far from equal to the Father. Everything failed, Francis David persisted in his innovations and was tried--at Biandrata's urging--at the Diet of 1579 where he was found guilty and imprisoned. Faustus Socinus left then for Poland where he was to become the key figure in consolidating the anti-Nicene Polish Christians,<sup>30</sup> and Francis David died in prison on 15 November 1579.

Now Dr. Biandrata set about to tighten up church discipline, which had been slighted under Francis David, by securing the position of superintendent for a good administrator and theological conservative. Then at the synod of 1579, he got the anti-Nicene pastors to subscribe to a normative confession of faith and to his manual of church discipline. Having thereby secured the survival of the church, Dr. Biandrata retired from public affairs in 1580. These two documents from the synod of 1579 became the legal standard to which the Unitarians had to conform in order to retain official tolerance; they remained in force for two hundred years. And, indeed, until the present time, the Transylvanian anti-Nicenes have been officially tolerated although they frequently were harrassed and occasionally persecuted.

---

30

Infra, pp. 20-30.

Thus, in Voltaire's era, they were the only extensive body of organized anti-Nicene Christians. However, they had sunk into the most profound obscurity and were practically forgotten in their inaccessible mountains<sup>31</sup> of Transylvania. Père Maimbourg was pleased that in 1686 anti-Nicenes survived nearly unknown only "dans un miserable coin de ces païs qui sont sous la domination des Mahometans."<sup>32</sup> Dionysius Lörinczy has shown that it was not until well into the nineteenth century that Western Europeans had more than a pittance of information about the anti-Nicene church in Transylvania after Francis David's time.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, for the purpose of understanding the eighteenth century's concern with anti-Nicene history and thought, the Transylvanians are quite unimportant; it is the Polish anti-Nicenes who are most important.

In 1555 Poland allowed each noble to introduce whatever Scriptural form of worship he wished on his estate,<sup>34</sup> which gave the ruling class an inordinate degree of doctrinal freedom for the era. Anastase attributed this act to the dissolute morals of the

---

31

Anastase, for example, only devoted four pages (123-126) of his *Histoire* to the Transylvanians to cover all their history after 1585. Maimbourg, *Histoire*, II, pp. 473-477, noted how Transylvania had established complete religious tolerance by 1603.

32

Maimbourg, *Histoire*, II, p. 486. See also *ibid.*, p. 483, for a similar statement.

33

Lörinczy, "Hungarian Unitarian", pp. 20-39.

34

Williams, *Radical Reformation*, p. 640.

reigning monarch, Sigismond Augustus,<sup>35</sup> but there are other explanations. At that time, as at most times, Poland's political freedom was endangered by her neighbours, and she could not afford internal religious bloodshed. Furthermore, the Reformation in the form of Calvinism had made many converts amongst the powerful nobility,<sup>36</sup> and they were strong enough to see that their interests were respected. In fact, in 1573, the Diet forced the new monarch to guarantee freedom of religion in the constitution before he could take the throne.<sup>37</sup> Now, as Anastase observed, it was formally permitted "d'être Hussites, Lutheriens, Sacramentaires, Calvinistes, Anabastistes, Ariens, Pinczowiens, Unitaires, Antitrinitaires,<sup>38</sup> Trithéïtes, et Sociniens."

What the pact of 1573 had done was to acknowledge a fait accompli. In the years following the interim grant of toleration of 1555, and even before, Poland was a very attractive refuge for radical Italian theologians. These imported thinkers, such as Laelius Socinus, Alciati, Ochino, Gentile, and Biandrata, aided the Poles in developing several sects, as Anastase's terminology indicated, of anti-Nicene Christianity. The anti-Nicene party grew from the

---

35

Anastase, Histoire, pp. 18-19.

36

Because, said Maimbourg (Histoire, II, p. 462) of "la conduite trop lache et trop molle de Sigismond Auguste."

37

Anastase, Histoire, pp. 90-91.

38

Ibid., p. 91.



Polish Calvinist church which had been established in 1550, and which held its first synod in 1555. Even at this first synod, questions concerning Nicene orthodoxy were debated; and similar debates occurred at their frequent synods until 1565 when the orthodox Calvinist majority refused to have any further relations with the anti-Nicene minority. This irrevocable split marked the beginning of the first anti-Nicene church since the last of the Arians in the seventh century; the ostracized minority called itself the Minor Reformed Church of Poland or, simply, the Polish Brethren.

Only a year before this separation, all non-Catholic foreigners were expelled from Poland, which was perhaps the first fruits of the Jesuits who had been invited to Poland in 1564. <sup>39</sup> So the Minor Reformed Church was deprived of the help of its intellectual Italian friends in the earliest years of its organized life. And, at this point intellectual effort was essential in the Minor Church, for in 1565 the anti-Nicenes agreed only that the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity was non-scriptural and a sophistical corruption of Christianity. In that same year, they began meeting to work out their theology and soon established that mutual toleration within the Minor Church was necessary if they were to hold together.

From this time until Faustus Socinus arrived in Poland in 1579, the Minor Reformed theologians attempted to unify the church with a unified body of doctrine. However, in 1579, there

still was considerable disarray and a real danger of disintegration in the Minor Church. Anastase said that there were thirty or thirty-two different anti-Nicene sects in Poland at Socinus's arrival "qui toutes neanmoins s'accordoient en ce point, que J. C. n'étoit pas le grand et le vrai Dieu."<sup>40</sup> Socinus became the leader that the Minor Church needed, acting as conciliator and theologian, even though he never held an official church office. His name was eventually attached to the Church he advised.

Anastase was wrong when he said that in 1579 the Polish anti-Nicene Christians agreed on no more than they had in their establishment in 1565. In fact, when Socinus arrived, they concurred that Jesus's teachings as revealed in the New Testament were to be followed literally without equivocation. In general, the Minor Church believed that Christian life was more central than dogma. Also they all affirmed individual freedom of conscience, mutual toleration both within and without the Minor Church, and were well on their way to the development<sup>41</sup> of their distinctive theological method.

Biandrata, an Italian physician who was mentioned above in relation to his theological activities in Transylvania, was also active in Polish Protestant circles from 1558-1563. As he was in

---

40

Anastase, Histoire, pp. 106-107. Here, perhaps, Anastase relied on Maimbourg who wrote that in 1566: "comme chacun de ceux . . . parloit de Dieu de la maniere qu'il vouloit, sans suivre d'autre règle que celle de son sens particulier, cette détestable hérésie s'y multiplia, divisée en tant de différentes sectes, qu'on en a compté jusqu'à trente-deux, qui s'accordoient pourtant toutes à nier la Divinité de Jesus-Christ . . ." (Histoire, II, p. 464).

41

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 384. Bayle, Dictionnaire, III, pp. 2608-2610, treats the Socinian way of life; see Kot, Socinianism, for a detailed modern study of Socinian social thought and of the life of the Socinian community.

Transylvania, so too in Poland Biandrata was one of the most important figures in the establishment of the anti-Nicene church. His fundamental religious principles are typical of the movement: "il ne falloit rien croire que ce que étoit formellement dans l'Ecriture, et que ce qui pouvoit en estre déduit par des conséquences claires, naturelles, et décisives."<sup>42</sup> These simple principles could lead to some peculiar practices. Gregory Paulus, a Polish anti-Nicene leader of the 1560's, reduced the service of worship to reading the New Testament in its received order "sans y ajouter que les gloses, les commentaires, les paraphrases, et les réflexions morales."<sup>43</sup> In short, the earliest anti-Nicene Protestants in Poland reduced theology to exegesis; they were "enlightened" fundamentalists.

Faustus Socinus, born in 1539, was from a noble Sienese family. His uncle, Laelius Socinus, was a secret anti-Nicene theologian who chose to preserve his freedom by concealing his beliefs. Laelius had made two trips to Poland, once with Biandrata in 1558, and died in Zurich in 1562. It was the inheritance of his uncle's theological papers that turned Faustus to his life as a theologian. After serving twelve years as a courtier to the Medicis, he went to Basel where he studied the Bible and wrote what is

---

42

Anastase, Histoire, p. 28; see also Maimbourg, Histoire, II, pp. 458, 466, and passim.

43

Ibid., p. 30. It would seem that, following these maxims, one must end with one's religious life devoted solely to the study of the most authentic Koine texts.

considered his greatest work, De Jesu Christo Servatore. In 1578 Dr. Biandrata, who had read De Jesu Christo Servatore in manuscript (it was published in 1594), called Faustus to Transylvania to mediate a dispute in the anti-Nicene church there. Socinius failed in that task and moved on to Poland the following year where he remained until his death in 1604.

As Socinus was the great systematic theologian of the anti-Nicenes, the salient points of his work will be reviewed. In common with his predecessors, Socinus was a Biblical theologian who relied on his unaided reason to interpret God's revelation in the scriptures. His theology centred on a new, positive Christology which determined his rejection of the Trinity, which has usually

44

Of all Socinus's works only one, De Sacrae scripturae auctoritate, is available in a modern language; it was translated in 1731 into English as An Argument for the Authority of Holy Scripture. However, the Racovian Catechism (*infra*, pp. 32-37), the single most authoritative Socinian book, was generally quite close to Socinus's thought and is relatively easily available and will be used as the major source in what follows. Wilbur's Unitarianism, *passim*, Williams's Radical Reformation, *passim*, and John C. Godbey's "Faustus Socinus" all contain good recent accounts of Socinus's thought. Alexander Gordon's 1879 article, "The Sozzini", is an excellent succinct review of both Lelio and Fausto Socinus's theological careers. Part II of Cory's Socinus, which outlines Socinus's theology credibly, contains several interesting citations from Socinus's works.

As Bayle said (Dictionnaire, III, p. 2614), Moréry's Dictionnaire (article "Socin") offers a good, broad view of Socinus's doctrines. Maimbourg (Histoire, II, pp. 477-481) underscores where Socinus's system paralleled early Christian heresies. Anastase's Histoire (pp. 364-402) is a study of Socinus's and later Socinian teachings.

45

been considered as the single most characteristic Socinian doctrine. Socinus taught that Jesus was in nature purely human and that He assumed an adoptive deity at the moment of the ascension: "by nature he was truly a man; a mortal man while he lived on earth but now immortal."<sup>46</sup> As the ascended Christ, Jesus was divine although secondary to God the Father in all ways.<sup>47</sup> Jesus was, however, to be worshipped as the secondary author of salvation.<sup>48</sup> This Christology, which as Moréry noted "n'auroit été entendue de personne jusqu'à Fauste Socin",<sup>49</sup> was substantiated by extensive quotations from the Bible and by arguing that the orthodox Christology was "repugnant both to right reason and to the Holy Scriptures."<sup>50</sup>

---

45

De Jesu Christo Servatore was Socinus's fullest Christological work. Godbey's article "Faustus Socinus", pp. 72-88, has the most detailed resumé of De Jesu Christo Servatore I have seen. For other recent treatments of the work, see Williams's Radical Reformation, pp. 752-756 and Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 392. See also Gordon's "The Sozzini", pp. 546-549 and 551ff. Chapters 13-15 of Cory's Socinus emphasize that Socinus was not primarily opposed to the orthodox Trinity but was interested in presenting his positive concepts of God and Christ.

46

Racovian Catechism (Rees), p. 51; see also p. 54.

47

Ibid., pp. 54-60.

48

Infra, pp. 24-25.

49

Moréry, Dictionnaire, IV, p. 203.

50

Racovian Catechism (Rees), p. 55.

In general, as all the authorities agreed, Socinus sought the unity of Christians through latitudinarianism. Anastase summarized and exaggerated this tendency:

Aussi les Sociniens se déclarent-ils ennemis de nos Mysteres, se contentent d'adorer un Dieu, de reconnoître une Providence telle quelle; c'est-à-dire, qui ne prévoit pas les futurs contingens; d'admettre un paradis et un enfer, de croire un Jesus-Christ non pas comme le Grand Dieu, mais comme un homme, grand roi, spirituel et juge établi de son Dieu; se trouvent fort bien des Juifs, des Mahometans et de toutes les autres Communions; et insistent beaucoup pour la tolérance et la liberté de conscience.<sup>51</sup>

In a 1584 letter to the Superintendent of the Transylvanian Unitarians, Socinus expressed his actual position:

I do not condemn other churches, nor by any means despise them, but acknowledge all as the true churches of Christ, in which the voice of the precepts of Jesus Christ our Lord resounds and is heard, even if in certain doctrines which do not relate to the actual precepts, they do not seem to me to think rightly, and whosoever keep the same precepts, I consider to be true members of Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Thus Anastase's statement distorted Socinus's position both by tying it too closely to specific Socinian doctrines and by including Jews and Moslems, who hardly could be said to centre their religious lives

---

51

Anastase, Histoire, p. 8. See also Moréry, Dictionnaire, IV, 403.

52

Quoted in Cory, Socinus, pp. 133-134. See also Gordon, "Sozzini", p. 568.

on the precepts of Christ. Nonetheless, it was representative of how the Socinians were viewed in the early eighteenth century.

Even though in the early days of the Minor Church latitudinarianism had very definite limits, the anti-Nicenes were the most latitudinarian Christians of the time. Socinus himself was never admitted into the communion of the Minor Reformed Church of Poland because "il différoit d'eux sur quelques points, et qu'il ne voulait pas garder le silence."<sup>53</sup> This situation was rather peculiar; the commonly acknowledged leader of the anti-Nicene Protestants could not join their church. Anastase explained this by saying Socinus desired to influence all religious bodies for selfish reasons and thus joined none.<sup>54</sup> Bayle's report that Socinus wanted to partake of the Minor Reformed Church's communion but was excluded over matters of conscience was much closer to the truth.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, Socinus was quite adamant that one must worship Christ as Divine, albeit inferior to God the Father. His position was expressed in the first edition of the Racovian

---

53

Bayle, Dictionnaire, III, p. 2608. Socinus, who tended to spiritualize all the sacraments, refused to be rebaptized as was the custom in the Minor Church.

54

Anastase, Histoire, p. 107.

55

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 393-395.

Catechism (1609) as follows:

What think you of those men which doe not invoke  
Christ, nor think that he must be adored?

That they are no Christians, since indeed they have  
not Christ; for though in words they dare not  
deny him, yet in reality they do.<sup>56</sup>

57

In fact, in his controversy with Francis David on this point,  
Socinus did not object to the state's imprisonment of Francis David  
for his religious teachings.<sup>58</sup> This was in accord with Socinus's  
general principle that those men who persisted in publicly maintaining  
theologically dangerous doctrines could be suppressed--even imprisoned  
by the authorities; however, if one merely held such errors privately,  
then the state had no right to intervene.<sup>59</sup>

As Bayle noted, this dispute and Francis David's related  
death blackened Socinus's reputation in some quarters while in others  
"on soutienne qu'il n'eut point de part aux conseils que furent  
donnez au Prince de Transilvanie pour oprimer François David."<sup>60</sup>  
Bayle did not say which of the two opinions was least wrong, but the

56

Racovian Catechism (Rees), p. 199n; later editions were  
hardly less severe on this point (ibid., pp. 196-197).

57

Supra, pp. 14-15.

58

Cory, Socinus, p. 41; see also Wilbur, Unitarianism, I,  
pp. 392-393 and II, pp. 68-80.

59

Gordon, "The Sozzini", pp. 564-565, cites the relevant  
passages in Socinus's works.

60

Bayle, Dictionnaire, III, p. 2608. Maimbourg, Moréry,  
and Anastase all do not mention this charge.



modern judgment is that Socinus did not aid in the prosecution  
of Francis David.<sup>61</sup> This episode and the Socinians' general  
intransigence on the issue of Christ's adoration show that the  
Minor Church was not altogether latitudinarian. Indeed, Socinus  
was only relatively tolerant as he allowed it legitimate for the  
magistrate to imprison obstinate teachers of unsound doctrine  
while absolutely condemning any corporal punishment for that or  
any other offense. It was the mature Socinianism of the middle  
seventeenth century that insisted on complete religious toleration  
from the state.<sup>62</sup> In the 1680 edition of the Racovian Catechism,  
exclusion from the fellowship and sacraments of the church was the  
most severe discipline prescribed for the regulation of Christians.<sup>63</sup>

While nonetheless tolerance and liberty of conscience  
were the general rule in matters of dogma, the early Minor Church  
was extremely strict in matters of Christian behaviour.<sup>64</sup> This was  
a result of their exegetical method which led them to try to follow  
the New Testament's radical ethical teachings literally--without

---

61

Gordon, "The Sozzini", pp. 557, 559, and 562; Wilbur,  
Unitarianism, II, pp. 79-80.

62

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 586-587.

63

Racovian Catechism (Rees), pp. 376-381.

64

Kot, Socinianism, ch. 3-6, and 8, treats the early  
ethical teachings of the Minor Church. See also Racovian Catechism  
(Rees), pp. 239-249.

qualification or exception. So they refused to bear arms, to serve as magistrates as the magisterial office involved the use of force, and to seek social honours and public office. Bayle mordantly noted that such a morality was not going to win a large number of converts:

et s'il est vrai qu'un Pape, aiant ouï dire que les Protestans ne souffroient ni l'adultaire ni la fornication, s'écria qu'ils ne seroient pas de longue durée, on peut assûrer que son pronostic eût été plus juste, s'ils l'eût appliqué à une Secte que renonce aux armes, et aux dignitez.<sup>65</sup>

But they were not concerned with comprehending a large number of people within their church. They desired rather to retire from the world insofar as possible and to live together as a regenerate Christian community.

Socinus was in general accord with this sort of sectarian morality. His De Jesu Christo Servatore insisted that salvation came from following Christ's moral teachings and example rather than through belief in doctrines about Him: "the way of salvation is to regulate our life according to the example of Christ."<sup>66</sup> However, the Minor Church came to moderate its extreme world-rejecting morality under the influence of Socinus, who was inclined to

---

<sup>65</sup>

Bayle, Dictionnaire, III, p. 2609. Bayle's treatment of Socinian thought (Ibid., 2609-2610) is a particularly fine piece of work.

<sup>66</sup>

De Jesu Christo Servatore, I, iv, quoted in Cory, Socinus, p. 112.

67

spiritualize all external observances. So long as one lived in the spirit of Christ, it was permitted to compromise on the details of outward behaviour. By the time of the death of Socinus, no one was denied membership in the Minor Church due to his office or position in society. "And any person may engage in the magistracy, provided that in undertaking and discharging his duties he so conduct himself as not to offend against the laws and institutions of Christ" <sup>68</sup> was how the 1659 edition of the Racovian Catechism expressed it. Thus, always violence was <sup>69</sup> strictly forbidden and Christian simplicity enjoined.

Socinus's work for the Minor Church was successful in that he provided their much needed doctrinal framework, and his

---

67

Kot, Socinianism, ch. 7, 9, and 11.

68

Racovian Catechism (Rees), p. 177. It is interesting that the note to this passage made in the 1680's by B. Wissowatius (Benedict Wiszowaty, one of the Socinian exiles in the Netherlands) indicates that the last Socinians returned to the original uncompromising moral position of the earliest Polish anti-Nicenes. Wiszowaty wrote: "it best becomes Christians . . . to remain in that state wherein their Lord founded the first church, . . . that is, under afflictions, and under persecution; to relinquish civil magistracy to the men of this world; and to refrain from usurping for themselves the right of exercising authority over others. . . ." (ibid., p. 178n.)

69

One of Socinus's letters said: "I can scarcely think that Christian charity by any means allows the putting of the guilty to death, or mutilating their limbs. Nor will any Christian magistrate, if he regard my advice, venture to do this." Quoted in ibid., p. 179n.

great moral and intellectual strength became the fixed point around which the anti-Nicene Poles rallied. His tremendous influence on the movement led to the common use of his name to describe the Minor Church and later related ecclesiastical bodies and individual thinkers as "Socinian".<sup>70</sup> The Minor Church seems to have been at its peak of organizational strength and social influence roughly in the period from 1600 to 1620.<sup>71</sup> A number of factors contributed to their modest success: even if Bayle were right in saying that sectarian morality insures a small membership, the Socinians attracted some members and drew considerable strength from their way of life; religious tolerance was still guaranteed by law; and, of course, Socinus's personal authority was at its height.

However, even before the turn of the seventeenth century it was clear that the Socinians could expect trouble.<sup>72</sup> The Counter-Reformation in Poland under Jesuit leadership was strong quite early, and Socinus's prestige was not sufficient even to

---

70

Anastase, Histoire, p. 110. From this point on in this study, "Socinian" and "Socinianism" will be used in this common way.

71

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, ch. 32; Kot, "Mouvement", pp. 131-133.

72

Anastase, ibid., pp. 110-122, carefully traces the decline of the Socinians in Poland; Bayle, Dictionnaire, III, pp. 2606-2607, is also good; Maimbourg's Histoire (II, pp. 482ff) jumps immediately from outlining Socinus's career to the expulsion of the Socinians from Poland; see Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 433-482, for a full modern account.

protect himself. In 1598, he was abused by a mob in Krakow, lost his house and papers, and nearly lost his life. He spent the rest of his life in the refuge of a sympathetic nobleman's estate. In 1611 an anti-Nicene burgher of Biesk was executed for blasphemy against the Holy Trinity and for dishonouring a crucifix; Socinians were forbidden to meet in Lublin after 1627; and in 1638 the intellectual centre of Socinianism--the college and press at Rakow--were razed in punishment for a prank done by two Socinian schoolboys. In short, toleration in Poland, while still a constitutional guarantee, was hardly in practice.

To make matters still worse for the Socinians, the country was ravaged by two series of invasions--from 1648 to 1651 and from 1655 to 1657. In the first war Cossacks and Tartars literally wiped out the Minor Reformed Church in the East; in the second the western Socinians suffered both from the invaders and from Catholic mob violence. And, of course, in such an era, their pacificism hardly endeared them to the Polish government. The end came in 1658 when the King kept the vow he had made to the Virgin, as urged upon him by Jesuit advisors, <sup>73</sup> to rid Poland of the anti-Nicene heresy should he regain control; he ordered the Socinians to be expelled in 1660. As Maimbourg expressed it,

---

73

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 470.

Les Seigneurs Catholiques dans la Diète générale de Varsovie en l'année mil six cens cinquante-huit prirent cette occasion pour exterminer de la Pologne cette abominable hérésie, laquelle pourroit encore attirer de plus grands fleaux de Dieu sur l'Etat qui n'avoit pas esté loin de sa ruine.<sup>74</sup>

By 1660, after twelve years of disaster and two of systematic cruelty, there were few enough Socinian survivors to expel; perhaps a thousand families abjured their faith and remained<sup>75</sup> in Poland while a few hundred fled. Most who left went to Transylvania, where they could be safe in the officially recognized anti-Nicene church; a few to the Netherlands, where there was effective religious toleration; and a very few to Prussia, where they were welcomed as settlers provided they refrained from proselytizing. From this point, Socinianism as an organized church existed only as very obscure dwindling remnants. The last Polish-language anti-Nicene church in Transylvania closed its doors<sup>76</sup> in 1792; the exiles in the Netherlands never had their own<sup>77</sup> church; and the last Socinian church anywhere closed in East<sup>78</sup> Prussia in 1803.

---

<sup>74</sup>

Maimbourg, Histoire, II, p. 482.

<sup>75</sup>

Precise numbers are very hard to establish for the Minor Church. This estimate of the exiles comes from Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 483. But see ibid., I, pp. 426-427, where Wilbur estimates that at the Socinians' peak they only numbered a thousand families. At any rate, modern sources all agree that very few Socinians were in Poland in the period from 1658 to 1660.

<sup>76</sup>

Ibid., I, p. 486.

<sup>77</sup>

Infra, p. 43.

<sup>78</sup>

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 520.

It is obvious that the Socinians made very little world historical impact as an ecclesiastical body. The Minor Church was never large and never spread beyond Poland and was exterminated after fewer than one hundred years' existence. So it was the ideas of Socinianism that were so widely debated in the thirty years around the turn of the eighteenth century. To answer Hazard's question "But what precisely do we mean by a Socinian?", we must now look more closely at the development of Socinian thought. Our best source for this is the Racovian Catechism, which was both the most distilled expression of the fundamentals of Socinianism and the most widely circulated Socinian book.

Prepared from notes left by Socinus, the first Racovian Catechism was published in 1605 and was republished many times in several languages over the next two centuries. It was not an ordinary catechism of pat questions and answers but was more "a course of instructions for producing theologians". Succeeding

79

Rees, in his edition of the Racovian Catechism (pp. lxxi-xcii), relates the publishing history of the Catechism, which was: Polish, 1605 and 1619; German, 1608 and 1612; Latin, 1609 (this edition was dedicated to King James I of England, who expressed his gratitude by threatening to execute its authors if they ever came to his country and by having burnt all copies that could be found, by act of Parliament, 1614; incidentally, this shows the wide and rapid penetration of Socinian books and thought in Europe), 1651, 1665, 1680, and 1684; English, 1652 and 1818; Dutch, 1665, 1666, and 1667. Those editions before 1650 were printed at Rakow; those after 1650 were printed in the Netherlands, except for the 1651 Latin and the 1652 English, which were probably the work of John Bidle and which were published in London (McLachlan, Socinianism, pp. 187-191) and the 1818 English, a London edition. See also Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 410.

80

Harnack, Dogma, VII, 138-139.

editions showed gradual changes in Socinian thought, but one major point remained constant--Socinus's emphasis on reason in religion. Since the only religious authority was the Holy Scripture and since each Christian was responsible for interpreting it in its plain sense, the place of reason must needs be high. As the 1818<sup>81</sup> edition of the Racovian Catechism put it:

It [reason] is, indeed, of great service, since without it we could neither perceive with certainty the authority of the sacred writings understand their contents, discriminate one thing from another, nor apply them to any practical purpose. When therefore I stated that the Holy Scriptures were sufficient for our salvation so far from excluding right reason, I certainly assumed its presence.<sup>82</sup>

83

Structurally, the entire Catechism expressed the characteristic Socinian theory of religious knowledge. It started by defining the "Christian Religion" as "the way of attaining

---

81

The 1818 edition is the work of Thomas Rees, a Unitarian clergyman, who translated the 1680 Latin edition, the last "official" Racovian Catechism which was produced by exiled Minor Churchmen in the Netherlands. The 1680 work was a corrected and annotated version of the 1665 Latin edition, which, in turn, was greatly expanded from the 1609 Latin publication (Catechism (Rees), pp. lxxviii-lxxxv). Rees's translation is especially valuable as he often included in notes passages from earlier editions of the Catechism, where there had been significant changes in doctrine. He also frequently quoted from other relevant Socinian documents.

82

Racovian Catechism (Rees), p. 15.

83

The following discussion is based on the 1818 (Rees) edition of the Racovian Catechism.



eternal life, which God has pointed out by Jesus Christ." <sup>84</sup> (p. 1)  
 Then the first section, "Of the Holy Scriptures", established the  
 New and Old Testaments as the sole and certain source of learning  
 what this Christian Religion was. <sup>85</sup> Chapter one of the first  
 section, "Of the Authenticity of the Holy Scriptures", proved--at  
 least, to the authors' satisfaction--using the same logical and  
 historiographical arguments that apply to any documents, that the  
 ideas recorded in the New Testament "could have had no author  
 but God himself." (p. 11) The authority and credibility of the  
 sources established, chapter two, "Of the Sufficiency of the Holy  
 Scriptures", showed that all essential saving knowledge was in  
 the Bible and was available to any rational being as the long  
 passage quoted on the previous page insisted.

Furthermore, the third and last chapter, entitled "Of  
 the Perspicuity of the Holy Scriptures", of the section concerning  
 the Holy Scriptures argued that they were not only the sufficient  
 authentic record of God's saving plan but that also all the  
 essentials of the faith were clearly stated in the Bible. After  
 all, since God gave the Scriptures to man to teach him how to

---

84

Socinus defined it (Opera I, p. 281, quoted by Cory,  
Socinus, p. 115) as follows: "The Christian Religion is the  
 heavenly doctrine teaching the true way of attaining eternal life.  
 This way is nothing else but to obey God in regard to those things  
 which he has taught us through our Lord, Jesus Christ."

85

This first section is a faithful distillation of Socinus's  
An Argument for the Authority of the Holy Scriptures.

attain eternal life, they must be understandable by all men; indeed, the Epistles of the New Testament were obviously addressed "to men of plain understanding." (p. 17)

However, some Scripture passages--non-essential by definition-- were admittedly somewhat obscure. The method proposed in the Racovian Catechism for illuminating such opacities involved four stages:

By carefully ascertaining, in the first instance, the scope, and other circumstances, of those passages, in the way which ought to be pursued in the interpretation of the language of all other written compositions. Secondly, by an attentive comparison of them with similar phrases and sentences of less ambiguous meaning. Thirdly, by submitting our interpretation of the more obscure passages to the test of the doctrines which are most clearly inculcated in the Scriptures. . . . And lastly, by rejecting every interpretation which is repugnant to right reason, or involves a contradiction. (p. 18)

This mundane, philological method for resolving theological problems is very representative of the spirit of Socinian thought.

Only now, after having proved the authority, sufficiency, and perspicuity of the Scriptures and having provided a method for dealing with difficulties, did the Catechism move into the major part of the work--the explication of God's "way of salvation."<sup>86</sup>

The way consisted "of the knowledge of God and of Christ": not a mere theoretical knowledge, but knowledge coupled "with its proper effects; that is, with a lively or efficacious faith, and a suitable

and exemplary conduct." (p. 24) Thus, as to be expected, the practical, moral effects of Christianity were insisted upon as essential to salvation. After this definition, the great bulk of the Catechism, 359 of 384 pages, went on to spell out the saving faith. As was true of Faustus Socinus's theology, the Catechism centred on Christ, devoting 314 pages to His person and office. The Socinians' most notorious doctrine, the unipersonality of God, was quickly disposed of. (pp. 33-48)

The Catechism's rather lengthy and thorough establishment of its scriptural foundation before passing on to its doctrines of salvation was reminiscent of Faustus Socinus's literary production. His second theological work was De sacrae scripturae auctoritate, written around 1570 and published in several editions and languages from 1588 to 1731, at first not under Socinus's name. Socinus's arguments for proving the credibility of the two Testaments were welcomed and appropriated by theologians of many confessions even after it was known who was the author of De sacrae scripturae auctoritate. The great Socinian exegetical principle that nothing in the Bible was contrary to reason was the cornerstone of the work; however, contrary to the position of the Racovian

87

---

For the history of De sacrae scripturae auctoritate see Gordon, "The Sozzini", pp. 542-544; Williams, Radical Reformation, pp. 750-751; and Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 390-391.

Catechism, Socinus taught that the Scriptures were not absolutely perspicuous. If they were, then men of bad faith could feign a Christian life, which would insure them an unwarranted salvation. 88:

Thus there was substantial continuity from the earliest post Reformation anti-Nicene thinkers, through Faustus Socinus, to developed Socinianism concerning the source, methodology and end of religious knowledge. We have already seen that Biandrata and his Polish coworkers began with Scripture interpreted individually and plainly as the only source of religious knowledge 89 -- the basic principle of Socinus and the Socinians. Anastase returned to this key point throughout his history of the Minor Reformed Church and showed how it was always the basis of Socinian thought. 90 This Socinian method of argument was particularly effective against Protestants as they formally agreed with its first premises of sola scriptura and "the priesthood of all believers". In fact, as Anastase noted, whenever the Socinians and the Calvinists debated the Socinians won. So "Les Prétendus Réformez, pour détruire Socin, après avoir expérimenté que la voye des conférences et des disputes leur étoit inutile, lui susciterent des affaires d'Etat." 91 This meant that all religious

88

Socinus, Argument, pp. 157-158.

89

Supra, pp. 19-20.

90

Anastase, Histoire, pp. 8-9, 36-38, 109, and passim.

91

Ibid., p. 110.

bodies in Poland urged the government to persecute the Socinians.

To the very end, the Polish Socinians believed their gentle, rational interpretation of scripture would convince their opponents and give them peace. Pathetically, they arranged a conference to this end, which began in March, 1660, only a few months before the date of exile.<sup>92</sup> Andrew Wiszowaty, Socinus's grandson, was the only debater on the Socinian side; he faced two Jesuits and a Bernadine monk. As usual, the spectators agreed that the Socinian arguments carried the debate. For example, a Franciscan noted the force of Wiszowaty's arguments by saying: "si tous les Diables de l'Enfer étoient ici pour la soutenir, ils ne l'auroient pas si bien soutenuë qu'a fait ce Ministre."<sup>93</sup> He added that if more Socinians had dared participate, "je ne vois pas comment on pourra se defendre contre ces sortes de gens."<sup>94</sup> But, as usual, the Socinians lost the war. "[La conférence] n'aboutit à rien qu'à irriter encore plus les Catholiques contre les Sociniens."<sup>95</sup> And soon the Socinians were expelled and the learned Fathers no longer needed to worry about defending the faith

---

92

Ibid., pp. 120-122; Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 481-482.

93

Anastase, Histoire, p. 121. The dialogue comes from a Socinian account of the debate published in 1684 and was probably invented as was the historians' convention of the time.

94

Ibid., p. 121.

95

Ibid., p. 122; but Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 482, says this conference gained slightly less hostile feeling towards the Socinians than before. In light of the relentless way the Socinians were hunted out and forced to leave, Anastase's interpretation of the result of this conference seems correct.

against those heretics.

While it was conceded that the Socinians were excellent debaters who reasoned formidably from scripture, some contemporaries<sup>96</sup> thought their reasoning was by no means philosophically profound. Moréry, writing of the developed faith, put it very well:

On ne trouve pas une grande literature, dans les Livres des Unitaires. . . . Mais ils sont grands Dialecticiens; et en rejetant toutes les autoritez, hormis celle de l'Ecriture, ils ont réduit la Théologie à une espece de Critique de la Bible. . . . s'il se rencontre quelque difficulté, ils ont recours aussi-tôt à la Concordance, et qu'ils expliquent les mots obscurs par d'autres qui paroissent plus clairs.<sup>97</sup>

Writing of the early Italian anti-Nicenes, Anastase noted that they simply discarded all the tremendous philosophical theology of Catholicism as so much irrelevant Greek paganism unnaturally grafted on to the essentials of Christian faith.<sup>98</sup> Even so Anastase respected their thought so much that he did not publish the doctrinal part of his Histoire because "la secte des Sociniens<sup>99</sup> étant celle qui éblouit davantage par la subtilité du raisonnement" and he had not had time to refute their arguments in sufficient

---

96

Gordon, in "The Sozzini", concurs with this judgment in regard to Faustus Socinus himself. Referring to Socinus's controversy with some Jesuits on the unity of God, Gordon comments: "The truth is, Sozzini had no metaphysical genius. Nothing can be more jejune than his dreary elaboration of textual commonplaces in refutation of the subtle arguments of the Catholic dogma de Deo." (p. 561)

97

Moréry, Dictionnaire, IV, pp. 551-552; Moréry's statement agrees with the Racovian Catechism, supra, p. 35.

98

Anastase, Histoire, p. 13.

99

Ibid., p. 4.

detail.

In summing up his history of the more recent anti-Nicenes, Maimbourg denied their thought was worthy of any serious consideration: "je suis obligé de dire qu'il n'y a rien ni de plus foible ni de plus déraisonnable que leur conduite, en écrivant comme ils ont fait."<sup>100</sup> All they had done, according to Maimbourg, was to have repeated the errors of the heretics of the first centuries of the church; and these errors had been thoroughly refuted by the Fathers. Socinianism was the lowest common denominator of all heresy and had had what little success it had because: "Il n'y avoit rien dans cette doctrine qui surpassast l'intelligence humaine, et qui abbaissast l'orgueil de l'esprit qui se révolte naturellement contre ce qu'il ne comprend pas . . . ." <sup>101</sup> When the individual could interpret scripture as he pleased with no guidance from the living tradition of the Church, then, Maimbourg believed, there was nothing to stop him from the prideful errors of the Socinians. <sup>102</sup> Exegesis rather than metaphysics was the strength of the Socinian thought in the judgment of writers around

---

<sup>100</sup> Maimbourg, Histoire, II, p. 485.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 480. See also pp. 477-479 and 481-482.

<sup>102</sup> This is Maimbourg's most consistent theme: Histoire, II, pp. 450-451, 453, 455-456, and passim.

103

the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Bayle also emphasized again and again the importance of reason freed from tradition in Socinianism. Of the anti-Nicene Italians, he said:

ils s'étoient trompez en subtilisant, et en consultant avec trop de déférence la Lumiere naturelle; et s'ils ont gardé une partie du Christianisme, et non pas l'autre, c'est que leur premier principe, de ne rien admettre que choquât directement les lumieres de leur Raison. . . . Leur principe avilit la Religion, et la convertit en Philosophie.<sup>104</sup>

Just as Bayle thought the strictures of Socinian morality would keep the movement small, so too he thought their insistence on simple, clear, transparently understandable doctrine was not attractive to the mass of men. Bayle continued that most men want grandeur, mystery, even incomprehensibility in their faith; they want to believe rather than to see; therefore, "le Système des Sociniens n'est guere propre à gagner les peuples. Il est plus propre à conduire au Pyrrhonisme les gens d'étude."<sup>105</sup>

103

One might wonder then, why, if Socinus and the Socinians were so philosophically inept, was their work so worthy of philosophical and other refutation for some three centuries? Even in those writers who disparaged Socinian theology, a note of respect sounded through the wall of insults. In fact, as shown by current studies, Socinus and his followers were able theologians who developed an original and subtle system. See Godbey, "Socinus", pp. 65-69, for a review of recent work.

104

Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, III, p. 2610. For similar statements, see *ibid.*, pp. 2609-2612 and 2614-2615.

105

*Ibid.*, p. 2610.



From the first, anti-Nicene thought was anchored in two sources of authority: the Bible, which was God's only word to man and common reason. If ancient creeds, the pronouncements of the Church Fathers, or any other venerable tradition could not be found in the text of the Bible or could not be simply and clearly deduced therefrom, then they must be discarded. <sup>106</sup> And, of course, if the doctrine were unreasonable, it could not be Biblical for there was nothing irrational in the Bible. Bayle pointed out that this great reliance on "la lumière naturelle" was also ultimately destructive of the authority of scripture. For example, in explaining those passages of the New Testament that seem to identify Jesus with God, Socinian exegetes explained them away as "les figures et les phrases les plus outrées que la dévotion puisse suggérer." <sup>107</sup> This meant that, on the authority of their "lumière naturelle", the Socinians declared that some of the New Testament was not the inspired Word of God but only the product of believers' enthusiasm. Reason, then, actually became the sole basis of religious knowledge.

Bayle here characterized a doctrine that developed among the Polish Minor Church exiles in the Netherlands. Andrew Wiszowaty, the exile leader, taught in his last book (1685) that reason took

---

106

Anastase, Histoire, p. 37, has a very clear exposition of this point of view.

107

Ibid., III, p. 2615.

precedence over scripture and that unreasonable passages of the Bible must be excised. <sup>108</sup> I would think that when the anti-Nicene thinkers gave up all reliance on received tradition that something like this late doctrine of the primacy of natural theology was inevitable. Bayle was probably right when he said that anti-Nicene thought, because of its first principles, led from religion--that is, Christianity--to philosophy; at least that is what happened in Socinianism. From the first Socinians' position of attacking orthodox theology, in part, for its affinity with ancient philosophy because such philosophy seemed to detract from the absolute authority of the Bible, the last Socinians had come to embrace modern, critical <sup>109</sup> philosophy as the final arbiter in religion.

Wiszowaty's exaltation of natural theology was one of the last intellectual manifestations of organized Socinianism. In the Netherlands, the Minor Church exiles never established an independent church largely because the Collegiant movement, the Remonstrant Church, and the Mennonites all welcomed and soon absorbed the Socinians into their fellowship. <sup>110</sup> However, the few exiles and a very few new

---

108

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 572.

109

Cory, Socinus, pp. 86-87, notes this changing emphasis.

110

Moréry, Dictionnaire, IV, pp. 403-404; Anastase, Histoire, pp. 152-175. The most thorough modern accounts of Socinianism in the Netherlands are Kuhler, Socinianisme and van Slee, Geshiedenis, both of whom confirm this point.

recruits maintained their tradition intact long enough to edit and publish their church's literature and even to produce some new works like Wiszowaty's. This fruit of Dutch freedom of the press made it possible for Socinianism to become widely known in Europe, for Socinian books were quite rare after the 1638 destruction of the Racovian press. Perhaps the major literary achievement of the Polish exiles was the Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum, which presented many of the major works of the best theologians of the Minor Church in eight large volumes. <sup>111</sup> The Bibliotheca was well distributed--especially in Holland and England.

Again we return to Hazard's question: "But what precisely do we mean by a Socinian?" This time we can formulate an answer. In the strictest sense, "Socinian" would apply only to a member of the Minor Reformed Church of Poland after it had come under the leadership of Faustus Socinus and had accepted his theological formulations as the standard of belief. However, as we have seen, around the beginning of the eighteenth century, there was no longer any Minor Reformed Church. So, of course, when "Socinian" was used in discourse in the Enlightenment, it was used in an extended sense to refer to the distinctive beliefs of the Minor Church.

112

In fact, as Bayle demonstrated with some disdain,

---

111

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 569, n. 20. They were published from 1665 to 1668, and a ninth volume, which is sometimes considered a supplement to the Bibliotheca, appeared in 1692.

112

Bayle, Dictionnaire, III, pp. 2611-2614. Here Bayle showed how ridiculous was the claim that the Jansenists of Port-Royal were infected with Socinianism.

"Socinian" was used very carelessly. In the late seventeenth century, too many writers were ready to call their opponents Socinians if they were in accord with even one Socinian idea. Anastase, although he complained in the preface of his Histoire that too many "differentes sectes qui s'accusent mutuellement de Socinianisme ne paroissent pas assez connoître cette hérésie qu'ils reprochent à leur adversaires",<sup>113</sup> called Jurieu a Socinian because of a similarity in one of Jurieu's innumerable arguments to a point in Socinian thought.<sup>114</sup>

While such loose use of words was common enough at the time, it was, nonetheless, improper. In its broad sense "Socinian" should only have been applied to one who ascribed to the complex of theological viewpoints that together made up Socinianism. Foremost among these was, as we have seen, the primacy of ordinary, individual reason as the arbiter in questions of understanding the only religious authority, the scriptures. Indeed, such reason eventually supplanted the Bible as the wellspring of Socinian thought. With Wiszowaty, Socinian "enlightened" fundamentalism became simply enlightened religious thought.

Linked to this were the two great anti-Nicene principles: that church councils and traditions had no authority over the believer, and that the state can rightfully have no power of

---

113

Anastase, Histoire, p. iiii.

114

Ibid., pp. 185-186. Here Anastase also was defending the Port-Royal community against Jurieu's "proof" that they were Socinians in thought. His charge against Jurieu was particularly ironic as Jurieu was the most implacable enemy of Socinianism in the Netherlands.

115

coercion in matters of faith. Individual tolerance and magisterial tolerance were, therefore, consistently sustained by the Socinians. Another related characteristic was their insistence that the way one lived rather than the doctrine one confessed, was the truest witness of Christian faith. Least important in this complex of ideas were the distinctive doctrines of the Socinians: Jesus's adoptive divinity, the absolute primacy of the Father, the limitation on the sufferings of the damned, and so on.

Now it is easy to see why the Socinians were so often discussed in the period of the Enlightenment. A Christian church that relied on "la lumière naturelle", that championed modern reason against ancient, that denied the authority of tradition, that insisted on clear, simple beliefs, that demanded toleration from the state and that practised it, and finally a church that had been hounded out of existence by religious persecution was made to order for the pens of Voltaire, his predecessors and colleagues.

---

115

As shown above, pp. 25-26, Socinus allowed the state some right to intervene in matters of faith; however, later Socinians denied that right altogether.

## II

### SOCINIANISM INTERPRETED (1680-1715)

The preceding chapter was a historical account of Socinianism before Voltaire's time which also reviewed the state of historical knowledge available in the French language at the turn of the eighteenth century. Now to be considered are various theoretical understandings of the Socinians current in that period. This critical review will restrict itself to the writings of French language authors as much as possible. In this way, the most likely sources of Voltaire's early interpretations of the Socinians will be brought to light.

As mentioned in chapter one, the period from 1680 to 1715 saw much written in French about the Socinians.<sup>1</sup> The significance of the various interpretations of Socinianism that appeared then are best understood in the context of the general religious situation of the time. Ernst Troeltsch, in his magisterial studies of Christianity and society, stressed the importance of this era in the religious history of the west and admirably captured its spirit. Since Troeltsch's general thesis that modernity was

---

<sup>1</sup> Supra, p. 3. Anastase, Histoire, part I, ch. 36-38 and part II, ch. 44-49; Hazard, European Mind, pp. 92-98, and Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 528-534, sketch the history of this literature.

ushered in in the Enlightenment rather than in the Reformation  
<sup>2</sup>  
 is widely accepted, his work will be used to characterize the  
 religious setting of the years under consideration.

In Protestantism and Progress, Troeltsch succinctly  
 expressed his theory:

that Protestantism cannot be supposed to have  
 directly paved the way for the modern world.  
 On the contrary, it appears at first, in spite  
 of all its great new ideas, as a revival and re-  
 inforcement of the ideal of authoritatively imposed  
 Church-civilisation, as a complete reaction to  
 medieval thinking, which sweeps away such be-  
 ginnings of a free and secular civilisation as  
 had already been toilsomely established.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>  
Protestantism and Progress, which appeared in German in  
 1906 with a title which literally translates "The Significance  
 of the Reformation for the Rise of the Modern World" (Pauck,  
Harnack, p. 61), is the work where his thesis was first fully  
 formulated. As the church historian Wilhelm Pauck commented,  
 "Today, Troeltsch's interpretation is generally regarded as  
 correct. . . ." (Pauck, Harnack, p. 61) Troeltsch's The Social  
 Teachings of the Christian Churches (1911), especially in chapter  
 III, developed this theme as did his Renaissance and Reformation  
 (1925). Recent studies of Troeltsch's work by church historians-  
 theologians are Wilhelm Pauck's Harnack and Troeltsch: Two His-  
 torical Theologians (1968) and Benjamin Reist's Toward a Theology  
 of Involvement: The Thought of Ernst Troeltsch (1966). Both of  
 these insist on the essential correctness of Troeltsch's position.  
 Similarly, English-speaking sociologists also rate his under-  
 standing of this matter highly. See J. M. Yinger's The Scientific  
 Study of Religion (1970), ch. 15 and Roland Robertson's The  
 Sociological Interpretation of Religion (1970), ch. 5. Thomas W.  
 Ogletree's Christian Faith and History, A Critical Comparison of  
 Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth (1965) is primarily interested in  
 Christology.

<sup>3</sup>  
 Troeltsch, Protestantism, pp. 85-86. See also Troeltsch,  
Renaissance, pp. 21-23.

That is, Calvinism and Lutheranism rather quickly poured their new religious wine into old ecclesiastical bottles:

The coercive ecclesiastical system set up everywhere again, the unification of political and ecclesiastical power, the resurrection of scholasticism and of scholastic Aristotelianism in all the churches, the tying of spiritual life to the confessions and clerical points of view--all that seemed to mean the return in threefold multiplication [Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist] of the Middle Ages, which had long since been overcome . . . .<sup>4</sup>

In short, Troeltsch saw the Reformation as actually stopping the humanist movement of intellectual freedom in religion and science.

"[Protestantism] supplied the incentive to a revival of the Catholic idea, and so, in spite of the contemporary diffusion of the ideas and manners of the Renaissance, Europe had to experience two centuries more of the medieval spirit."<sup>5</sup>

In addition to "real Protestantism"<sup>6</sup> or the "genuine early Protestantism of Lutheranism and Calvinism",<sup>7</sup> there were parallel sectarian movements that rejected the Protestant Churchly claim of the legitimacy of the use of compulsion to unite all men in matters of religious belief and practice. Such were the humanistic, Anabaptist, and Spiritualist movements. In turn, "real" Protestantism violently repudiated these sectarian Christian groups. The

---

<sup>4</sup> Troeltsch, Renaissance, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Troeltsch, Protestantism, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Troeltsch, Renaissance, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Troeltsch, Protestantism, p. 44.



Socinians are an excellent example of this relationship: their theology appropriated the methods and spiritual freedom of humanism; their ethics and policy were typical of Anabaptism; and the whole movement was under the inspiration of the Reformation. As Troeltsch put it, "the humanist theology of the Sozzinis, of Servetus and of Hugo Grotius actually signified a combination of both movements [Renaissance and Reformation]."<sup>8</sup> Thus the authoritarian Churches of Rome and of "genuine" Protestantism united in persecuting the Socinians and all anti-Nicene Christians. Servetus and Gribaldi both fled for their lives from Catholic lands and were executed by Protestants for their anti-Nicene beliefs; Bruno and Ochino both died in miserable exile, unwelcome in either Catholic or Protestant realms.

For two hundred years, the three great confessional Churches, Roman, Lutheran, and Calvinist, dominated the religious and political scene in Europe while sectarian Christian bodies like the Socinians barely survived in the shadowy corners of the continent. This period, which Troeltsch called the "Confessional Age", in trying to maintain the old ideal of a Church civilization, was caught in a self-contradiction: "Three infallible 'Churches', unchurching and anathematizing one another, discredited the idea of the Church for which there is no plural."<sup>9</sup> The new civilization--that first

---

<sup>8</sup> Troeltsch, Renaissance, p. 19. There is substantial reason to think that Grotius was greatly influenced by Socinian literature (Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 448-450).

<sup>9</sup> Troeltsch, Protestantism, p. 89.

stage of modernity, the Enlightenment, which rose from the chaos of confessional wars and the fragmentation of Christendom--was the triumph, in a new form, of the spirit of the Renaissance.<sup>10</sup>

This was why the controversialists of the years from 1680 to 1715 wrote so much of the Socinians:

Towards the close of the seventeenth century, after long and cruel oppression, they had their hour in the history of the world. Free-Churchism, philologico-critical theology, the subordination of objective revelation to the practical ethico-religious content of life, . . . a subjectivism which makes little of cultus, ceremonial and ecclesiasticism, have since then irresistibly broken in upon the Protestant Churches, like a flood sweeping away the old landmarks.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly orthodox confessional Protestantism did not lack literary defenders against this Socinian flood, and Roman Catholic authors were happy enough to point out the spread of heresy amongst Protestants and were also on guard against the infection breaking out in their own house.

Thus, the statements made by Protestant and Catholic orthodoxy about Socinianism to be considered come from a time of bitter conflict: the time of "the great struggle for freedom at the end of the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century which really brought the Middle Ages to an end."<sup>12</sup> They are

---

10

Troeltsch, Protestantism, p. 86, Renaissance, p. 27, Social Teachings, ch. III, sections 1, 3, and 4. See also Cassirer, Philosophy, pp. 139-141, and 158-160; Hazard, European Mind, Part I, ch. IV.

11

Troeltsch, Protestantism, pp. 51-52. See Strauss, Spinoza's Critique, especially ch. III, for examples of how Socinianism influenced the time.

12

Troeltsch, Protestantism, p. 86.

missiles forged by some two centuries of Reformation and Counter-Reformation clashing together and are meant to wound more than to inform. Furthermore, they are nearly as far in time and spirit from the Early Reformation as we are from the beginning of the eighteenth century, so they must neither be taken as expressions of the time of the Reform nor be confused with modern Protestantism or Catholicism.

On the third side of the struggle, the party favorable to Socinianism was very much constrained in what it could say openly. Anti-Nicene expression, especially anti-Trinitarianism, was formally illegal everywhere in Christendom, save Transylvania. In most lands, it was a capital offense. Even in the Netherlands, where religious and freedom of the press were the unofficial rule, clergymen could not admit to Socinianism without losing their positions and livelihood, and publishers were subject to the occasional religiously inspired harrassment. Subtlety and indirection were the necessary tools for survival for the writer with Socinian inclinations in this period--but not overmuch subtlety, as the times were relatively liberal, and the writers wanted to enlighten masses of men. <sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, except for a few fearless men, Socinian exiles in the Netherlands, or men writing anonymously, writers expressed their Socinian ideas obliquely and can not be taken at face value.

---

13

Strauss, Persecution, pp. 34-35. In this book, Persecution and the Art of Writing, Strauss has shown in an overwhelmingly convincing way that heterodox writers from ages where heterodoxy was persecuted must be read very carefully to uncover their disguised meanings.

Since in the period under consideration (1680-1715) there were no French language sources that unequivocally expressed a Socinian position, an English pamphlet, Stephen Nye's A Brief History of the Unitarians, Called also Socinians. In Four Letters, Written to a Friend, published anonymously in 1687 and again in a revised version in 1691,<sup>14</sup> is to be the major source considered here for the self-interpretation of the Socinians. It begins with a seven page (pp. 3-9) exposition of the Unitarian doctrine of God, supporting it by large doses of scripture interpreted by linguistic and common sense principles. For example, the Trinitarian doctrine of three persons in one substance falls because God always speaks of himself in the singular in the Bible:

No instance (say the Socinians) can be given in any Language of Three Persons, who ever spoke of themselves, or were spoken to, by the singular Pronouns, I, Thou, Me, Him, Thee, etc. Such speaking is contrary to Custom, Grammar, and Sense, which are the Laws of Speech: therefore the Holy Scriptures always speaking thus of God, either he is only One Person, or the Scriptures are one continued ungrammatical Solqecism and Impropriety . . . . (p. 7)

Similarly, the orthodox doctrine that the three coequal divine persons are but one God is dismissed summarily: "This is an Error in counting or numbring; which when stood in, is of all

---

14

The present study uses the second edition. See McLachlan, Socinianism, for a complete account of the Unitarian Tracts of which this pamphlet is one. Jean Le Clerc reviewed A Brief History in BUH, XV, (1690), pp. 364-366.

others the most brutal, and inexcusable: and not to discern it,  
<sup>15</sup>  
is not to be a Man." (p. 9)

While this doctrinal introduction serves well to illustrate the kind of argument developed Socinianism used, it does little to advance the history that is Nye's express subject. In fact, as a history of the Socinians, the pamphlet is quite inadequate.<sup>16</sup> Less than four pages (pp. 10-13) cover the entire subject with more than half going to the ancient heresiarchs, and in the modern period not Faustus Socinus, nor Francis David, nor their churches are named. (p. 11). Nye leaps immediately from the ancient period, pausing only to mention that in 1687, outside some obscure parts of eastern Europe, anti-Nicenes are nowhere officially tolerated. And, for the modern period, he only lists five men--Erasmus, Grotius, the Jesuit Petavius, Episcopius, and Sandius (pp. 11-12)--none of whom were admitted Socinians but who had some degree of affinity with them. The remainder of the pamphlet, in three letters (pp. 14-46), systematically works through the Old and New Testament passages most relevant to Socinian thought.

---

15

Compare Socinus: "For this distinction, one essence and three persons, nowhere occurs in Holy Scripture and is manifestly opposed to most certain reason and truth." (Opera, I, p. 282, quoted in Cory, Socinus, p. 93).

16

Le Clerc, in his review of A Brief History (BUH, XV (1690), p. 364), began by commenting that it was more a doctrinal than an historical work.

It is not in A Brief History proper that is found an explicit theoretical exposition of how the Socinians considered themselves. For that it is necessary to turn to a peculiar document, ostensibly a letter to the publisher evaluating Nye's pamphlet, appended to A Brief History (pp. 47-51).<sup>17</sup> Actually it is a well reasoned argument:

1. That the Doctrine of the Trinitarians is not a necessary or fundamental Doctrine of Christianity.
2. That 'tis unjust and unchristian, to lay the Unitarians or Socinians under any Penalties or Forfeitures, upon the account of their Doctrine.
3. That Trinitarians ought to own the Unitarians for Christian Brethren, and behave themselves toward them as such. (p. 47)

In the course of following through this train of thought, the author expresses a very clear theoretical understanding of Socinianism.

He places the rejection of the Trinity square in the Protestant tradition. Since the Nicene Trinitarian doctrines are not clearly indicated in scripture, to make them fundamental is to fall into a Papist trap, as then one has "a necessity of admitting and believing unscriptural Traditions." (p. 47) This is against a fundamental principle of Protestantism as laid down in the Sixth Article of the Church of England: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to Salvation: So that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any Man, that it should be believed as an Article of Faith." (p. 48).

---

17

The appended "letter" is of quite different tone and style from Nye's history; therefore, I doubt very much that it is Nye's own work.

Or, as he puts it in his own words:

Is it not the common Principle of all Protestants; to believe the Holy Scriptures are sufficient to all Religion, and clear in all Necessaries of Faith and Manners, and that every Man is obliged by our Lord Christ, to believe and practice according to his own Knowledge, Light and Understanding of the Scriptures? (pp. 48-49)<sup>18</sup>

Thus the Socinians think they are the truest Protestants who push what they see as the fundamental ideas of the Reform--the sufficiency and clarity of scripture and the responsibility of the individual believer for its interpretation--to their ultimate end, rejecting all belief in all non-scriptural doctrine.

Quite early the anti-Nicenè party saw themselves in this light as completing the work that the first reformers left half finished. Gregory Paulus, who was active in the Minor Reformed Church in Poland from its beginning until his death in 1591, was reported to have had made some pictures:

où l'on voyait un grand Temple representant l'Eglise Romaine, dont Luther démolissoit le toit; Calvin en abbatoit les murailles; et pour luy [Paulus], il en sapoit les fondemens, en s'attachant, comme il faisoit, au mystere de la Trinité qu'il prétendoit détruire.<sup>19</sup>

Anastase added an allegorical interpretation of this picture and a few more graphic details. For example, he had "Servet, Blandrat, Gregoire Pauli, et quelques autres"<sup>20</sup> mining the foundation.

---

<sup>18</sup>

See also supra, pp. 33-37, where the Racovian Catechism's foundation of religion on the authority, sufficiency, and perspicuity of Scriptures was reviewed.

<sup>19</sup>

Maimbourg, Histoire, II, pp. 453-454.

<sup>20</sup>

Anastase, Histoire, pp. 11-12.

Paulus and the unknown author of the appendix to A Brief History had a very distinguished ally in Bossuet, Monsieur l'Evêque de Meaux, Catholicism's greatest apologist of the era,<sup>21</sup> who offered an almost identical interpretation of Socinianism. Bossuet's Histoire des Variations des Eglises Protestantes, which appeared in 1688, was a formidable attack against Protestantism. It went straight to the heart of the matter and showed how the notorious disunity of the Protestants proceeded directly from their having denied the authority of the Roman Church. Since, in Protestantism, the people, rather than the centralized Church, had the right to establish their own pastors and churches, it followed inevitably that they would fragment into innumerable bodies, as<sup>22</sup> indeed they had done.

Worse still, this process occurred also in the realm of Christian belief. Bossuet outlined it as follows: Luther could not deny the real presence of the body of Christ in the Eucharist, but balked at transubstantiation. Thus Luther breached the wall of Christian mysteries, and soon Zwingli went farther and denied the real presence as a residue of Papist superstition. Anabaptists next rose up who questioned all the sacraments, and ultimately the Socinians, who were in accord with the Anabaptists about sacraments, applied the same standards to the central mysteries of Christianity,

---

21

For general accounts of the controversies that called forth Bossuet's consideration of Socinianism, see Hazard, European Mind, pp. 80-115 and 198-216, and Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 530-534.

22

Bossuet, OEuvres, XV, pp. 134-136.



the Trinity and Incarnation, "parce que les principes qu'ils<sup>23</sup> avoient pris des réformateurs les avoient poussés plus loin."

Contrary to what Protestants like Jurieu would have one believe, Bossuet continued, there was firm historical evidence to back up the contention that the Socinians grew from Reformation groups and principles. Bossuet was right in this as shown in chapter one of this study, and he quickly outlined the role of the two Socinuses and Blandrata in establishing the Minor Reformed Church of Poland.<sup>24</sup> But, most damning was his citation of works by George Schomann, an early leader of the Minor Church who died in 1591, and by Andrew Wiszowaty,<sup>25</sup> Bossuet's contemporary and a leader of the Socinian exiles in the Netherlands. They claimed that their predecessors in the Reformation were only "une ébauche et comme l'aurore de la Réforme, et que l'anabaptisme joint au socinianisme en est le plein jour."<sup>26</sup> Thus, Socinians and Catholics, in the years 1680 to 1715, agreed on the origin of Socinianism and on its relation to the Reformation.

---

<sup>23</sup>

Ibid., XV, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., XV, pp. 137-138. See also supra, pp. 9-11 and 13ff.

<sup>25</sup>

Supra, p. 28.

<sup>26</sup>

Bossuet, Oeuvres, XV, p. 138. He was quoting Sandius, Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum (1684), which contained Wiszowaty's A Brief Narrative of the Origins of the Unitarians in Poland.

Jurieu was not long in answering Bossuet, which, in turn, called forth Bossuet's Avertissemens aux Protestants (1689), where he very systematically showed how the great principles of Protestantism must lead to Socinianism. These principles, in Bossuet's formulation were three:

la première: Il ne faut connoître nulle autorité que celle de l'Écriture . . . . La seconde . . . : L'Écriture pour obliger doit être claire . . . .  
 La troisième et la dernière: "Ou l'Écriture paroist enseigner des choses inintelligibles, et où la raison ne peut atteindre, comme une Trinité, une Incarnation, et le reste; il faut la tourner au sens dont la raison peut s'accommoder, quoyqu'on semble faire violence au texte."<sup>27</sup>

Note that Bossuet's first two points are identical with the first two of the appendix to Nye's A Brief History, and Bossuet's third is consonant with the Socinian document's third "that every Man is obliged . . . to believe and practice according to his own Knowledg, Light, and Understanding of the Scriptures."<sup>28</sup> Again, this time about the nature of Socinianism's fundamental ideas, the Catholic and the Socinian interpretations agree.

Bossuet took these three principles and demonstrated<sup>29</sup> that the logical end of Protestantism was Socinianism. For example, he returned to the question of the nature of the Eucharist; since Calvinists like Jurieu use all three Protestant principles to explain away the real presence figuratively, how can they object

---

<sup>27</sup> Bossuet, OEuvres, XVI, Sixth Avertissement, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> Supra, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> Bossuet, OEuvres, XVI, pp. 131-141. Bayle took considerable pains to show that Socinianism had no chance to become a numerically powerful faith (supra, pp. 27 and 41.)

when the Socinians turn them against the Trinity and Incarnation?<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the Socinians are at least consistent. And what about the second principle: are the scriptures really self evidently clear? If they are so transparent, then why do the Socinians understand them differently from the rest of the Protestants? A more telling question: why, then, have the orthodox Protestants, the Lutherans and Calvinists, been at odds for over 150 years over the meaning of these clear texts?<sup>31</sup> Bossuet could have only one answer to all these queries. Outside the infallible, changeless tradition of the Roman Church, there can be no certainty.

Tout est compris en ces quatre mots: Jésus-Christ, les apôtres, les Pères, nous et l'Eglise catholique; c'est la chaîne qui unit tout; c'est le fil qui ne se rompt jamais . . . .<sup>32</sup>

All else leads to organizational chaos and to the worst of heresies, Socinianism.

In this accord between Catholic and Socinian thought on the nature of Socinianism, it is important to note that the anti-Nicene conception of what the Reformation was had triumphed. From the beginning, the anti-Nicenes insisted

---

<sup>30</sup>

Ibid., XVI, p. 136.

<sup>31</sup>

Ibid., XVI, p. 140.

<sup>32</sup>

Ibid., XV, first Avertissement, p. 223.

that Scripture and the intellect of the believer were the only religious authorities, and when they got the "genuine" Protestants to agree to these principles, the anti-Nicenes usually carried the day.<sup>33</sup> But "real" Protestants, early Calvinists and Lutherans, would never have accepted the simple, dogmatic three principle summation of their movement. For them, the Church was the authoritative centre of Christian civilization, and they were far from freeing every man to believe as reason and scripture led him. Recall Luther's persecution of the Anabaptists and Calvin's reaction to Servetus. As Troeltsch pointed out, "The formula of the formal principle of the Bible as sole authority . . . is an entirely dogmatic and, in addition, a very late schematization."<sup>34</sup> That Catholics, normative Protestants, and Socinians were willing to use it as the basis for argument at the close of the "Confessional Age" is proof of Troeltsch's thesis that this was the time when anti-Nicene thought finally entered the mainstream of European civilization.

Pierre Jurieu, a Huguenot refugee in the Netherlands after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the Huguenot's

---

<sup>33</sup>

Supra, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup>

Troeltsch, Renaissance, p. 21.

most outspoken controversialist, fiercely defended Calvinist orthodoxy against all comers, including both Bossuet and Bayle. Socinianism was one of the things that most enraged Jurieu; he saw it everywhere. In 1681, in La Politique du clergé de France, he discerned that large numbers of the French Catholic clergy were secretly heterodox. "Ils sont Sociniens, ne croient ni le mystere de la Trinité, ni celui de l'Incarnation." (p. 90) Not only was the clergy infected, but so also was the Jansenist Port-Royal community. "Et ce qui est de plus terrible, . . . c'est la Theologie de quelques societez graves, sages et qui font une grande parade de la pureté de leurs moeurs et de leur attachement pour la foy catholique." (pp. 90-91) Bayle<sup>35</sup> and Anastase, among others, refuted this slander of the Jansenists.

In La Politique du clergé de France, Jurieu argued against the revocation of the Edict of Nantes from the general principle that religious toleration leads to order and tranquillity in the state: "bien loin que la tolerance des differentes Religions causât du desordre, le trouble ne naissoit que de ce qu'on ne vouloit pas tolerer la diversité des

---

35

Bayle, Dictionnaire, III, pp. 2612-2614; Anastase, Histoire, part I, ch. 36-38, carefully refutes Jurieu and others who made similar claims (see pp. 181-182 for Anastase's comments on Jurieu's quoted passage.)

sentimes." (p. 237)<sup>36</sup> However, "tolerance ne doit pas aller jusqu'à celles qui ruinent les fondemens du Christianisme . . . , ce que font les Sociniens aujourd'huy." (p. 236) Later, after Jurieu had despaired of toleration from France, he denounced toleration as "ce dogme socinien, le plus dangereux de tous ceux de la secte socinienne"<sup>37</sup> and accused anyone who favoured tolerance of being nothing less than a Socinian.<sup>38</sup>

Noel Aubert de Versé, one of Jurieu's opponents, defended toleration vigorously in two works, Traité de la liberté de conscience ou de l'autorité des souverains sur la religion des peuples and Le Tombeau du Socinianisme . . . , both published in 1687. Aubert de Versé had a very unstable religious career<sup>39</sup> that reflects the unsettled times. He began as a Catholic in France, moved through "Protestant, Calviniste, bon Socinien et bon Arien"<sup>40</sup> phases in the Netherlands and finally returned to Catholicism and France. In 1692, he confessed in his

---

36

See pp. 295-362 for a sustained argument in favour of toleration with myriad citations of ancient and modern authorities.

37

From his 1687 Droits des deux souverains, en matière de religion, la conscience et l'expérience, quoted in McLachlan, Socinianism, p. 9n.

38

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, p. 532.

39

Anastase, Histoire, pp. 171-173; Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, pp. 531-533.

40

Anastase, Histoire, p. 172.

L'Anti-Socinien, ou nouvelle apologie de la foi Catholique contre les Sociniens et les Calvinistes . . . that his books in favour of toleration had really been thinly disguised Socinianism,<sup>41</sup> which meant that, at least in one case, Jurieu was right about the relationship between the advocates of tolerance and Socinianism.

The Traité de la liberté, from Aubert de Versé's Socinian period, will be considered as an example of the work of those who felt it necessary to conceal their Socinianism. Interestingly enough, Aubert de Versé started this book with the same sort of argument Jurieu had earlier used in favour of toleration in La Politique du clergé de France: that religious toleration meant civil peace and prosperity as witnessed Amsterdam where men of all faiths worked together for the common good.<sup>42</sup> Aside from such general arguments for toleration, which he was careful to point out must include Socinians (p. 75), Aubert de Versé developed two major specific reasons for allowing Socinians to practice their faith freely.

First, all the Socinians were doing was to attack superannuated scholastic nonsense: "[les Unitaires] ne blasphèment que des folies et des contradicitions d'Ecole."<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup>

Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>42</sup>

Aubert de Versé, Traité, "Epître", not paginated.

<sup>43</sup>

Ibid., "Advertissement", not paginated.

Que donc ces termes d'union hypostatique sont des termes inintelligibles, inexplicables, incompréhensibles, que l'on a inventez, et dont on se sert, non pour signifier quelque chose de réel, de véritable, d'intelligible, mais pour parler seulement, et n'être pas réduit au silence. (p. 292)

Second, all sectarianism was a blot on Christianity ("Epître"); when looked into deeply, it was clear that Socinian and orthodox theology was in full agreement: "nos Omousiens et nos Sociniens sont parfaitement d'accord entre eux, quant aux choses mêmes, quoi que leur langage soit si opposé qu'on n'en peut pas inventer un plus opposé." (pp. 300-301) He came to this remarkable conclusion by maintaining, in effect, that the orthodox did not believe what they said: "nos Omousiens ne croyent nullement que ce qu'ils appellent la Personne de Fils et du Saint Esprit, soient de véritables personnes proprement dites. . . ." (pp. 293-294)<sup>44</sup>

Aubert de Versé's true sentiments were only barely beneath the surface here, but still prudence kept him from avowing Socinianism openly. At one point, after noting that heretics were less abominable than the methods used to exterminate them (pp. 162-166), he used the device of a dialogue to reveal his position indirectly. Suppose that a Chinese philosopher were to overhear representatives of the three wings of Confessional orthodoxy and the sects wrangling over the current theological problems. After

---

44

See also pp. 295-299 and passim.



having him listen for some time (pp. 166-180), then:

"Opposez lui les passages dont on l'appuye, et les explications qu'en donnent les Unitaires, et vous verrez encore qu'il prononcera pour eux." (p. 170)

Since Aubert de Versé was neither a very influential nor subtle writer nor much of a theologian, his affair with Socinianism was merely a bizarre skirmish in the greater religious struggles of the time. Jean Le Clerc, who edited some of the most widely-read journals of the years around 1700 and who was a competent and controversial exe-<sup>45</sup>gete and theologian, also was embroiled in the Socinian question. Indeed, Voltaire, in the seventh Lettre philo-<sup>46</sup>sophique, singled out Le Clerc as a distinguished French-speaking exponent of Socinianism. However, as Le Clerc never admitted to Socinianism and was much more careful in his writing than was Aubert de Versé, Voltaire's judgment cannot be accepted at once.

Le Clerc was born in 1657 to one of Geneva's most distinguished families and received an excellent Calvinist education for the ministry. He hesitated for two years after la Vénérable Compagnie adopted the severely orthodox Consensus Helveticus as the standard of faith in 1678

---

<sup>45</sup>

The best study on Le Clerc is Barnes, Le Clerc; Hazard, European Mind, Part I, ch. 3-4 and passim has a good account of the role of the French journalists like Le Clerc in Holland in the intellectual movements of the time.

<sup>46</sup>

L. P. (Lanson), I, p. 80.

before signing in April, 1680, to become a Genevan pastor. But rather than taking on a conventional charge, Le Clerc left for the seminary at Saumur, in France, to continue his theological studies in the fall of 1680; he remained until April, 1682. Saumur was at the time a centre of liberal Calvinism, and, while there, Le Clerc published his first book anonymously--the Epîtres Théologiques.<sup>47</sup> Here he argued for tolerance and for freedom to examine scripture and all doctrine without regard to tradition and, in fact, interpreted the fundamentals of Christianity quite unconventionally. For example, he maintained that scripture provided equally good arguments for both the orthodox and the Socinian view of the Trinity; therefore, all Trinitarian positions should be tolerated. Had the anonymity of the Epîtres been broken, Le Clerc would have been in serious trouble with the Genevan ecclesiastical authorities.

On leaving Saumur, rather than returning to Geneva, Le Clerc made his way to England where he preached at French Calvinist churches until January, 1683,<sup>48</sup> when he went to Amsterdam. Here Le Clerc met with Limborch, the leader of the liberal Dutch Calvinists (Remonstrants), with whom he had been in correspondence since Saumur. He also paid his respects to

---

<sup>47</sup>

Barnes, Le Clerc, pp. 59-63.

<sup>48</sup>

Ibid., p. 74.

49  
 Jurieu, and in a theological conversation with the tireless defender of Calvinism, Le Clerc spoke well of tolerance. When Le Clerc finally reached Geneva again in August, 1683,<sup>50</sup> he found the whole town in an uproar over him. Jurieu had written ahead, denouncing Le Clerc as a Socinian, as Jurieu saw Socinianism behind all pleas for tolerance. After a month of investigation, where letters from Saumur appeared connecting Le Clerc with his Epîtres, la Vénérable Compagnie des Pasteurs withdrew Le Clerc's right to preach.

51  
 On 17 September 1683, Le Clerc left Geneva voluntarily for Amsterdam; he never returned home again. In Amsterdam he eventually became a professor in the Remonstrant's academy and published a number of works, primarily in Biblical exegesis, as well as editing and writing a series of critical journals. In 1696 Le Clerc issued his Parrhasiana ou Pensées Diverses<sup>52</sup> where he reviewed much of his previous work in part as an attempt to defend himself from theological criticism. There he clearly stated the basic principle of his exegesis; his end was to have "les trois Sciences, . . . la Théologie, la Philosophie, et

---

49

See ibid., pp. 81-86 for Le Clerc's relations Jurieu and their results.

50

Ibid., p. 82.

51

Ibid., p. 85.

52

This study cites the second, 1702, edition.

la Critique concourir également à inspirer des sentimens pieux et raisonnables, touchant la Religion et les bonnes moeurs." (I, 357) In this ambition, Le Clerc saw no great, inherent problems, for "La Raison et la Révélation sont, pour aisi dire, deux Filles du Ciel. . . ." (I, 357-358) This approach to scripture was consistent with that he had employed in the Epîtres Théologiques as well as with the Socinian position.

Pierre Bayle perceived the similarity of Le Clerc's exegetical principles and the Socinians' and believed that such a great reliance on natural reason was ultimately destructive of the authority of revelation. <sup>53</sup> Accordingly, Bayle decided to caution Le Clerc by writing to a mutual friend who passed this warning on to Le Clerc:

Vous devriez l'avertir, qu'au lieu de faire du bien au Parti qu'il a embrassé, je veux dire aux Arminiens [Remonstrants], il servira à les rendre plus odieux: car il ne servira qu'à confirmer les gens dans la pensée où l'on est ici, que tous les Arminiens savants sont sociniens, pour le moins.

"Pour le moins", indeed, for Bayle went on to say that the Remonstrants had poisoned all their books with Socinianism, and to add insult to insult, suggested that any true Calvinist should "s'éloigner d'une Secte, qui est l'égoût de tous les Athées, Deistes et Sociniens de l'Europe." <sup>54</sup> Thus

---

<sup>53</sup>

Supra, pp. 42-43.

<sup>54</sup>

Barnes, Le Clerc, p. 230.

began a feud that enlivened Le Clerc's and Bayle's journals and books even after Bayle's death in 1704.

No wonder Le Clerc was ready to fight; only two years before he had lost his position in the Genevan clergy because Jurieu had accused him of Socinianism. And now Bayle, as Jurieu had taken tolerance, took one aspect of Socinian thought--its free, rational exegesis--as its defining (and dangerous) characteristic. In Parrhasiana, Le Clerc complained about this dangerous name calling that afflicted theologians at that time: "la coutume s'établit, 55 parmi plusieurs d'entre eux, de se traiter reciproquement de Sociniens; dès qu'ils croient remarquer quelque chose dans leurs adversaires, qui approche de quelque sentiment de Socin . . . ." (II, p. 23) As he noted elsewhere,

Peu de gens même osent lire les livres des Sociniens, et l'on ne conseille à personne de le faire. Se déclarer pour leur opinion, c'est vouloir perdre son honneur, son repos, ses biens et sa vie, au moins dans la plupart des Etats de l'Europe. . . . Se déclarer Avocat d'une cause si odieuse, c'est marcher droit à sa ruine.<sup>56</sup>

When men like Bayle and Jurieu called a man like Le Clerc "Socinian", the possible injury was very great.

Le Clerc countered such threats by emphatically denying the charge--for example, "Mr. L.C. n'est nullement

---

55

Supra, p. 44-45.

56

Le Clerc, BUH, XV (1690), pp. 367-368.

57

Socinien . . ." —by writing a commentary on the prologue of the Gospel of John to show his Christology was not Socinian<sup>58</sup> and by consistently writing nothing that explicitly advocated Socinianism. However, Le Clerc often reviewed books by Socinians and books that expressed a Socinian bias<sup>59</sup> and thereby presented detailed accounts of Socinianism to his public; furthermore, the reviews were generally favourable. This, coupled with his affinity to the Socinian style of Biblical theology, lent weight to those critics who called him Socinian.

Compare Le Clerc's description of Socinian methodology, "le Socinien ne raisonne presque point, sur les passages de l'Écriture qu'il explique, mais se contente d'en marquer en peu de mots le sens, qu'il croit le plus

57

Le Clerc, Parrhasiana, I, 405. In BC, III (1704), p. 395, Le Clerc wrote: "Je déclare donc d'abord que je ne suis point des sentimens particulier des Sociniens, et principalement sur la Divinité et sur le sacrifice de Jésus-Christ . . ."; this entire article defended Le Clerc against the charge of Socinianism (BC, III, pp. 394-409). Similarly, BC, X (1706), pp. 379-392, defends himself against both Catholic and Protestant charges of Socinianism. See also Barnes, Le Clerc, pp. 237-244 and passim.

58

Le Clerc, Parrhasiana, I, pp. 405-406; Barnes, Le Clerc, p. 241.

59

BUH, II (1686), pp. 21-51; XV (1690), pp. 364-379; XXIV (1693), pp. 1-40. BC, II (1703), pp. 284-305; III (1704), pp. 394-409; VII (1705), pp. 395-396; X (1706), pp. 364-426; XII (1707), pp. 198-385, passim; XIII (1707), pp. 38-73. BAM, I (1713), pp. 201-202; XIV (1715), pp. 230-232. These references mark only his extended journalistic references to Socinianism.

natural . . . ,"<sup>60</sup> to what he said in Parrhasiana of his own method in theology:

Mr. L.C. . . . n'aime pas que l'on ajoute à ces dogmes ce que l'Ecriture Sainte ne nous en a pas appris. . . . Mr. L.C. ne diminue ni n'augmente les articles de Foi, il les prend dans l'Ecriture Sainte, tels qu'ils sont, sans y rien changer; et pour la Morale, il n'approuve aucun relâchement. (I, pp. 435-436)

Clearly, Le Clerc was at least very sympathetic to Socinianism.

Indeed, Le Clerc's relationship seems to have gone beyond mere sympathy. In a passage where it is not difficult to read between the lines, Le Clerc fabricated a theological debate before an impartial Chinese sage who was to judge between the orthodox and Socinian doctrines of God.<sup>61</sup> At the end (pp. 373-374), he had the sage express great wonder that the Socinians were so universally persecuted for opposing the Trinity, which the orthodox admitted was founded on "certaines relations incomprehensibles". (p. 372) Yet, always prudent, Le Clerc closed with: "On ne croit pas qu'il se déclarât pour les sociniens mais il y a bien de l'apparence, que ce ne seroient pas leur seules explications qu'il trouveroit dures." (pp. 374-375) Even

---

<sup>60</sup>  
BUH, XV (1690), pp. 366-367; see also VII (1688), pp. 302-303.

<sup>61</sup>  
BUH, XV (1690), pp. 370-375.

though the Chinese philosophe could not decide the case, the reader could not have failed to notice that "l'Unitaire" had expressed his position clearly, reasonably, and succinctly whilst the muddled orthodox spokesman could do no better than to declare the Trinitarian position "incompréhensible"--that is to say, "une chose, dont on ne peut avoir aucune idée." (p. 372)<sup>62</sup>

In light of such passages--not to mention the very widespread opinion among Le Clerc's contemporaries that he was Socinian--it would seem that Voltaire's judgment of Le Clerc's theology was correct. Le Clerc quite likely was a Socinian in the broader sense as defined at the end of chapter one of this study.<sup>63</sup> At any rate, as Barnes commented, "Après sa mort, 'Le Clerc socinien' fut définitivement consacré par Voltaire."<sup>64</sup> This refers to the seventh Lettre philosophique where Le Clerc appeared along with

---

62

Le Clerc, BC, III (1704), p. 403, noted that the doctrines that the Socinians disputed were not without difficulties: they were "des mysteres incompréhensibles".

63

Supra, pp. 45-46. One of the most strongly sustained passages in Anastase's Histoire (pp. 568-597) was a series of proofs that Le Clerc was Socinian.

64

Barnes, Le Clerc, p. 242.



Newton, Locke, and Clarke as one of the "plus grands Philo-  
 65  
 sophes et les meilleurs plumes de leur temps," who tried--  
 in Voltaire's telling--to establish or reestablish a Soci-  
 nian sect. A glance at the major twentieth century editions  
 of the Lettres philosophiques confirms that Voltaire's  
 judgment has been accepted. Lanson's annotation presented  
 some of the accusations of Socinianism against Le Clerc  
 and said only that he "protesta vaguement" against these  
 charges. 66  
 Nave's edition let Voltaire's statement pass  
 without comment while F. A. Taylor's explication was wildly  
 inaccurate: "Leclerc was, for a time, a Unitarian minister  
 67  
 in Amsterdam."

While in Le Clerc's case the accusation was prob-  
 ably true, Le Clerc was right in objecting to the too ready  
 use of "Socinian" to discredit one's theological adversary  
 rather than to engage in honest argument. Barnes commented  
 that

le terme de socinien devint vite une insulte qui  
 ne correspondait guère à aucune conception théo-  
 logique. . . . Autour de 1700 le terme de socinien  
 était plutôt ce qu'est le terme de communiste dans  
 la bouche d'un bourgeois de XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. 68

In the French language this was true among both Protestant and

---

65

L. P. (Lanson), I, p. 80. In his Siècle de  
 Louis XIV (1742), M. XIV, p. 96, Voltaire was considerably  
 less appreciative of Le Clerc's merit.

66

L. P. (Lanson), I, p. 87, n. 18.

67

L. P. (Taylor), p. 153, n. 13.

68

Barnes, Le Clerc, p. 238.

69  
 Catholic writers. Jurieu denounced Socinians as "celles  
 qui ruinent les fondemens du Christianisme";<sup>70</sup> Bayle began  
 his Dictionnaire article on Socinus, "Socin . . . le prin-  
 cipal Fondateur d'une très mauvaise Secte qui porte son  
 nom."<sup>71</sup> Maimbourg's Histoire de l'arianisme pullulates with  
 phrases like "le venin de cette exécration hèresie" (II, p.  
 457) and "cette extrême impieté" (II, p. 479) to describe  
 anti-Nicenes, and Bossuet, after arguing that Socinians  
 were closer to Islam than to Christianity, reassured his  
 readers that "Vous avez horreur de ces blasphèmes et avec  
 raison."<sup>72</sup>

"Socinian" and related terms were no less an in-  
 sult in English in the seventeenth century. Around 1640  
 to 1660, there was a flurry of anti-Nicene activity in  
 Britain, which aroused the literary concern and fury of  
 orthodox Christians.<sup>73</sup> Cheynell's Rise, Growth and Danger  
of Socinianisme (London, 1643) starts gently enough:

---

69

Pere Anastase in his Histoire (1727) and Theo-  
 dore De Blanc, "pasteur réfugié de la Rochelle, in his  
Principes contre les Sociniens. . . (Hambourg, 1718-1719)  
 were both careful to avoid abusive language. They are the  
 only anti-Socinians of the period I have read who were mod-  
 erate in this respect.

70

Jurieu, Politique, p. 236.

71

Bayle, Dictionnaire, III, p. 2606.

72

Bossuet, OEuvres, XV, p. 237.

73

See McLachlan, Socinianism, for an excellent,  
 detailed history of the considerable impact Socinianism  
 had in seventeenth century Britain.

The Socinians have raked many sinkes, and dunghils for those ragges and that filth, wherewith they have patched up and defiled that leprous body which they account a compleat body of pure religion. (p. 1)

The core of Cheynell's critique was solid enough; he objected that Socinians taught "whatever the words of the Text seeme to hold forth unto us, wee must goe looke out for some other sense which is agreeable to right Reason."

(p. 21) However, his language was outrageously abusive throughout the book, and he tended to link Socinianism with any religious or political opinion he disliked. Pagitt, in his Heresiography (London, 1645), was much less vituperative than Cheynell in the four pages (116-119) he devoted to "Socinians" and "Antitrinitarians." He began with a rather loaded definition: "Socinianisme is a compound of many pernicious and antiquated heresies. . . ." (p. 116)

In 1645 Thomas Edward's Gangraena: or A Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in these four last years . . ., which title adequately indicates the tenor of the book, attacked the Socinians along with thirteen other "heresies and blasphemies." As a final example from the earliest English critiques of Socinianism, consider Nicholas Chewney's Anti-Socinianism . . . and A' IPEΞIAPXAI, Or a Cage of Unclean Birds. Containing the Authors, Promoters,

Propagators, and chief Disseminators of this damnable Socinian Heresie . . ., a work gentler than its title. Still Socinianism was clearly condemned:

There are many [heresies] indeed, but none more dangerous and desperate, as being farther gone from Christianism, and neerer to Gentilism, then this Sect of the Socinians whose Spseudo-Divinity arisith from no other fountaine, then the abuse of the principles of reason, the corrupting of the words and the sense of the Scriptures, and the pretence of Divine revelation . . . .<sup>74</sup>

He argued that mere human reason was the source of the Socinian system and that scripture was twisted and revelation fabricated to corroborate the Socinians' fancies. This reliance on reason was fatal to true religion: "should Reason be our purveyor in matters of Religion, we might quickly find we had a fat Reason, but I am sure we should have but a lean Religion."<sup>75</sup>

All these early writings on Socinianism; which indeed contain some of the earliest uses of the term "Socinian" in the English language, agree that their subject was something quite wicked. "Pernicious" and "damnable" were relatively mild epithets for Socinianism in the seventeenth century. The pejorative connotation of "Socinian" long persisted in English. Alexander Gordon, the leading

---

74

Chewney, A' IPEΣIAPXAI, p. 131.

75

Ibid., p. 132.

British historian of Unitarianism of the nineteenth century, commented in 1879 that "Socinian is a term which has come to be applied and resented as a theological taunt."<sup>76</sup> He noted that Professor de Morgan wrote in 1872 that "[Socinian] is used in our own day by the small fry, the unlearned clergy and their immediate followers as a term of reproach for all Unitarians. I suspect they have a kind of liking for the word; it sounds so sinful."<sup>77</sup> Or, as Le Clerc commented nearly two centuries earlier, "C'est aujourd'hui une injure à la mode, parmi . . . la Canaille des Théologiens, qui ne manquent jamais, quand ils ne savent plus rien dire, de crier au Socinien."<sup>78</sup>

Not only, then, were the great interest in Socinianism and the general understanding of the nature of Socinianism functions of Europe's religious struggles at the beginning of the Enlightenment, but also the word "Socinian" itself was a weapon in these struggles. And just as there

---

<sup>76</sup>

Gordon, "Sozzini", p. 531.

<sup>77</sup>

Ibid., p. 531.

<sup>78</sup>

Le Clerc, BC, II (1703), p. 299. The context of Le Clerc's remark is a defence of Locke's On the Reasonableness of Christianity against its being called Socinian. For a similar statement, see Le Clerc, BC, III (1704), pp. 397-398. In 1706, he complained that Bayle "Pour faire diversion, . . . ramene le Socinianisme sur la Scene, et veut m'en rendre suspect, afin d'empêcher que mes raison ne fassent l'empression sur les esprits. Mais c'est une très-méchante finesse, et que ne trompera personne." (BC, X, pp. 379-380)

was basic agreement amongst the Catholics, "real" Protestants, and the Socinians that Protestantism was a faith based only on the authority, clarity, and individual believer's interpretation of scripture, so too did all three parties agree that "Socinian" was a potent insult. In the remaining chapters of this study, Voltaire's evaluations of Socinianism will be considered in light of the received opinions current when he was educated and began writing.

### III

#### VOLTAIRE'S RELIGION AND SOCINIANISM BEFORE HIS ENGLISH EXILE

A. Childhood and Youth: Having now established what the status and nature of Socinianism were at the turn of the eighteenth century, we will show whether or not young man Voltaire adopted his religious attitudes from the Socinians. Voltaire's biographers, including the chronicler of his religious life, René Pomeau, seem to be in general agreement as to the general outline of young Arouet's religious development. His solidly bourgeois family were influenced both by the Jansenists and the libertines. Armand Arouet, the elder son, who went to study at the Jansenist séminaire de Saint-Magloire, became an enthusiast; François-Marie, the younger Arouet, who studied at the Jesuit collège Louis le Grand, became Voltaire.

How much credit should we give the Jesuits for this transubstantiation, or was it a transubstantiation at all? After all, the first credible anecdote about François-Marie we have relates that the libertine abbé de Châteauneuf taught him to recite the Moïside, a then unprintable poem that attacked religion on rational grounds, when young Arouet was only three.<sup>1</sup> So, when François-Marie entered Louis

---

<sup>1</sup>Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, 13; Pomeau, Religion, p. 31. Both Desnoiresterres and Pomeau think this story authentic, though Pomeau thinks Arouet's youth was exaggerated. Voltaire was born on 21 November, 1694. Besterman, Voltaire, p. 28, n. 27, thinks the story apocryphal.

le Grand in October, 1704,<sup>2</sup> he had already had some six or seven years' training in impiety.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, though the teachers of Louis le Grand were undoubtedly devout and wanted their pupils to be good Catholic Christians, the college was one of the primary producers of philosophes. Voltaire's favorite professors also taught d'Argenson, Richelieu, Malesherbes, Helvétius, and other freethinkers.<sup>4</sup> The Jesuits' educational goal was to mold Christian humanists, to combine a taste for belles-lettres with liberal Catholic thought in their pupils. They were half successful, not a bad record for a system of schooling; unfortunately, from their religious point of view, their half-success was in forming "le bon goût" rather than piety.<sup>5</sup>

And in Arouet's case, his Christian sensibilities continued to be undermined by the libertines. As early as 1706, l'abbé de Châteauneuf introduced François-Marie into the society of the Temple, a group of men informally led by l'abbé de Chaulieu, known for their intellectual daring.<sup>6</sup> They were skeptics in the French tradition of

---

<sup>2</sup>Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, 15.

<sup>3</sup>Besterman, Voltaire, pp. 27-28.

<sup>4</sup>Pomeau, Religion, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup>Lanson, Voltaire, p. 12. See also Pomeau, Religion, Part I, chapter 2, especially p. 46. Pomeau pointed out that the Jesuits' emphasis on natural theology and the overwhelming glory of God tended towards deism.

<sup>6</sup>Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, pp. 39-40.



Montaigne, Bayle, Saint-Evremond, and Fontenelle, who were quite happy to scoff at religious superstition and fanaticism--even at faith itself--but since most of them drew more-than-ample stipends from the Church, they were not eager to upset the religious establishment.<sup>7</sup> François-Marie probably continued to frequent this society during his vacations from the Collège Louis le Grand even though their debauchery was too much for him physically.<sup>8</sup>

Ira O. Wade in his The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750 has shown that great numbers of manuscripts criticizing religion circulated in Arouet's collegiate years and youth.<sup>9</sup> Most of them were radically anti-Christian and had little in common with the tenor of Socinian writings although the clandestine authors borrowed Socinian critical biblical studies to turn against religion in general. With Arouet's curiosity and the company he kept, it is most likely that he read some of them. There are some marked similarities between some of

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., I, 89-102; Hazard, European Mind, pp. 128-129.

<sup>8</sup> Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, 39-40, 99. Besterman, Voltaire, pp. 47-51 and 58-61. See Best, D32, D33, D35, and D38, letters exchanged between Voltaire and Chaulieu in 1716, which show Voltaire's considerable respect for the philosophical and literary judgment of the old templar.

<sup>9</sup> Wade, Clandestine, see especially the tabulations on pp. 10-19 and 263-264.

the ideas in his early poetry and prose and the ideas in the secret papers. Finally, his later interest in these documents (he edited several for publication) suggests that he read them as a young man.<sup>10</sup>

When he left college on 5 August 1711, "Arouet n'est déjà plus chrétien."<sup>11</sup> Exactly why he was no longer Christian has not been satisfactorily explained. One must agree with Pomeau that it is too easy to posit that "Voltaire naquit déiste" so that "on est dispensé d'expliquer comment il l'est devenu."<sup>12</sup> Three major threads in Arouet's religious sensibilities at this time are clear: a reaction against familial Jansenism, a facile anti-Christianity from the libertines, and a positive inclination towards a natural religion with a clement God from

---

<sup>10</sup>

Best. D951, 30 November 1735, Voltaire to Thieriot. Here he first expressed his interest in Jean Meslier, whose Testament he eventually edited.

<sup>11</sup>

Pomeau, Religion, p. 75.

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p. 21. Compare with Torrey (Deists, p. 1), "In so far as deism means the adoption of a natural religion based on the common ideas of morality and including the worship of a rather indefinite Supreme Being . . . Voltaire was a deist, one might say, from birth." A few years later (1930 to 1938), Torrey must have abandoned idées inées, for he gave quite a good sketch of Voltaire's religious development in The Spirit of Voltaire, chapter 2.

both the Jesuits and the libertines. Thus the Jesuits were not guilty of a miracle.

It would be beyond the scope of this study to try to explain the process by which Arouet became Voltaire;<sup>13</sup> we must limit ourselves to outlining his religious development and to showing how (or whether) Socinian thought influenced it. When François-Marie left college, he had had no personal contact with Protestants.<sup>14</sup> And probably he had read little about them; Mason conjectured that he might have read and discussed Bayle surreptitiously at college and openly at the Temple,<sup>15</sup> but there is no direct proof that he read Bayle before 1723.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, there are grounds to believe that he read clandestine manuscripts but no documentary proof. Certainly one was not ordinarily well educated in Protestant thought in a Jesuit college.

Moreover, on his first trip to the Netherlands in late 1713, (Best. D7-D23) François-Marie was so thoroughly immersed in his role of buffoon in the glandular comedy he played with

---

13

I suspect that Pomeau (Religion, pp. 34-36) and his satellite in this matter, Gay (Politics, p. 37n), are wrong in arguing that there are insufficient data for a psychoanalytic interpretation of Arouet's development. After all, Erikson's Young Man Luther, a breath-taking Freudian reading of Luther's interior growth in the light of historical and social influences, could draw upon considerably fewer established facts about Luther's childhood and schooling than we have for Voltaire. Lanson, who always deserves careful consideration, said of Voltaire's mother's death when he was only seven: "on peut raisonner des consequences qu'eut l'absence d'une mère sur la formation morale de Voltaire." (Voltaire, p. 7) "On peut raisonner", indeed. Torrey (Spirit, p. 22) rejects Freudian interpretation in a strange paragraph which allows that Voltaire was probably not a virgin.

<sup>14</sup> Pomeau, Religion, p. 133.

<sup>15</sup> Mason, Bayle and Voltaire, pp. 2-4.

<sup>16</sup> Pomeau, Religion, pp. 34 and 95.

Mademoiselle Pimpette that he did not notice the religious situation  
 18  
 in Holland. Any influence, then of Socinianism or of any  
 Protestantism on Arouet at this early stage was extremely indirect  
 and diffused.

As we have tried to show, the Socinian rationalist approach  
 to religion had some influence in the growth of universal critical  
 spirit that characterized the Enlightenment and which was the  
 spirit of the future Voltaire. Like all historical phenomena,  
 this general spirit was overdetermined: fathered by Cartesian  
 doubt, Locke's philosophy, Bayle's skepticism, Spinoza's thought,  
 scientific advance, increased international contacts, etc. 19 I  
 do not know how to determine with any precision the relative  
 weights of these general forces in forming young Arouet's  
 ideas.

Even though the Pimpette affair best typified this period  
 of adolescent dissipation, Arouet was already concerned with  
 religious questions. He had begun work in 1713 on his play OEdipe,

---

 18

Bengensco ("Hollande", p. 797) said of this visit,  
 "Quelque rapide qu'ait été ce premier contact de Voltaire avec  
 la Hollande . . . il est impossible que son esprit curieux et  
 observateur n'ait pas été vivement impressionné par l'aspect,  
 la physionomie, les moeurs de cette terre 'de liberté, d'égalité  
 de propriété' . . . . La tolérance l'humanité! C'est en Hollande  
 que tout jeune encore, Voltaire en eut la fugitive, mais très  
 précise intuition." Well said, but where is the evidence?

Incidentally, "Mademoiselle Pimpette" was really Madam  
 Winterfeldt and had had a daughter in 1710. (Valkhoff and Fransen,  
 "Hollande", II, 1071 n.)

19

Descartes, Locke, Bayle, and Spinoza, that is, as they  
 were taken by the early eighteenth-century men of letters.

where he exorcized the terrible heavenly father,<sup>20</sup> and in 1716 his epic the Ligue, where he pled for religious tolerance in France.<sup>21</sup> One of his earliest published works, the ode Le Vrai Dieu (1715), took the atonement as its theme. In light of its ironic conclusion,

Grand Dieu! grâce aux fureurs humaines,  
L'univers a changé de sort.  
.....  
L'homme est heureux d'être perfide,  
Et, coupables d'un déicide,<sup>22</sup>  
Tu nous fais devinir des dieux.<sup>22</sup>

Le Vrai Dieu deserves Pomeau's description as "le premier texte déiste de Voltaire."<sup>23</sup>

When we recall the importance of biblical studies to the Socinians and their reverent, though rational treatment of the scriptures, it is clear that the irony of Le Vrai Dieu was enough to set Arouet far from the Socinian camp. However, the theological content of the poem, against the usual doctrine of Christ's atonement and deity, was most Socinian. Stronger yet in anti-biblical tone was his short poem "La Bastille" (1717) where he whimsically compared the descent of the police on himself during pentecost in 1717 to the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

---

<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps his terrible earthly father, too.

<sup>21</sup>

Pomeau, Religion, p. 106.

<sup>22</sup>

M. VIII, 417.

<sup>23</sup>

Pomeau, Religion, p. 80.

24

in the New Testament. Strongest in this period was his "Epître à Madame de G . . ." (1716), where he denounced "la chimérique histoire, / Et les songes sacrés de ces mystiques fous" <sup>25</sup> of the Bible. Arouet denounced them, of course, because Madame de G . . . had broken off their affair as the result of religious advice. He countered the chimerical laws of scripture with "la loi de la nature . . . : Elle parle plus haut que la voix de vos prêtres, / Pour vous, . . . l'amour et pour moi." <sup>26</sup> Apparently, Arouet never had much respect for the Bible. In this aspect of his religious thought, Chaulieu, the libertines, and the Temple were dominant; perhaps François-Marie never forgot the Moïside.

B. Literary Success: When Arouet was arrested and sent to the Bastille (16-17 May 1717), the Comedie Française was ready to play OEdipe. They prudently decided to withhold the play until its author was rehabilitated, so OEdipe was not produced until <sup>27</sup> 18 November 1718. It had an unparalleled success with the public

---

<sup>24</sup> M. IX, 353. In a letter to Thieriot on 2 June 1721, Voltaire rather off-handedly cast doubt on the historicity of the Old Testament. "Avez vous toujours mon cher ami la bonté de me faire en ma faveur ce qu'Esdras fit pour l'écriture sainte, c'est-à-dire d'écrire de memoire mes pauvres ouvrages." (Best. D93). Similarly the poem l'Anti-Giton of 1714, directed against a homosexual nobleman, cast doubt on the Biblical account of Gommorrah (M. IX, 562). See Besterman's comments on l'Anti-Giton (Voltaire, p. 58).

<sup>25</sup> M. X, 231 f.

<sup>26</sup> M. X, 231 f.

<sup>27</sup> Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, 137-138 and 141; Besterman, Voltaire, chapter 6. He was released from the Bastille on 11 April 1718 (Best. D57) but was not given complete freedom of movement until 12 October of the same year (Best. D67).

and immediately established Voltaire (he had taken his new name as early as 12 June 1718, Best. D62) as a leading man of letters in France.

OEdipe has some memorable lines where Voltaire railed against the idea of vengeful, persecuting deity. In the first scene, the general effects of such gods are described as "Funeste à l'innocent sans punir le coupable."<sup>28</sup> OEdipe's last speech (Act V, scene IV) indicts the gods in his specific case:

Le voilà donc rempli cet oracle exécration  
 Dont ma crainte a pressé l'effet enévitable!  
 Et je me vois enfin, par un mélange affreux,  
 Inceste et parricide, et pourtant vertueux.  
 . . . . .  
 Un dieu plus fort que toi [la vertu] m'entraînait  
 vers le crime;  
 Sous mes pas fugitifs il creusait un abîme;  
 Et j'étais, malgré moi, dans mon aveuglement,  
 D'un pouvoir inconnu l'esclave et l'instrument.  
 Voilà tous mes forfaits; je n'en connais point  
 d'autres.  
 Impitoyables dieux, mes<sup>29</sup> crimes sont les vôtres,  
 Et vous m'en punissez!

Jocaste's final four lines, the last lines of the play, complete the case against the cruel god:

Prêtres, et vous Thébains, qui fûtes mes sujets;  
 Honorez mon bûcher, et songer à jamais  
 Qu'au milieu des horreurs du destin qui m'opprime,  
 J'ai fait<sup>30</sup> rougir les dieux qui m'ont forcée au  
 crime.

Of course, as Pomeau pointed out,<sup>31</sup> what the gods did to

<sup>28</sup>M. II, 62.

<sup>29</sup>M. II, 107-108.

<sup>30</sup>M. II, 111.

<sup>31</sup>Pomeau, Religion, p. 87. Ridgway, Propagande, pp. 61-65, agrees with Pomeau's analysis. For his contemporaries' reaction, see: Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, 143-144; and Pomeau, Religion, pp. 87-89. Besterman (Voltaire, pp. 75-76) argues that (continued)

their innocent pawns, OEdipe and Jocaste, was exactly what God in the Jansenist (or Calvinist) theological scheme did to his subjects. Now, although Arouet de Voltaire was almost certainly unaware of it at this time, Socinian theologians objected to the concept of a vengeful God who predestined some men to sin, then punished them eternally for this sin, which, indeed, they could not have avoided. Redemption, for the Socinians, came by following the moral example of the man Jesus and through the mercy of a clement God. All the passages from OEdipe quoted above showed Voltaire's major objection to the cruel god was that his arbitrary punishments took no account of the individual's virtues. Thus, here, Voltaire's thought and Socinian theology were in harmony.

In addition to the assault on the terrible god, OEdipe also had some audacious insults to superstitious priestcraft. The two best-known couplets of the play speak for themselves:

Nous nous fions qu'à nous: voyons tout par nos yeux:  
 Ce sont là nos trépieds, nos oracles, nos dieux.  
 . . . . .  
 Nos prêtres ne sont pas ce qu'un vain peuple pense,  
 Notre crédulité fait tout leur science.<sup>32</sup>

Further, there was an impassioned denunciation of religiously

---

31 (continued)

Pomeau was wrong in seeing OEdipe as "a contemporary parable" of the Jansenist-Molinist controversy. He points out that not too many contemporary critics fastened on the anti-Jansenist themes of the play and that in later analyses of his work Voltaire never mentioned that as a motive. I believe that Pomeau was right; at the very least there is an implicit, perhaps even subliminal on Voltaire's part, attack on Jansenist theology.

<sup>32</sup>M. II, 80; 93. I felt constrained to quote the latter couplet to fulfill Ballantyne's oracle: "Every one who has his word to say on this matter puts his finger on two lines in Voltaire's earliest play." (Visit, p. 326.)



inspired civil disorder:

Fortement appuyé sur des oracles vains,  
 Un pontife est souvent terrible aux souverains;  
 Et, dans son zèle aveugle, un peuple opiniâtre,  
 De ses liens sacrés imbécile idolâtre,  
 Foulant par piété les plus saintes des lois,  
 Crois honorer les dieux en trahissent ses rois;  
 Surtout quand l'intérêt, père de la licence,<sup>33</sup>  
 Vient de leur zèle impie enhardir l'insolence.

This last theme, the hatred of religious bloodshed, returned again and again in the works of the author of OEdipe and inspired many of his most moving passages. Voltaire argued his case on the grounds that the civil power should be supreme. Socinians rejected all violence on the grounds that it violated Christian teachings. However, the end result of Socinian and Voltairian theory was the same: the church could not rightfully meddle in the political sphere; and there could be no religious justification for bloodshed or revolt. Again, it was extremely unlikely that Voltaire knew Socinian theory at this time. Both the doctrine of the clement God and the rejection of religious fanaticism were also Chaulieu's;<sup>34</sup> Voltaire probably took them from the Temple or from libertine manuscripts.

Voltaire's epic poem, the Ligue, secured Voltaire's position as the leading writer in France. Although completed in 1721 as a work with nine chants, the Ligue was only published in

---

33

M. II, 89-90.

34

Ascoli, "Voltaire", II, pp. 21-22.

1723—and then clandestinely.<sup>35</sup> Its overwhelming popularity led to some sixty editions in Voltaire's lifetime;<sup>36</sup> the author, as was his custom, continually reworked it. The greatest change came in the 1728 London editions, where the Ligue was increased to ten chants, added some 1100 lines, and took on its final name, the Henriade.<sup>37</sup> It may have been for the first rewriting of the epic that Voltaire asked Thieriot to send him Jurieu's Histoire du Calvinisme . . . on 10 September 1724 (Best. D206) this request was one of the first references to Voltaire's sources of information about the Protestants.

One chant, the second, invoked the horrors of the St. Bartholomew's Night massacre. Voltaire wrote this section in a state of agitation, while he was in the Bastille in 1717. In fact, Voltaire always reacted physically on the twenty-fourth of August, the anniversary of the massacre. His hatred of intolerance reached what may be called a mystical level.<sup>38</sup> Whatever the source, the second chant of the Ligue was inspired; this chant was the most

---

<sup>35</sup> Henriade, D.2, chapter I. See especially, pp. 37, 43, and 48. All references to the Ligue and the Henriade are from the definitive edition of O. R. Taylor.

<sup>36</sup> Henriade, D.2, p. 233.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 51 and 60. Voltaire completed the first version of the Henriade in July, 1725; he was, however, unable to print it until he went to England (ibid., pp. 60-67).

<sup>38</sup> Pomeau, Religion, pp. 109-111.

poetically moving and was the only chant that was not revised  
39

significantly in later editions.

These lines show Voltaire's dead-earnest hatred of superstitious priests and religious crimes:

Je ne vous peindrai point le tumulte et les cris,  
Le sang de tous côtés ruisselant dans Paris,  
Le fils assassiné sur le corps de son père,  
Le frère avec la soeur, la fille avec la mère,  
Les époux expirans sous leurs toits embrasés,  
Les enfans au berceau sur la pierre écrasés:  
Des fureurs des humains c'est ce qu'on doit attendre.  
Mais ce que l'avenir aura peine à comprendre,  
Ce que vous-même encor à peine vous croirez,  
Des monstres furieux de carnage altérés,  
Excités par la voix des prêtres sanguinaires,  
Invoquent le Seigneur en égorgeant leurs frères;  
Et le bras tout souillé du sang des innocens,  
Osaient offrir à Dieu cet exécration encens.<sup>40</sup>

Voltaire offered a trinitarian formulation for God in the Ligue, which remained in all the subsequent editions.

---

39

Ibid., p. 110; Henriade; D.2, p. 51. Not everyone agrees that even Chant II is good verse. G. Ascoli analyzed lines 173-190 (D.2) of this chant and concluded: "On ne saurait trop insister sur la pauvreté de l'invention verbale dans un passage comme celui-ci." ("Voltaire", VI, 423.) I was moved by my first reading of the second chant; in fact, I, thinking it was good verse, copied out part of the above mentioned passage all of which Ascoli has shown to be palely derivative in imagery and rhyme from earlier poets. (Ibid., VI, 422-424.) Ignorance is bliss. Nonetheless, I still am moved by the second chant. Invincible ignorance is truest bliss.

40

Henriade, D.2, II, 259-272. One can determine in which eighteenth-century edition a line appeared from the critical apparatus of Taylor's definitive edition. The Roman numerals refer to the chant and the Arabic numerals to the verse.

La puissance, l'amour, avec l'intelligence,  
Unis et divisés, composent son essence.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, Voltaire did not personally accept the received  
42  
doctrine of the Trinity, but such an inclusion was cheap  
theological insurance. Note, however, that his expression of  
the doctrine involved theological abstractions rather than  
43  
biblical "persons". There was nothing particularly suspect  
about such an impersonal discussion of dogma, but a later critic  
in an anonymous letter to the Journal de Trévoux (1731) found  
several Athanasian nits to pick from this couplet:

on cite une définition de la trinité, et cette définition est très mauvaise: . . . [he then quoted X, 425-426]. Car il faut dire que les trois personnes adorables de la sainte trinité sont, non pas unies, mais une seule substance, un seul dieu, quoiqu'elles soient, non pas divisées, mais distinguées. On ne sert des termes unis et divisés qu'à l'égard des substances différentes. Ces termes sont donc impropres à l'égard de la trinité, et plus propres à altérer le dogme qu'à l'établir et l'enseigner. (Best. D410, c May, 1731)<sup>44</sup>

With so many theological watchdogs about, it was clear that  
Voltaire had to be careful about what he wrote about religion.

C. The Netherlands, 1722: From July through October, 1722, 45

---

41

Ibid., X, 425-426.

42

Infra, pp. 97-98, 127-129, the discussion of the Epître à Uranie.

43

See Ascoli, "Voltaire", II, 21.

44

Infra, pp. 137-138.

45

Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, 223-244, Besterman, Voltaire, pp. 87-88, Best., D114-D132.

Voltaire travelled in the Netherlands with a young widow, "Une Beauté qu'on nomme Rupelmonde." (Best. D116, Voltaire to Cardinal Guillaume Dubois, July 1722). As in his earlier visit to the Lowlands, Voltaire was again busy with affairs of the heart. This time, however, he was not overcome by a frenzy of unrequited passion. Older and less impetuous than in 1714, he seemed to have divided his time roughly evenly between lubricity and literary work. As he wrote to the Marquise de Bernières on 7 October 1722, "J'y passe ma vie entre le travail et le plaisir et je vis ainsi à la hollandoise et à la françoise." (Best. D128). Typically, in the first half of his letter to Theiriot in mid-September, 1722, Voltaire celebrated his visit to "le plus bau bordel de la ville" with some licentious verse while the second half gave detailed instructions (which were not followed) for the illustrations to the Ligue. (Best. D121, and D121, n. 9).

46

From this voyage came the "lettre hollandoise" (Best. D128) where we find Voltaire's first use of the word "socinien": "Nous avons ici un opéra détestable mais en revanche je voi des ministres calvinistes, des arminiens, des sociniens, des rabins, des anabaptistes qui parlent tous à merveille et qui en vérité ont tous raison." This short letter, with its moral that religious toleration leads to prosperity, with its light-hearted treatment

of theology, indeed had "l'accent des Lettres anglaises." <sup>47</sup> And certainly it reflected Voltaire's first significant personal contact with Protestants.

However, Voltaire's reference to Socinians cannot be taken literally; there were never any Socinian congregations in <sup>48</sup> Holland, and in 1722 there were not even any Socinian spokesmen <sup>49</sup> active there. Had he not included both Arminians and Anabaptists in the list of sects, we might easily conclude that Voltaire had confused the liberal Remonstrants and Mennonites with Socinians <sup>50</sup> or that, perhaps, he took the Collegiants for Socinians. In

<sup>47</sup>

Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>48</sup>

Supra, pp. 43-44.

<sup>49</sup>

Wilbur, Unitarianism, I, Chapter 44. Samuel Crellius, the last Polish Socinian in the Netherlands arrived there from England around 1727. Before going to England in 1725, Crellius had been the minister of the Konigswalde (Germany) refugee church for nearly forty years. (Ibid., I, 497-499, 575-577.) He was born in the year of exile, 1660; from the time of the death of the first-generation Brethren exiles--around 1680-1700--to Crellius's settling in the Netherlands around 1727, there were no full Socinians in the country. And after he died in 1747, there were again no Socinians in Holland.

<sup>50</sup>

Ibid., I, Chapter 43. The Collegiants were a lay-led movement that drew its membership chiefly from the Remonstrants and Mennonites. They met for free discussions and had no dogma prescribed; here the Polish Brethren found the most congenial surroundings. When Spinoza was expelled from the synagogue, he was welcomed into the fellowship of the Collegiants, which illustrates their liberal spirit. (Ibid., I, pp. 566-567.)

view of the ironic conclusion that all the marvelous, contradictory preachers were right, perhaps we should not take the careful differentiation of the list so seriously. To make his points about toleration and the futility of dogma, Voltaire may well have assembled the most fearful series of heresies imaginable to a French Catholic. That "Socinian" was most often used as a frightful word supports this conjecture. Could the term have been suggested by Bayle's Dictionnaire, which we know from a note<sup>51</sup> in the Ligue he had read by this time?

Might not, though, "Socinian" in this letter refer to Jean Le Clerc, who was still most active in Amsterdam? After all, it would have been natural for Voltaire and Le Clerc to seek one another out as men of letters, and Le Clerc was popularly thought to be a Socinian.<sup>52</sup> Desnoiresterres reported J. B. Rousseau's accusation that Voltaire attempted to start a quarrel between Le Clerc and Basnage (the third most important journalist, after Bayle and Le Clerc, in the Netherlands). Since it was during this trip that Voltaire and J. B. Rousseau began their life-long enmity and since there was no other evidence for this incident,<sup>53</sup> it was most likely apocryphal. Annie Barnes did not mention that Le Clerc and Voltaire ever met in her biographical study of

---

51

Pomeau, Religion, pp. 34 and 95.

52

Supra, pp. 66-74.

53

Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, 231-244.

Le Clerc, and I have not found such a claim in Voltaire's writings. So Voltaire very likely saw no "Socinians" in Holland, and the "Socinians" of the "lettre hollandaise" were fictional.

Madame de Rupelmonde, puzzled about what to believe, asked Voltaire for advice. His answer, l'Epître à Julie,<sup>54</sup> which was written around the time of their visit to Holland, was a brilliant summary of his religious position. He rejected the "mensonges sacrés" of scripture, the tyrannical god, original sin, and the divinity of Jesus while affirming natural religion, the beneficent god, and the primacy of morality over ritual. In short, l'Epître à Julie tied together the themes of OEdipe, la Ligue, and the early heterodox short poems, and it marked the turning from the hatred of the tyrant-god to the love of the good-god:

L'insensé te blasphème, et moi, je te révère;  
Je ne suis pas chrétien; mais c'est pour t'aimer  
mieux.<sup>55</sup>

The "te", of course, referred to Dieu. Pomeau, correctly, I think, emphasized the sincerity of this adoration of the just God.<sup>56</sup> Wade noted that while the "contre" of the Pour et le contre, directed against revealed religion, predominated, Voltaire did not intend to discredit it completely.<sup>57</sup> This good-natured poem is "pour" in spirit, more "pour" than Voltaire's previous works.

---

<sup>54</sup> M. IX, 357-362. It was later called l'Epître à Uranie and the Pour et le contre.

<sup>55</sup> M. IX, 361.

<sup>56</sup> Pomeau, Religion, pp. 111-114.

<sup>57</sup> Wade, "Uranie", p. 1096. Besterman, however, said, "The poem is in fact a total condemnation of Christianity." (Voltaire, p. 89.)



L'Epître à Uranie was so much in the spirit of the Temple that, when it circulated widely in manuscript some ten years later, the police readily accepted Voltaire's attribution of it to Chaulieu,<sup>58</sup> who had died in 1720. Indeed, as I. O. Wade has shown, not only was the spirit of the poem like that of Chaulieu, Voltaire also borrowed "the form, content, and expression" of Chaulieu's<sup>59</sup> Les trois facons de penser sur la mort. There were no radically new ideas in l'Epître à Uranie; they could all be found in any number of those clandestine libertine manuscripts that were so plentiful in the Regency. What Voltaire did in this philosophical note to his attractive travelling companion was to summarize his own thoughts but also to express "in compact form and good verses"<sup>60</sup> the thought of the libertine movement.

Pomeau has printed the first version of a short poem "A Louis Racine", which dates from late 1721.<sup>61</sup> This verse also rejected the Jansenist, vengeful God, "ton Dieu n'est pas le mien./ Tu m'en fais un Tyran, je veux qu'il soit mon père" (Pomeau's edition).

---

58

Conlon, Literary Career, pp. 36-37; Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, I, 231.

59

Wade, "Uranie", pp. 1079-1081.

60

Ibid., p. 1085. Wade (ibid., pp. 1082-1083 and Clandestine, p. 163) shows particular influence from the clandestine manuscript, l'Examen de la religion on the Epître.

61

Pomeau, Religion, p. 102; see M. X, 479 for a slightly revised version.

In assessing Voltaire's religious position in his early works, one should perhaps give greatest weight to the Epître à Uranie and the "lettre hollandaise". Both were private works, not intended for publication, so Voltaire was free to express his true opinions spontaneously--without fear of the censor. OEdipe must be approached carefully for two contradictory reasons. First, there was the danger of poetic and dramatic exaggeration; and, second, was that Voltaire had to be careful not to offend the authorities if the play were to be performed and published. Similarly, the Ligue was written with the author keeping one eye on the Court in the vain hope of royal patronage.

D. The Road to England (1722-1726): On leaving the Lowlands, Voltaire went to la Source to visit "milord Bollimbrock" (Best. D134, c. 1 December 1722, to Thieriot), then a political exile from England. His short visit, around 3 December 1722, (Best. D135, textual notes) was long enough for Voltaire and Bolingbroke to form very high opinions of one another. Voltaire, on the fourth of December, wrote to Thieriot: "J'ai trouvé dans cet illustre anglois, tout l'érudition de son pays, et toute la politesse du nôtre." (Best. D135). The same day Bolingbroke wrote to a friend

---

62

Ballantyne, Visit, p. 326.

63

Ascoli, "Voltaire", II, pp. 16-17.

about Voltaire and his poem, the Ligue: "J'ay été charmé et de lui et de son ouvrage. . . . je ne me suis pas attendu à trouver l'auteur si sage, ni le poème si bien conduit." (Best. D135, commentary).

Their mutual esteem apparently continued for some time. A year and a half after their first meeting, Bolingbroke wrote Voltaire a lengthy philosophical letter where he most highly praised the fecundity of Voltaire's poetic imagination and where he diplomatically suggested that Voltaire cultivate his powers of judgment as well. How? Any English gentleman could have started him on the path to the discovery of truth:

Si vous lisez l'Essay sur l'Entendement humain,  
vous lisez le livre que je connais le plus capable  
d'y contribuer. Si vous n'y trouvez que peu de  
choses, prenez garde que ce ne soit votre faute.  
Vous y trouverez de vérités prodigieusement fertiles . . . .  
C'est une grande science que de savoir, ou l'ignorance  
commence. (Best. D190, 27 June 1724).<sup>64</sup>

Thus was Voltaire introduced to the work of John Locke.

Undoubtedly, Bolingbroke's letter had a great effect on Voltaire's intellectual development. He had worked himself into a corner by rejecting conventional religious wisdom without having a satisfactory replacement or a methodology to work out of the corner. The underlying seriousness of young Voltaire's quest was not satisfied by the facile worldliness of the Temple. Locke, indeed,

---

64

This is the first correspondence preserved between Voltaire and Bolingbroke. That he saved it indicates that Voltaire found it important as he retained very little of his correspondence at this time.

offered a way "de tirer la vérité de Recoins de ce Laberlinthe où elle se cache fort souvent." (Best. D190).

Digression on the Nature of the Scholarship

For nearly a century, savants argued about the arming of Voltaire's mental arsenal. At first the arguments tended to follow nationalistic prejudices: Englishmen claimed Voltaire was a bubble-headed poet when he came to England and a philosopher when he left; Frenchmen countered that he was already a philosopher in the French-skeptical mode before he went to England and was not significantly molded by English thought. The argument came to focus more-or-less on the weight of Bolingbroke's influence on Voltaire and over the years lost most of its chauvinistic overtones.

In 1930, Norman L. Torrey published his Voltaire and the English Deists, the sixth chapter of which reported the results of a very careful, thorough reading of those Voltairian passages that Voltaire himself attributed to Bolingbroke. Torrey discovered that all such attributions were false. From this he made the plausible conclusion that: "Critics have spoken so long of Bolingbroke as master and of Voltaire as pupil that a tradition has been established, for which there seems to be little foundation in fact." So the argument seemed to close in favour of Voltaire's independence from English thought, but we have already seen from Bolingbroke's letter

---

65

Torrey, Deists, p. 135.

to Voltaire (Best., 185) that Voltaire was indeed Bolingbroke's  
 66  
 pupil.

The moral: beware of plausible explanations, even when offered by a meticulous scholar of Torrey's stature. As to plausible explanations found in the present study, Caveat emptor.

To return to the matter at hand, Pomeau's estimation of who were the most influential teachers of Voltaire before the English sojourn was, I think, a good one. "Bolingbroke fut après Chaulieu, et mieux que ne l'avait été le vieil abbé libertin, son maître à penser."<sup>67</sup> Voltaire's retrospective treatment of the intellectuals of the era of his infancy and youth in the Siècle de Louis XIV (1752) tends to confirm Pomeau. Chaulieu, in the "Catalogue de la plupart des écrivains français", had more than a page, quite a lengthy entry.<sup>68</sup> Here his character was praised, his "Épître sur la mort" (a primary source for Voltaire's Épître à Uranie) and another heterodox poem were quoted. Then, on 2 February 1759, Voltaire wrote to Anne Marie Figuet du Bocage: "La Tocane et la Goutte de Chaulieu, qui ne contiennent que deux pages, valaient cent fois mieux que tous les volumes dont on nous accable."

---

66

Best., D190 was not widely known until 1953 when published in Besterman's first edition of Voltaire's letters. See Besterman's commentary to this letter. See also Fletcher, "Fortunes" (especially pp. 208-215) for a similar conclusion.

67

Pomeau, Religion, p. 94.

68

M. XIV, 53-54; more than either Jean Racine or Pierre Corneille. Certainly, Voltaire did not think Chaulieu was a greater writer than these two.

(Best. D8075). Of course Voltaire's highest praise was reserved for that philosopher Bolingbroke recommended:

Locke seul serait un grand exemple de cet avantage que notre siècle a eu sur les plus beaux âges de la Grèce. Depuis Platon jusqu'à lui, il n'y a rien. . . . Locke seul a développé l'entendement humain, dans un livre où il n'y a que des vérités; et, ce qui rend l'ouvrage parfait, toutes ces vérités sont claires.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, Voltaire's "Discours sur la tragédie: à mylord Bolingbroke" attached to the play Brutus (1730) acknowledged his intellectual debt to Bolingbroke:

Souffrez donc que je vous présente Brutus, . . . à vous qui m'apprendiez du moins à rendre à ma langue cette force et cette énergie qu'inspire la noble liberté de penser: car les sentiments vigoureux de l'âme passent toujours dans le langage, et qui pense fortement parle de même.<sup>70</sup>

Bolingbroke's influence on Voltaire cannot be denied.

Something happened to cool the enthusiasm Bolingbroke had for Voltaire before Voltaire went to England. In December, 1725, Bolingbroke refused the dedication of the Henriade (Best. D257) and wrote to a mutual friend that he thought Voltaire tried to take him "pour dupe avec un peu de verbiage." (Best. D258). What it was that put Bolingbroke off is unknown; the relevant correspondence has been lost. Voltaire, for his part, avoided excessive reliance on the Bolingbrokes

---

69

M. XIV, 562-563, from the chapter, "Des beaux-arts en Europe" which dated from 1756.

70

M. II, 311.

after he arrived in England. "I have often seen mylord and mylady Bolinbroke. I have found their affection still the same, even increased in proportion to my unhappiness. They offered me all, their money, their house; but I refused all, because they are lords, and I have accepted all from Mr Faulkneare, because he is a single gentlemen." (Best. D303, 26 October 1726). Perhaps Bolingbroke's greatest influence on Voltaire was in starting him on the study of English philosophy in 1724.

Ballantyne, on the other hand, discounted the misunderstanding of 1725: "Whatever this little misunderstanding may have been, it was a mere trifle, which in no way interfered with the friendship between the two."<sup>71</sup> And it must be admitted that Voltaire did see a lot of Bolingbroke for a while in England and that Bolingbroke introduced him into English society; however, after 1725, we do not find their early enthusiasm and warmth in their opinions of one another. In fact, long before Voltaire returned to France, all mention of him disappeared from Bolingbroke's correspondence; and when Bolingbroke was exiled into France for the second time, he did not see Voltaire.<sup>72</sup> But if Boling-

---

<sup>71</sup> Ballantyne, Visit, p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> Pomeau, Religion, p. 129.

broke did no more than teach Voltaire to appreciate Locke, then his effect on Voltaire's thought was far from negligible.

73

La Fête de Bélébat (1725) was an offering of Voltaire's irreverent spirit. Voltaire and some of his friends in the nobility honoured the half-mad, half-drunk curé de Courdimanche with a mock-Christian, mock-Pagan ceremony. The curé, who fancied himself a poet and who was a Rabelasian drinker and wencher, "reçut tous ces éloges avec l'air d'un homme qui sait bien qu'il en mérite encore davantage."<sup>74</sup>

First they praised his pastoral qualities:

Vous viviez en châtré; c'est un bonheur extrême:  
Mais ce n'est pas assez, curé; Dieu veut qu'on  
aime.

.....  
Combien de muids de vin vous vidiez dans un an;  
Si Brunelle avec vous a dormi bien souvent.<sup>75</sup>

Then, after the curé extemporaneously confessed his sins-- the text did not record them, but they must have been many and bizarre--he appointed his successor:

A Courdimanche avec honneur,  
J'ai fait mon devoir de pasteur;  
J'ai su boire, chanter, et plaire,  
Toutes mes brebis contenter:  
Mon successeur sera Voltaire,<sup>76</sup>  
Pour mieux me faire regretter.

---

<sup>73</sup>M. II, 277-298.

<sup>74</sup>M. II, 282.

<sup>75</sup>M. II, 287.

<sup>76</sup>M. II, 290.



Voltaire, pasteur! Even in such a burlesque, the idea feels strange, but Voltaire proved a hard-working pastor--in the tradition of Courdimanche. Two of his parishoners, young girls, sang his praise:

Que nos prairies  
Seront fleuries!  
Les jeux, l'amour,  
Suivent Voltaire en ce jour;  
Déjà nos mères  
Sont moins sévères;  
On dit qu'on peut faire  
Un mari cocu.  
Heureuse terre!  
C'est à Voltaire  
Que tout est dû.<sup>77</sup>

The farce ended with a hymn to fleshly delights after Voltaire had addressed a libertine homily to each of the important participants. Reading the sombre Locke patently had not dimmed Voltaire's wit nor had given him any respect for religious practices.

The "Avertissement des éditeurs de l'édition de Kehl" (1785-1789) said of La Fête de Bélébat, "Le ton qui règne dans cette fête, où se trouvaient un grand nombre de jeunes femmes, et dans la description adressée à une princesse jeune et qui n'était point mariée, est un reste de la

77

M. II, 292.

liberté des moeurs de la Régence."<sup>78</sup> The judgment was true enough, but today it is difficult to appreciate the shock that the editor felt because sexual allusions were made before young women--worse, young, unmarried women. What is still shocking today, it seems to me, is that France's leading poet led the public ridicule of a good-natured, alcoholic priest.

Of course, a society that could applaud a poet when he humiliated a crazy curé could also applaud when the poet was beaten by the paid thugs of a nobleman, which was precisely Voltaire's lot early in 1726. The Chevalier Guy-Auguste de Rohan-Chabot offered Voltaire a crude insult at the opera; two days later Voltaire returned a brilliant one at the theatre. Some days thereafter Rohan had Voltaire

78

M. II, 279. Desnoiresterres (Voltaire, I, 341) commented about this "mascarade": "Ces plaisanteries-là . . . n'ont d'autre mérite que de donner une idée des moeurs du temps et la tournure d'esprit de la bonne société de la Régence dont on sortait à peine." Pomeau (Religion) did not mention La Fête de Bélébat at all. I feel it was the purest illustration of the negative component of Voltaire's attitude towards religion.

79

As Ascoli noted ("Voltaire", III, 129), this "morceau . . . témoigne que Voltaire ne pratique peut-être pas scrupuleusement lui-même la vertu qu'il vante."

80

Around 1 February 1726 (Best., D260, commentary n.2). As the Rohan incident is well known and so well chronicled, I will only outline it. Foulet, Correspondance, Appendice I, is one of the best accounts. Best., D260-D294 make up the relevant correspondence.

beaten. Most of Voltaire's noble "friends" thought the incident funny and appropriate discipline for a commoner and refused to help in any way. Even the Sullys, from whose dinner table Voltaire had been summoned to be caned, dropped him completely. Nonetheless, Voltaire demanded justice--he may have tried to challenge Rohan to a duel. Since justice from a nobleman to a commoner was impossible, and since Voltaire refused to let the case die, the authorities sent him to the Bastille on 17 April 1726.

In prison or not, Voltaire was still adamant; he began a letter to the secrétaire d'état:

Je remontre très humblement que j'ai été assassiné, par le brave Chevalier de Rohan assisté de six coupe jarets derrière les quels il étoit hardiment posté.

J'ai toujours cherché depuis ce temps là, à réparer non mon honneur, mais le sien, ce qui étoit trop difficile. (Best., D271, c. 20 April 1726).

The same letter contained his request that he be released in order to go to England, which request was implemented on the second or third day of May, 1726. (Best., D287-D288).

Although Voltaire's situation was desperate, his decision to go to England was not born of desperation. In October of the preceding year, when he still was society's pet, Voltaire had written King George I of England for royal patronage to publish the expanded version of the Ligue and had indicated his desire

to go to London. (Best. D250, 6 October 1725). His imprisonment "merely" encouraged him to follow through on his earlier plans.

Exactly when Voltaire arrived in England we do not know. However, on the fifth of May, 1726, still fuming from the injustice done him, he wrote from Calais to Rene Herault, the lieutenant of the French police. "J'ai la permission et non pas l'ordre, d'en sortir, et j'ose vous dire qu'il ne seroit point de l'équité du roy de bannir un homme de sa patrie, pour avoir été assassiné." (Best. D291). So he left France, on his own request, furious with the authorities over his maltreatment, furious with French society over his humiliation.

E. Summary: The year of the Rohan incident, 1726, marked a turning point in Voltaire's thought and spirit.

81

He must have left for England within a week of the writing of this letter. See Best., D290, commentary. See also Foulet, Correspondance, p. 28.

82

Foulet (Correspondance, pp. 212-219) documented the magnificent thoroughness of Voltaire's humiliation. Not only did high society prick at his pride with barbed epigrams, and the middle-class journals also publicized his disgrace; but, worst of all, Voltaire became the butt of several street songs and soldiers' ballads. See also, Lantoine, Lettres philosophiques, chapter 1.

83

Lanson, Voltaire, p. 24, for example, said, "Cette date de 1726 est décisive dans la vie de Voltaire."

Not that, as we have seen, this event and his subsequent experience of England created Voltaire, the philosophe, ex nihilo; rather, as Lanson said, "L'Angleterre a mûri, armé,<sup>84</sup> excité Voltaire: elle ne l'a pas fait." Yet, up to this point, Voltaire's work only reflected the almost commonplace ideas of his educated French libertine contemporaries;<sup>85</sup> and its tone was--with the important exceptions of the Ligue, OEdipe, and perhaps l'Epître à Uranie--libertine and light. The fierce seriousness of his letters to the police was unprecedented and unexpected.<sup>86</sup> Who would have guessed the author of La Fête de Bélébat was a man of tenacious integrity?

It should be noted that Voltaire was not a philosophical radical of the "far left". He rejected out of hand those little circles of atheists who centered on some Parisian cafés.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, in the eyes of some dévots, Voltaire

---

<sup>84</sup>  
Ibid., p. 36. Ascoli ("Voltaire", III, 144) similarly said that Voltaire would leave England, "mûri et vielli" but retaining "ses convictions de jeunesse".

<sup>85</sup>  
Pomeau, Religion, pp. 114-115.

<sup>86</sup>  
The letters quoted above, Best., D271 and D291. Besterman noted that: "Voltaire's reaction was dignified, even stern, and from this moment a new note of seriousness enters his letters, never to leave them, and often to be accompanied by a philosophic melancholy." (Voltaire, p. 109; see also Best. II, p.xix, for the identical comment).

<sup>87</sup>  
Pomeau, Religion, p. 116. Wade, Clandestine, pp. 5-7, documents the activities of these atheists.

was a dangerous beast, a blasphemer. One of them wrote, anonymously, to Herault a few days after Voltaire's imprisonment; he made the ridiculous charge that Voltaire secretly preached deism to schoolboys some fifteen years earlier. Voltaire would have been only fourteen then. But the anonymous Christian did have the charity to add:

je voudrais être homme d'autorité pour un jour seulement . . . afin d'enferme ce poète entre quatre murailles pour toute sa vie; il ne m'a pourtant jamais fait ni bien ni mal, n'en ayant jamais été connu; mais tout homme qui se déclare ennemi de Jésus Christ, notre divin maître et bon sauveur, est un impie que nous devons poursuivre à cor et à cris. (Best.D277, c. 25 April 1726).

As to Socinians, we can say with some assurance that Voltaire had met none when he left for England. From the "lettre hollandaise", we know he knew something about Socinianism, but how much and from where has not been determined. One likely source of information would have been Bayle's Dictionnaire. Finally, his spirit of bawdy irreverence, so marked in La Fête de Bélébat, and his constant denigration of scripture indicated an enormous gulf between Socinian thought and his, even though some of his theological opinions were similar to Socinian doctrines.

IV

VOLTAIRE IN ENGLAND

A. The Visit: Voltaire, in his letter of 26  
October 1726 to Thieriot,<sup>1</sup> sketched his activities of the  
first months of his stay in England. We need only com-  
ment upon it: "let me acquaint you with an account of my  
for ever cursed fortune. J came again into England in the  
latter end of July very much dissatisfied with my secret  
voiage into France both unsuccessfull and expensive." (Best.  
D303). The "secret voiage" was in part an attempt to seek  
out Rohan-Chabot; luckily for Voltaire's future, he failed  
to avenge himself.<sup>2</sup>

Voltaire, of course, lost his royal pension when  
he left France, and he intended to rely on his own moderate  
savings for which he had a letter of credit. However, as  
he continued to Thieriot: "At my coming to London i found  
my damned Jew was broken. J was without a penny, sick to  
death of a violent agüe, a stranger, alone, helpless. . . .

---

<sup>1</sup>See also Best., D302, of the same date, to Mlle.  
Bessières, which is similar in tone and content to the  
letter to Thieriot. Foulet's commentary on these letters  
is enlightening (Correspondance, letters 28 and 29).

<sup>2</sup>Best., D299 (Foulet 26), Voltaire to Thieriot, 12  
August 1726, also mentions this trip into France.

J had never undergone such distress; but j am born to run through all the misfortunes of life." Voltaire's major objective in making this voyage may have been to try to put his financial house in order.<sup>3</sup> Not only did he fail to raise any money, but he also discovered that in the few months he had been gone nearly all his powerful patrons had lost favour.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, these blows were easily enough to justify his distress and depression, but in this same period he also learned of the death of his sister, *Mme. Marie-Marguerite Mignot*, the only member of his immediate family he ever loved. "J have wept for her death, and j would be with her. Life is but a dream full of starts of folly, and of fancied, and true miseries. Death awakes us from this painful dream, and gives us, either a better existence or no existence at all."

How did Voltaire cope with all these misfortunes?

On 12 August 1726, he wrote Thieriot that:

Je n'ay plus que deux choses à faire dans ma vie, l'une de la hasarder avec honneur dès que je le pourai, et l'autre de la finir dans l'obscurité d'une retraite qui convient à ma façon de penser, à mes malheurs, et à la connoissance que j'ai des hommes. (Best. D299).

During this healing, "plus profonde retraite" (Best. D299),

<sup>3</sup>Foulet, *Correspondance*, pp. 47, n. 1 and 55, n. 1.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 47, n. 1.



which was marked by a silence in his correspondence from 12 August (Best. D299) to the letters of 26 October 1726. (Best. D302 and D303), Voltaire made enormous steps towards mastering the English language. The excellent English of the letter to Thieriot (Best D303) marking the end of the retreat, displayed Voltaire's remarkable progress. Further, this letter showed that he was drawing out of his depression. He mentioned the possibility of having "Poor Henry", that is, the Henriade, printed by subscription, and he wrote of his intention to establish himself in London. A day later, he repeated his resolve to repair to London "chez mylord Bolingbrooke" in a letter to the marquise de Bernières; (Best. D305) his tone was still most melancholy, but at least he wrote as though he expected to survive.

By 2 February 1727, that date of Voltaire's next extant message to a friend (Thieriot, Best. D308), he was in much better spirit. Swift's Gulliver's Travels and new verses for the Henriade dominated the letter, though he also asked Thieriot to try to help him out of his financial plight. Clearly Voltaire's passion for belles lettres was taking over his life again. Indeed, the remainder of his English visit was filled with conferences with leading literary and philosophical Englishmen, and, of course, with his own prodigious

5  
labours. When Voltaire returned to France, he left behind three published works, the Henriade (1728), and two works in English, published together: An Essay upon the Civil Wars of France. Extracted from Curious Manuscripts. And also upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations from Homer down to Milton. The latter two first appeared late in 1727, another witness to Voltaire's rapid progress in English, and were reprinted twice in 1728.<sup>6</sup> In addition, he brought home some notebooks<sup>7</sup> full of English extracts and anecdotes, many of which later appeared in print, the manuscript of his Histoire de Charles XII (published in 1731),<sup>8</sup> a draft for his tragedy Brutus, and at least the idea for the Lettres philosophiques.

Just as it was impossible to determine exactly when Voltaire entered England and to trace his activities there with any certainty or completeness, his departure to France was also mysterious. From November, 1728, to February, 1729, Voltaire disappeared; in the letter that marked his reappearance in France (Best. D344, c. February 1729, to Thieriot), there

---

<sup>5</sup>  
Foulet, Correspondance, Appendice IX; and Balandynte, Visit, Chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup>  
Henriade, O. R. Taylor (1965), pp. 659-660.

<sup>7</sup>  
In Besterman's definitive edition of the Notebooks, the "Small Leningrad Notebook" (pp. 51-69) and the "Cambridge Notebook" (pp. 70-111). The former dates from 1726 (ibid., p. 17), thus represents the work of the first retreat; the latter from 1727, or perhaps 1726, and several years following (ibid., p. 19).

<sup>8</sup>  
ibid., p. 105, "Cambridge Notebook".

was a despairing passage reminiscent of those in Best. D299, D302, and D303.<sup>9</sup> Pomeau suggested that this letter and the antecedent silence indicated another depression and retreat like that of Voltaire's first summer and fall in England;<sup>10</sup> and it is true that Voltaire suffered periodic depressive episodes throughout his life.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Foulet offered a detailed argument to show that Voltaire secretly re-entered France in September or October, 1728, to try to arrange the publication of some of his work, which explained his silence.<sup>12</sup> Besterman,<sup>13</sup> Conlon,<sup>14</sup> and F. A. Taylor<sup>15</sup> all agreed basically with Foulet's explanation, as do I. It is likely, then, that Voltaire's second silence was not due to a second retreat for reasons of mental health.

B. Contacts with Socinians and Socinianism: Of those English Socinians that Voltaire so identified--Newton,

<sup>9</sup> Supra, pp. 112-113.

<sup>10</sup> Pomeau, Religion, p. 123.

<sup>11</sup> Another fact which cries out for a psychoanalytic interpretation; supra, p. 84, n. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Foulet, Correspondance, Appendice VII.

<sup>13</sup> Best. D344, commentary.

<sup>14</sup> Conlon, Literary Career, pp. 255-256.

<sup>15</sup> Lettres philosophiques, F. A. Taylor, pp. xxiv-xxv.

16

Clarke, and Locke --he met only with Clarke. Locke had died in 1704, but Newton, who died 20 March 1727, was alive during part of Voltaire's time in England. Nonetheless, Voltaire and Newton never met although Voltaire attended Newton's funeral, where he was most favourably impressed by the honours paid to the great physicist.

17

Later in the year, in the "Advertisement to the Reader" of his Essay upon Epick Poetry, he announced his intention to write an account of English life—not to be the ordinary traveller's book where the country's monuments were described: "I consider England in another View; it strikes my Eyes as it is the Land which hath produced a Newton, a Locke, a Tillotson, a Milton, a Boyle." He then asked his readers to share with him any anecdotes they had about these men to enrich what was to be the Lettres philosophiques. No doubt he was trying to make up for his failure to see Newton alive.

18

There were no contemporary accounts of Voltaire's meetings with Samuel Clarke, which proves the old saw that Voltaire was far more influenced by England than England

16

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 79-80.

17

Ibid., II, 158-159 (twenty-third Lettre, "Sur la consideration qu'on doit aux gens de lettres") and ibid., II, 2 (fourteenth Lettre, "Sur Descartes et Newton").

18

Essay, in O. R. Taylor's 1965 edition of the Henriade, p. 663.

by Voltaire. Further, Voltaire did not mention seeing Clarke in his correspondence of the English period, in the Lettres philosophiques, or in the Notebooks. However, in the Eléments de la philosophie de Newton (1738), he told how Clarke's air of respect when pronouncing the name of God was so striking and reported that Clarke said he learned that from Newton.<sup>19</sup> The other record of their conversations was recorded in Voltaire's Courte réponse aux longs discours d'un docteur allemand (1744). The anecdote was long but deserves to be presented in full:

Lorsque j'étais en Angleterre, je ne pus avoir la consolation de voir le grand Newton, qui touchait à sa fin. Le fameux curé de Saint-James, Samuel Clarke, l'ami, le disciple et le commentateur de Newton, daigna me donner quelques instructions sur cette partie de la philosophie qui veut s'élever au-dessus du calcul et des sens. Je ne trouvais pas, à la vérité, cette anatomie circonspecte de l'entendement humain, ce bâton d'aveugle avec lequel marchait le modeste Locke, cherchant son chemin et le trouvant; enfin cette timidité savante qui arrêtait Locke sur le bord des abîmes. Clarke sautait dans l'abîme, et j'osai l'y suivre. Un jour, plein de ces grandes recherches qui charment l'esprit par leur immensité, je dis à un membre très-éclairé de la société: "M. Clarke est un bien plus grand metaphysicien que M. Newton. -- Cela peut être, me répondit-il froidement; c'est comme si vous disiez que l'un joue mieux au ballon que l'autre." Cette réponse me fit rentrer en moi-même. J'ai depuis osé percer quelques-uns de ces ballons de la métaphysique, et j'ai vu qu'il n'en est sorti que du vent.<sup>20</sup>

Ballantyne placed these interviews in 1726 but did

---

19

M. XXII, 403.

20

M. XXIII, 194.

not say why.<sup>21</sup> Since Voltaire said in the passage above that he saw Clarke only after Newton's death, since he stated late in 1727 that he could hardly understand English in conversation and could not pronounce it at all,<sup>22</sup> and since 1726 was spent mainly in his secret mission in France and subsequent retreat, I doubt very much that Voltaire's lessons in metaphysics from Clarke were in 1726. But when--more precisely than after March, 1727 (Newton's death) and before Voltaire left England in the autumn of 1728--they were can not be said.

Most of Voltaire's references to Clarke after 1750 took the form of regrets that he had followed him into the murky abyss of metaphysics. In the 1730's and 1740's, Clarke's influence on Voltaire's thinking was pronounced in the latter's metaphysical works and was obvious in the frequent references to Clarke in the correspondence. The last sentence from the extract of the Courte réponse quoted above, where Voltaire confessed that metaphysics was proving to be nothing but so much wind, marked his growing disenchantment with Clarke's thought.

---

21

Ballantyne, Visit, p. 109.

22

From the "Advertisement to the Reader" of his Essay on Epic Poetry, in O. R. Taylor's 1965 edition of the Henriade, p. 662. No doubt there was some false modesty here, but in 1726, his command of the spoken language was probably insufficient to carry on a metaphysical conversation with Clarke.

Another passage from the Courte réponse made the same anti-speculative point: "Plus je vais en avant, et plus je suis confirmé dans l'idée que les systèmes de métaphysique sont pour les philosophes ce que les romans sont pour les femmes. Ils ont tous la vogue les uns après les autres, et finissent tous par être oubliés." <sup>23</sup> Even though Voltaire came to scorn Clarke's thought, he always retained his respect for the character and person of the "curé de Saint-James." Much later, in attributing his youthful affirmation of Clarke's ideas to soft-headedness, he wrote, "j'aimais sa personne, quoiqu'il fût un arien déterminé ainsi que Newton, et j'aime encore sa mémoire parce qu'il <sup>24</sup> était bon homme."

The Notebooks show that Voltaire wanted to understand Newton and Locke while in England but do not prove that he read Clarke then. Locke's On the Reasonableness of Christianity rated one rather cryptic sentence in the "Small Leningrad Notebook": "Mr. Lock's reasonableness of christian <sup>25</sup> religion is really a new religion." Annotated by later reflections, such as: Christianisme raisonnable "est un

---

23

M. XXIII, 194.

24

M. XIX, 36. From Questions sur l'Encyclopédie, fifth part (1771), article "Eternité".

25

Notebooks, p. 67, "Small Leningrad Notebook".

mauvais livre: il voulait laver la tête d'un âne",<sup>26</sup> and  
 "quand le célèbre Locke, voulant menager à la fois les im-  
 postures de cette religion [le christianisme] et les droits  
 de l'humanité, a écrit son livre du Christianisme raison-  
 nable, il n'a pas eu quatre disciples: preuve assez forte que  
 le christianisme et la raison ne peuvent subsister ensem-  
 ble",<sup>27</sup> it would seem that the "Notebook" meant no com-  
 pliment to the Reasonableness of Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

Why was this most Socinian of Locke's works so  
 offensive to Voltaire? Here Locke showed, empirically,  
 of course, that the essence of the New Testament's message  
 was very simple, suitable for ignorant fishermen and pea-  
 sants. To be a justified Christian, all one had to do was  
 to believe Jesus was the messiah, was resurrected, was the  
 Lord and Judge of all men, and was to become their King  
 and Ruler.<sup>29</sup> Locke also argued strongly for individual  
 freedom of belief, attacked the priests, and denounced all  
 those who declared their creeds to be normative for "true"  
 Christianity. Voltaire, too, wanted to purify religion as

---

26

M. XXXII, 462. A private manuscript, no date.

27

M. XXVI, 550-551. Le Dîner du compte de Bou-  
 lainvilliers (1767); see also M. XX, 230.

28

However in 1767, in Lettres à S. A. Mgr. Le  
 Prince de ---, Voltaire mentioned this work with no rancor  
 at all. M. XXVI, 483-484.

29

Locke, Reasonableness, paragraphs, 1, 247, 252,  
 and passim.



he showed in this entry in the "Cambridge Notebook":

Personne ne dispute sur l'essentiel, de la religion, qui est de faire du bien; on dispute sur des dogmes inintelligibles. Si la religion se contentoit de dire soyez juste, il n'y auroit pas un incrédule sur la terre. Mais les prêtres disent croiez etc. et on ne croit point.<sup>30</sup>

Where Voltaire differed from Locke was that the Frenchman would remove all Christian content from true religion; "le christianisme et la raison ne peuvent subsister ensemble." Bayle, earlier also argued that the Christian faith and reason were antithetical and insisted that the Christian must abandon philosophy. But Voltaire applied the argument in precisely the opposite way; recall that as early as 1716 François-Marie Arouet rejected the Christian scriptures as "la chimerique histoire, / Et les songes sacrés de ces mystiques fous."<sup>31</sup> No doubt Locke's careful examination of the New Testament seemed like a fool's task to Voltaire.

To extend the metaphor of the Courte réponse, Locke stopped at the edge of the abyss only to try to bridge it with rotten lumber from an ancient trash heap--that is, so-called revelation. And On the Reasonableness of Christianity insisted that God's special revelation was necessary

---

30

Notebooks, p. 71. It is interesting that Voltaire misspelled "religion" in both English and French.

31

M. X, 231 f. Supra, p. 87.

for man's salvation, that the light of natural reason could not be sufficient to establish a pure natural religion.<sup>32</sup> Locke made the same point in other works, notably the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, which Voltaire admired highly. No doubt, the good philosophy in those books outweighed the bad theology in Voltaire's judgment while On the Reasonableness of Christianity was all bad theology.

Voltaire firmly believed, on the contrary, that what the priests called revelation kept man from knowing God. In the Epître à Uranie (1722), he promised:

Devant toi, d'une main hardie,  
Aux superstitions j'arrache le bandeau;  
Que j'expose à tes yeux le dangereux tableau  
Des mensonges sacrés dont la terre est remplie.  
.....

Then:

Songe que du Très-Haut la sagesse éternelle  
A gravé de sa main dans le fond de ton coeur  
La religion naturelle.<sup>33</sup>

No wonder this Voltaire, who had declared himself no Christian so he could better love God, did not find Locke's Christian apologetics to his taste.<sup>34</sup>

His libertine's distaste for the Bible and for popular devotion found ample expression in the English

<sup>32</sup>

Locke, Reasonableness, paragraphs 1, 241, and 243.

<sup>33</sup>

M. IX, 358-359 and 361. Supra, pp. 97-98.

<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, Locke's apologetics may well have been camouflage for his true religious beliefs.

notebooks. He copied—and recopied in later notebooks—a  
 pornographic English verse about David and Bathseba,<sup>35</sup> a  
 rather off-colour funny story about a weeping statue of  
 the Blessed Virgin Mary,<sup>36</sup> and a joke about a communion  
 wafer that served to ridicule priests and the doctrines of  
 transubstantiation and the trinity.<sup>37</sup> This last little  
 tale also served as a shaft in Hume's deist quiver. Hume's  
 version was in his The Natural History of Religion (1757):

One day, a priest, it is said, gave inadvertently, instead of the sacrament, a counter, which had by accident fallen among the holy wafers. The communicant waited patiently for some time, expecting it would dissolve on his tongue: But finding that it still remained entire, he took it off. I wish, cried he to the priest, you have not committed some mistake: I wish you have not given me God the Father: He is so hard and tough there is no swallowing him.<sup>38</sup>

Voltaire's version, which was very much longer, began:

"There was a parson in France, who for to saunter away the time, was playing one day in the morning, at piquet, with his own whore." Again, Voltaire had shown how far removed from Socinian, or any Christian, thought he was.

---

35

Notebooks, pp. 74-76, "Cambridge Notebook".

36

Ibid., p. 72, "Cambridge Notebook".

37

Ibid., p. 57, "Small Leningrad Notebook".

38

Hume, Religion, p. 73.

C. Other Contacts with English Religion: A

rough calculation shows that of the first seven Lettres philosophiques, those which dealt specifically with religion, Voltaire only devoted twenty-two per cent to the established churches of England and Scotland. The lion's share of his attention, four letters, went to the Quakers with the few pages remaining to the Socinians. Ulterior-motives aside for the moment--and with one major exception--this distribution probably accurately reflected Voltaire's personal experience with English religion.

The exception was that there was no letter devoted to the English deists; he only mentioned two of them, Collins and Toland, in passing: "Ce n'est ni Montagne, ni Loke, ni Bayle, ni Spinoza, ni Hobbes, ni Milord Shaftesbury, ni Mr. Collins, ni Mr. Toland, etc. qui ont porté le flambeau de la discorde dans leur Patrie; ce sont pour la plupart des Théologiens." Judging from the lack of notebook entries concerning the deists and from their negligible treatment in the Lettres philosophiques, Pomeau and Torrey may well have been right in saying that Voltaire had little interest in the serious deists' books and squabbles while he

---

39

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 175-176 (thirteenth Lettre, "Sur Mr. Loke"). Lanson printed the 1734 Jore edition; later editions had different men in the list of harmless philosophes.

40  
 was in England. On the other hand, in moving as much as he did in Bolingbroke's circle, he must have met many anti-clerical freethinkers, the "membre[s] très-eclairé[s] de la société" of the Courte réponse, who laughed at all metaphysics and doctrine.

This omission was noted as soon as Thieriot published the first edition of the Lettres philosophiques in England. "Quant aux Déistes, qui font tant de bruit en Angleterre, l'Auteur n'en dit ni bien ni mal: il n'en dit rien."<sup>41</sup> Prudence, more than ignorance, was the obvious reason for Voltaire's silence.<sup>42</sup> After all, he wanted to be able to publish the book in France too.

When Voltaire retired to the countryside to recuperate after his disastrous sortie into France in 1726, and again in the spring of 1727, he stayed in Wandsworth, a village not far from London. Wandsworth had an active Friends' Meeting, and there, primarily during his second visit,<sup>43</sup> Voltaire learned the Quakers' customs and doctrines

---

40

Pomeau, Religion, p. 190; Torrey, Déistes, pp. 2-3.

41

"Lettres Anglaises", BB, tome second, première partie (Oct.-Dec., 1733), 34.

42

Lanson commented: "Voltaire n'a pas parlé des déistes anglais. C'était probablement trop dangereux." (Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 81.)

43

Best., 307, commentary. Pomeau (Religion, p. 133) also noted the influence of Wandsworth's Quakers on Voltaire and further noted that there was a large community of French Protestant refugees there from whom Voltaire may have gained his first serious personal impressions of Protestantism. (Ibid., p. 133).

first hand. Edward Higginson, who was the apprentice schoolmaster at the Wandsworth Friends' school, wrote an apparently reliable account of several meetings with Vol-  
<sup>44</sup>taire.

Their first encounter came when Higginson was called in to arbitrate an argument about baptism--an argument which began as an English lesson--between Voltaire and the schoolmaster. After Voltaire repeated the gist of the discussion, Higginson brought up I Corinthians 1:17, where Paul said, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to  
<sup>45</sup>preach the gospel", one of the texts which led the Quakers to reject baptism. This passage struck Voltaire "so strange, that in a violent passion he said, I lied--which I put up patiently, till he, becoming cooler, desired to know why I would impose upon a stranger." Higginson was unable to convince Voltaire he told the truth until Voltaire read the passage for himself in a Greek Testament.

Voltaire reset this anecdote in the first of the Lettres philosophiques. In his version, immediately after citing I Corinthians 1:17, the Quaker added:

aussi ce même Paul ne baptisa jamais avec de l'eau que deux personnes, encore fut-ce malgré lui; il circoncit son Disciple Thimotée, les autres Apôtres

---

44

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 19-22, reprints the entire article from an old (1832) Quaker journal.

45

Ibid., I, 20.

circoncisoient aussi tous ceux qui vouloient.  
 Es-tu circoncis, ajouta-t-il? --Je lui répondis  
 que je n'avois pas cet honneur. --Eh bien, dit-  
 il, l'Ami, tu es Chrétien sans être circoncis,  
 et moi sans être baptisé.<sup>46</sup>

The four letters on the Quakers were the only ones that went into any theological detail and, unlike the letters on the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Socinians, were filled with lively, personally observed details. It would seem that Voltaire knew Quakers best of all English faiths.<sup>47</sup>

Higginson also preserved a very important Voltarian "confession of faith". In the course of trying to convince Higginson to become his paid companion, Voltaire spoke very freely about his religious beliefs:

telling me then plainly, he was a Deist; adding, so were most of the noblemen in France and in England; deriding the account given by the four Evangelists concerning the birch [sic] of Christ, and his miracles, etc., so far, that I desired him to desist; for I could not bear<sup>48</sup> to hear my Saviour so reviled and spoken against.

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., I, 4. That Voltaire and Higginson reproduced recognizably the same story speaks well for the substantial truth of the anecdote. Voltaire related the story as an after-dinner conversation with an old Quaker gentleman, Andrew Pitt of Wandsworth, who was another major source of information to Voltaire about the Friends. (Ibid., I, p. 12, n. 7.)

<sup>47</sup> They were the only Protestants mentioned in the English notebooks, Notebooks, pp. 52, 54, and 65; however, there may have been references to other Protestants in notebooks which have not come down to us. Further we know from Higginson that Voltaire read Robert Barclay, the Quaker apologist, in England (Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 21). See Barber, "Voltaire", for an excellent study of Voltaire's treatment of Quakers.

<sup>48</sup> Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 21-22.

This was one of the rare times that what the young Voltaire said about his beliefs, when he had nothing to fear from the authorities, was recorded. The Epître à Uranie, another uninhibited statement of belief, agreed essentially with Higginson's report. Shocked by Voltaire's opinions about Jesus, Higginson refused to serve him. "Whereupon he [Voltaire] seemed under a *desappointement* [sic], and left me with some reluctance."<sup>49</sup>

Samuel Clarke, Bolingbroke and his circle, Quaker schoolmasters: these were the primary sources of Voltaire's knowledge of the English religious scene. No wonder the Lettres philosophiques presented such a peculiar, skewed picture of English Christianity. As Ballantyne pointed out, Voltaire did not have the opportunity to find out what the ordinary, serious-minded Englishman believed.<sup>50</sup> But as Abbey and Overton eloquently proved, ordinary, serious-minded Englishmen were perhaps rare at this time. Personal and public morality and piety were at their ebb.<sup>51</sup>

D. The Henriade: Horace Walpole, the English ambassador to France, solicited Bubb Doddington, a wealthy

---

49

Ibid., I, 22.

50

Ballantyne, Visit, p. 329; see also Bellesort, Essai, p. 67.

51

Abbey and Overton, Church, chapters 1 and 8, pp. 302-304, for a summary.



patron of the arts, only a few days after Voltaire left for England: "Mr. Voltaire, a French poet, who has wrote several pieces with great success here, being gone for England in order to print by subscription an excellent poem, called Henry IV, which, on account of some bold strokes in it against persecution and the priests, cannot be printed here." (Best., D296, 29 May 1726). This statement was true on both counts. One of Voltaire's motives in going to England was to publish the Henriade, and it was the clergy that lay behind his failure to get the censors' permission to print the poem in France.

Perhaps to ease the court's conscience over the Rohan affair, the comte de Morville, the secretary of State in France, had written letters of recommendation for Voltaire to the French ambassador to England, the comte de Broglie, at the time of Voltaire's departure. (Best., D297). However, when Voltaire approached the comte de Broglie to gain his support for the Henriade, de Broglie turned him down unequivocally. The reasons he gave to de Morville for this refusal were typical of the kind of official thinking

---

<sup>52</sup>Supra, pp. 108-109 for Voltaire's early plans to visit England. See Foulet, Correspondance, p. 38, n. 3, for the clerical obstruction.

Voltaire always had to contend with:

comme je n'ay point veu cet ouvrage et que je ne sais point siles additions et soustractions qu'il dit auoir fait à celui qu'il a déjà donné au Public à Paris, ni si les planches grauées qu'il en a fait venir pour l'enricher seront approuuées de la Cour, je luy ay dit que je ne pouuois m'en mesler qu'autant que vous l'auriés pour agréable; Je crains toujours que des auteurs françois ne veuillent faire vn mauuais vsage de la liberté qu'ils ont dans vn país comme celuy cy d'Ecrire tout ce qui leur vient dans l'jmagination sur la Religion, le Pape, le Gouvernement, ou les personnes qui le composent. (Best. D309, 3 March 1727).

In Voltaire's case, the fears were well justified, for the Henriade which appeared in March, 1728, was much more outspoken than the Ligue--especially in matters of religion.<sup>53</sup> For example, he added some lines, very charitable towards non-Christian faiths, emphasizing his belief in the beneficent God:

Un Juge incorruptible y rassemble à ses pieds  
Ces immortels esprits que son souffle a créés.  
C'est cet être infini qu'on sert et qu'on ignore:<sup>54</sup>  
Sous des noms differents le monde entier l'adore.

Here was the deist doctrine that essentially all religions were dedicated to the same supreme being even though

---

53

Henriade, D2, pp. 69-71. On p. 70, Taylor cites several passages that were strengthened. Incidentally, the proceeds from this edition eliminated Voltaire's financial worries.

54

Ibid., VII, 71-74; the whole section, VII, 71-137, was much more heterodox in 1728 than the 1723 passage it replaced.

55

priestly fraud had obscured the simple truth. This doctrine carried along as its corollary the doctrine of universal salvation, which Voltaire was not afraid to make explicit.

Ce Dieu les punit-il d'avoir fermé leurs yeux  
Aux clartés que lui-même il plaça si loin d'eux?  
Pourrait-il les juger tel qu'un injuste maître,  
Sur la loi des chrétiens qu'ils n'avaient pû connaître?

Non. Dieu nous a créés, Dieu nous veut sauver tous.  
Partout il nous instruit, partout il parle à nous.<sup>56</sup>

A couplet, also introduced in 1728, drove the point home:

Non, s'il est infini, c'est dans ses récompenses:  
Prodigue de ses dons, il borne ses vengences.<sup>57</sup>

Voltaire was still at war with the "Dieu vengeur".

Need we add that orthodox Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, were quick to attack the theology of the Henriade?<sup>58</sup> In fact, for half a century, this epic poem which was the cornerstone of Voltaire's reputation withstood dogmatic criticism. One such critique is noteworthy as it came from a man who, as Foulet said, had rather good

55

Henriade, D.2, IV, 187-226, 263-290, and passim.

56

Ibid., VII, 103-108.

57

Ibid., VII, 221-222.

58

Ibid., pp. 85-86 and chapter IV. See, for example, Best., D410, a long theological critique of the Henriade published as a letter to the editor of the Jesuit Journal de Trevoux of June, 1731.

59

sense and was not a dévot and as it was one of the earliest examples of French reaction to the Henriade. Mathieu Marais wrote in his diary on 16 November 1728 that he had finally seen a copy of the poem and commented: "Il [Voltaire] a mis au 7<sup>e</sup> chant une théologie affreuse et brûlable. Il amène aux pieds de Dieu toutes les nations pour être jugées." Then Marais copied out twelve lines, which included VII, 103-108, reproduced above, and three others on the theme of universal salvation. He continued, "Vous verrez que ce fou-là dira que ce chant est un songe et qu'en songe on peut être athée, spinoziste, naturaliste et tout ce qu'il vous plaira, sans aucune consequence. Nous n'envierons pas à l'Angleterre ce déserteur de notre patrie." <sup>60</sup> "Brûlable, athée, déserteur": ominous words, these, and from a reasonable man at that.

When Voltaire, who had asked Theiriot to let him know what the French public thought of the Henriade (Best. D336, 14 June 1728), learned of their theological objections, he defended his concept of God without compromise:

---

59

Foulet, Correspondance, p. 175, n. 2.

60

Ibid., p. 175, n. 2. See also, Best. D336, commentary. Marais used a pirated Dutch Henriade, and his quotations differ somewhat from the established text (O.R. Taylor's).

Vous me mandez que des dévots gens de mauvaise foy ou de très peu de sens ont trouvé à redire que j'aye osé dans un poème que n'est point un colifichet de roman, peindre dieu comme un être plein de bonté et indulgent aux sottises de l'espèce humaine. Ces faquins là feront tant qu'il leur plaira de dieu un tiran, je ne le regarderay pas moins comme un être aussi bon et . . . sage que ces messieurs sont sots et méchants. (Best. D341, to Thieriot, 4 August 1728).

As one would have expected, that other major theme of Voltaire's religious thought was also strengthened in the Henriade: that is, his hatred for civil disorder inspired by the clergy. In the fifth chant, where he developed this theme, there was a sequence of textual changes that traced Voltaire's growing knowledge of Socinianism. Lines 79-80, which remained constant from the 1723 publication of the Ligue throughout the history of the poem, introduced the topic:

La Discorde attentive en traversant les airs,  
Entend ces cris affreux, et les porte aux enfers.

Ten rather weak lines that condemned "la Discorde religieuse" in colourless generalities followed this couplet in the Ligue.

Voltaire discarded these spineless lines in 1728 and replaced them with three times their number. First he showed that la Discorde led to something worse:

Elle amène à l'instant, de ces royaumes sombres,  
Le plus cruel tyran de l'empire des ombres.

Il vient, le Fanatisme est son horrible nom.  
 Enfant dénaturé de la Religion,  
 Armé pour la défendre, il cherche à la détruire,  
 Et reçu dans son sein, l'embrasse et le déchire.<sup>61</sup>

"Le Fanatisme", the worst tyrant of Hell, posed as religion's protector but was really its worst enemy. He illustrated Fanatisme's excesses at first with safe examples drawn from outside Christianity but eventually sketched its beginnings in the Roman Church:

Du haut du Capitole il criait aux païens:  
 'Frappez, exterminiez, déchirez les chrétiens'.  
 Mais lorsqu'au fils de Dieu Rome enfin fut soumise,  
 Du Capitole en cendre il passa dans l'Eglise;  
 Et dans les coeurs chrétiens inspirant ses fureurs,  
 De martyrs qu'ils étaient, les fit persécuteurs.<sup>62</sup>

Then in the 1728 London editions, he jumped immediately from the general description of Christian fanaticism to specific English cases with this couplet:

Dans Londres il inspira ces peuples de sectaires,  
 Trembleurs, Indépendants, Puritains, Unitaires.<sup>63</sup>

This was the first time, that I have discovered, Voltaire

<sup>61</sup>  
Henriade, D.2, V, 81-86.

<sup>62</sup>  
Ibid., V, 99-104. Voltaire was right; after the Nicene Council, Constantine ordered death for those who refused to surrender Arius's books. Castelli, Heretics, p. 16 (Bainton's introduction); see ibid., pp. 12-18.

<sup>63</sup>  
Henriade, D.2, V, 105-106, 1728 variant.

used "Unitaire" (or a related term) in a text he intended to be published. What makes this passage valuable for this study, even more than its primacy, is its short life. In the next edition of the Henriade (1730) that Voltaire supervised, these two lines disappeared to be replaced with:

Dans Londres il a formé la secte turbulente,  
Qui sur un Roi trop faible a mis sa main sanglante.<sup>64</sup>

We have already seen how highly Voltaire regarded the English Unitarians; he nearly idolized Locke and Newton. And the history of the Unitarians and the Quakers (Trembleurs)<sup>65</sup> was one of conscientious non-violence.

Why then did Voltaire at first list the Quakers and Unitarians as persecutors and fanatics? I think it was a blunder born of ignorance. Voltaire had finished the Henriade in July, 1725, (Best. D240, D242, and D243) long before he came to England, and he may have used "Trembleur" and "Unitaire" like he used "socinien" a few years earlier in the "lettre hollandaise". He did, however, change some verses, dealing with England, after he was in the country. For example, in a letter of 13 February 1727 to Thieriot, he enclosed six

---

64

Ibid., V, 105-106. After 1730 the authorities allowed the Henriade to be printed in France, without official approbation; thus they could have confiscated it whenever they pleased. Ibid., p. 86; Conlon, Literary Career, p. 34.

65

Voltaire noted the Quakers' pacificism favourably in the Lettres philosophiques (Lanson, I, 6-7, 48).

new lines and mentioned others. (Best. D308). Now, on 3 March 1727 (Best. D309), he had begun to solicit subscriptions for the deluxe edition of the Henriade and had, therefore, probably stabilized the text. Thus the mistake was likely made long before he had learned about the Quakers from the Wandsworth school teachers<sup>66</sup> and about the English Unitarians<sup>67</sup> from Clarke. The mistake appeared in print because Voltaire had revised the manuscript before he knew how harmless the Quakers and Unitarians were.

A less complicated explanation of all this could be that Voltaire simply overlooked the error in this couplet when preparing the finished product. However, the simple explanation does not correlate well with Voltaire's usually careful preparation of his texts.

Whatever the case, by 1730, the Lettres philosophiques were under way and Voltaire was very well acquainted with the nature of the Society of Friends and with the Unitarians, so the misleading lines were replaced. The new English example of Fanatisme, "la secte turbulente", obviously referred to the Independents who had executed King Charles I in 1649. However, the critic whose letter was

---

66

Supra, pp. 126-129.

67

Supra, pp. 117-120. O. R. Taylor (Henriade, D. 2, pp. 640-641) gives no literary sources for the lines in question.



printed in the June, 1731, issue of the Journal de Tre-  
voux, explained "la secte turbulent" as "les Quakers d'  
 Angleterre" and chastised Voltaire for placing them in "l'  
 Eglise". (Best. D410)<sup>68</sup> Not abashed at such a display of  
 misinformation, this critic went on to prove himself beyond  
 any doubt "un dévot de mauvaise foi et de très peu de sens"<sup>69</sup>  
 by trying to justify the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions  
 with which Voltaire had closed his passage on religious  
 discord.<sup>70</sup>

E. Summary: In England, then, Voltaire made his  
 first verified contact with "Socinians"--in the person of  
 Dr. Samuel Clarke--and with "Socinian" writings, those of  
 Locke, Newton, and perhaps Clarke. Successive editions of  
 the Henriade showed his improving understanding of Socinian-  
 ism, but not until the publication of the Lettres philoso-  
phiques did he give the Socinians a significant place in  
 his works. Voltaire left France in 1726 as a non-Christian  
 deist, who probably knew very little about the Socinians.  
 He returned from England in 1728 as a non-Christian deist,  
 who knew something more of the Socinians, but who--as his  
 comments on Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity showed--re-  
 jected their thought in so far as it was Christian and scriptural.

---

<sup>68</sup>  
Supra, p. 93.

<sup>69</sup>  
 Voltaire's phrase, Best. D341, supra, p. 134.

<sup>70</sup>  
Henriade, D.2, V, 107-110.

## SOCINIANS IN THE LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES

A. Introduction:1. The Writing of the Lettres Philosophiques:

"Les Lettres philosophiques sont la première bombe lancée<sup>1</sup> contre l'ancien régime." Lanson picked an ideal metaphor for this most complex and destructive book. On the surface all was bright and harmless, but every detail was chosen for its lethal impact. Everything reminded the French reader that in France things were different from England and, almost invariably, worse. "Tout était fait pour blesser dans ce livre."<sup>2</sup>

In the Lettres on the Quakers, he ridiculed the Jansenist convulsionaries by analogy; in showing how the English rationally adopted inoculation against smallpox, he put the French academics and clerics, who opposed this proven life-saving technique, in a bad light. He argued that the Académie Française wasted its time when compared to the Royal Society of England and that England treated her men

---

<sup>1</sup> Lanson, Voltaire, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, II, 40.

of intelligence and wit with the proper respect and honour while France ignored, or persecuted, hers. On all fronts Voltaire attacked those powers in France that stood in the way of social and intellectual progress. But his programme was far from being all destructive as he offered the English way of freedom and tolerance as a most desirable alternative.

Voltaire was not in a good position to publish such a dangerous book; he had seemed to go out of his way to defy official opinion since his return to France.<sup>3</sup> In 1731 he published an "underground" Histoire de Charles XII, after one edition had been confiscated; his poems, Mort de mlle Lecouvreur and the Epître à Uranie, circulated in manuscript and came to the attention of the literary inquisitors in 1731 and 1732, respectively. Finally, in January, 1733, the police seized his Epître dédicatoire to Zaïre; and in March of the same year, the Temple du goût, where Voltaire had considered the literary merits of French men of letters, was taken as slander and near treason by the public and the censors. He was really quite justified in worrying about the Lettres philosophiques.

---

<sup>3</sup>Conlon, Literary Career, pp. 34-41.

Therefore, Voltaire took extraordinary pains to see that the French language edition would not appear until the time was safe. The English version was published in London in August, 1733, and was generally well received; but that was no gauge of how the French authorities would react. In spite of all Voltaire's precautions, in April, 1734, an unauthorized version of the Lettres philosophiques went on sale in Paris.

When Voltaire, who was in Monjeu, Burgundy, at the time, found out that the Lettres philosophiques had exploded in Paris, he immediately wrote to the ministers Fleury and Maurepas and to some influential friends, denying all knowledge of the recent edition. He was innocent of any responsibility for this particular volume, but it was too late for a simple denial. Maurepas wrote the order for arrest on 3 May 1734: "Le roi a jugé à propos de faire arrêter, et conduire au château d'Auxonne, Arouet de Voltaire." (Best. D731) When his friends warned him of this order, Voltaire--remembering his months in the Bastille: "J'ai ne plus une aversion mortelle pour la prison; je suis malade; un air enfermé m'auront tué" (Best. D738, to d'Argental, c. 8 May 1734)--fled to Lorraine.

"LA COUR a arrêté et ordonné que ledit Livre  
[Lettres philosophiques par M. de . . .] sera laceré et brûlé

---

<sup>4</sup>  
Best. D721, D722, D723, D724--all 24 April--D725  
and D726, 25 April.

dans la Cour du Palais, au pied du grand Escalier d'icelui par l'Exécuteur de la haute Justice, comme scandeleux, contraire à la Religion, aux bonnes moeurs et au respect du<sup>5</sup> aux Puissances . . . ." So ordered the Parlement of Paris, a body dominated by Jansenists, on 10 June 1734; the order was carried out the same day. Or more accurately, it seemed to be carried out as the executioner tore and burned a copy of the "Révolutions d'Espagne . . . à la place de l'Exemplaire des Lettres philosophiques . . .",<sup>6</sup> the latter which he apparently retained for his private library. That the public executioner collected condemned books somehow seems appropriate for the ancien régime.

Much more serious than the Parlement's symbolic destruction of the Lettres philosophiques was their intention to conduct an investigation into the circumstances of their authorship and publication.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the ministry was willing to let the case die as it faded from the public's attention (Best. D790, Chauvelin to Joly de Fleury, 7 October 1734), Parlement would not consider giving up its right

---

<sup>5</sup>  
Best., Vol. D86, App. D31, p. 498.

<sup>6</sup>  
Lantoine, Lettres philosophiques, p. 120. The quoted passage was from a marginal note found in the Parlement's records on the order to burn the book.

<sup>7</sup>  
Best, Vol. D86, App. D31, p. 498.

to conduct a literary inquest. (Best. D791, Joly de Fleury to Chauvelin, 8 October 1734) Ten months after the order for his arrest was issued, it was cancelled. Voltaire could return to Paris, but the police warned him to stay out of the kind of business that had got him into trouble in the first place: "Plus vous avez de talent, Monsieur, plus vous devez sentir que vous avez et d'ennemis et de jaloux. Fermés leur donc la bouche pour jamais par une conduite digne d'un homme sage et d'un homme qui a déjà acquis un certain âge." (Best. D848, Hérault to Voltaire, 2 March 1735) However, for eight more years, Parlement retained the power to look into the Lettres-philosophiques affair<sup>8</sup> which could have had catastrophic effects on Voltaire. This was one good reason that he spent so little time in Paris in the following years.

When Voltaire heard of Parlement's order, he sat down with the Lettres philosophiques to determine what had likely been the barbs that had struck home. He wrote La Condamine on 22 June 1734: "On a cru qu'un français qui plaisantoit les quakers, qui prenoit le parti de Loke et que trouvoit de mauvais raisonnements dans Pascal étoit un

---

8

Conlon, Literary Career, p. 44.

athée." (Best. D759) In ridiculing the Quakers, he  
 ridiculed the Jansenists,<sup>9</sup> and in challenging Pascal's  
 apologetics, he took on the Jansenists' great saint and  
 defender. As to Locke, the scandal was over Voltaire's  
 discussion on the nature of the soul, where he maintained  
 that it transcended the power of the unaided human reason  
 to determine whether or not the soul were mortal or immor-  
 tal,<sup>10</sup> material or immaterial.

Adding the twenty-fifth Lettre philosophique, "Sur  
 les Pensees de M. Pascal", was an afterthought. Voltaire  
 first mentioned this project in a letter to Formont a year  
 and a half after he decided to finish the Lettres (Best.  
 D617, c. 1 June 1733), and it did rather have the appearance  
 of an afterthought. On the surface, remarks on Pascal's  
Pensées had no relation to a discussion of English thought  
 and customs: Ascoli described them as "si bizzarrement"  
 added to the whole.<sup>11</sup> But viewed functionally, as part of  
 the "bombe", the twenty-fifth Lettre fit very well into the

---

<sup>9</sup>  
Supra, pp. 139-140.

<sup>10</sup>  
Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 170-175  
 (thirteenth Lettre).

<sup>11</sup>  
 Ascoli, "Voltaire", IV, 285.

mechanism; it added more than a few pounds of powder to  
<sup>12</sup>  
 the explosive charge aimed at orthodoxy.

Bombs, especially of the sort thrown at the ancien régime, could easily blow up in the face of the revolutionary. Voltaire knew this too well and from the very beginning was apprehensive about the extra charge, the anti-Pascal bonus: "Au reste, je m'y prendrai avec précaution, et je ne critiquerai que les endroits qui ne seront point tellement liés avec notre sainte religion qu'on ne puisse déchirer la peau de Pascal sans faire saigner le christianisme." (Best. D617).

It was imprudent for Voltaire to challenge Pascal, for not only was he the Jansenist champion, Pascal was, as Lanson said, "le seul apologiste de la religion révélée qui comptât dans la littérature française et pour le grand public."<sup>13</sup> But this made the target too appealing, and Voltaire could not resist: "Il y a déjà longtemps que j'ai envie de combattre ce géant." (Best. D617) Further, he was convinced that he would win:

---

<sup>12</sup>  
 Barling ("Art", pp. 50, 68-69) discussed the unity of the Lettres philosophiques and the "Remarques". He saw them as a coordinated campaign against the traditional French-Christian view of life and society.

<sup>13</sup>  
 Lanson, Voltaire, p. 49.



Je ne crois pas que le petit nombre de vrais philosophes qui, après tout, font seuls à la longue la réputation des ouvrages, me reprochent beaucoup d'avoir contredit Pascal. Ils verront au contraire combien je l'ai ménagé; et les gens circonspects me sauront bon gré d'avoir passé sous silence le chapitre des miracles et celui des prophéties, deux chapitres que demontrent bien à quel point de faiblesse les plus grands génies peuvent arriver quand la superstition a corrompu leur jugement. Quelle belle lumière que Pascal, éclipsée par l'obscurité des choses qu'il avait embrassées!<sup>14</sup>

Thus his comments on Pascal were perhaps the most important part of his assault on the old order, as they went to the heart of the system--Christianity.

In the course of discussing Pascal's metaphorical description of human existence, Voltaire revealed his anti-Nicene attitude towards the doctrine of the Trinity. Pascal had described man as abandoned on a terrible desert island with no idea of where he was or why he was there, and Voltaire commented: "Quel est l'homme sage qui sera prêt à se pendre, parce qu'il ne sçait pas comme on voit Dieu face à face, et que sa raison ne peut débrouiller le mistere de la Trinité? il faudroit autant se désespérer de n'avoir pas quatre pieds et deux ailes."<sup>14a</sup>

---

14

Best., D637, 25 July 1733, to Formont. See also Best., D626, 1 July 1733, to Cideville, where Voltaire wrote, "Le Projet est hardie, mais ce misantrophe chrétien, tout sublime qu'il est, n'est pour moi qu'un homme comme un autre quand il a tort et je croi qu'il a tort très souvent."

14a

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, II, 193, Remark VI.

Similarly, in the first draft of the Lettre on Locke, which he thought was too dangerous to publish until 1738, he said about that doctrine: "le mistere de la Trinité et celui de l'Eucharistie ont beau être contraires aux démonstrations connues . . . les objets de la raison et de la foi sont de differénte nature."<sup>15</sup>

B. The Socinians:

1. The Rehabilitation of Heresy: Sometime during his English stay, Voltaire wrote in his notebook this little paragraph:

Nature, purity, perspicuity, simplicity never walk in the clouds. They are obvious to all capacities and where they are not evident, they don't exist. Ignorant divines supported by more ignorant men are the founders of all religions, men of wit, founders of heresies, men of understanding laugh at both.<sup>16</sup>

These thoughts were fully developed in the Lettres philosophiques.<sup>17</sup> In the four Lettres on the Quakers, he gave the historical account of the founding of a religion--by a very ignorant divine--but also spoke of Quaker simplicity and purity with genuine admiration. However, it was the Socinians, the most notorious heretics of all, who furnished

---

<sup>15</sup>

Ibid., I, 201.

<sup>16</sup>

Notebooks, p. 62, "Small Leningrad Notebook".

<sup>17</sup>

Barber, "Voltaire", is an excellent account of Voltaire's relations with and writings on the Quakers.

Voltaire the best examples to set up against orthodoxy. If it were too dangerous to speak of the deists directly, he could insinuate something of the spirit of their rational theology into his book by discussing England's unitarians.

Furthermore, there was a direct link between Socinian thought and deism. Locke's general principles that received doctrines and the claims of scripture to be divine revelation must pass the test of reason were also Socinian.<sup>18</sup> While the Socinians and Locke judged that many of the traditional beliefs failed the test, they did not challenge the authenticity of the Bible as God's revelation. Nonetheless, if the Nicene Trinity and the usual theories of atonement could be rejected because they were incomprehensible, then why not the incarnation, and the miracles as well? In fact, was the idea that the creator of the universe revealed his will only to an insignificant, rather barbarous nation in the ancient Near East reasonable? That is to say, rational exegesis, if carried to its logical end, could destroy all Christian mystery and the idea of revelation itself.<sup>19</sup>

Toland, in his Christianity not Mysterious (1696), drew the logical conclusions of Locke's method. Toland's work, the first blow in the deist controversy, appeared only a year after Locke's The Reasonableness of Christianity, and Toland claimed to be Locke's disciple. Locke repudiated

---

18

Supra, p. 45.

19

Supra, pp. 42-43.

Toland and his deism which were so dangerous to Locke's claim to a reverent biblicism; but Toland had, in fact, been a faithful disciple of the Locke's critical-<sup>20</sup> philosophical thought. Voltaire later took on the same robes of discipleship and no doubt would have been even less welcome to Locke than Toland. Thus Stephen's formulation: "Locke, the Unitarians, Toland form a genuine series, in which Christianity is being gradually transmuted<sup>21</sup> by larger infusions of rationalism", could be extended to Voltaire and the other philosophers, who eliminated all Chris-<sup>22</sup> tianity from their rational religion. No wonder, then, that Voltaire used the Socinians to speak for him in the<sup>23</sup> Lettres philosophiques.

At the beginning of the twelfth Lettre, "Sur le chancelier Bacon", he answered the question, "quel étoit le plus grand homme?" with "c'étoit sans contredit Isaac<sup>24</sup> Newton." Developing the same thought, he continued, "Puis

---

20

Abbey and Overton, Church, pp. 104-105; Stephen, History, pp. 78-100.

21

Stephen, History, p. 94.

22

However, the likelihood that Locke was far less Christian than the surface of his writings suggests should be kept in mind.

23

The French philosophes, of course, made ample use of Toland and the other English deists. (Torrey, Deists, passim.) See also, Gay, Enlightenment, chapter 6.1. Here I am using "Socinian" to refer to those persons so named by Voltaire in the seventh Lettre: that is, Locke, Newton, Clarke, and Le Clerc.

24

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 152.

donc que vous exigez que je vous parle des hommes célèbres qu'a porté l'Angleterre, je commencerai par les Bacons, les Lockes, les Newtons, etc."<sup>25</sup> This was high praise, indeed, for two Socinians, and the Lettre on Locke (the thirteenth) and those on Newton (fourteen through seventeen) were also quite flattering. Newton and Locke again, with Clarke and Le Clerc added, appeared in the Lettre on the Socinians as "les plus grands Philosophes et les meilleures plumes de leur tems."<sup>26</sup>

Beside bestowing highest honours to the individual Socinians, Voltaire's tone was subdued and respectful throughout the Lettre on the Socinians, in striking contrast to his mocking the conventional English churches. And, of course, the praise he gave to Quaker virtue was offset by his ridiculing their bizarre practices so that the Socinians were the only group he praised without reservation.

Voltaire's contemporaries--for example, the reviewer of the Lettres philosophiques for the Journal littéraire--noted his generous attitude towards heretics:

Dire de ces lettres qu'elles abondent en pensées hardies, exprimées vivement et heureusement . . . . On juge d'abord qu'entretenant son Ami des Quakers et des Ariens, il n'aura pas manqué de les traiter favorablement. Qu'Anglicans et Presbyteriens n'auront pas aussi aisément trouvé grace devant ses yeux.

---

25

Ibid., I, 152-153.

26

Ibid., I, 80.

Que Locke et Clarke doivent lui avoir fait abandonner la Philosophie et la Théologie des Anciens.<sup>27</sup>

This article went on to point out how Voltaire "n'aura laissé échapper aucune occasion de s'égarer par des traits ingénieux et malins contre les usages, ou les abus qui l'auront choqué en France, soit dans la Religion, ou dans le Gouvernement, ou dans la manière de penser."<sup>28</sup>

While the Journal littéraire was content to mention Voltaire's iconoclasm, the Present State of the Republick of Letters, in reviewing Théarriot's edition, became incensed. In discussing the close of the Lettre on Locke where Voltaire affirmed that theologians rather than philosophers were the source of civil disorder,<sup>29</sup> the English reviewer wrote:

Is this one of those Solid Reflections promised by the Editor in his Preface? Or has it not a manifest tendency to destroy all Right in the Church to judge Matters of Faith? By this admirable way of reasoning, not Arius, but the whole Church assembled in a general Council, were responsible for all the Confusion and Violence which ensued; and the orthodox Bishops, who oppose pernicious Novelties, have no other View but that of appearing at the Head of a Party.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> "Lettres Anglois", JL, tome 22, seconde partie (1735), p. 348.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>29</sup> Supra, p. 125.

<sup>30</sup> "English Letters", PSRL, XII (October, 1733), 276.

He was not bad at all at reading between the lines. Earlier he had written of Voltaire's handling of the Socinians, "Their Crime does not here seem represented so great, as their Antagonists affirm it to be."<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, modern commentators have noted this tendency in the Lettres philosophiques. Barling concluded, "Any tenderness, any respect for religious sentiments, are, it should be noted, reserved for the Quakers and the Socinians";<sup>32</sup> and Pomeau emphasized the same point.<sup>33</sup> However, neither the eighteenth-century nor the twentieth-century scholars have shown just what a radical break with earlier French thought and literature Voltaire's pro-Socinian stance entailed.

Recall that "socinien" had come to be synonymous with heretic,<sup>34</sup> and we know how the French dealt with heretics. Other than Le Clerc, who always defended Socinians against threats of persecution and who sometimes offered embarrassed, tortuous defences of selected aspects of their thought, Voltaire was the first writer in French (that I know about) who presented the Socinians in a good light, even as "les plus grands Philosophes et les meilleurs plumes

---

<sup>31</sup>

Ibid., p. 271

<sup>32</sup>

Barling, "Art", p. 50.

<sup>33</sup>

Pomeau, Religion, pp. 133-140.

<sup>34</sup>

Supra, pp. 74-79.

de leur tems."

Hume, much later, in The Natural History of Religions (1757), took up the same theme of the rehabilitation of heresy:

Though the reproach of heresy may, for some time, be bandied about among the disputants, it always rests at last on the side of reason. Any one, it is pretended, that has but learning enough of this kind to know the definition of ARIAN, PELAGIAN, ERASTIAN, SOCINIAN, SABELLIAN, EUTYCHIAN, NESTORIAN, MONOTHELITE, etc. not to mention PROTESTANT, whose fate is yet uncertain, will be convinced of the truth of this observation.<sup>35</sup>

Although Hume followed this statement with, "It is thus a system becomes more absurd in the end, merely from its being reasonable and philosophical in the beginning",<sup>36</sup> the irony of this orthodox disclaimer proved his agreement with Voltaire's notebook entry on heresy.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, there could have been no direct influence from Voltaire's notebook to Hume, so that Hume's equation of heresy with rational religion and his use of "Arian" and "Socinian" to illustrate the point was most interesting. Praising heretics, showing their philosophical soundness was one of the tactics that philosophes chose to harass the Christian establishment, and the Socinians offered themselves as an ideal example.<sup>38</sup> One of the reasons,

---

<sup>35</sup>  
Hume, On Religion, p. 71

<sup>36</sup>  
Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>37</sup>  
Supra, p. 147.

<sup>38</sup>  
The Quakers too had tendencies towards rational theology; see Pomeau, Religion, pp. 137-138.



then, that Voltaire lauded the Socinians was as a ploy in his battle against orthodoxy.

The other reason was, simply, that he was genuinely attracted to the person of Clarke and to Socinian thought. We have already shown how the Lettres philosophiques demonstrated this high regard, and the correspondence of the 1730's was full of compliments for Newton,<sup>39</sup> Locke, and Clarke. Another solid proof of the sincerity of his esteem was Voltaire's heavy reliance on these Socinian thinkers in his own metaphysical writings of the two decades following his English visit.<sup>40</sup>

Voltaire's letter of this period to Jacob Vernet, the Genevois Calvinist, following their initial meeting in Paris, offered a view from another angle of Voltaire's thought about the heretics:

Mais en fait de religion, nous avons, je crois, vous et moi, de la tolérance, parce qu'on ne ramène jamais les hommes sur ce point: je passe tout aux hommes, porvu qu'ils ne soient pas persécuteurs; j'aimerais Calvin, s'il n'avait pas fait brûler Servet; je serais serviteur du concile de Constance, sans les fagots de Jan Huss. (Best. D653, 14 September 1733)<sup>41</sup>

---

39

Here is one example from the scores possible: "J'ai relu le raisonneur Clarke, Mallebranche et Locke. Plus je les relis, plus je me confirme dans l'opinion où j'étais que Clarke est le meilleur sophiste que ait jamais été, Mallebranche le romancier le plus subtil, et Locke l'homme plus sage." Best. D646, c. 15 August 1733, to Formont.

40

Infra, chapter 6.

41

Vernet will be very important in the following chapters on Geneva.

Here was Voltaire's first reference to the antitrinitarian martyr, Servetus, and another variation on the major Voltairian theme of tolerance in religion. The sentiment expressed here was no doubt authentic; Voltaire's hatred of the crimes committed in Christ's name was a major reason behind his refusal of the Christian label. Christendom, as such diverse persons as Voltaire and Kierkegaard saw, offered from its own history the best arguments against one's considering himself a Christian.

2. Locke and Newton: Both Locke and Newton were eager to avoid theological controversy so were most circumspect in what they published on religion. Neither made any public confession of Socinianism or Unitarianism; yet Voltaire unequivocally identified them as antitrinitarians in the seventh Lettre philosophique.<sup>42</sup> The Bibliothèque Britannique wondered about this: "On est au reste un peu surpris que Newton and Locke, qui n'ont rien publié en faveur du nouvel Arianisme, se trouvent ici aux côtés du

---

42

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 79-80. Incidentally, once again in The Natural History of Religion, Hume paralleled Voltaire in his treatment of Socinianism. The same great men appeared as the patron saints of heresy: "I maintain, that NEWTON, LOCKE, CLARK, etc. being Arians or Socinians, were very sincere in the creed they professed." (Hume, Religion, p. 84, n. 21.

43

Docteur Clark, comme des Chefs de secte." Perhaps  
 Voltaire judged Locke a Socinian from Locke's general  
 rational approach to religion or from The Reasonableness  
of Christianity. Or, perhaps, he reported some theological  
 gossip he heard in England or repeated Bayle's judgment.<sup>44</sup>

Newton wrote an enormous mass of theology, prob-  
 ably more than 1,300,000 words. After his death, his liter-  
 ary executor suppressed Newton's religious writings, de-  
 claring them "not fit to be printed."<sup>45</sup> They remained an  
 embarrassment to his family and to English churchmen so  
 were not permitted to be published until 1950.<sup>46</sup> In fact,  
 his theological position was most unconventional; he accepted  
 the Bible literally as divinely inspired, and in the  
 Socinian fashion allowed reason as the only authority in its  
 interpretation. A near-fanatical hatred for Athanasius,  
 the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Roman Church underlay  
 much of his writing, and he denied divinity to Jesus. Vol-  
 taire's first words on Newton as a Unitarian were, in a way,

---

<sup>43</sup>  
 "Lettres Anglois", BB, tome second, première  
 partie (October-December, 1733, p. 34).

<sup>44</sup>  
Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 87, n. 17.

<sup>45</sup>  
 McLachlan, Manuscripts, p. 2. This discussion of  
 Newton's theology was drawn from McLachlan's introduction  
 (ibid., pp. 1-26) and from the manuscripts themselves.  
 See also, Manuel, Portrait, Chapter 17.

<sup>46</sup>  
 In McLachlan's edition where he printed only a  
 small fragment of the total; 1934 saw their first accurate  
 description (McLachlan, Manuscripts, p. 7).

true. "Le grand Monsieur Newton faisoit à cette opinion l'honneur de la favoriser, ce Philosophe pensoit que les Unitaires raisonnoient plus géométriquement que nous."<sup>47</sup>  
 Given the Bible, then Newton proceeded "geometrically" to deduce an antitrinitarian system.

When Voltaire was preparing the Lettres philosophiques, only two Newtonian religious works had been published, both posthumously, Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms (1727) and Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John (1733).<sup>48</sup> Neither manifested Newton's unitarian christology, although both were examples of Socinian exegesis. Voltaire, then, probably got his surprisingly accurate information about Newton's beliefs from his talks with Dr. Clarke.

Voltaire ignored Observations upon the Prophecies in the Lettres philosophiques although he blasted it thirty years later: "Comment Newton, le plus grand des hommes, a-t-il pu commenter l'Apocalypse. . . . Je crois voir des aigles qui, s'étant élançés dans la nue, vont se reposer sur un fumier."<sup>49</sup> He did, however, devote half of Lettre seventeen

---

<sup>47</sup>

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 79.

<sup>48</sup>

McLachlan, Manuscripts, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup>

M. XX, 230, from Nouveaux Mélanges (1765). But note that Newton was still the "plus grand des hommes".

to Newton's work on chronology, where he used Newton's general method rather than explicated Newton's actual application of it.<sup>50</sup> Since Newton tried to fit all human history into what was then considered the scriptural framework with the creation in 4004 b.c., Voltaire had an invitation to amuse himself and his readers with his consummate satire. However, he chose instead to present a view of reason picking away at the edges of the commonplace system of revelation, which moderate tactic allowed him, prudently and effectively, to show Socinian style religious thought in practice.

Lanson's "bombe" was here, too. Under the smooth surface of the subject of chronology, lay a deadly threat to the orthodox religio-political structure. For example, many clandestine philosophes, as inverted fundamentalists, thought that if the Bible could be shown false in only one historical detail, then the whole Christian structure would tremble.<sup>51</sup> The more subtle heterodox thinkers saw Biblical<sup>52</sup> chronology as one place where the wall could be breached;

---

<sup>50</sup>  
Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, II, 55-61, and 63, n. 43 ("Sur l'infini et sur la cronologie").

<sup>51</sup>  
Wade, Clandestine, pp. 244-253 and 271-272.

<sup>52</sup>  
Hazard, European Mind, pp. 40-51; Brumfitt, D.59, p. 33; Manuel, Portrait, Chapter 16.

Voltaire recruited Newton's considerable force to help open  
<sup>53</sup>  
 the breach.

C. The Seventh Lettre philosophique, "Sur les Sociniens, ou Ariens, ou Anti-Trinitaires":

1. History of Socinianism: Voltaire hardly treated Socinian doctrine at all in this letter. He mentioned that the English "Socinians" rejected the Athanasian formula of the Trinity and presented an anecdote to illustrate their belief that "le Pere est plus grand que le Fils."<sup>54</sup> There were, however, a few historical remarks about the antecedents of the English anti-Nicene Christians. First was "Quoiqu'il en soit, le parti d'Arius commence à revivre en Angleterre aussi bien qu'en Holland et en Pologne."<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, Voltaire made two errors in this brief statement; the Polish Socinians had been perfectly exterminated in 1660,<sup>56</sup> and by 1733 there were no Socinians in the Netherlands.<sup>57</sup>

Lanson's note merely canonized Voltaire's mistakes: "Voltaire confond le mouvement antitrinitaire avec le socinianisme que

---

53

Barling missed the point: "One might well wonder what interest this largely forgotten aspect of his work [Newton's chronology] could have held for Voltaire, but it must be remembered that the latter appears to have been fascinated by all the intellectual activities of the English man." (Barling, "Art", p. 31.) Barling's guess was an insult to Voltaire's fine critical sense and was also strangely unaware of the concerns of the era.

<sup>54</sup> Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 78.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., I, 79. He nowhere mentioned the Transylvanian Unitarians.

<sup>56</sup> Supra, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> Supra, pp. 43 and 95.

depuis longtemps s'était répandu en Pologne et en Hollande:  
c'est pourquoi il associe ces deux pays à l'Angleterre."<sup>58</sup>

The second historical note began, "Vous voyez  
quelles révolutions arrivent dans les opinions comme dans  
les Empires. Le parti d'Arius, après trois cens ans de  
triomphe et douze siècles d'oubli, renaît enfin de sa cen-  
dre."<sup>59</sup> Voltaire's intention here, as in the earlier historical  
comment, was transparent enough; he wished to lend some  
weight of tradition to the antitrinitarian cause as part  
of his programme to legitimize heresy. In this case, his  
facts were basically correct even though "triomphe" was  
too optimistic a term.

Voltaire did not always let his basic sympathy with  
the English "Socinians" interfere with his historical sense,  
as the continuation of the second observation showed:

mais il prend très-mal son tems de reparoitre  
dans un âge où le monde est rassasié de dis-  
putes et des Sectes; celle-ci est encore trop  
petite pour obtenir la liberté des Assemblées  
publiques, elle l'obtiendra sans doute, si elle  
devient plus nombreuse; mais on est si tiède à  
present sur toute cela, qu'il n'y a plus guère  
de fortune à faire pour une Religion nouvelle  
ou renouvelée.<sup>60</sup>

---

58

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 82, n. 5. Nave's  
edition is mute on this topic. F. A. Taylor's has a page-and-  
a-half note on antitrinitarian history (pp. 151-152), but does  
not mention that Socinianism was dead in Poland and the Nether-  
lands long before Voltaire wrote the Lettres philosophiques.

59

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 80. See Lanson's  
note 13 (ibid., I, 86).

60

Ibid., I, 80.

Since a major part of the strategy employed in the Lettres philosophiques involved setting English toleration as a model for France, Voltaire's glossing over of the British laws which specifically exempted antitrinitarians from toleration<sup>61</sup> was understandable.

It was true that in the time Voltaire visited England religious feelings were generally at a low level; this was especially true in the class that Voltaire frequented. Abbey and Overton agreed with Voltaire's reasons for the failure of the antitrinitarians to flourish: "it was quite as much owing to the spiritual torpor which overtook the Church and nation . . . as to the strength of conviction,<sup>62</sup> that the Trinitarian question was not further agitated."

Moreover, Voltaire's pessimism about the prospects of a unitarian church--"Messieurs Newton, Clarck, Locke, le Clerc, etc., les plus grands Philosophes et les meilleurs plumes de leur tems, aient pû à peine venir à bout d'établir un petit troupeau qui même diminue tous les jours"--fit in well with his theory that religious movements began with fanaticism and fed on ignorance. Cool-headed philosophes

---

61

Wilbur, Unitarianism, II, p. 235.

62

Abbey and Overton, Church, p. 216; supra, p. 129.



like Locke and Newton were not the sort of men who founded sects. The letter on Locke emphasized this point: "jamais les Philosophes ne feront une Secte de Religion. Pourquoi? C'est qu'ils n'écrivent point pour le peuple, et qu'ils sont sans entousiasme."<sup>64</sup>

Voltaire's concluding thought on the Quakers,<sup>65</sup> a remarkable attempt to link religious growth with socio-economic facts which preshadowed modern sociology of religion, would also apply to the Socinians. Here he argued that the prosperity of the older Quakers led to a decline in the religious fervour of the younger generation; that is, wealth engendered worldliness. So English prosperity, born of tolerance, would not present a fertile ground for new sectarianism.

What could have been Voltaire's sources for Socinian history in this seventh Lettre philosophique? Lanson shows some general similarities between Voltaire's dismissal of the possibility for popular success for Socinianism to Bayle's Dictionnaire article, "Socin".<sup>66</sup> They both thought that Socinianism was too intellectual for the common man. Further, Lanson notes that Voltaire's information that Arianism flourished in the first three hundred years of

---

<sup>64</sup>

Ibid., I, 175.

<sup>65</sup>

Ibid., I, 50-51 (fourth Lettre).

<sup>66</sup>

Ibid., I, 86, n. 14; supra, p. 41.

Christian history could have come from Bayle's article, "Arius",<sup>67</sup> however there is no great verbal similarity between Bayle's article and Voltaire's Lettre.

Mason, in his book, Pierre Bayle and Voltaire, argues that Voltaire most likely borrowed heavily from the "Socin" article for several topics in the Dictionnaire philosophique (1760's and 1770's) and demonstrates with parallel passages that Voltaire's remarks appended to the Lettres philosophiques<sup>68</sup> on Pascal's "pari" were taken from Bayle. However, all of the above does not constitute a proof that Voltaire used Bayle for the "Lettre sur les Socinians".

Of the sources available to Voltaire early in the eighteenth century reviewed in the first chapters of the present study, Maimbourg's Histoire de l'Arianisme seems the closest to the seventh Lettre philosophique. Maimbourg's abrupt transition from the ancient heretics to the Reformation heretics was the following:

Ainsi l'Arianisme . . . fut enfin tout-à-fait éteint vers l'an six cens soixante, ayant régné . . . environ trois cens quarante ans . . . . [J]usqu'à ce qu'après un intervalle de près de neuf cens ans, il fut renouvelé le siecle passé par les nouveaux Ariens, ou les Trithéites, et Antitrinitaires, qui se sont enfin confondus avec les Déistes, et les Sociniens de nostre siecle. (p. 450)<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup>

Ibid., I, 86, n. 13.

<sup>68</sup>

Mason, Bayle and Voltaire, pp. 34 and 42, and 61-62, respectively.

<sup>69</sup>

See also, supra, p. 6. Morery's Dictionnaire article was plagiarized from Maimbourg (supra, p. 6.)

Voltaire's treatment of the same phenomenon was somewhat similar in structure: "Le Parti d'Arius, après trois cens ans de triomphe et douze siècles d'oubli, renaît enfin de sa cendre."<sup>70</sup>

This similarity was not close enough to argue conclusively the dependence of this Lettre philosophique on Maimbourg or his copier Moréry. In Voltaire's later writings on the Socinians, Maimbourg was the only writer he ever cited, and then only once.<sup>71</sup>

Bayle and Maimbourg, then, were the most likely sources for this Lettre; but their possible influence was general and diffused. Perhaps Voltaire remembered the gist of Bayle's denigration of the popular fear of a Socinian renaissance and Maimbourg's general approach to the chronology of the movement from earlier reading when he sat down to write the Lettre sur les sociniens. Certainly, had Voltaire followed any of the available sources closely, he would not have made the historical blunders he did.<sup>72</sup> They were all clear on the eradication of the Polish Socinians and the survival of the Transylvanian Unitarians.

---

70

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, p. 80.

71

Essai sur les moeurs, II, p. 743 (*infra*, p.241).

72

Harcourt Brown argues that several of the Lettres philosophiques, including the Lettre on the Socinians, were written by Voltaire in English for the English edition which preceded the French ("Composition", pp. 23-24 and 33). If this is true, it might help explain the difficulty in finding precise sources for the seventh Lettre.

As Naves said, "Quant aux Sociniens, ils semble bien que Voltaire les ait décrits beaucoup moins par observation directe que par imagination zélée."<sup>73</sup> And imagination must have supplanted documentary sources, an uncharacteristic carelessness on Voltaire's part.

2. Terminology: "Sur les Sociniens, ou Ariens, ou Anti-Trinitaires" was the title Voltaire gave the seventh Lettre philosophique, and in the body of the Lettre he used these three terms interchangeably and added "Unitaire" as a fourth synonym. Pomeau, Lanson, and F. A. Taylor scored Voltaire for confusing these historically separate and doctrinally distinct sects.<sup>74</sup> Naves commented that:

En confondant Ariens . . . , Sociniens . . . , et Anti-Trinitaires ou Unitaires anglais, Voltaire simplifie, et il ne retient que leur refus commun du dogme de la Trinité. Son intention est évident: il veut montrer l'ancienneté de cette école rationaliste et son importance par la diversité de ses adhérents.<sup>75</sup>

While I agree with Naves's assessment of Voltaire's motives for writing the seventh Lettre, I would argue with him and with Pomeau, Lanson, and F. A. Taylor about Voltaire's "confusion" in terminology.

---

73

Lettres philosophiques, Naves, pp. vi-vii.

74

Pomeau, Religion, p. 139: "il confond les uns et les autres"; Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 81, n. 2; Lettres philosophiques, F. A. Taylor, p. 152, n. 1.

75

Lettres philosophiques, Naves, p. 196, n. 49.

Rather than being confused, Voltaire was simply following accepted ordinary usage--in both French and English--which did not retain the subtle and sometimes nearly incomprehensible shades of difference among the four terms.<sup>76</sup> Since Voltaire was writing in a light mode for the general public, his choice to stick to the simplest use of technical terms was undoubtedly the wisest he could have made. Even so, in the first sentence of the essay, he did offer his readers a hint of suppressed complexities: "Il y a ici une petite secte composée d'Eclésiastiques et de quelques Séculiers très-sçavans qui ne prennent ni le nom d'Ariens ni de Sociniens."<sup>77</sup> Further, there were definite historical connections between continental Socinians and English antitrinitarians, and the English looked back to the Arian dispute in the ancient Church for support.

Yet there was a peculiar use of words in the "Letter on the Socinians". The first sentence began, "Il y a ici une petite secte;"<sup>78</sup> thus, clearly he gave the English unitarians the status of a sect. Later in his commentary

---

76

See above, Chapter II.

77

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 78. One wonders how aware of these complexities was Voltaire himself in light of the historical errors in his discussion of the Socinians.

78

My italics.

on the lack of zeal he found in England for religious innovation, Voltaire called, "Le Parti d'Arius . . . un petit troupeau"<sup>79</sup> which was unable to establish itself at that time as "il prend très-mal son tems de reparoître dans un âge où le monde est rassasié de disputes et de Sectes."<sup>80</sup> Thus, Voltaire, in this case, implied that the unitarians were not a sect. And he regretted that while in an earlier age literary barbarians "aient fondé des Sectes qui partagent l'Europe",<sup>81, 82</sup> in the eighteenth century, the greatest philosophers and best writers could only gather "un petit troupeau".<sup>83</sup> There was, obviously, an inconsistency in Voltaire's use of the word "secte"--in the sense of Littré's first meaning, "Ensemble<sup>84</sup> des personnes que font profession d'une même doctrine". He vacillated between calling the English unitarians a "secte" and declaring that they were unable to organize such a "secte".

Thieriot, in carrying out his duties as editor of the English edition of the Lettres philosophiques, noted

---

79

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 80.

80

Supra, p. 160; my italics.

81

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 80.

82

My italics.

83

Supra, p. 161.

84

Littré, Dictionnaire, IV, 1874.

Voltaire's strange use of "secte". Unfortunately, Theriot's letter was lost, but we can infer his objections from Voltaire's reply: "Vous me dites que le docteur Clarke n'a pas été soupçonné de vouloir faire une nouvelle secte. Il en a été convaincu, et la secte subsiste, quoique le troupeau soit petit. Le docteur Clarke ne chantait jamais le Credo d'Athanase." (Best. D596, April 1733). Voltaire was wrong; Clarke was never convicted of anything at all, and there never was an ensemble of believers or a common doctrine to confess. In fact, Clarke was not even charged with trying to establish a new sect; he was extremely reluctant to disrupt Church unity. Rather they accused him of the heresy of Arianism, which accusation he honestly refuted.

85

Infra, n. 87. But Besterman's commentary to letter D596 takes up Voltaire's part against Theriot. "Voltaire was quite right, since Samuel Clarke was condemned by Convocation and had trouble in clearing himself; by 'la secte subsiste' Voltaire meant that there remained a few right-thinking people."

86

Stephen, History, I, 109 and Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, 87, n. 19.

87

Abbey and Overton; Church, pp. 213-214; Colligan, Arian Movement, pp. 34-39; Wilbur, Unitarianism, II, 239-242. That is not to say that Clarke was orthodox in his views on the Trinity, but his position was substantially different from Arius's.

Neither did Voltaire's calling the English anti-trinitarians a "secte" correspond with the second meaning as given by Littré: "Particulièrement. Ensemble de ceux<sup>88</sup> qui suivent une opinion accusé d'hérésie ou d'erreur."

There was neither an ensemble nor one opinion. Littré, indeed, quoted the passage where Voltaire complained that Newton, Locke, Clarke, and Le Clerc were able only to draw a few followers unlike earlier fanatics who had easily founded sects as the primary historical illustration for<sup>89</sup> the second meaning of "secte".

Therefore, when, at the beginning of the seventh Lettre, Voltaire called the few English anti-Nicene thinkers a "secte", his terminology was at variance with ordinary usage. Besterman's suggestion that Voltaire only meant<sup>90</sup> "that there remained a few right-thinking people" by "la secte subsist", if correct, would show that Voltaire was in error, for a "few right-thinking people" do not constitute a sect. At any rate, the terminology at the beginning of the seventh Lettre contradicted that at the end. For once, Thieriot was right.

---

88

Littré, Dictionnaire, IV, 1874.

89

Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, p. 80; supra, pp. 160 and 167.

90

Supra, n. 85.



Voltaire, in the other Lettres philosophiques, furnished more evidence against himself. For example, there was the statement from the Lettre on Locke quoted earlier:<sup>91</sup> "jamais les Philosophes ne feront une Secte de Religion." In the first six letters on the Quakers (four), Anglicans,<sup>92</sup> and Presbyterians, he used "Secte" fourteen times and "Sectaire"<sup>93</sup> once, in all cases referring to an established religious organization with well-defined beliefs or to a member of such an organization. One example was "la Secte Episcopale et la Presbiterienne."<sup>94</sup> All these cases were in conflict with the use of "Secte" in the first sentence of the seventh Lettre to describe the English "Socinians". Finally, remember that in the 1730 edition of the Henriade, Voltaire suppressed his earlier characterization of the "Unitaires" as "Sectaires".<sup>95</sup>

The tension between Voltaire's terminology at the beginning of this letter and that in its body is like the

---

<sup>91</sup> Lettres philosophiques, Lanson, I, p. 175; supra, p. 162.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., I, 5, 32, 34 (three times), 45, 49 (twice), 50, 61 (twice), 62, 72, 74.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., I, 49.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., I, 74 ("Sur les Presbiteriens"). This Lettre had its own peculiar use of words: "Prêtre" for Calvinist minister. In his quarrel with the Genevois ministers (infra ch. IX), "prêtre" became a term of abuse for them.

<sup>95</sup> Supra, pp. 135-137.

conflict shown in his treatment of Socinian history. He was uncomfortably poised between his desire to present the unitarian heretics as a respectable group and the reality that they were scattered, disorganized, and outside the law. Voltaire's resolution of the problem, in both cases was not very successful.

While Voltaire was definitely in error when he wrote Thiériot that Clarke had been convicted of sectarianism and that a Socinian sect still existed in England, he might well have found out from his personal contacts that Clarke wanted to see a non-Athanasian, or anti-trinitarian, reform within the church. Clarke prepared a version of the Book of Common Prayer which deleted all references to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity among other changes. In Clarke's lifetime, it was never used (in a church, at least), but it is highly unlikely that anyone would have developed a liturgy merely as a theological exercise or for personal use--a liturgy for one man would be senseless.

Much later, on 17 April 1774, when Theophilus Lindsey conducted the first Unitarian service in England, he used<sup>96</sup> Dr. Clarke's Prayer Book, modified again--but slightly.

---

96

Wilbur, Unitarianism, II, 284-285.

From there it passed to James Freeman, who on 19 June 1785, convinced the proprietors of King's Chapel, Boston, to adopt a minor revision of Lindsey's revision of Clarke's revision of the Book of Common Prayer, thus establishing the first Unitarian church in America. 97

Locke, though he never left the Anglican confession, at one time (1688) considered in his secret notebooks, which he wrote in code, establishing a new sect, the "Society of Pacific Christians". In practice and doctrine it was to have been Quaker simple and Socinian rationalist. However, nothing ever came of this idea. Voltaire could not have known of it as Locke's notebooks remained locked away in a writing desk until recently in this century. 98

Clarke's friend Whiston 99 may have had some intention of founding a new communion. 100 Might Voltaire have heard some hint of these feeble attempts and inferred a sectarian conspiracy?

D. 1734: Voltaire a Socinian?: Pomeau, in discussing the Lettre philosophique on the Socinians, made a

---

97

Wright, Beginnings, pp. 210-212.

98

Cranston, Locke, p. 297.

99

Wilbur, Unitarianism, II, pp. 237-240 and passim.

100

Abbey and Overton, Church, pp. 202-205.

startling statement: "Pour sa part, Voltaire est certaine-  
 101 ment un 'unitaire'." He supported this claim with the  
 102 confession of faith Voltaire made to the Quaker Higginson,  
 103 the story about the communion wafer, and the following  
 argument:

Les graves partisans du nouvel arianisme obéissent  
 aux exigences de leur raison, quand ils préfèrent  
 le Dieu des philosophes, logiquement un, à la Trin-  
 ité chrétienne. C'est cet acheminement des théo-  
 logiens anglais les plus éclairés vers le déisme  
 que Voltaire indique dans sa dernière Lettre sur la  
 religion en Angleterre.<sup>104</sup>

To review, Voltaire's confession to Higginson was that he  
 was a deist, and there was considerable difference between a  
 libertine French deist and a unitarian of the time; the wafer  
 anecdote showed an irreverence completely foreign to men  
 like Clarke and Newton.

Pomeau's major argument has two major flaws.  
 First, the "neo-Arians" did not follow their reason alone;  
 they followed the Bible, interpreted by reason alone, to  
 their rejection of the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. Second,  
 105 the God of the antitrinitarians, of Locke, Newton, Clarke,

---

101

Pomeau, Religion, p. 140.

102

Supra, pp. 127-129.

103

Supra, p. 124.

104

Pomeau, Religion, p. 140. Pomeau also mentioned  
 a 1739 variant of the seventh Lettre which said that Clarke's  
 contemporaries did not consider him Christian.

105

As always, the public Locke.

and Le Clerc, was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--Who acted in history, Who sent Jesus as the Messiah to redeem mankind--not le dieu fainéant of Voltaire and deism. Recall that Voltaire cried to God in the Epître à Uranie, with something like devotion, "Je ne suis pas chrétien; mais c'est pour t'aimer mieux." <sup>106</sup> All the Socinians, Unitarians, neo-Arians, and antitrinitarians mentioned in this study, on the contrary, always argued with apparent sincerity that they were truly Christian.

<sup>107</sup> However, as Pomeau noted, Voltaire presumed that "Mr. Clarke . . . le plus savant et plus honnête homme du Royaume . . . manque d'être Chrétien." <sup>108</sup> Thus, I suppose, in Voltaire's own mind he could have considered himself an "unitaire" or "socinien". However, in abstracting the beliefs of Clarke and the other anti-Nicenes of the time from their base in Christianity, both Voltaire and Pomeau failed to do justice to the movement. If Voltaire could be called "unitaire", then any monotheist who denied divinity to Jesus would qualify, and "unitaire" would lose all its historical

---

106

M. IX, p. 361; supra, p. 97.

107

Pomeau, Religion, p. 140.

108

In a variant of 1739 of the seventh Lettre philosophique (Lanson, I, p. 80n) this statement was in the form of an anecdote; so, strictly speaking, Voltaire never affirmed point-blank that Clarke was not Christian.

meaning. Nonetheless, it is clear that Voltaire was attracted both to the persons of those Socinians he identified in the Lettres philosophiques and to their general religious principles of reason and tolerance.

VI

VOLTAIRE AND SOCINIANISM: THE QUIET YEARS (1734-1754)

A. Diffused Influences: The first chapters of this study argued that Socinianism was a form of Protestantism distinguished from other groups by its radical break with the traditions of the church and by its common-sense Biblical theology. Voltaire, from his very first writings<sup>1</sup> on the subject of religion, showed a libertine scorn of scripture, which, indeed, he never lost. This set him apart from Socinianism even though he admired the simplicity of Socinian theology as well as their tolerance. Therefore, Pomeau was a bit too exuberant when he described Voltaire after his English experience as an "unitaire", and even exclaimed, "voici le Voltaire nouvel arien, socinien, anti-trinitaire."<sup>2</sup> That is not to deny that, in his years of<sup>3</sup> study at Cirey with Mme. Du Châtelet (1734-1749), Voltaire

---

<sup>1</sup>Supra, chapter III.

<sup>2</sup>Pomeau, Religion, p. 140; supra, chapter V, section D, for my discussion of Pomeau's formulation.

<sup>3</sup>I. O. Wade, who (along with Pomeau) has made the most serious study of Voltaire's intellectual activities in these years, summed them up in these words: "It is as if the poet turning philosopher had suddenly decided to give himself a totally modern, liberal education." (Development, p. 331.)

spent much of his effort on understanding Locke, Newton, and Clarke--the English leaders of Socinianism as reported in the Lettres philosophiques. Accordingly, Pomeau entitled one of his chapters on this period "Le Dieu de Locke, de Clarke et de Newton."<sup>4</sup> The Traité de métaphysique (1734-1738)<sup>5</sup>, Eléments de la philosophie de Newton (published 1738, revised edition 1741), and Métaphysique de Newton (published 1740) provided ample proof of Newton's, Locke's, and Clarke's great influence on Voltaire.

However, in these three books, Voltaire ignored their Biblical studies, the most clearly Socinian part of their work. It would be a very large and difficult task to show precisely how Locke's, Newton's, and Clarke's Biblical works were related to their metaphysics and how (or whether) both their metaphysics and exegesis were related to Socinian thought. Fortunately, for the purposes of the present study, this will not be necessary as Voltaire clearly separated their philosophical work from their minute studies of the Bible. Recall that when he did mention Newton's commentary

---

<sup>4</sup>Pomeau, Religion, part II, chapter IV; Wade, Voltaire, Studies, and Development, part II, and part IV, section 1; and Staum, "Newton", are all excellent modern studies on the relationship between Voltaire's philosophical writings at Cirey and the metaphysics of Locke, Clarke, and Newton. The present study will not rework the same material.

<sup>5</sup>The Traité was not intended for publication and first appeared in print in the posthumous Kehl edition of Voltaire's works. For the composition of the Traité, see Wade (Studies, passim) and Pomeau (Religion, pp. 196-197).



on Daniel and Revelations, he said: "Je crois voir des aigles qui, s'étant élancés dans la nue, vont se reposer sur un fumier."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Voltaire thought very little of Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Manuel, in his study of Newton, noted: "That part of the Newtonian system which was related to his puritanical bibliolatry and to his interpretation of prophecy was, of course, rejected by most eighteenth-century intellectuals and for many years was kept hidden as a shameful weakness in their new god."<sup>8</sup> This certainly captured Voltaire's feelings towards the Biblical side of all his English Socinian heroes.

For Newton, "The Bible described events as they had 'actually happened' in the commonsense meaning of occurrence; it was the best place to look for historical facts about the objective world."<sup>9</sup> For Voltaire, the Bible was nothing but "mensonges sacrées"<sup>10</sup> and certainly not the place he would turn to for reliable information. For example, in his Traité de métaphysique,<sup>11</sup> Voltaire denied, in his chapter

---

<sup>6</sup>M. 20, p. 230, from the Nouveau mélanges (1765); supra, p. 157.

<sup>7</sup>Supra, pp. 120-123.

<sup>8</sup>Manuel, Portrait, p. 380.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 364. Note the Socinianism of Newton's exegetical principles as described by Manuel.

<sup>10</sup>Epître à Uranie; supra, pp. 97-98.

<sup>11</sup>Always cited in this study from Mélanges, pp. 157-202.

"De la vertu et du vice", that God had given man any particular rules of morality. Rather, He gave man "la raison, l'amour-propre, la bienveillance pour notre espèce, les besoins, les passions, tous moyens par lesquels nous avons établi la société." (p. 199) This was quite radical, for many who would argue against the historicity of parts of the Bible would acknowledge its moral teachings.

In the Traité he mentioned the Bible only in the chapter, "Si l'homme a une âme, et ce que ce peut être", and then to note a contradiction. God, according to "le plus ancien livre qui soit au monde" (p. 182), had given the Jews very detailed laws but had failed to say anything about the immortality of the soul. Later, in the New Testament, God taught the soul was immortal. Voltaire commented: "Il semble étrange à ma raison que Dieu ait fait croire aux hommes le pour et le contre; mais ci c'est un point de révélation où ma raison ne voit goutte, je me tais et j'adore en silence." (p. 183) Thus Voltaire's attitude towards Scripture in the Traité was antipathetical to that of Newton or of Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity.

Whilst Voltaire ignored or scorned his mentors' scriptural commentaries, he did not ignore the study of the Bible. At Cirey he deepened and extended his knowledge of the Old and New Testament as part of his programme of

reeducation.<sup>12</sup> However, his careful reading of the Bible was hardly an exercise in devotion as witnessed the fruits of his study:<sup>13</sup> the Biblical articles of the Dictionnaire philosophique (written from the 1750's onward), l'Examen important de milord Bolingbroke (published in 1767), La Bible enfin expliquée (published in 1776), and his other fifty<sup>14</sup> publications on the Christian scriptures. All these were saturated with his early low opinion of the Bible but showed a new, intimate knowledge of the text and even a stronger dislike for it than before he knew it well. However, in his private correspondence, where he could relax from his mission as an anti-Christian propagandist, Voltaire often quoted scripture--especially from the Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes--with respect and appreciation.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Pomeau, Religion, part II, chapter III; Wade, Voltaire, Studies, and Development, part III, especially section 9, and Ages "Voltaire's" are all excellent recent studies of Voltaire's Biblical expertise. The present study will not rework the same material.

<sup>13</sup> Wade (Voltaire, pp. 150ff) argued that Voltaire had written a large part of l'Examen from 1736-1754; Pomeau (Religion, pp. 180-181) preferred a much later date; but Wade (Development, pp. 550-556) maintained again a Cirey date for l'Examen. Similarly, Wade and Pomeau disagreed on the date for La Bible enfin expliquée. These disagreements, however, do not materially affect the present study, for, as Wade noted (Development, p. 531), "There is no disagreement among Voltaire scholars" that Voltaire did his basic Biblical research, on which his later publications depended, at Cirey.

<sup>14</sup> Ages, "Voltaire's", p. 205.

<sup>15</sup> Ages, "Private Voltaire", p. 11.

There was in this an indirect influence of Socinianism. Nothing in Voltaire's exegetical stance was new; it has all been traced to English and French deist and atheist books and clandestine manuscripts. The well-spring for all these works was Spinoza's Tractatus,<sup>16</sup> and Leo Strauss in his Spinoza's Critique of Religion has shown that the Tractatus borrowed much from Socinian theologians and exegetes. Spinoza's, and thus Voltaire's, commonsense approach and use of the best philological studies was in the Socinian exegetical tradition. Of course, it must be said that the pious Socinian Biblical theologians would have been appalled by the way Spinoza and Voltaire turned Socinian methods against the book by which the Socinians strove to live.

Therefore, in the great mass of Voltaire's literary output of the Cirey period, there was only an attenuated interest in and influence of Socinianism. The evidence of the correspondence also bears this out. Between the publication of the Lettres philosophiques (1734) and Voltaire's removal to Switzerland (1755), Socinianism was only mentioned once and then in a letter of Frederick, crown prince of Prussia. Frederick and Voltaire had entered into a philosophical correspondence in 1736, which in late 1737 and

---

<sup>16</sup>

Wade (Clandestine) is one of the best of many demonstrations of this.

early 1738 had turned to the question of liberty--triggered by Voltaire's having sent Frederick a draft of chapter VII, "Si l'homme est libre", of the Traité de Métaphysique. In his letter of 23 January 1738 (Best. D1432), Voltaire defended his interpretation of "les Clarke, les Locke, les Newton" against Frederick's interpretation of "les Leibnitz, les Wolf". To this Frederick replied on 19 February (Best. D1459) and said, after attempting to demonstrate that man was totally determined, "Réfuteroige encore le sisthème des Sociniens après avoir sufisamment établi le mien?" He then rather well mauled a particular aspect of Clarke's theology that Voltaire had defended. Frederick probably was thinking of the seventh Lettre philosophique, which identified Newton, Locke, and Clarke as Socinians, when he used the term in this letter. Voltaire did not pick up the reference.

The only other explicit epistolary reference to things anti-Nicene in this period in Voltaire's correspondence was in his letter of 19 August 1752 (Best. D4984) to his niece and lover, Marie Denis. There he suggested that if Arius had been as light-hearted as the abbé de Prades, the Sorbonne's latest theological scapegoat, "les pères du concil . . . se seraient pris par la main et auraient dansé en ronde avec [lui]." So there was no

serious concern with Socinianism in Voltaire's correspondence from 1734 through 1754 that I have found. His "Saint Fargeau Notebook", which Besterman dated around 1752 to 1755,<sup>17</sup> contains some historical notes on the history of Arianism.<sup>18</sup> The "Leningrad Notebooks" (roughly from 1735 through 1750)<sup>19</sup> as well as "Notebook Fragments" 30 and 43<sup>20</sup> all have short, complimentary historical notes on Servetus. Thus the Notebooks, like the correspondence, showed only a minimal interest in Socinianism in these middle years of Voltaire.

B. Explicit References: After Mme. Du Châtelet died in 1749, Voltaire was finally free to accept Frederick's much repeated invitations to visit him in Prussia, where he now ruled as Frederick II. Voltaire, who at this point ruefully regarded his futile attempts to ingratiate himself with the French establishment as wasted time (Best. 18772, to Duvernet, 7 February 1776), established himself in Frederick's apartments from the summer of 1750 to the summer of 1753. Their relationship was never an easy one and varied from

---

17

D. 81, p. 20.

18

D. 81, pp. 114, 116, and 150.

19

D. 81, p. 29.

20

D. 81, p. 361; D. 82, pp. 642 and 675.

tolerable to sordid. It was in Prussia, however, that the two most interesting of Voltaire's references to Socinianism from this period saw the light of day.

21

The first was in the Sermon des cinquante, which was probably written as early as 1749, which was read to Frederick's court in 1751 or 1752, and which was probably published first in 1753.<sup>22</sup> The Sermon was in the traditional form of a sermon--beginning with a prayer followed by three major points and ending with an exhortation. It was this work where Voltaire first publicly vented his vitriolic anti-Christian feelings. In the introduction to the Sermon (p. 254), all particularity in religion was opposed as unworthy of the universal "Être suprême". The first point was dedicated against the moral atrocities of the Old Testament, the second against its historical absurdities, and the third against the New Testament. To taste the flavour of this work, try this morsel from the end of the "Premier point":

Mais que dirons-nous du saint roi David, de celui qui est agréable devant le Dieu des Juifs, et qui mérite que le messie vienne de ses reins? . . . Devenu roi, il ravit la femme d'Urie, fait tuer le mari; et c'est de cet adultère homicide que vient le messie, le fils de Dieu, Dieu lui-même; o blasphème! . . . Enfin, sous le gouvernement sage des Romains, il naît un roi aux Hébreux, et ce roi, mes frères, ce silo, ce messie, vous savez qui il est: c'est celui qui, ayant d'abord été mis dans le grand nombre de ces prophètes, . . . qui, . . . se fais-

---

<sup>21</sup>Mélanges, pp. 253-270; this study always cités the Sermon from this edition.

<sup>22</sup>Pomeau, Religion, pp. 182-183, summarized the early history of the Sermon. The first edition seems to have been very limited in circulation.

aient un métier de'être inspirés, a été, au bout de quelques centuries, regardé comme un Dieu. (pp. 269-270).

Such virulence continued throughout the Sermon.

At the very end, after noting that the Church which had been overwhelmed by superstitions split into "une multitude de sectes" and "on se bat, on s'égorge, on s'assassine" (p. 268), there was a very unexpected note of hope:

Déjà une foule de théologiens embrasse le socinianisme, qui approche beaucoup de l'adoration d'un seul Dieu, dégagée de superstition. L'Angleterre, l'Allemagne, nos provinces, sont pleines de docteurs sages qui ne demandent qu'à éclater; il y en a aussi un grand nombre dans d'autres pays: pourquoi donc attendre plus longtemps? (p. 269)

Here Voltaire was much more optimistic about the prospects of Socinianism than he had been in the Lettres philosophiques; in fact, he highly overestimated the actual extent of Socinianism in the Sermon.<sup>24</sup> It is highly significant that, in the diatribe against the Christian tradition that was the Sermon des cinquante, Voltaire spoke well only of the Socinians and saw them as the exemplars of the religion of the future.

Voltaire's Défense de Milord Bolingbroke par le Docteur Goodnatur'd Wellwisher, chapelain du comte de Chesterfield<sup>25</sup> was written in 1752 and published in 1753.

<sup>23</sup> Supra, pp. 159-162.

<sup>24</sup> Infra, pp. 241-242.

<sup>25</sup> M. 23, pp. 547-554.



Since it was much more a public work than the Sermon, and since Voltaire was easily identifiable as its author, its tone was subdued. The Défense, on the one hand, quietly argued for the free application of reason to scripture and gently pointed out some of the contradictions and problems in the Bible and, on the other hand, argued that "déisme" was the universal religion far superior to any single sect. In that regard, anti-Nicenes were mentioned: "quand vous aurez vu que la religion du Messie a été corrompue, vous choisirez entre Wiclef, Luther, Jean Hus, Calvin, Mélancthon, OŒcolampade, Zuingle, Storck, Parker, Servet, Socin, Fox, et d'autres réformateurs."

(p. 553) Thus he seemed to see more merit in Protestantism than in Catholicism, but the real hope was in the growing power of the deists: "Ils sont dans la magistrature, dans les armées, dans l'Eglise, auprès du trône et sur le trône même." (p. 551) Whilst the general arguments of the Défense and the Sermon were similar, Socinians were incidental to the Défense and central to the Sermon.

C. Conclusion: After what he had written in the seventh Lettre philosophique about Socinianism, Voltaire might well have been expected to have continued his Socinian enthusiasm. However, this chapter's survey of the years 1734-1754 showed that Voltaire did very little writing about Socinians then. Two off-hand remarks in letters, a few lines

scribbled in notebooks, and references in only two publications is a very lean harvest from twenty years of Voltaire's work. If it were not for what he had written in the Sermon des cinquante, one would conclude that Socinianism hardly crossed his mind in these two decades. Yet, in the Sermon, we see that his vision of the progress of Socinianism that had begun in England continued throughout this time. If anything, his hopes for their future were brighter in 1754 than they had been in 1734. It would seem that although he had written very little about Socinianism in this period--probably because he had had no contact with them, or with any Protestants, for that matter, then--these years of study had strengthened his preference for them over any other Christian body.

## VII

### VOLTAIRE DECIDES THE SWISS ARE SOCINIANS (1754-1756)

A. The Road to Switzerland: After Voltaire's unsettling time as Frederick's guest, which ended with Frederick's forceful detention of Voltaire and Voltaire's escape on 7 July 1753, Voltaire wandered along the Rhine, from Mainz to Strasburg to Colmar, in an unhappy and insecure state.<sup>1</sup> The Autobiography (pp. 571-573) glossed over Frederick's outrageous behaviour and Voltaire's troubles except for the tell-tale phrase, "The fugitive from Berlin". (p. 573) But Voltaire's true feelings were clear in a letter to his old friend Fawkener in England:

J am not unfortunate for having fled from one who could debase himself so far as to turn a pamphleteer against me, and to employ in so scurrilous a manner his pen that j had cut, and his wit that j had form'd . . . J have nothing to do than to forget his false friendship, and his perversity. (Best. D5598, 23 December 1753, at Colmar).

This disheartening fugitive period ended in November, 1754, when he left Colmar to settle near Geneva, then an independent republic, where he hoped to find the security that had so long eluded him.<sup>1a</sup> The Autobiography (p. 573) explained

---

<sup>1</sup>

Besterman, Voltaire, pp. 332-337.

<sup>1a</sup> As early as 1725 (Best. D259, to Isaac Cambigue), Voltaire considered Geneva a good place to have his Henriade printed.

that he decided to move to Geneva because "Mr. Vernet<sup>2</sup>, a  
 French refugee<sup>3</sup>, and minister of the gospel at Geneva, and  
 Messrs. Cramer<sup>4</sup>, old citizens of that famous city, wrote to  
 him while at Colmar, begging him to come and print his works  
 there." In the midst of his negotiations to buy some Genevan  
 land, Voltaire wrote Francois Tronchin, his Genevan agent,  
 with more good, and true, reasons for wanting to live in  
 Geneva. "Je révère votre gouvernement, j'adore la liberté,  
 j'aime la retraite, mon corps a besoin de Monsieur Tronchin  
 le médecin." (Best. D6107, 25 January 1755).

Jean Louis Du Pan, a prominent Genevan, commented on  
 Voltaire's manoeuvres around Geneva on 26 January 1755:

Il pensoit à s'établir auprès de Lausanne, mais soit  
 qu'il en ait craint les beaux esprits, qui ont marqué  
 un peu trop d'empressement pour être en relation avec  
 lui qui ne cherche que le repos, soit qu'il n'ait pas  
 voulu s'éloigner du Docteur Tronchin ou de Mrs Cramer  
 les Libraires, il s'est déterminé à se fixer auprès  
 de Genève, il a visité quelques campagnes à vendre  
 ou à louer . . . (Best. D6109, to Suzanne Freudenreich).

As Voltaire's testimony showed, Du Pan was right in marking out  
 tranquillity, a good publisher and doctor as things that

---

<sup>2</sup>  
 Best. D5647, D5663, D5698, D5733, D5734, D5777, D5787,  
 and D5936 show the excellent relations between Vernet and  
 Voltaire in 1754.

<sup>3</sup>  
 In fact, Vernet was born in Geneva in 1698. (Falletti,  
Vernet, p. 10.)

<sup>4</sup>  
 Best. D5775, 15 April 1754, is the first letter from  
 the Cramers. See also Best. D5818.

attracted Voltaire to Geneva. He was also right in saying that some Lausannois were trying to attract the poet to their<sup>5</sup> city. Jean Antoine Noé Polier de Bottens, Lausanne's leading Calvinist minister, and Jacques Abram Elie Daniel Clavel de Brenles,<sup>6</sup> an important citizen of Lausanne, had written early in 1754 to urge him to make his home in their city.

However, Voltaire's letters and actions--he had bought Montriond, a house near Lausanne, around the first of January,<sup>7</sup> 1755 --show that Du Pan was quite wrong in suggesting that Voltaire was frightened away from Lausanne by the threat of good company. It was not until 10 February 1755 that he completed negotiations for buying a small estate called St. Jean not far from Geneva's gates.<sup>8</sup> Du Pan may have been misled by one of Voltaire's rumors. He had written to François Tronchin on 17 January 1755 that he wanted a refuge in Geneva

---

<sup>5</sup>Best. D5665, Voltaire to de Bottens, 10 February 1754, is the reply to a letter which is not available. Voltaire here wrote that de Bottens's invitation increased his wish "de finir ma vie dans un pays libre, sous un gouvernement doux, loin des caprices des rois et des intrigues de cours"--very moderate and sensible wishes in light of his last years' experiences. See also Best. D5738, Voltaire to de Bottens, 19 March 1754. In 1752 Voltaire had attempted to ingratiate himself with the government of Bern, which was sovereign over Lausanne, by offering to dedicate a play to them. (Best. D5064, 8 November 1752). After some whimsical confusion over titles, the Bernois refused the dedication but offered Voltaire "toujours leur Protection". (Best. D5213, 21 February 1753). Roulet, Voltaire, chapter 3, is a delightful account of this first contact between Voltaire and the Bernois.

<sup>6</sup>Best. D5669, D5817, D5823, February through May, 1755.

<sup>7</sup>Best. D6061, Polier de Bottens to Voltaire, c. 1 January 1755.

<sup>8</sup>Best. D6150, Voltaire to Clavel de Brenles, 9/10 February 1755.

and that although Lausanne was pressing him he had not yet  
 "donné de parole positive." (Best. D6088).

B. Geneva and Voltaire, the Beginnings: Now Voltaire had two properties on "free" soil: "Les Délices [with which fleshly name he immediately desanctified St. Jean] seront pour l'été, Monrion pour l'hiver." (Best. D6150) Les Délices, indeed, for Voltaire was truly delighted to have found peace and freedom at last. For the moment he lost himself in the joys of his new situation<sup>9</sup> and celebrated with his Epître de m. de Voltaire en arrivant dans sa terre près du lac de Genève en mars, 1755.<sup>10</sup> As Voltaire was Europe's leading poet, this poem of warm praise for Geneva was a generous gift to his hosts. He wrote of perfect happiness:

De cette courte vie il n'est point le partage.  
 Il y faut renoncer; mais on peut quelquefois  
 Embrasser au moins son image.

And, because of Geneva's devotion to liberty--"Liberté! liberté! ton trône est en ces lieux"--it was in her territory that one could come as close to happiness as was possible.

Liberty, as praised in this poem, was what he had sought so long and had only tasted long before in England. Along with liberty, Voltaire found something else in Geneva

---

9

Witness the entire correspondence early in 1755. See also Ages, "The Private Voltaire", pp. 93-94.

10

M. 10, pp. 362-366.

that he had admired in England:

On n'y méprise point les travaux nécessaires:  
Les états sont égaux, et les hommes sont frères.

Ironically enough, the Genevan council on 14 July 1755<sup>13</sup> ordered "de saisir sur le champ tous les Exemplaires"<sup>13</sup> of Voltaire's Epître praising Genevan liberty. A few lines of the poem concerning a member of the house of Savoy who died in 1451 offended the present government of Savoy. Since Savoy was one of Geneva's most powerful neighbours, her complaints were quickly dealt with to the expense of Voltaire--and of freedom in Geneva. Besterman, arguing chiefly from Voltaire's silence about this episode in his correspondence, thinks that this extremely ungracious act by Geneva's authorities was one of the relatively few<sup>14</sup> that ever "really deeply wounded" Voltaire.

There was another factor in Voltaire's original happiness and hopefulness at Geneva. Not only was he free from the "caprice of kings" and joyfully busy in refurbishing les Délices, he also was encouraged by the religious leaders and climate in Geneva and Lausanne. Pomeau suggests that Voltaire may have located where he did in part because

---

13

Best. D'app.148, vol. D100, p. 477. This appendix contains the official documents concerning the seizure of the Epître.

14

Besterman, Voltaire, p. 344.

he expected to find religious allies--that is, deists or fellow travelers--amongst the clergy.

Depuis longtemps, Voltaire sait ce qu'il faut penser de protestants 'éclairés'. La Lettre philosophique sur les nouveaux ariens les montrait, dès 1734, engagés sur la bonne voie. Le Sermon des cinquante, la Défense de Bolingbroke ont répété qu'ils sont à mi-chemin du déisme. Voltaire s'attendait donc à trouver à Genève et à Lausanne des sociniens, et d'abord il les y trouva.<sup>15</sup>

Earlier chapters of this study agree in general with Pomeau's analysis of Voltaire's assessment of liberal Protestantism from the 1730's to the early 1750's. Then, in the midst of his continual attacks on the fanaticism of Christianity and its priests, he excepted the Socinians whose intellect and tolerance he respected and who he hoped would set the example for the rest of Protestantism to follow.

To consider the remainder of Pomeau's claims--that Voltaire expected to find Socinians in Geneva and Lausanne and at first did--we will first consider Geneva, primarily through Jacob Vernet, Geneva's leading theologian, and his relations with Voltaire. Vernet must be treated at some length because it was his theology that best represented Geneva's religious thought and because his relations with Voltaire will be very important in the chapters to follow.

---

15

Pomeau, Religion, p. 292.



16

Vernet, born in 1698 to a bourgeois Genevan family, was a good student in the usual course of Calvinist education for his class and time. After three years of theology in Geneva, he lived away from home from 1720 to 1733 except for a three-year period beginning September, 1729. Most of this time abroad was in Paris where he mixed freely with Catholic clergy and intellectuals.

In 1733, after relatively short visits to the Netherlands and to England, Vernet met Voltaire in Paris. On 14 September 1733, Voltaire wrote to Vernet after what seems to have been their first conversation: "je vous dis deja, sans aucune compliment, que vous avez en moi un ami. . . . Vous m'avez paru un philosophe pensant librement et parlant sagement . . . ." (Best. D653). As to religion, Voltaire continued,

17

nous avons, je crois, vous et moi, de la tolérance . . . ; je passe tout aux hommes, pourvu qu'ils ne soient pas persécuteurs; j'aimerais Calvin, s'il n'avait pas fait brûler Servet; je serais serviteur du concile de Constance, sans les fagots de Jean Huss.

Significantly, Voltaire identified in Vernet free thinking and tolerance, two of the primary characteristics of Socinianism,

---

<sup>16</sup>Saladin, Mémoire, pp. 1-19; Falletti, Vernet, pp. 11-20. Neither Saladin nor Falletti, the two major works on Vernet, thoroughly treated the question of Vernet's Socinianism.

<sup>17</sup>Besterman's commentary on this letter notes that this was Voltaire's first recorded use of the word "tolerance". About tolerance Vernet and Voltaire agreed on their assessment of the current religious climate of the Netherlands and England--both condemned Dutch intolerance (Falletti, Vernet, pp. 22-24; supra p. 93-99, for Voltaire's reaction) and praised English open-mindedness (Falletti, Vernet, pp. 24-25; supra, chapter V-VI, for Voltaire's reaction).

and mentioned the Calvinists' burning of the anti-Nicene Servetus. Thus Voltaire may have been thinking of Vernet and of Genevan Calvinism as Socinian as early as 1733. That this letter of 14 September 1733 also discussed the Lettres philosophiques, where Voltaire had developed his theories about the direction that Protestantism was moving—and first treated Socinianism at length, increases the likelihood that he then saw Vernet as a Socinian.

Be that as it may, Vernet over some thirty years did much that would encourage Voltaire to see him as an ally in religion. His first publications in 1726<sup>18</sup> denied the authenticity of a Jansenist miracle in Paris in 1725—a theme very congenial to Voltaire. In Rome in 1729, Vernet had become good friends with Montesquieu, which friendship led to Vernet's editing L'Esprit des Lois, first published in Geneva in 1748.<sup>19</sup> This service to the philosophes could not have gone unnoticed by Voltaire. In fact, in 1744, Voltaire outlined to Vernet his plan to write l'Histoire universelle as an edifying work and added, "Peut-être un jour le ferai je imprimer dans votre ville." (Best. D2984, 1 June 1744.) Then he went on to suggest that if Vernet would find a reliable printer Voltaire would rush to use him.

<sup>18</sup>Saladin, Mémoire, pp. 7-9; Falletti, Vernet, pp. 13-15. Saladin emphasized Vernet's common-sense approach of going to see the woman who was supposedly miraculously cured to gather all the evidence for his case.

<sup>19</sup>Saladin, Mémoire, pp. 26-31; Falletti, Vernet, pp. 19-20.

Ten years later Voltaire wrote Vernet to see if it were true that a pirated edition of the Abrégé de la Histoire universelle was being prepared under Vernet's supervision. (Best. D5647, 1 February 1754.) Vernet replied that he had only intervened to see that Voltaire's work was mutilated as little as possible and reminded Voltaire of his earlier plan to entrust l'Histoire universelle to Vernet. (Best. D5663, 9 February 1754.) Later that same month, Vernet wrote again with a detailed account of the editing he was doing, which even included correcting some of Voltaire's minor historical errors. (Best. D5698, 27 February 1754.) Voltaire obviously appreciated his clergyman friend's help; for in April, 1754, when he heard that the Annales de l'Empire were being printed in Geneva, he rushed Vernet material to insure a good edition. (Best. D5787, 23 April 1754.) Then on 29 September 1754 Voltaire graciously acknowledged Vernet's help in his writing of cultural history by writing:

Je sens que je trouverais plus de secours encore dans la conversation d'un homme comme vous que dans les livres. Vous savez que les Grecs allaient en Egypt et aux Indes consulter des sages d'une autre religion qu'eux; le voyage de Colmar à Genève est plus facile. (Best. D5936).

In short, when he came to Switzerland, Voltaire saw Vernet as a reliable friend.

Vernet's own writings would also have encouraged Voltaire.

Beyond a doubt Vernet's most ambitious work was his Traité<sup>20</sup>  
de la vérité de la religion chrétienne of which he  
 published the first volume in 1730 and the final tome of  
 the ninth and last volume in 1788. As the sub-title of the  
 1730 edition of the first volume (Traité . . . , tiré du latin  
de Mr. J.-Alphonse Turretin, professeur en théologie et en  
histoire ecclésiastique à Genève) indicates, at first Vernet's  
 intention was to translate the work of his teacher Turretini,  
 the theologian who had broken the hold of Calvinist orthodoxy  
 in Calvin's city. However, from the first volume, which  
 appeared while Turretini lived, Vernet extensively rewrote  
 and added much material of his own. The second edition of  
 the first volumes and the later volumes were even less closely  
 related to Turretini's Latin work.

Vernet's aim was to demonstrate that the truth of  
 Christianity cohered with natural theology. In the first  
 chapter of the first volume of the 1730 edition, he explained  
 that the Traité was directed to deists in order to bring them  
 back to Christian faith. This he did not think would be too  
 difficult if deists only took Christianity

---

20

Falletti, Vernet, Appendix A, pp. 115-117, is  
 an annotated bibliography of Vernet's Traité. Vernet  
 sent Voltaire a copy of the Traité in 1755 when he was  
 settling at Geneva (Chaponnière, Voltaire, p. 55).

dans sa pureté, et qu'ils eussent soin d'en séparer les Doctrines ou les Explications purement humaines . . . ils verroient qu'un homme qui est sincèrement attaché à la Religion naturelle . . . , comme la Raison le dicte, n'a qu'un pas à faire pour devenir Chrétien."<sup>21</sup> (pp. 2-3).

It is not difficult to see why Voltaire, who saw liberal Christians only a step from deism, got along so well with this Protestant clergyman who saw deists only a step away  
22  
from Christianity.

Logically, then, Vernet began his mission to the deists by establishing the authority and nature of revelation. Thus sections I and II of the 1730 edition of the Traité treated "De la nécessité, et des caractères de la révélation." Revelation (restricted, of course, to Jewish and Christian revelation), he argued for some hundred pages in Section I, was necessary because religion without revelation in both antiquity and modernity had been morally debased and ridiculously superstitious. Furthermore, the philosophers severally had never been able to work out complete systems of religion and morality and never agreed among themselves. So "la Lumière naturelle" at its brightest was too weak for mankind; it, in the end, produced nothing more than unauthoritative "discours humains."

---

<sup>21</sup>The last chapter of Section IV of the Traité (1736) returns to this starting point and offers a summary of the internal excellences of Christian doctrine.

<sup>22</sup>See the discussion of Best. D653 above, p.194-195. Of course, this little step from deism to Christianity (continued)

(p. 86) Therefore, the deist attempt to base religion on unaided reason "tend . . . à anéantir toute Religion." (p. 92) Natural theology without revelation "dégènera bientôt en froide spéculation, en chimères de toute espèce, ou bien en indifférence." (p. 93)

23

Christian revelation offered the way out of all the difficulties mentioned due to its two great advantages. First, it is "plus conforme à la droite raison, plus sainte, plus utile aux Sociétez . . ." (pp. 95-96) than any other religion. Second, it was "la plus autorisée, et la mieux fondée en faits." (p. 96) Section I closed (pp. 95-96) in berating the deists for wanting to undermine Christianity which Vernet saw as the surest barrier of reason against the torrents of immorality and superstition. Thus, even though Vernet saw the closeness of his type of Christianity to deism, he believed that deism was fundamentally destructive

---

22 (continued)

was not really an easy one--in either direction. Note the similarity between Vernet's position and Locke's in On the Reasonableness of Christianity (*supra*, p. 121 ). As Vernet noted (Traité (1730), I, p. 4n), Socinus had denied any validity to natural theology; Vernet's evaluation of natural theology is, however, in accord with developed Socinianism. Significantly, Vernet recommended Samuel Clarke's work on natural religion as the best (Traité (1730), I, p. 10n; for Clarke, see above, pp. 117-120). Vernet cites both Locke and Clarke often in the Traité.

<sup>23</sup>This was Locke's solution too to the same problem in the Reasonableness of Christianity. Vernet, in his summary of the arguments for the necessity of revelation, quotes extensively from Locke's Reasonableness (Vernet, Traité (1730), I, pp. 89-90 and 90-91).

of true religion -- that is to say, Christianity.

Having established to his satisfaction that revelation was a necessity, Vernet went on in Section II to spell out the five distinguishing marks of the word of God to man. First, "la Foi ne doit point être opposée à la Raison, ni rien admettre de contradictoire." (p. 137) Since God created both "la Lumière naturelle" and revelation, it would be ridiculous for Him to have the one cancel the other by contradiction. However, there are many obscurities in revelation that cannot be explained by natural reason; revelation transcends the power of reason, but is never unreasonable. (pp. 138-142)

Second, true revelation can never contradict itself. (p. 143) Third, since revelation is necessary due to fallen man's proclivities towards error and immorality, true revelation must lead in the opposite direction:

en donnant des idées saines de la Divinité, en réhabilitant son vrai Culte, en faisant revivre la pureté de la Morale, en inculquant de nouveau les préceptes qui étoient effacez, en nous apprenant notre origine, et la vraie fin de la vie humaine, et en fixant nos doutes touchant le souverain Bien et l'immortalité de l'ame. (pp. 144-145).

That is, "la Lumière naturelle" is restored to its full brilliance with the help of revelation.

The fourth mark of revelation is that it teaches something more than unaided reason can teach. Fallen man cannot know enough on his own to live properly. (pp. 145-146).

Finally, God's revelation bears His seal; it is marked by positive signs, namely "les Prophéties et les Miracles."

(p. 146) Of these five characteristics of true revelation proposed by Vernet, the first two are also found in developed Socinianism.<sup>24</sup> The third seems to me to put reason so far in control of revelation that the necessity for revelation, so carefully established in section one of the Traité, disappears. If reason will admit as true only those items in a claimed revelation that conform to preconceived rational standards of "idées saines de la Divinité . . . la pureté de la Morale," etc., then there really is no necessity for the revelation. If this analysis of the third mark is correct, then the fourth and fifth are logically superfluous and serve<sup>25</sup> only to impress theological and moral laws upon the ignorant.

The third part of the Traité, "De la vérité de la révélation judaïque," was published in 1731 and the fourth, "De l'excellence et de la Beauté de la Religion Chrétienne considérée en elle-même," in 1736. In the first five chapters of Section IV, Vernet showed the superiority of Christianity to classical philosophy and religion according to the first three marks of a true revelation as previously

---

<sup>24</sup>

Supra, pp. 32-35 and 42-43.

<sup>25</sup>

Which is similar to Locke's position in the Reasonableness of Christianity.



developed in Sections I and II of the Traité. That is, Christian doctrine, not in its Gothic overdeveloped scholastic form but in "la simplicité primitive de l'Évangile" (Section IV, p. xiii), "loin d'éteindre la Lumière naturelle, la fait revivre." (p. 2) It offered a complete and completely certain "philosophie celeste" (p. 3) that answered all the important questions about the origin and destiny of man and of the world and revealed the nature of God: all of which before Christ men could never know for sure.

Chapter six of the Section IV turns to that part of Christian doctrine which goes beyond the limits of "la Lumière naturelle." For example (chapter six), as Vernet emphasized so often, man by himself is unable to derive a satisfactory faith; therefore, God intervened in an extraordinary way--through Jesus Christ, the Messiah--to reveal His plan of salvation. As the scriptures say in many places, "en un mot . . . la Nature Divine avec toutes ses perfections, s'est unie intimément avec l'humanité de JESUS-CHRIST." (p. 41) That this is so cannot be derived by reason alone, but certainly is not unreasonable.

So far Vernet's theology in the Traité is quite in accord with developed Socinianism, and now in the seventh

chapter of the fourth section, "Du mystère de la Trinité," Vernet treats the most critical doctrine. He begins: "Outre la distinction de Père et du Fils, il est parlé dans l'Évangile du Saint Esprit, et il est dit que ces trois ne sont qu'un." (pp. 47-48) Il est dit que ces trois ne sont qu'un! One hardly needs to read farther to know that Vernet is not orthodox on the Trinity. But he continues, "Comme cet article est celui qui soulève le plus certains esprits, il est à propos de s'y arrêter un peu."

First he notes that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is expressed in the words of scholasticism and is quite removed from the simple language and doctrines of the New Testament. (p. 48) This observation, of course, was the starting point for the Socinians and other anti-Nicene theologians. Then Vernet goes on to cite several New Testament passages that unequivocally affirm the unity of God. (p. 49) Now the problem is manifest: scripture speaks of "un seul Dieu, Créateur du monde, et la première cause de tout", of Jesus Christ who had "toute la plénitude de la Divinité . . . en lui," of the Holy Spirit "un principe divin," (p. 50) and at the same time affirms the unity of God. What then are the precise relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within

the divine unity? Since the first principle of the Traité is that it is necessary to recapture scriptural simplicity, Vernet rejects the traditional orthodox explanations. Furthermore, he offers none of his own: "L'Écriture se taisant là-dessus, et la Raison n'en disant rien, il faut s'arrêter là, en ne point entreprendre d'expliquer ce que l'Écriture n'explique pas." (p. 51) Thus, Vernet stops at a Lockean point a sanitary distance from the Trinity, declaring it beyond the scope of both God-given sources of knowledge--reason and revelation.

Perhaps to temper his clear rejection of the Nicene Trinity, Vernet closes chapter seven in showing that although the Trinity is both an obscure and incomprehensible doctrine it is nevertheless to be admitted into Christian belief. The justification for the Trinity is that it is scriptural and there is nothing logically contradictory in it. Therefore, "notre foi n'est point aveugle." (p. 56) However, he repeats, scripture tells us nothing about how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished in the divine unity. "Il faut donc suspendre son jugement là-dessus." (p. 56) And, after all, since as Mr. Locke says in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding there are so many things in our everyday experience that lie

outside the range of our reason (p. 59), "trouvera-t-on étrange que la Révélation dise quelque chose de l'Essence divine qui passe nos conceptions?" (p. 60)

Vernet, therefore, began his consideration of the Trinity with the Socinian principles that Scripture in its plain sense and common sense reason (more precisely, scripture and John Locke) are the only authorities in faith. He stopped short, however, of the Socinian formulations on the nature, relative importance, and relationships of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by suspending judgment on these incomprehensibilities.<sup>26</sup> Whether this reticence was from prudence or conviction is a question which lies beyond our sources and "la Lumière naturelle" and must remain obscure. But it is clear that Voltaire would have considerable sympathy with a theologian who did theology within the limits that Locke allowed man's understanding.<sup>27</sup>

---

26

Chapter nine, "De la mort de JESUS-CHRIST considérée comme un sacrifice," offers a doctrine of atonement more orthodox than Socinian while chapter ten, "De la gloire où JESUS-CHRIST a été élevé après ses souffrances," does not contain even a hint of the peculiar Socinian doctrine of the ascension. *Supra*, p. 27 and p. 22, for the respective Socinian doctrines.

27

Vernet also often cited the English theologian Clarke; for example, *Traité* (1730), p. 10 and (1736), pp. 77-78. *Supra*, pp. 117-120, for Clarke and Voltaire.

Far from being censured for his Traité, Vernet was highly praised by the great majority of those Protestants who reviewed his first three volumes.<sup>28</sup> This alone helps substantiate Voltaire's assessment of the trend of Protestant theology and Pomeau's statement about Voltaire's hope of finding Socinians in Geneva.<sup>29</sup> Falletti's judgment that Vernet was a Socinian if one considers the "tendance générale" of his thought seems correct.<sup>30</sup> In this line, it is interesting to note the structural similarity between the Racovian Catechism<sup>31</sup> and Vernet's Traité.<sup>32</sup> Pomeau relies on Falletti's analysis and further notes that Catholic theologians in 1748 and 1763 argued that Vernet was Socinian. Neither Falletti nor Pomeau ever clearly define what would constitute a Socinian.

Encouraged by the acceptance of his work, Vernet continued--first reprinting the four sections in two volumes, then adding three new sections in two volumes in 1745 and 1747. These new sections proved the authenticity of the New Testament by using such external evidence as the impeccable character of the first Christians, the witness of miracles, and the like.

---

<sup>28</sup> Falletti, Vernet, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Supra, pp. 192-193.

<sup>30</sup> Falletti, Vernet, p. 91. See infra., pp. 314-315.

<sup>31</sup> Supra, pp. 32-37.

<sup>32</sup> Religion, p. 295.

Strangely enough, Vernet did not directly go on with his Traité but thoroughly revised the first seven sections, calling them livres in the second edition, which he published in the years 1748 through 1751. The new subtitle was changed to Tiré principalement du Latin de Mr. J. Alph. Turretin which showed that this edition was even more removed from Turretini's original than was the first edition.<sup>33</sup> Also there was a significant change in the titles of the first and second livres (1748): from "De la nécessité, et des caractères de la révélation" in the first edition to "De la Grande utilité d'une Révélation ajouté à la lumière naturelle [et] . . . Des caractères d'une vraie Révélation" in the second.

In moving from attributing necessity to utility to the Christian revelation, Vernet brought upon himself some bitter opposition, mostly from laymen.<sup>34</sup> He had made the change to meet professional criticism of the first edition. Several friends and theologians had pointed out that to proclaim the necessity of revelation logically removed the entire point of the Traité, which was to

---

<sup>33</sup>On the whole, in my opinion, the second edition is much inferior to the first. It is overstuffed with examples and too fine distinctions and thus loses the force and clarity of the first exposition. For example, livre I of the second edition is 198 pages long and covers the same ground as the 96 pages of section I of the first edition. Falletti, Vernet, pp. 49-51, agrees that the second edition was not as good as the first.

<sup>34</sup>Falletti, Vernet, pp. 47-51, treats the reception of the second edition of the Traité.

demonstrate the truth and superiority of Christianity. Thus he said in his Avertissement to the second edition that he had changed to "utilité" from "nécessité" because "ce dernier mot . . . n'a pas laissé de m'attirer des objections, qui disparaissent dès qu'on en met un autre." (p. iv) It took Vernet's considerable skill to quiet the uproar over the word "utilité", which, after all, he introduced to avoid controversy.

However, offensive or not "utilité" did characterize revelation in Vernet's thought. As noted earlier,<sup>35</sup> the place of reason in the first edition of the Traité seemed to have usurped any necessity for revelation; and the second edition (1748) reaffirmed reason's supremacy: "En un mot la Raison est comme l'oeil de l'Ame; la droite Raison est en tout nôtre premier guide." (pp. 6-7) The marks of true revelation in the second edition were expanded from five to seven and were in a different order, but they were essentially those of the earlier Traité.<sup>36</sup>

---

35

Supra, p. 201.

36

Supra, pp. 200-201, for the first edition's five characteristics of revelation.

Chapter two of the second livre presented the first five marks. First, revelation restores "à la Religion naturelle tout son lustre." (p. 212) Second, true revelation must speak to the actual needs of man in his debased state (pp. 212-213); and, third, it is delivered in simple, striking language appropriate to all men. (p. 213) That a true revelation will be delivered by disinterested men of impeccable character is its fourth mark (pp. 213-214) whilst the fifth is that it will be marked by unmistakable divine signs--miracles and prophecies fulfilled. (pp. 214-215).

The next chapter of the second edition fully developed the two points that revelation can never contradict "la Lumière naturelle" or itself, which were the first two characteristics of revelation in the previous version of the Traité. Using Locke as his authority, Vernet went on in the second edition to show that there was nothing contradictory in revelation's going beyond the limits of natural reason while remaining reasonable.<sup>37</sup> Of these seven signs of revelation, the second and third show its "utilité"; the fourth and fifth treat its propagation; and the first, sixth, and seventh show that true revelation is in perfect accord with right reason. It seems, then, that Vernet was true to the logic of his system in speaking

---

<sup>37</sup> Traité (1748), livre II, chapter IV.



of the "utilité" rather than the "nécessité" of revelation. At any rate, despite the attacks he had suffered for declaring his faith useful rather necessary, Vernet retained the precise wording of the second edition when the Traité was reprinted in 1772.

The second edition avoided the embarrassment of the obscurities of the Trinity by eliminating the chapter "Du mystère de la Trinité".<sup>38</sup> In the second edition, Vernet no longer suggested that deists and Christians were only kept apart by some minor understandings, which could be cleared up with a little more clarity in the deists' understanding of Christianity.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, he now thought that "la plupart de Déistes" (livre I, p. 5) were so eager to extirpate superstition that they had rushed to the opposite and equally harmful extreme of impiety. By 1748, Vernet definitely seemed to have soured on the possibility of Deist-Christian rapprochement even though his theology remained close to deist thought.

When Voltaire settled at les Délices, Vernet's ambivalence towards deism came out in his attitude towards his old friend Voltaire. On 8 February 1755, Vernet wrote Voltaire a peculiar letter, which due to its importance

---

38

Similarly Vernet's five volume Instruction Chrétienne, in its first (1751-1754) and second (1756) editions, failed to mention the Trinity.

39

Supra, p. 197-198.

for the topic at hand will be quoted at some length.

. . . La seule chose (je vous le dirai librement en vertu du titre d'ami dont vous m'honorez) la seule chose qui a un peu troublé la satisfaction générale de voir arriver parmi nous un homme aussi célèbre que vous l'êtes, c'est l'idée que des ouvrages de jeunesse ont donnée au public de vos sentiments sur le fond même de la religion, quoique des ouvrages d'un âge plus mûr semblent s'en prendre aux abus de la religion. (Best. D6146).

That Voltaire's earlier writings were singled out as dangerous for religion although the latter ones were even more strongly anti-religious illustrates that Voltaire's disavowals of authorship had been effective, and, perhaps Vernet had been misled by the early tomes of l'Histoire universelle that dealt only with the abuses of ancient and medieval Catholicism.

40

Vernet then repeated that Geneva's leading men were worried about Voltaire's religious stance and continued:

Vous savez qu'il faut aux hommes une religion aussi bien qu'un gouvernement, et vous voyez que la nôtre est, par la grâce de dieu, si simple, si sage, si douce, si épurée, qu'un philosophe ne saurait en demander une plus raisonnable, ni un politique une plus convenable au bien public. Il ne faut donc pas l'ébranler, et autant il est digne d'un habile homme de couper des excrescences difformes, autant doit il prendre garde d'aller jusqu'au vif. Je vous ai quelquefois vanté l'heureux accord qui règne entre nos théologiens, nos juriconsultes et nos philosophes; c'est que les premiers ont la sagesse de s'en tenir au pur évangile, qui s'allie si bien avec la théologie naturelle, et que les autres voyent bien qu'en effet l'évangile est nécessaire, ne fût ce que pour donner à cette théologie naturelle une autorité, une consistance, une forme populaire que la simple philosophie, ou l'autorité civile ne lui donneraient pas.

---

<sup>40</sup>Wade (Voltaire, pp. 190-192) notes that Voltaire had been successful in concealing his anti-Christian work since the Lettres philosophiques.

This passage, practically a resumé of the Traité, shows how important Vernet saw religion as maintaining civil order in Geneva, how close he saw pure Biblical Christianity to natural religion, and how much he feared the results of too much criticism of Christianity although he appreciated the critic's help in pruning the faith of excesses. The last sentence again suggests, even though he used the word "nécessaire", that revelation was in fact "utile" in Vernet's system.

The next part of this letter reminds us that the form of the Traité was a mission to the deists; Vernet wanted them to convert to the Genevan type of Christianity.

Il serait, monsieur, bien satisfaisant pour nous de vous voir entrer dans nos vues, et concourir, quand les occasions s'en présenteront, avec tous nos gens de lettres, pour détourner notre jeunesse de l'irréligion qui la conduit toujours au libertinage.

One wonders if Vernet thought for an instant that Voltaire might convert; nonetheless, the invitation was clear.

Unfortunately, only a short excerpt of Voltaire's reply is known.

Mon cher monsieur, ce que vous écrivez sur la religion est fort raisonnable. . . . Je déteste l'intolérance et le fanatisme, je respecte vos lois religieuses. . . . J'aime et je respecte votre république. . . . Je suis trop vieux, trop malade, et un peu trop sévère pour les jeunes gens. Vous me ferez plaisir de communiquer à vos amis les sentiments qui m'attachent tendrement à vous. (Best. D6149, [9 February 1755], quoted in its entirety.)

What did Voltaire really think of Vernet's offer? His refusal was unequivocal and characteristically polite, but he was angry as his letter of 4 September 1757 to François Tronchin showed:

Souvenez vous de la plaisante lettre qu'un certain tartuffe m'écrivit lorsque j'étais prest de signer à Prangin avec mr de la Bat. [February, 1755]  
Souvenez vous combien cette lettre me donna d'ombrage, et combien vous me rassurâtes. (Best.D7367).

However, there was no mention of Vernet's letter in Voltaire's other correspondence early in 1755.

Saladin, whose 1790 biography of Vernet conserves the two letters just quoted, stresses the menacing aspect of Vernet's letter to Voltaire and says that Vernet had been alerted by correspondents in Berlin not to trust Voltaire's intentions towards Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Besterman says Vernet's "warning was ominous"<sup>42</sup> but does not comment on the theology of the letter. Similarly, Denoïresterres notes only the negative side of Vernet's letter.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, Pomeau points out how attractive the theology of this letter would have been to Voltaire: it was nothing more than "la loi naturelle, présentée sous 'une forme populaire'",

---

41

Saladin, Mémoire, pp. 45-48.

42

Besterman, Voltaire, p. 344.

43

Desnoïresterres, Voltaire, V, pp. 75-76. Desnoïresterres was working from a corrupt text of the letter which was much harsher than Saladin's version. Saladin is followed by all the contemporary authorities.

or, less kindly, "une double doctrine non dénuée d'hypocrisie."<sup>44</sup> Pomeau does not mention any threatening quality in Vernet's letter. Both sides are there: Vernet warns Voltaire not to tamper with Geneva's well ordered, religiously stabilized life and at the same time attempts to tempt him to Geneva's faith. Rather than being either chastened or tempted, Voltaire was only angered by Vernet's tartuffery but prudently appeared to accept the Calvinist's advice.

So Voltaire did find in Geneva's leading theologian, his old friend Vernet, a Socinian--albeit a reluctant Socinian, which made him in Voltaire's eyes a hypocritical Socinian.<sup>45</sup> After Vernet's letter of 8 February 1755, his friendship with Voltaire was never again warm although they had not yet broken off polite relations. However, Voltaire continued to praise the religious climate at Geneva. On 24 March of the same year, he wrote to Thieriot of "[les] enfants de Calvin: leurs moeurs se sont fort adoucies: ils ne brûleraient pas aujourd'hui Servet . . . (Best. D6215) After he had introduced the Genevans to the joys of good theatre at les Délices, Voltaire mus.ed to Germain de Ruffery, ". . . La sévérité de Calvin a cédé au plaisir." (Best. D6233, 4 April 1755.)

---

<sup>44</sup>Pomeau, Religion, pp. 295-296.

<sup>45</sup>There is no further correspondence between the two.

In 1756, after the Genevan clergy and city fathers had listened to his newly published Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne and Poème sur la loi naturelle, Voltaire wrote De Cideville:

Geneve n'est plus la Geneve il s'en faut beaucoup. C'est un pays rempli de vrais philosophes. Le christianisme raisonnable de Loke est la religion de presque tous les ministres, et l'adoration d'un être suprême jointe à la morale est la religion de presque tous les magistrats. (Best. D6821, 12 April 1756.)

They warranted this accolade because the two poems were written because, he said, "J'ay vu la nécessité de bien faire connaître ma façon de penser qui n'est ny d'un superstitieux ny d'un athée"; and they were "universellement approuvez dans tous les points."<sup>46</sup> This year, too, Vernet--rather than being censured for his Socinianism--was appointed to the Chair of Theology at Geneva's theological school.<sup>47</sup> No wonder Voltaire still lauded their reasonable Christianity.

At the same time that Vernet and Voltaire were<sup>48</sup> becoming cool to one another, Jacob Vernes, a young

<sup>46</sup> On the same day on the same subject, he wrote to Thieriot: "Il y a plus de philosophie sur les bords de notre Lac qu'en Sorbonne. Le nombre des gens qui pensent raisonnablement se multiplie tous les jours . . ." (Best. D6824) On 21 January 1756, the Genevoise Marie Charlotte Saladin de Crans had written her uncle from Paris, ". . . on parle beaucoup d'un Poème de Voltaire sur la Religion naturelle qu'on dit admirable . . ." (BPU, Archives de Saussure, 241, fol. 238v.) See also Best. D6774, Voltaire to S. Dupont, 10 March 1756, for similar praise of Geneva's philosophes.

<sup>47</sup> Saladin, Mémoire, p. 32; Falletti, Vernet, p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> See Dufour, Vernes, the only biography of this man. Whilst Vernes is interesting in his own right and was perhaps the most important clergyman in Geneva after Vernet, he is not nearly as important as Vernet for our topic and will, accordingly be treated very quickly. For comments on him and on some lesser religious liberals of Geneva, see Pomeau, Religion, pp. 297-300.

(born 1728) Genevois pastor and man of letters, and Voltaire were becoming more and more friendly. In the first letter of their correspondence that has come down to us, we find Voltaire trying to reconcile him to his ministerial vocation. "Ne vous plaignez point tant de votre métier; il donne de la considération et de la réputation." (Best. D6653, 26 December 1755) His next letter also was very complimentary to ministers; he said of the Lausannois clergy:

Ils sont tous fort aimables et très instruits.  
 Il faut avouer qu'il y a plus d'esprit et de connaissance dans cette profession que dans aucune autre.  
 Il est vrai que je n'entends point leurs sermons, mais quand leur conversation ressemble à la vôtre, je vous assure qu'ils me plaisent beaucoup plus.  
 (Best. D6709, 29 January 1756).

These two letters as well as the short notes to Vernes of the next year (Best. D6747, D6769, D6895, D6983, and D7119), where Voltaire addressed Vernes as his literary equal, show the master of les Délices at his seductive best.

It would seem that Voltaire's admiration for Vernes was sincere. To look ahead, on 29 December 1757 (Best. D7540), we find Voltaire ready to sign Vernes's "profession de foy" and addressing him as "carissimé frater in deo et in Servetto." In short, Voltaire saw Vernes

---

49

This letter was written just as the Genevois were beginning to explode in anger on their being called "Socinians" in the Encyclopédie. See infra, Chapter VIII, Section B.

as an anti-Nicene ally--a Socinian like Vernet but more  
 50 reliable. The Catéchisme à l'usage des jeunes gens

qui s'instruisent pour participer à la sainte-cène (1778)

by Vernes confirms Voltaire's impression. This work was highly dependent on Vernet's Traité for its general structure and fundamental ideas. For example, the Catéchisme said the proof for the divine origin of Christian doctrine was that it was "si belle, si conforme aux Lumières de la Raison . . . ." (p. 35) Furthermore, the sections "De la personne de Jésus-Christ" (pp. 43ff) and "Du Saint-Esprit" (pp. 59ff) did not even mention the Trinity and studiously avoided Nicene terminology. Not surprisingly, Vernes's biographer agreed with Voltaire that Vernes could fairly be classed  
 51 in the Socinian party.

In spite of finding much to praise about Geneva, Voltaire found his first year in Switzerland very trying. Vernet's letter at Voltaire's arrival was the first expression of a general Genevan feeling of unease with Voltaire's presence. The first official actions from this feeling

---

50

Vernet, too, thought Vernes was Socinian (Ritter, "Rousseau . . . et Vernet", p. 145).

51

Dufour, Vernes, pp. 112-113. See also infra p. 320, n. 45a.



were the seizure of Voltaire's hymn of praise to his new  
<sup>52</sup>home and then the suppression of theatre at les Délices  
<sup>53</sup>in July and August of the same year. The closing of the  
 theatre was instigated by the Geneva Consistory, which shows  
 that the clergy were not all ready for ". . . La sévérité de  
<sup>54</sup>Calvin [de ceder] au plaisir." Again Voltaire was prudent  
 and acceded to the wishes of his hosts. The Registres du  
 consistoire for 14 August 1755 reported that Voltaire apolo-  
 gized for breaking a law of which he was ignorant, and that  
 "il se donnera bien garde d'y contrevenir, son intention  
 ayant toujours été d'observer avec respect les sages loix  
<sup>55</sup>du Gouvernement." But on 18 July 1755 Voltaire had written  
 d'Argental, "Geneve aura la comédie malgré Calvin." (Best.  
 D6340) At least some of the Genevois laymen approved of

---

52

Supra, p.192. The seizure was praised by some Swiss (Best. D6355) and condemned by others (Best. D6390 and D6421).

53

Best. D.app.149, vol. D100, pp. 478-480.

54

Best. D6233; supra, p. 214. However, on 10 October 1755, we find Voltaire having made a very simply decorated carriage in order to conform to Geneva's sumptuary laws. (Best. D6533, to J. R. Tronchin).

55

D. 100, p. 479. See *ibid.*, pp. 479-480 for similar promises recorded on 16 and 18 August 1755.

prohibiting playacting: "le Consistoire a fait tomber sagement la chose." (Best. D6515, Jean Peschier to Jean Formey, 26 September 1755).

All of these were annoyances, but in mid-1755 Grasset, a Swiss printer--scurrilous even by eighteenth century standards of the trade--threatened Voltaire with printing a debased version of la Pucelle.<sup>56</sup> Since Voltaire meant la Pucelle to be a salacious satire on the life of Jean d'Arc, even the version he actually wrote would have been dangerous; so Grasset's and the many unauthorized besmirched manuscripts circulating could well have brought serious trouble from the authorities. In August, 1755, the Geneva Consistory had already denounced the work as "fort licentieux" and tending<sup>57</sup> "à saper tous les fondemens de la Religion Chrétienne." Thus, for over a year Voltaire frantically tried to enlist the Swiss authorities' help to see that Grasset could not publish his tawdry Pucelle. Although the governments of Geneva and of Bern were of some assistance, they certainly did not rush to see that justice was done Voltaire.

There was a reference to Socinianism in the mock-scholarly "Préface de Don Apuleius Risorius, bénédictin" to La Pucelle. Voltaire noted here that Arioste in his Orlando

---

<sup>56</sup>D.7 is J. Vercruysse's critical edition of la Pucelle; see pp. 13-57 for the history of the composition and pirated editions of the work. The correspondence for about a year from July, 1755, is dominated by the Grasset affair. See also Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, V, chapter 3; Roulet, Voltaire, chapter VIII, and Perey and Maugras, Vie, chapter III, for good accounts of the affair.

<sup>57</sup>Best. D100, p. 478.

had St. John appear a little unorthodox on the Trinity.

"Ce discours sent un peu son socinien. Notre auteur discret n'a garde de tomber dans un tel excès." (D.7, p. 256)

Also, in an interpolation in the 1756 London edition of this work, which Vercruyse warns was not Voltaire's (D.7, p. 243), were a number of lines on Calvin, including:

A son regard farouche, atrabilaire,  
On connaissait de l'orgueilleux sectaire  
Le mauvais coeur, l'esprit intolérant,  
L'âme jalouse et digne d'un tyran. (D.7, p. 595)

These were followed a few lines later with a condemnation of the roasting of Servetus,

Rival haï, dont tout le crime était  
De raisonner mieux que lui ne faisait . . .

Vercruyse is doubtless right that Voltaire did not write the interpolations, but these lines certainly do correspond well with the picture of Calvin in the Essai sur les moeurs,<sup>58</sup> also from 1756.

All these factors together--what Voltaire saw as Geneva's religious establishment's tartuffery, the seizure of his Epître . . . en arrivant dans sa terre près du lac de Genève, the closing of his theatre, and the Grasset affair--turned les Délices into something less than délices.<sup>59</sup> "Je ne suis pas excessivement dans les délices."<sup>60</sup> Then there were the letters dated "aux prétendues Délices" and

<sup>58</sup> Infra, p. 237-240.

<sup>59</sup> Best. D6360, Voltaire to d'Argental, 28 July 1755.

<sup>60</sup> Best. D6396, to J. R. Tronchin, 8 August 1755, and D6550, to d'Argental, c. 24 October 1755.

his comment to de Brenles of 6 December 1755, "Si je suis  
<sup>61</sup>  
 confiné à mes prétendues Délices . . ." In short,  
 Genevan ambivalence towards Voltaire as exemplified by  
 Vernet's attitudes, quickly manifested itself in such ways  
 as to call forth similar mixed feelings from Voltaire.  
 Geneva and Voltaire attracted each other and seemed com-  
 patible enough to begin to live together, but it was soon  
 clear that the relationship would not be a smooth one.

In fact, Geneva was not as peaceful and well governed  
<sup>62</sup>  
 as she wanted the world to think. Vernet had written  
 Voltaire that in Geneva their political system was as "con-  
 venable au bien public" as could be imagined and that her  
 theologians, juriconsults, and philosophers were in "l'heureux  
<sup>63</sup>  
 accord." It was true that the intellectual and ruling  
 aristocracy were in perfect accord in maintaining their  
 political system, which system was "convenable à leur bien"  
 if not "au bien public". Since the Reformation, a very  
 small elite had acquired all the effective political power  
 which was highly resented by the disenfranchised middle  
 and working classes. In 1707 and again in 1734-1738, there

---

<sup>61</sup> Best. D6615.

<sup>62</sup> Gay, Politics, chapter IV and Sayous, "Genève,"  
 are among the best accounts of eighteenth century Geneva's  
 complicated political system and history. See also, Jullien,  
Histoire, chapter IX; Chapponniere, Voltaire, chapter III;  
 Perey and Maugras, Vie, Introduction II; Fazy, Constitutions,  
 chapter VI; Spink, Rousseau, Part I, chapter II; Vallette,  
Rousseau, Part I, chapter I; DuBois-Melly, Moeurs; and Roget,  
 "Moeurs".

<sup>63</sup> Best. D6146, supra, p. 211.

had been civil disorder when the lower classes tried to get some recognition. Both times the aristocracy called in foreign troops and mediators in order to put the lid on the trouble without making any real concessions. Therefore, in the 1750's, Geneva was seething with class conflict even though she appeared relatively calm on the surface.

When Voltaire moved to Genevan territory, naturally his close associates were of the aristocracy. It was they whose religion he said was "La cristianisme raisonable de Loke" or "l'adoration d'un être suprême jointe à la morale."<sup>64</sup> This description of Geneva's religion was basically correct<sup>65</sup> for the oligarchy. Chapponnière put it succinctly:

<sup>66</sup>

Dès 1709, la liberté des catéchismes dans les écoles ayant été adoptée, le catéchisme de Calvin se liquéfie en préceptes d'amour et d'humanité. La Compagnie demandait en 1725 aux nouveaux ministres de ne traiter en chaire "aucune matière curieuse et inutile et qui tendit à troubler la paix."<sup>67</sup>

The aristocracy, wealthy, educated, and open to influences from abroad, wanted relaxation in Geneva's enforced austerity and was quite amenable to the tolerant, non-dogmatic,

---

<sup>64</sup> Best. D6821, supra, p. 215.

<sup>65</sup> Jullien, Histoire, chapter X; Chapponnière, Voltaire, chapters IV-VII; Spink, Rousseau, Part II, chapters I-III; Vallette, Rousseau, Part I, chapter I; Delattre, "Voltaire," section I; Masson, Religion, I, Chapter 1.

<sup>66</sup> Turretini was influential in securing this freedom which was an important step in dethroning confessional orthodoxy.

<sup>67</sup> Chapponnière, Voltaire, p. 40.

charitable Christianity of Turretini and his disciple Vernet. At the same time, they kept a stranglehold on the affairs of the Republic.

The other classes, on the other hand, upheld traditional Calvinism more than the official protectors of the faith. The lower city wanted its ancient political sovereignty returned and disliked what it saw as the upper city's betrayal of the old simplicity in life and orthodoxy in faith that had kept Geneva independent and strong. Gaberel estimates that at Voltaire's arrival the city was polarized with one half of the people wanting to emulate the French and with one half cleaving to the old way of life.<sup>68</sup> Since the sumptuary and other religious laws enforced a certain degree of social equality, the political and religious questions were inextricably tied together.<sup>69</sup> Spink's very interesting analysis of Genevois sermons of the period shows that most of the pastors were of the liberal Turretini-Vernet school in that they avoided contentious dogmatic matters.<sup>70</sup> However, in matters of morals and austerity, they were much more traditional, with most supporting the ancient ways.<sup>71</sup> Thus, when Voltaire formed his opinion of Geneva's religion from his initial contacts

---

<sup>68</sup> Gaberel, Voltaire, p. 34; see also Sayous, "Genève," pp. 383-384.

<sup>69</sup> Vallette, Rousseau, p. 12; see also Gay, Politics, chapter IV.

<sup>70</sup> Spink, Rousseau, pp. 129-147.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 145-147; Vallette, Rousseau, p. 12; thus their readiness to suppress Voltaire's theatre.

with the city's elite, he was somewhat misled; the situation was much more complex and much less settled than he seemed to believe.

72

Le Conseiller Jean-Louis Du Pan (1698-1775) was a prominent Genevan aristocrat who frequently visited Voltaire at les Délices and later at Ferney. On the whole, Du Pan shared his class's taste for a more luxurious life and for rational Christianity. He wrote to his friends the Freudenreichs in Berne on 9 January 1743:

Je veux aller faire le devot avec vous, je m'imagine que votre devotion est tres raissonable, je crois que vous prendriez aussi tot les bals, les grandes fetes, et le vin pour remede à votre corps. . . . vous avez bien raison de dire qu'il n'y a que le depit, le dégout ou le repentir, que puissent faire donner dans l'excès de la devotion.<sup>74</sup>

Understandably, he was one of the members of Council who was favorable to stage plays at les Délices: "Je crois que nous parlerons ce matin de la Comédie de St Jean, et j'espère que nous ne la défenderons pas . . ." Du Pan

---

<sup>72</sup>Chapuisat, Salons, for Du Pan's biography.

<sup>73</sup>Even though he was not fond of Voltaire's character: "J'admire l'esprit de Voltaire, mais je ne peux souffrir la fatuité et Son avarice." (BPU, Mss. suppl., 1538, fol. 138v, 1 January 1753). See also ibid., fol. 140v, 15 January 1753, and Best. D6033, 15 December 1754, for similar judgments.

<sup>74</sup>BPU, Mss. suppl., 1537, fol. 32v.

<sup>75</sup>Best. D6384, Du Pan to A. Freudenreich, 5 August 1755. In this same letter he asked Freudenreich to see that the Berne gazettes would not print that manuscripts of la Pucelle had been burned at Geneva without also noting that Voltaire had denied and denounced the poem. On 11 August 1755, Du Pan thanked Freudenreich for helping Voltaire in this matter and asked him to continue. (Best. D6401).

even found the authorized version of la Pucelle unexceptionable: "on n'y trouve que le badinage d'un homme d'esprit rien contre la religion, ni d'injurieux à personne." (Best. D6596, to Suzanne Freudenreich, 23 September 1755.) "La Pucelle nous a bien divertis, elle fait faire de beaux éclats de rire à nos femmes. . . ." (Best. D6617, to the Freudenreich's, 7 December 1755.)

In short, Du Pan was a not very pious layman who was willing to see some changes in Geneva's traditional life. Perhaps following Turretin and Vernet, he generally scorned  
76  
abstruse theology and shared with Voltaire a certain contempt for all priests. One day at Voltaire's table he heard d'Alembert tell a story about a Jesuit missionary to the savages in Canada who had lost his faith. When ordered to preach to a band that would very likely kill him,

quelqu'un lui dit qu'il étoit bien fou d'aller s'exposer ainsi pour une religion à laquelle il ne croyoit pas. Oh, dit-il, on voit que vous ne connoissez pas le plaisir de se faire écouter, et le plaisir en est d'autant plus grand quand on vient à bout de persuader des choses qu'on ne croit pas soi même.<sup>77</sup>

Du Pan then rhetorically asked, "Ne pensez vous pas qu'il y a bien de predicateurs qui ressemblent à ce Jesuite?"

---

<sup>76</sup>Chapuisat, Salons, pp. 21-22.

<sup>77</sup>BPU, Mss.suppl., 1538, fol. 83r-v, to the Freudenreich's, 18 August 1756. For some other anti-clerical passages see ibid., 1538, vol. 187v, 8 May 1754; fol. 200 r-v, 22 July 1754; 1539, fol. 87r, 11 September 1756; fol. 99r, 5 December 1756; fol. 132r, 24 October 1757; fol. 149bis r, 6 February 1758; fol. 191v, 16 October 1758; 1540, fol. 7v-8r, 23 February 1759; fol. 41 bis r-v, 17 October 1760; fol. 44r, 20 March 1761; fol. 49r, 30 Jan. 1762.



One of his most telling comments was made during a political crisis with Savoy: "Tous nos Ministres sans exception se sont tres bien conduits, et ont fait voir qu'ils étoient plus citoyens que Ministres."<sup>78</sup>

As his biographer said, Du Pan's characteristic attitude was "mi-hautaine, mi-sceptique";<sup>79</sup> however, there was also in him a more subdued strain of Genevan traditionalism. While it is obvious that Du Pan was not terribly austere--after all, he laughed at la Pucelle and priests alike--he strongly regretted that love of luxury seemed to be crowding out the traditional Calvinist respect for industry and economy.<sup>80</sup> Also he did not seem altogether happy with the direction theology was taking in Geneva even though his own religious thought was far from traditional.

Quand nous etions jeunes on nous enseignoit que J. Christ est venue pour nous sauver de la peine du peché originel, que l'eau du bapteme nous en lavoit, nos Ministres ont retranché ce peché de la liturgie du bapteme: on vouloit nous faire croire la trinité. Mr. Vernet n'en parle pas dans son catechisme. Mr. Alphonse Turretin a fait un traité sur la nécessité de la revelation, et Mr. Vernet a changé en le traduisant le mot de nécessité en grande utilité. Il y a des gens qui disent qu'on ne nous laisse plus de dogmes par ces changements, cependant il n'y a que les laïques qui puissent etre mécreans.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 1538, fol. 187v, 8 May 1754.

<sup>79</sup> Chapuisat, Salons, p. 23.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>81</sup> BPU, Mss. suppl., 1540, fol. 59r, 17 May 1762.

Note that Du Pan has singled out Vernet's "Socinian" characteristics for comment.

So the aristocratic layman, in his ambivalence towards religious and social change in the Republic of Geneva, mirrored the schism between the upper and lower city.

Furthermore, he came to see Voltaire's presence as a grave danger to Geneva.

∠ Voltaire a été assez dangereusement malade, il seroit guéri s'il vouloit, mais il se conduit comme un Poëte. Sa mort auroit causé une grande joye chez bien des gens. Les gens sages de notre pais voudroient qu'il n'y fut jamais venu, il a fait un mal incroyable dans notre ville en y faisant naitre une faction composez de Ministres et des devots. Si cette faction continue à s'échauffer, on pourra bien en venir a s'égorger pour la gloire de Dieu .  
 . . .<sup>82</sup>

Du Pan, then, agreed with Vernet that Voltaire was not religiously safe, but the anti-clerical reasons of the aristocrat were certainly different from those of the minister. Again, Du Pan showed the typical Genevan ambivalence toward Voltaire; like Vernet and the city as a whole, he seemed to be attracted and repelled, delighted and frightened--all simultaneously.

C. Voltaire and Lausanne: Just as Vernet, Geneva's chief theologian, was influential in attracting Voltaire to Switzerland, so too did J. A. N. Polier de Bottens, Lausanne's chief Calvinist minister, urge Voltaire to his city.  
<sup>83</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Polier de Bottens (1713-1783) remains rather elusive; he did not complete his autobiography, and his highly erudite published works were all uncontroversial. However, in 1757

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 1540, fol. 88r, [c. 11 December 1762].

<sup>83</sup> Supra, p. 190 . See also Roulet, Voltaire, chapter IV.

<sup>84</sup> Naves, Voltaire, pp. 23-33 and 141-148; Pomeau, Religion, pp. 296-297 and *passim* for glimpses of Polier.

85

Voltaire recruited him to the ranks of the encyclopédistes,  
and Polier furnished some seventeen articles, all on religious  
86  
subjects. Polier did his work too well:

Voici encore le mot Liturgie qu'un savant prêtre  
m'a apporté. . . . J'ai eu toutes les peines du  
monde à rendre cet article chrétien. Il a fallu  
corriger, adoucir presque tout . . . . Vous voyez,  
mon cher et sublime philosophe, quel progrès a  
fait la raison. C'est moi qui suis forcé de mo-  
dérer la noble liberté d'un théologien qui, étant  
prêtre par état, est incrédule par sens commun.  
(Best. D7165, Voltaire to d'Alembert, 19 February 1757.)

But even after Voltaire's pious editing, d'Alembert thought,  
"Nous aurons pourtant bien de la peine à faire passer cet  
87  
article . . . ." D'Alembert went on to explain to Voltaire  
that his nervousness was increased by the law passed a few days  
earlier that imposed the death penalty for anyone "qui aur-  
ont publié des Ecrits tendants à attaquer la religion . . ."  
(Best. D7247, 26 April 1757.)

Over the next few months Voltaire sent Polier's  
articles to d'Alembert which he acknowledged on 21 July 1757.  
"Les articles que vous nous envoyez de prédicateur hétérodoxe  
sont peut être une des plus grandes preuves des progrès de la  
philosophie dans ce siècle." (Best. D7320.) Again he asked  
permission to temper them: "de faire patte de velours dans  
les endroits où il aura un peu montré la griffe." To under-  
stand what pleased and startled d'Alembert and Voltaire,

<sup>85</sup>"Un prêtre hérétique de mes amis, savant et philosophe,  
vous destine Liturgie." Best. D7139, Voltaire to d'Alembert,  
4 February 1757.

<sup>86</sup>Naves, Voltaire, pp. 32-33, for a listing of the articles.  
Only nine were printed--all without Polier's name.

<sup>87</sup>Liturgie was, however, printed as submitted. (Naves,  
Voltaire, p. 33.)

88

consider Polier's article Messie which Voltaire used in shortened form in his Dictionnaire philosophique (1764).

After a short definition and etymology of the term (p. 401), Polier pointed out that it had been applied to foreign and Hebrew kings, prophets, and priests in the Old Testament (p. 402). Then he reviewed some rabbinical literature on the Messiah ending with an eschatological extravaganza (pp. 402-404) about which he commented, "On est humilié en détaillant des chimeres aussi absurdes que celles-là." (p. 404).

Having thus disposed of the theological background of Messianic speculation in Jesus's time, Polier turned to consider the divinity of Jesus: ". . . . Jesus-Christ lui-même, ou par ménagement, ou pour ne pas revolter les esprits, paroît extrêmement réservé sur l'article de sa divinité." (p. 404) This passage which presented some of the Christian evidence for Christ's divinity constituted only about five per cent of the article and was followed immediately by numerous arguments from Jewish sources against Jesus's divinity. (pp. 405-406) Polier closed his disquisition with an account of false messiahs from before the time of

---

<sup>88</sup> Encyclopédie, X, pp. 401ff.

<sup>89</sup> Naves, Voltaire, Appendix IV.

Christ until the end of the seventeenth century. (pp. 406-407). No wonder Voltaire could use Polier's work with little editing in his anti-Christian polemics; and no wonder d'Alembert was alarmed by "ce prédicateur hétérodox." Naves characterized the general tenor of Polier's Encyclopédie contributions as tending "de discréditer les controverses théologiques et les récits fabuleux de la Bible, dont un chrétien raisonnable et civilisé du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle ne peut rien tirer de satisfaction."<sup>90</sup>

If Polier was one who led Voltaire to expect to find Socinians<sup>91</sup> in Switzerland, then these writings could only confirm that expectation.

François Louis Allamand,<sup>92</sup> pastor at Bex in Vaud (1752-1764), entered into correspondence with Voltaire shortly after the poet settled in Switzerland. (Best. D6085, Voltaire to Allamand, 15 January 1755). They sporadically wrote one another until 1772, but their letters hardly ever moved beyond matters of scenery, health, and other commonplaces. Yet, in

---

<sup>90</sup>

Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>91</sup>

Supra, p. 192-193; let me emphasize once again that he was the head of Lausanne's ministry.

<sup>92</sup>

Vuilleumier, Histoire, IV, pp. 287-300.

the first surviving letter from Allamand to Voltaire, (Best. D6169, 17 February 1755) there is a hint as to what must have attracted Voltaire to the obscure pastor in a remote mountain village. Alamand explained that he had recently refused Le Clerc's old chair at the Arminian college in Amsterdam

parce que, Hérétique pour Hérétique, j'aime autant le pain de Calvin que celui d'un autre, et que mes Paisans ne s'embarrassent pas, si leur liberté est d'indifférence ou de spontanéité, pourvu que je les déclare prédestinés au salut, quand ils pratiquent les dix Commandemens.

So Voltaire discovered another highly learned Swiss Calvinist who swept aside theological subtlety for simple morality.

Allamand's published works confirm and intensify this  
93  
impression. In 1751, he published his Pensées anti-philosophiques, which--whilst being directed against Diderot's Pensées philosophiques--showed him an advocate of doubt in  
94  
matters religious. L'Anti-Bernier . . . (1770), Allamand's rebuttal of d'Holbach's Théologie portative . . . , defended Christianity, but not complex, confessional theology for "il se sent incapable d'en défendre aucun autre que celui du

---

93  
Vuilleumier, Histoire, IV, pp. 293-300; Pomeau, Religion, p. 299.

94  
George Polier de Bottens, the uncle of J. A. N. Polier de Bottens, also published against Diderot's Pensées. See Vuilleumier, Histoire, IV, p. 259 and Marx, "Autour."

95

Nouveau Testament." So he began with the basic Socinian exegetical principle which led to his denial of the Nicene Trinity: "Ce mot [Trinité] n'étant point dans l'Écriture, non plus que les autres expressions techniques dont on se sert pour expliquer, ou pour obscurcir le dogme même, je consentirais de bon cœur qu'il n'en fut plus parlé." <sup>96</sup> So it would seem that Allamand could fairly be classed among the Socinians.

Voltaire got along famously with these liberal priests during his winters at Lausanne. On 29 January 1756, he reported to Jacob Vernes that several of them visited Montriond, and "Il faut avouer qu'il y a plus d'esprit et de connaissance dans cette profession que dans aucune autre." (Best. D6709.) A year later the clerics attended the theatre there and Voltaire reported, to Vernes: "Nous avons été honorez hier samedi de la présence de douze ministres, qui ont amené tous les proposans . . . . La piété n'est point ennemie des plaisirs honnêtes." (Best. D7209, 20 March 1757). However, not everyone was pleased with Voltaire's affinity with

---

95

L'Anti-Bernier, I, p. vi, quoted in Vuilleumier, Histoire, IV, p. 295. Allamand used passages from Voltaire favorable to Christianity against the atheist d'Holbach. (Ibid., pp. 295-296).

96

L'Anti-Bernier, II, p. 284; quoted in Vuilleumier, Histoire, IV, p. 297.

the Lausannois clergy, for around mid-March in 1756, he was sent an anonymous letter from Berne warning him to leave the religion of the country alone.<sup>97</sup> Voltaire complained to Elie Bertrand,<sup>98</sup> pastor of the French Calvinist Church at Berne, on 6 April 1756 that the anonymous author was "un fou, mais . . . un fou très-dangereux," (Best. D6818) who must be stopped by the authorities.

Though the clergy of Lausanne were put off by Voltaire's boisterous celebration of Christmas in 1755 and by his poem on the disaster of Lisbon early in 1756,<sup>99</sup> and though there were some who wrote against him and defended Calvinist orthodoxy,<sup>100</sup> generally speaking Voltaire's impression of them as worldly in behaviour and liberal in theology was correct. Berne, the political master of Vaud who took its duty to oversee the faith and morals of their French-speaking subjects very seriously, became alarmed in 1757 about the state of Lausanne's Academy. After several weeks of investigation, the authorities reported that the ministers under the supervision of the Academy "ne prêchaient

---

97

Roulet, Voltaire, pp. 84-88, discusses this letter, which is lost.

98

Bertrand, who contributed scientific articles to the Encyclopédie, corresponded from 1754 through 1773 with Voltaire; his letters show him to be a very liberal Christian. Pomeau says of him, "le ministre bernois aboutit . . . au pur eudémonisme. . . . Enfin un prédicant renonçait à Jésus-Christ!" (Religion, p. 300) See also Roulet, Voltaire, pp. 64-68.

99

Roulet, Voltaire, pp. 77-81.

100

Vuilleumier, Histoire, IV, pp. 245-285, details the work of Lausanne's traditionalist apologists.



la plupart du temps qu'une morale sèche et délaissaient les doctrines capitales de la piété chrétienne."<sup>101</sup> One preacher even went so far as to preach Socinian principles openly; others had substituted liberal catechisms in place of the authorized, orthodox ones; and the theological teaching of the school was so heterodox that from then on the teachers could only expound certain approved, printed texts.<sup>102</sup> It would seem that Voltaire and the Bernois authorities agreed on the nature of Lausanne's religion.

Vuilleumier, in summing up the spirit of eighteenth century theology in Vaud,<sup>103</sup> sketched a way of thinking parallel to Vernet's and thus in accord with developed Socinianism. Vuilleumier lamented "que les hommes qui entendaient la révélation de cette façon-là n'eussent l'âme religieuse et même chrétienne,"<sup>104</sup> and attributed this religious climate to the theologians who were too taken by "ce christianisme raisonnable ou, si l'on peut dire, de cette raisonnabilité du christianisme d'un John Locke . . . ." <sup>105</sup> This excellent characterization stands for Geneva as well as Lausanne. What was cause for lament to the Christian historian was, as we have seen, a great joy to that critical historian of Christianity, Voltaire.

---

101

From the report of the investigating committee, quoted *ibid.*, IV, p. 232. Vuilleumier's analysis of Lausannois sermons (*ibid.*, p. 300) confirms the commissioners' findings.

102

*Ibid.*, IV, pp. 232-235.

103

*Ibid.*, IV, pp. 306-308.

104

*Ibid.*, IV, p. 308.

105

*Ibid.*, IV, p. 310.

## VIII

### QUARRELS ABOUT SOCINIANISM AT GENEVA: 1756-1758

1 2

A. L'Ame Atroce: Voltaire wrote La Loi Naturelle in 1752 to oppose La Mettrie's atheism but did not publish it until early in 1756. It was the object of strong attacks in France but was well received by the clergy and city fathers of Geneva.<sup>3</sup> As well as defending against atheism, this poem also disparaged all theological systems, which Voltaire claimed stifled the God-given voice of natural law and which ultimately led to persecution and murder. The poem chronicles the crimes of many religious traditions including the Calvinist:

Calvin et ses suppôts, guettés par la justice,  
Dans Paris, en peinture, allèrent au supplice.  
Servet fut en personne immolé par Calvin.  
Si Servet dans Genève eût été souverain,  
Il eût, pour argument contre ses adversaires,  
Fait serrer d'un lacet le cou des trinitaires.<sup>4</sup>

Voltaire, in declaring the Geneva that approved these lines  
<sup>5</sup>  
"un pays rempli de vrais philosophes", interpreted their

---

<sup>1</sup> Chaponnière, Voltaire, chapter VII, treats the "âme atroce" incident.

<sup>2</sup> Pomeau, Religion, pp. 282-285, discusses the context, ideas, and reception of this poem. I was struck by how little the theology of this poem was changed from that of the Henriade, nearly thirty-five years earlier.

<sup>3</sup> Supra, p. 215.

<sup>4</sup> Voltaire, Mélanges, pp. 282-283.

<sup>5</sup> Best. D6821, Voltaire to Cideville, 12 April 1756, supra, p. 215.

liberal Christianity as a purified religion free from all extraneous theology.

At the end of 1756, Voltaire published his Essai sur l'histoire général et sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à nos jours in Geneva, printed by the Cramers. This massive history, now generally referred to simply as l'Essai sur les moeurs, was unusual in that it began with the ancient orient and tried to recount the cultural history of the entire human race. Of course, it was an edifying book with the end of exposing and discrediting fanaticism and cruelty, especially when it was religiously inspired. In it was Voltaire's first lengthy treatment of the Socinians and other anti-Nicenes since the Lettres philosophiques of 1734. Indeed, it was his first extended historical study of them ever.

As to the ancient church, Voltaire quickly noted that "Ce qu'il y a de déplorable, c'est qu'à peine la religion chrétienne fut sur le trône que la sainteté fut profanée par des chrétiens qui se livrèrent à la soif de la vengeance."<sup>6</sup> In the provinces they slaughtered their former oppressors, the pagan magistrates, and made the struggle over the "consubstantialité du Verbe" (E.I, 299) a bloody one. Then, in the eleventh chapter, "Causes de la chute de l'empire romain", Voltaire declared: "Deux fléaux détruisirent

---

<sup>6</sup>Essai (Pomeau edition, which is always referred to in this study as E.), chapter X, E.I, p. 299. This is reminiscent of the Henriade, D. 2, V, 81-86; supra, p. 135.

enfin ce grand colosse: les barbares, et les disputes de religion." (E,I, p. 303) He argued that the empire was so taken up in the fight between the Arian and the Athanasians that the will to defend itself was lost. "On ne s'occupait que de deux objets, les courses du cirque et les trois hypostases." (E,I, p. 304) This was all that Voltaire had to say of the ancient anti-Nicenes--nothing of their or their opponents' merits, only a condemnation of the bloodshed and disorder resulting from the dispute.

When he turned to the Reformation in Geneva, he returned to his outrage against Calvin's cruelty. Recall that in his first letter to Vernet in 1733<sup>7</sup>, in his correspondence with the Genevois in 1755 and 1756, and in La Loi naturelle his major point about Calvin was that he had had Servetus burned at the stake. The Essai sur les moeurs ran true to form: of the two chapters on the Reform in Geneva (CXXXIII-CXXXIV), the second "De Calvin et de Servet" was nearly twice as long as the first. After an account of the establishment of the new dispensation in Geneva which emphasized the great improvement in morals, Voltaire closed his chapter, "De Genève et de Calvin", by stating that Calvin had had "l'esprit tyrannique" as shown by his chasing Castellio from the city and by "la mort cruelle" of Servetus. (E,II, p. 243)

The chapter on Calvin and Servetus began by noting

---

<sup>7</sup>  
Best. D653, supra, p. 194.

that Servetus abandoned the "art utile" of medicine for  
 the "sciences dangereuses" (E,II, 243) of theology. In  
 his new and fatal trade, Servetus

adoptait en partie les anciens dogmes soutenus par  
 Sabellius, par Eusèbe, par Arius, qui dominèrent  
 dans l'Orient, et qui furent embrassés au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle  
 par Lelio Socini, reçus ensuite en Pologne, en  
 Angleterre, en Hollande. (E.II, p. 244)

As he had done earlier in the Lettres philosophes, Voltaire  
 here said there was continuity in the various ancient, Re-  
 formation, and contemporary anti-Nicenes. Chapter one of  
 this study has shown that there was no historical link be-  
 tween the earliest anti-Nicenes and Servetus, nearly none  
 between Servetus and the Socinians, and only an indirect con-  
 nection between the Socinians and the eighteenth century  
 liberal Christians. However, Voltaire's likely historical  
 sources all assumed intimate ties among the anti-Nicenes  
 of all periods, which assumption Voltaire turned to give the  
 respectability of antiquity to the party of heresy.

There was another striking similarity between this  
 chapter of the Essai and the seventh Lettre philosophique,  
 which had said "les plus grands Philosophes et les meilleurs  
 piumes de leur tems" were in the Socinian camp.

---

<sup>8</sup>  
 Voltaire noted that Servetus had discovered the  
 circulation of the blood. (E,II, p. 244)

<sup>9</sup>  
Supra, pp. 159-165.

<sup>10</sup>  
L.P., Lanson, I, p. 80.

Il semble aujourd'hui qu'on fasse amende honorable aux cendres de Servet: de savants pasteurs des Eglises protestantes, et même les plus grands philosophes, ont embrassé ses sentiments et ceux de Socin. Ils ont encore été plus loin qu'eux<sup>11</sup>: leur religion est l'adoration d'un Dieu par la médiation du Christ. (E,II, p. 247)

The greatest philosophes, always Newton and Locke in the Voltairean canon, and learned pastors have even gone beyond Socinus to a sort of Christian deism. Thus, in the Essai in 1756, Voltaire was more optimistic about the success of enlightened Christianity than he had been in 1734 in the Lettres philosophiques, where he insisted that the English anti-Nicenes could barely survive. Although he named only England and the Netherlands as places where Socinianism had spread, it is certain from his correspondence reviewed in the previous chapter that Voltaire had the Genevois in mind. Quite likely the confident tone of the Essai reflects Voltaire's early joyous impressions of Geneva's religion.

The Essai's account of Calvin's treatment of Servetus was straightforward and accurate.<sup>12</sup> Servetus entered into a debate by correspondence with Calvin in the incredible hope of convincing Calvin of the errors of the Trinity. "De la dispute Calvin passa aux injures, et des injures à

---

<sup>11</sup>"Ce qui augment encore l'indignation et la pitié, c'est que Servet . . . reconnaît nettement la divinité éternelle de Jésus-Christ." (E, II, p. 246)

<sup>12</sup>Bainton, Heretic, chapters 8-11, confirms Voltaire in the main.

cette haine théologique, la plus implacable de toutes les haines." (E, II, p. 245) This hatred led Calvin to denounce Servetus to the French Inquisition, but Servetus escaped whilst under investigation. Foolishly he stopped in Geneva where he was recognized, arrested, and imprisoned in terrible conditions.

Enfin, à force de presser les juges . . . de crier et de faire crier que Dieu demandait l'exécution de Michel Servet, il le fit brûler vif, et jouit de son supplice, lui qui, s'il eût mis le pied en France, eût été brûlé lui-même. (E, II, p. 246)<sup>13</sup>

Thus Voltaire proved that Calvin had "l'esprit tyrannique", was infected with "la haine theologique", and, in general, was branded by a certain "dureté" of character common to the "esprit sanguinaire" (E, II, p. 248) of the age of the Reformation. Fortunately, Voltaire concluded, that spirit was finally dead or "l'Europe serait un vaste cimetière". (E, II, p. 248)

In the 1756 edition of the Essai, as in the Lettres philosophiques, there was practically no discussion of anti-Nicene theology: not in regard to the heresiarchs of the primitive church, to Servet, nor in chapter CLXXXIX, "De la Pologne au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, et des sociniens ou unitaires." The last two long paragraphs of chapter CLXXXIX, devoted

---

13

Whilst Calvin acted as prosecutor at one stage in the trial, he had asked for a more humane form of execution. La Loi naturelle (supra, p. 235) also stressed that what Calvin did to Servetus in Geneva was the fate awaiting Calvin in Paris.

to the Socinians, began by noting that religion "causa peu de troubles dans cette partie du monde." (E, II, p.742)

The "unitaires, qu'on appelle tantôt sociniens, tantôt ariens,"<sup>14</sup> (E, II, p.743) were tolerated there until 1658, when Voltaire said they were proscribed for political reasons. In describing the fate of the Socinians in Poland, Voltaire made two rather serious errors. First, he said they were "assez florissante en Pologne jusqu'à l'année 1658" (E, II, p.743) whilst they were actually decimated by then.<sup>15</sup> Second, he claimed, "ils sont encore en grand nombre en Pologne, quoiqu'ils y aient perdu la liberté de faire un profession ouverte de leurs sentiments." (E, II, p.743)

This Socinian underground in Poland must have been the product of Voltaire's wishful thinking, for they had been successfully extirpated there for nearly a century--as Voltaire's<sup>16</sup> likely sources stated.

The chapter closed with another burst of optimism concerning the progress of this enlightened form of Christianity.

---

14

He emphasized their pacifism and their attempt to return to the purity of primitive Christianity. (E, II, p. 743). See supra, pp. 7-9 and 165-166 for a discussion of the varying terminology.

15

Supra, pp. 30-31.

16

Maimbourg's Histoire de l'arianisme, the only source cited by Voltaire (E, II, p. 743--paraphrased) in this chapter, is clear that the Socinians in Poland were extinct. (Supra, p. 31) For what Voltaire's other possible sources said on this, see supra, Chapter 1 and pp. 162-165.



Cette religion s'est étendue surdement en Hollande<sup>17</sup>, en Transylvanie<sup>18</sup>, en Silésie<sup>19</sup>, en Pologne<sup>20</sup>, mais surtout en Angleterre<sup>21</sup>. On peut compter, parmi les révolutions de l'esprit humain, que cette religion, qui a dominé dans l'Eglise à diverses fois pendant trois cent cinquante années depuis Constantin, se soit reproduite dans l'Europe depuis deux siècles, . . . sans avoir aujourd'hui de temple en aucun endroit du monde<sup>22</sup>. (E, II, pp. 743-744)

Note that, as he had done in his earlier comments in the Essai concerning the infiltration of Socinianism into Protestant

17

Socinian influence in the Netherlands at this time was quite diffused (supra, pp. 43-44). In the Essai (II, p. 743), Voltaire corrected his "Lettre hollandaise" of 1722 (supra, pp. 94ff) by writing that in Holland "jamais les unitaires ou les sociniens n'y ont eu d'assemblée publique." The Essai chapter on the Netherlands in the seventeenth century (ch. CLXXXVII) stresses its tolerance but does not mention that the Socinians fled there from Poland.

18

There was an officially tolerated Unitarian church in Transylvania (supra, p. 15).

19

In 1756 an infinitesimally significant remnant of the Polish Socinians survived in Silesia (supra, p. 31).

20

There were no Socinians in Poland in 1756 as just discussed.

21

There were no Socinian organizations then in England; what influence there was very indirect (supra, pp. 159ff). The 1756 edition of the Essai in its chapter on England under Charles II (ch. CLXXXII) did not mention the English anti-Nicenes. However, the 1761 edition did (infra, p. 344).

22

But there were temples in Transylvania and Silesia in 1756.

confessions à propos the death of Servetus, Voltaire prudently avoided mentioning Geneva. Whilst in his eyes a term of praise, Voltaire well knew that "Socinian" was, in general use, an insult. This particular passage on the silent progress of Socinianism is also interesting in that it almost seems to be a paraphrase of part of the seventh Lettre philosophique, to wit:

Quoiqu'il en soit, le parti d'Arius commence à revivre en Angleterre aussi bien qu'en Hollande et en Pologne . . . . Vous voyez quelles révolutions arrivent dans les opinions comme dans les Empires. Le Parti d'Arius, après trois cens ans de triomphe et douze siècles d'oubli, renaît enfin de sa cendre.

Voltaire thus had printed in Geneva, the centre of Protestantism and Calvin's city, a very disagreeable portrait of Calvin and his theory that Protestantism, through Socinianism, was moving towards his sort of natural religion. As he wrote to Vernes on 13 January 1757: "C'est une chose bien honorable pour Geneve mon cher et aimable ministre qu'on imprime dans cette ville que Servet était un sot, et Calvin un barbare." (Best. D7119) Much to his pleasure, and perhaps surprise, the Genevois did not rise up against him. He bragged to Pierre Rousseau, editor of the Journal encyclopédique (Liège), that "ce que j'ay trouvé de plus commode parmy les

calvinistes très différents de leurs ancestres, c'est que j'ay fait imprimer à Geneve avec l'approbation universelle que Calvin était un très méchant homme, altier, dur, vindicatif et sanguinaire." (Best. D7172, 24 February 1757)

This, of course, showed to Voltaire, as Polier's Encyclopédie work around the same time showed, that Switzerland was full of philosophes.

In fact, Voltaire was so pleased with the Genevois that he wanted to share the good news with the world. Accordingly, he wrote his "trompette" Thieriot a letter dated 26 March 1757 (Best. D7213), which was clearly intended for publication. On 13 April (Best. D7232), Thieriot reported that his commission had been completed by turning the letter over to the editor of the Mercure and that he thought the letter was well worth publishing. It appeared in the May, 1757, issue of the Mercure and included this passage about Geneva:

J'ai fait ce que j'ai pu toute ma vie pour contribuer à étendre cet esprit de philosophie et de tolérance, qui semble aujourd'hui caractériser le siècle. . . . Ce n'est pas un petit exemple du progrès de la raison humaine qu'on ait imprimé à Genève dans cet essai sur l'histoire, avec l'approbation publique, que Calvin avait une âme atroce aussi bien qu'un esprit éclairé. Le meurtre de Servet paraît aujourd'hui abominable. (D7213).

That Voltaire meant this as the highest praise is clear from

---

<sup>24</sup> Supra, pp. 227-230.

<sup>25</sup> On the same day he wrote to J. R. Tronchin (Best. D7218): "Permettez que je vous envoie cette lettre à Tiriôt pour luy donner cours." Chaponnière erred when he said this letter was published due to Thieriot's indiscretion (Voltaire, p. 79). Chaponnière suggests (ibid., p. 81), probably correctly, that Voltaire intended this letter as well as the Essai chapters on Geneva "de pousser les choses jusqu'au bout et de sacrifier les lois anciennes aux moeurs nouvelles" in Geneva.

the context of "philosophie" and "tolérance", his two great ideals.

Not surprisingly, however, the Genevois were not flattered; Voltaire had made the serious mistake of taking a lack of public attack as "l'approbation publique" of his treatment of Calvin. For example, the naturalist Charles Bonnet, one of the many scientists who flourished under the liberal Calvinism of eighteenth century Geneva, was far from approving what Voltaire had printed in his Essai:

cet Ouvrage est élégamment écrit; mais les Serpents y dormant sous les fleurs. La Religion y est attaquée directement ou indirectement en cent endroits. L'Autheur préfère pourtant la sappe à la force ouverte.<sup>26</sup>

He went on to say (fol. 127r) that the Essai, in dwelling on and exaggerating the excesses of the Jews in the Old Testament, wanted to discredit revelation. In a passage very reminiscent of Vernet's ideas on the social utility of re-

<sup>27</sup>ligion, Bonnet continued:

Ce qui me déplaît le plus dans cet Autheur, c'est la manque de bonne foi: . . . un Homme qui cherche à rompre les liens sacrés qui unissent les Hommes; un Homme qui fait les plus grands efforts pour saper les fondements d'une Religion qui est le plus ferme appui de la Société; un Homme enfin qui tâche de nous enlever les plus douces consolations que nous ayons ici bas; cet Homme, dis-je, est-il un vrai Philosophe, un Ami des Hommes, un coeur vertueux? (fol. 127r)

---

<sup>26</sup>BPU, Mss Bonnet, vol. 85, fol. 126v, to M. de Geer, 16 January 1759.

<sup>27</sup>Supra, pp. 198-199 and 209-212.

28

Like Vernet, Bonnet scored the deist who foolishly attacked revealed religion, which he saw as man's greatest individual consolation and source of social order.

29

Very quickly, by May, 1757, French Catholic opinion was rising against Voltaire's Mercure letter, which was deemed interesting enough to be reprinted immediately.<sup>30</sup> Voltaire's well-honed protective instincts soon came into play. Around 15 May 1757, he wrote Vernes (Best. D7261), saying he had seen his letter in the Mercure but that it was "toutte défigurée et toute tronquée." It did not even make sense, Voltaire claimed: "Comment aurais je pu écrire que j'ay fait imprimer icy dans mon histoire que Calvin avait une âme atroce puisque cela ne se trouve point dans mon histoire?" Whilst it was true that "âme atroce" does not appear in the Essai, it was a reasonable inference from the text. Furthermore, Voltaire had written Vernes earlier (Best. D7119)<sup>31</sup> that Calvin was "un barbare."

To make his lie to Vernes that the Mercure had printed from bad copy more believable, Voltaire enlisted the help of Thieriot on 20 May 1757 (Best. D7264). For once, when threatened with official disapproval, Voltaire did not seem very worried: "je vous confie tout doucement qu'il y a

---

<sup>28</sup> Bonnet, whilst devout, was a very liberal Christian (infra, pp. 320-323.)

<sup>29</sup> Best. D7253, Alexis Piron to Pierre Louis Dumay; Piron, of course, was not offended by the references to Calvin but by those to the recent attempted assassination of Louis XV.

<sup>30</sup> Best. D7213, textual notes.

<sup>31</sup> Supra, p. 243.

dans le pays que j'habite trois ou quatre personnes qui sont encore du seizième siècle." These few, Voltaire said, were not pleased with having their Calvin assigned an "âme atroce". Therefore,

Vous me feriez plaisir de me mander qu'on a imprimé cette lettre sur une copie infidèle . . . , que dans celle que vous avez reçue de ma main il y a âme trop austère et non pas âme atroce. En effet autant qu'il peut m'en souvenir, c'était là la véritable leçon.

It was already too late to head off trouble, but the ploy of attributing the strongest language to copyist's errors might allay some of the repercussions. On 21 May 1757 le Conseil magnifique of Geneva received a request from le Vénérable Consistoire to censure Voltaire on his Mercure letter and on the passages of the Essai that treated Calvin harshly. The Council noted it had already conveyed its disapproval of these documents and had already acted on the suggestion of the Consistory that reissues of Voltaire's books would have "tout ce qui y seroit contraire à la Religion et aux bonnes moeurs"<sup>32</sup> suppressed. Thus Voltaire's request for help from Thieriot was nearly certainly his response to Council's expression of disapproval.

---

<sup>32</sup>Best. D7264, commentary, prints the relevant minutes of Council along with the request of the Consistory. See also Chaponnière, Voltaire, p. 81.

Whilst Voltaire was quietly trying to cover his tracks and the Consistory and Council were privately admonishing Voltaire, a group of Genevan traditionalists were preparing to meet Voltaire in open battle. Their open letter to Voltaire (Best. D7272), dated 30 May 1757, was published anonymously in the June issue of the Journal helvétique (Neuchâtel) and was shortly reprinted as a pamphlet. All in all, this quite long letter was a most peculiar effort; it vaunted enlightened religion, "vous ne devez pas ignorer qu'en effet tous les principes de l'évangile tendent à la liberté d'examen, à la charité, à la tolérance"; it agreed that Servetus's death was shameful, ". . . il fallait le remettre jugement de dieu. C'est une tache à notre histoire, c'est une tache à la vie de Calvin; nous en convenons." But, they argued, his execution was in no way a murder: Servetus had a proper trial before the legally constituted authorities and was condemned and burnt under a law that had its equivalent everywhere in Europe then. "Aujourd'hui l'on trouve cette loi injuste . . ."

Thus, concerning Geneva's treatment of Servetus, had

<sup>33</sup>The plural is nominal as the authorship of this letter remains unknown; it is written in the first person plural. Chaponnière, Voltaire, pp. 81-82, says it was "évidemment due à Vernet" on stylistic grounds. The ideas were those of Vernet's, but so were the ideas of most educated Genevois; however, the tone of letter was considerably harsher than Vernet's usual one. Thus, I do not find Chaponnière's attribution conclusive. Naves, Voltaire, p. 47, without giving his reasons, says Vernet was the author.

<sup>34</sup>The letter, in attempting to correct Voltaire's account of the arrest of Servetus in Geneva, made several errors and was much less accurate than Voltaire had been.

Voltaire been content "de dire en termes décents et mesurés, que ce jugement ne nous fait pas honneur, et qu'il n'y a personne aujourd'hui parmi nous qui l'approuve, vous n'auriez dit que la vérité." So it was the words "âme atroce" and "meurtre" that caused the offense.

The letter, however reserved its greatest indignation for Voltaire's having published that his writings on Calvin had "l'approbation publique".<sup>35</sup> Worse still, it continued, this false claim might be extended to everything Voltaire published in Geneva:

Car sur ce pied là, vous pourrez aussi un de ces jours écrire confidemment à votre ami [Thieriot] qui peut-être ne s'en taira pas:  
 'Admirez le progrès de la philosophie (c'est à dire de l'epicuréisme .), vous savez combien j'ai subtilement lâché des traits contre la providence, contre l'immortalité de l'âme, contre la religion des Juifs, contre l'histoire sainte, contre les prophètes etc. Vous voyez avec quelle adresse je travaille à affaiblir, à saper toutes les preuves du christianisme, et comment sous l'agréable forme d'une histoire, j'ai su faire une véritable satire de la religion: et cependant tout cela vient d'être imprimé à Genève avec l'approbation publique.'

Rather strong, but when one sees "serpents sous les fleurs",<sup>36</sup> one is morally obliged to call out a warning. Indeed, as events at the end of 1757 were to prove, this warning was warranted.

<sup>35</sup> It even pointed out that Voltaire's Epître on arriving in Geneva was condemned (supra, pp. 191-192).

<sup>36</sup> Bonnet's phrase; see supra, p.245 .



As the letter pointed out, Geneva did not have very strict controls over publishing; but, "C'est une connivence en faveur du commerce, bien différente d'une approbation." They continued that after the Essai was printed with its sanguinary portrait of Calvin, "le mal étant fait, l'on ne dit mot, espérant qu'au moins le publique équitable ne nous imputerait rien d'un livre qui ne porte pas le nom de Genève"; but the Mercure letter demanded a reply. As Chaponnière said, to attack Calvin in private conversation or in a learned book was one thing-- "Mais attaquer Calvin dans le Mercure de France, entre un logogriphe et une chanson à boire!"<sup>37.</sup> was altogether another thing.

This anonymous letter in its tension between its liberal theology and its indignation at Voltaire's audacity in exposing Geneva's liberalism was an expression of the precarious equilibrium in Geneva between the progressive and the traditionalist factions. It would seem, in spite of the harshness of the letter, that the progressive side was ascendent; the letter affirmed the essence of Voltaire's analysis, and the conflict boiled down to a scolding of Voltaire's bad manners in insulting the founder of Geneva's Calvinist state and, indeed, the present day Calvinists.

---

37

Chaponnière, Voltaire, p. 80.

Notwithstanding Voltaire's gracious Epître . . . en arrivant dans sa terre and his constant praise of the Genevois in his correspondence, Desnoiresterres was right in saying that Voltaire "venait demander le repos et la paix à Genève, comme si ses biens étaient faits pour lui." <sup>38</sup> There was more than a little arrogance in his attempt to accelerate Geneva's rush into liberalism with his writings.

Voltaire did not even seem to be annoyed by the letter in the Journal helvétique. He wrote to Thieriot on 2 June 1757 (Best. D7275):

Ce qu'on m'avait dit de l'atroce est une mauvaise plaisanterie qu'on a voulu faire à deux bonnes gens à qui on prétendait faire accroire qu'ils devaient pleurer sur leur patriarche, mais ils l'ont abandonné comme les autres. Nos calvinistes ne sont point du attachez à Calvin, il y a icy plus de philosophes qu'ailleurs.

I think that Voltaire had been assured by his friends on Geneva's Council that nothing could come of this more or less hypocritical defense of Calvin. It will be clear in the next few paragraphs that the city fathers were not at all interested in defending Calvin's reputation.

The Compagnie des pasteurs on 15 July 1757 noted that the Journal helvétique had defended the memory of Calvin "en réponse aux outrages imprimés dans un mercure de Paris" and that the Compagnie "voit avec plaisir l'apologie

---

38

Desnoiresterres, Voltaire, V, p. 127.

39

q̄ l'on fait de notre Religion et de nos Réformateurs."

They also appointed a commission of six ministers, including Jacob Vernet, to report on the matter at a later meeting. Vernet took his appointment very seriously--apparently he did not know Voltaire had said "nos calvinistes ne sont point du tout attachés à Calvin"--and entered into correspondence with the Tronchin family, first to ask Théodore Tronchin if it would be good for Vernet to answer Voltaire publically. (Best. D7319) Obviously Tronchin thought that would be a very bad manoeuvre, for Vernet wrote three days after his first letter, "je souhaite comme

---

39

Best., Appendix D157, vol. D. 102, pp. 500-502, prints extracts from the Compagnie's minutes of July and September, 1757, where Voltaire was condemned.

40

The relevant letters, all from 1757, are:

Best. D7319, Vernet to Théodore Tronchin, 19 July;  
 Best. D7322, Vernet to Théodore Tronchin, 22 July;  
 BPU, Archives Tronchin, 167, pp. 225-226, Vernet to Théodore Tronchin, 11 September (for the complete text of this letter see Appendix A of this study);  
Ibid., pp. 226-227, Vernet to Théodore Tronchin, 12 September (for the complete text of this letter see Appendix A of this study);  
 Best. D7382, Vernet to Théodore Tronchin, 13 September;  
 Best. D7383, Théodore Tronchin to Vernet, 13 September;  
 Best. D7389, Vernet to Théodore Tronchin, 20 September;  
 Best. D7392, Jean Robert Tronchin to Vernet, 21 September;  
 Best. D7396, Voltaire to Théodore Tronchin, 23 September;  
 Best. D7398, Théodore Tronchin to Vernet, 24 September;  
 Best. D7404, Vernet to Théodore Tronchin, 29 September;  
 Best. D7409, Théodore Tronchin to Vernet, 4 October.

vous que toute cette noize soit absolument étouffée."

(Best. D7322).

Although Vernet had given up the idea of open epistolary confrontation, he was still determined to defend Calvin's name. On 11 September 1757, he wrote Théodore Tronchin again asking him for the loan of his manuscript copy of Servetus's The Restoration of Christianity, which Vernet needed for the historical study he was preparing. Even though Vernet promised the utmost prudence and moderation in his work, Tronchin refused to loan him the manuscript. Vernet wrote the next day, obviously offended asking Tronchin to clarify some points about the contents of the manuscript, "Puis que vous avés de fortes raisons de ne pas communiquer votre Mss. à quelcun meme qui n'a en vice que l'honr. de nos Reformateurs . . ." (App. A)

Tronchin must have thought that Vernet still had in mind a public answer to Voltaire's Mercure letter along the lines of that which had already appeared in the Journal helvétique as Vernet began his letter of 13 September to Tronchin (Best. D7382) with "Je ne prends nul intérêt à la lettre de Journal Helvetique et Mr de Volt. . ." His plans were more ambitious: "je me suis mis à épilucher les deux chap. de l'Essay de m<sup>r</sup> de Vol. sur l'Hist<sup>re</sup> qui ont pour titre Geneve et Calvin et Calvin et Servet", and he needed to see Tronchin's manuscript for this. Of

course, he was writing with "une modération et un civilité<sup>41</sup> dont M<sup>r</sup> de V. et vous serés contens." The same day Théodore Tronchin thundered back: "Toute cette affaire, Monsieur, me chagrine infiniment . . . . La cause de Calvin est insoutenable, ce qui nous reste à faire c'est d'en rougir." He thought, and said the Magnifique Conseil thought, that any further publication on this matter could only bring shame to Geneva and her religion. (Best. D7383)

Vernet persisted and wrote again to Theodore Tronchin on 20 September. (Best. D7389) This very long letter agreed that the trouble over the anonymous letter in the Journal helvétique and the Mercure letter must stop but insisted that "Le désir général de mes collègues est que l'on prenne en main la défense de la Religion." The pastors intended to publish a small book that would defend Christianity in general and Calvinism and "nos Réformateurs" in particular.<sup>42</sup> In the postscript Vernet asked Theodore Tronchin to let Voltaire and Jean Robert Tronchin, one of the leading members of Geneva's Council, know Vernet's position. J. R. Tronchin replied to Vernet directly (Best. D7392) and confirmed

---

<sup>41</sup> This eventually appeared under the title Lettre à Mr. Formey, infra, pp. 263-264.

<sup>42</sup> Events moved too quickly, so this book never appeared. Vernet, however, in 1761 published his Lettres critiques d'un voyageur anglais . . . , which include such defenses (infra, pp. 309ff).

43

Théodore's judgment: "C'est leur intérêt, c'est le vôtre M<sup>r</sup>, c'est celui de l'Eglise, du Gouvernem<sup>t</sup>, qui nous a fait désirer que cette dispute fût abimée dans l'oubli." His reasons were: first, Voltaire "a voulu très visiblement donner un éloge à l'esprit de modération qu'il croit régner dans notre Ville" and would withdraw any offending statements. Second, since the immoderate anonymous letter had already appeared, any further Genevois defense of Calvin would certainly be linked to it by the reading public; and, third, "le supplice de Servet est un meurtre."

The Compagnie des pasteurs, undiscouraged by the attitude of the political masters of their republic, met on 23 September 1757 and received the report of their commission to study the Journal helvétique letter. First they noted that "on ne pouvait q. louer le but de l'auteur"<sup>44</sup> but felt he went too far in attacking Voltaire personally and in his strong language. Then they went on to say that in his histories Voltaire harmed Christianity and especially Protestantism and recommended that some of their members undertake to refute these attacks "en observant toutes les règles les plus exactes de la modération"

---

43

The unnamed authors of the letter in the Journal helvétique.

44

See note 39 supra.

et de la charité X<sup>e</sup>." Professor Vernet, through the commission, offered to undertake this task with the Compagnie's aid. A week later they reconsidered the Commission's report and agreed again that some of their members should refute Voltaire—of course, with "la modération et la charité X<sup>e</sup>." So while Geneva's magistrates basked in Voltaire's praise of their moderation and agreed that Calvin was a murderer, their ministers were preparing to answer the master of Les Délices.

On the same day that the ministers were hearing Vernet's committee's report condemning Voltaire, Voltaire wrote a letter to Théodore Tronchin (Best. D7396) that very seriously undermined Vernet's credibility.

Il me paraît assez étrange m<sup>r</sup> que le seul catholique romain qui jamais ait été le panégyriste de la liberté de Genève et de son gouvernement trouve un adversaire dans un Genevois. Ce qui doit me surprendre et m'affliger davantage c'est que ce Genevois soit m. le ministre Vernet.

Then he outlined his relations with Vernet; he pointed out that Vernet was the first to invite him to Geneva, that Vernet edited the first edition of the very work he now wished to refute, that Vernet induced the Cramers to invite him to Geneva, that Vernet was the first Genevois to visit him in Geneva and that he visited often, and finally that Vernet had been in perfect accord with Voltaire

---

45

No doubt Tronchin had shown Voltaire Best. D7389 as Vernet had authorized.

on Servetus and Calvin.

To prove his case, Voltaire enclosed copies of Vernet's letters from 1754 (Best. D5663, D5698, D5734, D5777) showing Vernet's role in the 1754 edition of the Essai sur les moeurs<sup>46</sup> and a copy of the publisher Philibert's letter (Best. D5776) on the same topic. One of the most incriminating of Vernet's letters was Best. D5734 (16 March 1754), where we find him writing to Voltaire, "Vous êtes un de ceux qui ont le plus rendu de service au genre humain du côté de la tolérance, et l'on y parvient mieux par l'Histoire que par les raisonnements". Now Voltaire paraphrased this in his letter to Tronchin (Best. D7396) and commented, "et ce sont aujourd'hui les armes de l'intolérance qu'il prend contre moi." Finally, Voltaire promised he would enter into no controversy: "mon respectueux attachement pour la république, et ma reconnaissance pour les bontés véritables dont on m'honore ici m'imposent un silence que m. Vernet aurait dû peut-être garder."

Théodore Tronchin the next day (Best. D7398) wrote Vernet enclosing copies of both Voltaire's and J. R. Tronchin's reactions to Vernet's plans. He repeated his consistent request that no more be said on Calvin and Servetus and pointed out the difficulty of Vernet's position:

---

<sup>46</sup>

Supra, pp. 195-196.



J'avois lu M<sup>r</sup>. toutes vos lettres à M<sup>r</sup> de V. et je sentois l'incompatibilité des services que vous lui avés rendus, et de ceux que vous vouliés rendre à la réformation, à notre Etat, et à Calvin. Je vous l'avoue de bonne foy, M<sup>r</sup>, ne pouvant m'apri-voiser à l'idée que le chef de notre Théologie eût été l'Editeur des oeuvres de M<sup>r</sup> de V., je n'ai pas cru que le Public en général, et nos étudiants en particulier pussent s'y accoutumer.

Again, he reminded Vernet that the Magnifique Conseil thought no good could come from any further publication. Vernet was in a terrible position; his liberalism had thoroughly compromised him in regard to Voltaire, and the powerful men of the city as well as Voltaire were dead set against his taking up his pen in defence of Calvin. However, as we have seen, Vernet and the Compagnie des pasteurs were determined to go ahead.

This exchange closed with Vernet's letter of 29 September 1757 (Best. D7404) to Tronchin and Tronchin's answer of 4 October (Best. D7409). Vernet defended himself credibly, noting that his entire life had been devoted to the defence of Christianity and that not to speak up now would be false to an "obligation d'honneur et de conscience" and pointed out that he had warned Voltaire early in 1755 not to meddle in religion in Geneva (Best. D6146).<sup>47</sup> His comments on his feelings about Voltaire are very revealing:

---

<sup>47</sup>

Supra, p. 210-212.

A vrai dire je le craignois et le désirois. Je le craignois parce que j'appréhendois toujours son peu de retenue sur des sujets respectables et je le désirois d'un côté parce que sa conversation est fort aimable, et de l'autre parce que j'espérois que vivant avec nous, il apprendroit à mieux connoitre la religion. . . .

It would thus seem that his invitation to Voltaire to join the Calvinist persuasion (Best. D6146) was straightforward. Tronchin had finally had more than he could bear. Vernet was not to be dissuaded, so the good doctor Tronchin washed his hands of the matter. "Nous ne pouvons pourtant pas nous dissimuler l'inutilité des disputes théologiques . . . . Conservons nos moeurs, M<sup>r</sup>, elles seront le vrai soutien de notre Religion." So Tronchin, in ending his attempt to quiet Geneva's ministers, conformed to Voltaire's impression of 1756: "l'adoration d'un être suprême joint à la morale est la religion de presque tous les magistrats." (Best. D6821).

Le conseiller Dupan, in a letter of 22 August 1757, to the Freudenreichs, reported that the cabal responsible for the anonymous letter in the Journal helvétique had prepared another but that they had been forced to withdraw it. Dupan stated that he knew the people responsible for "cette vilaine" nameless attack, but he did not write down whom. However, he did reveal that "l'on ne doute pas que le principal

---

48

Supra, p. 215.

49

BPU, Mss suppl. 1539, fol. 126r-127v, see Appendix A of this study.

auteur de la lettre n'ait travaillé à assoupir cette affaire, parce que l'on a en main de quoi le perdre de reputation si l'on pousoit Voltaire au dernier retranchement." This corresponds very well to Vernet's position in regard to Voltaire, and we know that Voltaire had already embarrassed Vernet when pushed too far. This can only increase the suspicion that Vernet was responsible for the letter in question; it is not a conclusive proof. At any rate, Dupan said, "les gens sensez" were filled "d'indignation et d'horreur" by the Swiss Mercure's answer to the French. No doubt, Dupan, who disliked clergymen, excluded the Compagnie des pasteurs from the category of "gens sensez" since they had praised that dreadful letter on 15 July. 50

Voltaire through all of this maintained perfect public silence. As he explained to d'Alembert on 29 August 1757:

Il est impossible que dans la ville de Calvin, peuplée de vingt quatre mille raisonneurs, il n'y ait pas encore quelques calvinistes; mais ils sont en très petit nombre et assez bafoués. Tous les honnêtes gens sont des déistes par Christ. Il y a des sots, il y a des fanatiques et des fripons; mais je n'ai aucun commerce avec ces animaux, et je laisse braire les ânes sans me mêler de leur musique. (Best. D7357).

He would have been very foolish to have offended his friends in Geneva's government who were working so hard to keep the matter quiet. To insure their continuing cooperation, Voltaire

again stated that the Mercure letter was an inaccurate copy of his original and further denied any interest at all in whatever might appear in such publications as the Mercure de France and the Journal helvétique.

51

Bertrand, the Francophone Calvinist minister at Berne, proved himself Voltaire's friend, when he wrote on 2 September 1757 (Best. D7365) that hearing of the Genevois ministers' plotting against Voltaire gave him "honte de ma robe".<sup>52</sup> Voltaire, in answering Bertrand (Best. D7368, 4 September 1757), assured him that his ministerial robe was clean, but as to Geneva—"Je conseille aux gens en question de faire laver la leur." Again he pleaded that the Mercure de France had published a mutilated text and insisted he would publish nothing more on this matter, "n'étant point de la paroisse je ne dois pas entrer dans les querelles des curez." His next letter to Bertrand (Best. D7371, 9 September 1757) was one of warmest thanks for the August issue

---

51

To Isaac le Fort, le Doyen du Consistoire, on 6 September 1757 (Best. D7369) and to David Louis de Constant Rebecque, seigneur d'Hermenches, a Swiss soldier in the service of the Netherlands, on 12 September 1757 (Best. D7377). Perhaps the letter to Le Fort had its desired effect, for the Consistoire did not condemn the Mercure letter as had done the Compagnie des pasteurs.

52

On 4 September 1757 (Best. D7367), Voltaire forwarded this letter from Bertrand (Best. D7365) and his own letter to Le Fort (Best. 7369) to François Tronchin—no doubt to strengthen his hand in the Magnifique Conseil. It was this letter to Tronchin that recalled Voltaire's anger with Vernet in February, 1755, when Vernet cautioned him about his behaviour in Geneva (Best. D6146). Supra, p. 213.

of the Journal helvétique which contained Bertrand's refutation of the earlier anonymous diatribe against Voltaire. Voltaire reported it was Polier de Bottens, who was also considering defending Voltaire, who had brought Bertrand's article to Voltaire's attention. As for the master of les Délices, he told Bertrand he had promised the "honnêtes gens" of Geneva "non seulement de ne jamais combattre cette adversaire, <sup>53</sup> mais d'ignorer qu'il existât."

On 21 September, he wrote Bertrand that interest in the Servetus-Calvin controversy in Geneva had waned (Best. D7390); he had not yet seen Vernet's letter of the previous day (Best. D7389). <sup>54</sup> A month later (Best. D7428) Voltaire returned to "l'âme atroce", telling Bertrand that Geneva's magistrates were indignant at Vernet's actions against Voltaire and that by revealing Vernet's letter of 1754 he had completely undermined "ce Tartuffe". The Conseil even refused to let Vernet see the Servetus dossier. "Ajoutons pour couronner l'oeuvre que c'est un antitrinitaire qui veut aujourd'hui justifier la mort de Servet." Around the

---

<sup>53</sup> Vernet, whom he dismissed as "un petit fou" in the same letter.

<sup>54</sup> Supra, pp.254-258, for Vernet's letter and the answers it drew forth.

same time Voltaire made a similar comment to Jacob Vernes (Best. D7437): "Hélas ce pauvre Servet avait déclaré nettement que la divinité habitait en Jésus Christ, et plus nettement qu'on ne le déclare aujourd'hui."

Vernet was a very stubborn man and refused to be discouraged by the obvious desire of his government that the matter be dropped. In July, 1758, he published, in the Nouvelle bibliothèque germanique (Amsterdam), the first part of a refutation of what the Essai sur les moeurs had had to say about Calvin. The remainder of Vernet's "Lettre de Mr. le Professeur Vernet à Mr. le Professeur Formey" was scheduled to appear in the next number of the journal, but the editor had a change of heart, and it did not appear. Only in 1766, in Vernet's third edition of his Lettres critiques d'un voyageur anglois . . .,<sup>55</sup> was the complete "Lettre à Formey" printed.

Perhaps because he was hampered by not being allowed to see the official records, Vernet did not write about the Servetus episode in this letter. He merely referred his readers to published sources, which he said vindicated Calvin from Voltaire's charges (II, pp. 170-171). After a short resumé of the events in Geneva following Voltaire's publications

---

55

Vernet, Lettres critiques, I, p. xiv; this study cites the "Lettre à Formey" from the 1766 edition.

about Calvin (II, pp. 144-146), where Vernet criticized Voltaire for the same reasons but in much more moderate language than had done the anonymous writers of the letter to the Journal helvétique.<sup>56</sup> he presented a careful defense of Calvin. His method was to outline the great work Calvin had done for the Reformation in his writings and his theological organization of Geneva's government and to refute Voltaire's generalizations with specific examples of Calvin's behaviour. The tenor of these twenty-five pages were summed up in Vernet's words: "Nous n'excusons point ses fautes; nous ne canonisons point sa personne; nous ne sommes point asservis à ses sentimens; nous demandons seulement qu'on lui rende justice." (II, p.155) Voltaire did not seem to have noticed the "Lettre à Formey" at the time of its partial publication in 1758.

One is struck by Voltaire's serenity throughout the entire "âme atroce" controversy. He was reassured by the constant support he got from the Tronchin family and the Magnifique Conseil and was heartened by his Vaudois minister friends Polier de Bottens and Bertrand as well as the Genevois minister Vernes. His confidence in the enlightenment of la Suisse romande was unshaken. Vernet was a Tartuffe, a

---

56

Supra, pp. 248-250.

little crazy, but the great mass of his compatriots and all those who really counted seemed to support Voltaire. Even Vernet was "un antitrinitaire" like everyone else. In fact, Voltaire felt so secure that on 5 November 1757, he began his letter to Sebastien Dupont (Best. D7446) with a new poem to Swiss liberty:

Le fantôme brillant de l'immortalité  
Ne se présente plus à ma vue éblouie.  
Je jouis du présent, j'achève en paix ma vie  
Dans le sein de la liberté.

If his exposure of Geneva's liberalism in the Essai and in the Mercure had not caused the city to declare itself publically on the side of the philosophes, still it was not too late to try again.

B. The Genève Article in l'Encyclopédie and Some  
57  
of the Turmoil that Accompanied its Publication: As the tempest in a teacup over "l'âme atroce" was subsiding, a tempest in a teapot was brewing over what d'Alembert had written about Geneva in l'Encyclopédie. In 1755 Voltaire had joined forces with the encyclopédistes; he contributed articles and recruited Swiss writers like Polier de Bottens for the enterprise. D'Alembert visited Voltaire at les

---

57  
As not much had been written about the "âme atroce" incident, it was necessary to cover it in considerable narrative detail. In the case of the Genève article, Naves (Voltaire, part III, chapter I), Chaponnière (Voltaire, chapter VI), Pappas (Voltaire, chapter I, and "Diderot"), Ruffini ("Voltaire"), Wilson (Diderot, chapters 21 and 22), Grimsley (D'Alembert, pp. 46-68), and Pomeau (Religion, pp. 304-308) are some of the modern narrations of this episode. Perey and Maugras (Vie, chapter VI),  
(continued)



Délices for five weeks in August and September, 1756, their first meeting. Voltaire, excellent host that he was, introduced d'Alembert to his circle of Genevois friends, who gladly helped the geometer gather information for his article on their city to appear in volume VII of l'Encyclopédie. Vernet cooperated to the extent of compiling notes on the constitutional history of Geneva for d'Alembert's use. In seeing the Geneva of the liberal aristocracy and seeing it through his host's interpretations—at this time Voltaire was most pleased with the political and religious climate of the republic —d'Alembert came away with a very favourable impression.

Before the seventh volume, which was probably published late in November, 1757, reached Geneva, rumors about its Geneve article had upset some of the city. Voltaire wrote d'Alembert on 2 December (Best. D7490), "on prétend

---

57 (continued)

Rogot, "L'Article", and Desnoiresterres (Voltaire, V, pp. 159ff) are three especially fine nineteenth century accounts. Therefore, my study will concentrate on the Socinian aspects of the affair and will present only the minimum general framework of events. The otherwise unacknowledged sources for this framework are those of this note.

<sup>58</sup> Vernet, Lettres critiques, I, p. 18; throughout this book, Vernet charged d'Alembert with plagiarizing from this memoir. See also Saladin (Mémoire, p. 54).

<sup>59</sup>

Supra, Chapter VII.

<sup>60</sup>

See Wilson, Diderot, p. 388, n.8, for the various ideas on the publication date.

que vous y louez la modération de certaines gens. Hélas! vous ne les connaissez point . . . . Les agneaux que vous croyez tolérants, seraient des loups si on les laissez faire." On the sixth, he told d'Alembert again he had not yet seen Volume VII, "mais je sais que je ne pourrai jamais vous remercier assez de m'avoir appuyé de votre éloquence et de vos raisons, comme on dit que vous l'avez fait, à propos du meurtre infâme de Servet, et de la vertu de la tolérance, dans l'article Genève." (Best. D7499)

He went on to complain about the "coquins", led by Vernet, who were trying to justify Calvin. These letters and others in December, 1757, <sup>61</sup> show that the "âme atroce" quarrel had both somewhat soured Voltaire on Geneva and put the Genevois in no mood to have their religion publically discussed again by the philosophes. <sup>62</sup> However, Voltaire was still confident of the good sense and protection of the

---

61

Best. D7500, to Thieriot, 7 December 1757; Best. D7504, to Théodore Tronchin, 9 December 1757; Best. D7509, to Vernes, c. 10 December 1757. Voltaire did not see Volume VII until sometime between 24 December (Best. D7534) and 27 December (Best. D7536).

62

The timing of Volume VII was also unfortunate in France, for there was just then a very strong wave of opposition to the party of the enlightenment.

magistrates: "Des magistrats détestent le crime auquel le fanatisme entraîna leurs pères, et des prêtres veulent canoniser ce crime!" (Best. D7499)

63

D'Alembert's article clearly meant to praise Geneva. She was "une des villes les plus florissantes de l'Europe: riche par sa liberté et par son commerce." (p.575b) Her government was blessed with "tous les avantages et aucun des inconvéniens de la démocratie" (p.576a); "le peuple de Genève est-il beaucoup plus instruit que partout ailleurs" (p.577a); "Toutes les Sciences et presque tous les Arts ont été . . . bien cultivés à Genève" (p.577b). He even praised the salubrious effects of Geneva's sumptuary laws (p.576b). The only thing that d'Alembert seriously complained about was Geneva's ban on theatre to which he devoted nearly a column (pp. 576b-577a).

He reserved his greatest compliments for the Genevois clergy and their religion (pp. 577b-578b). This section began by warning the Encyclopédie's pious readers that what was going to be said about Geneva's faith was only for historical interest and that they should consult the theological parts of the Encyclopédie for an antidote. D'Alembert

63

---

Encyclopédie, VII, pp. 574b-578b. Significantly, the Genève article was four times as long as France in the same volume and about twelve times as long as the one on England previously.

first commended to Catholicism the Genevois practice of carefully screening prospective clergy for morals and learning before admitting them. Apparently he thought this selectivity was fruitful, for he said, "Le clergé de Genève a des moeurs exemplaires: les ministres vivent dans une grande union; on ne les voit point, comme dans d'autres pays, disputer entre eux . . . sur des matieres inintelligibles." (p. 577b) All of this was true and no Genevan would want to dispute it.

However, when he turned to Calvin and Servetus, d'Alembert moved on to very contentious ground. His introduction of the topic was far from politic: "Plusieurs ne croient plus la divinité de Jesus-Christ, dont Calvin leur chef étoit si zélé défenseur, et pour laquelle il fit brûler Servet." (p. 578a) He added that no Calvinist now tried to justify Calvin's behaviour; they only pointed out that it was no worse than the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre or Jan Hus's execution. Perhaps, these comments on Calvin could have passed without uproar even after the "Éme atroce" scandal, although it was no longer true that no one was willing to defend Calvin's actions. Still, d'Alembert's saying that many of the ministers did not believe in Christ's divinity was far bolder than anything Voltaire had published.

When d'Alembert continued his discussion of Calvin and Servetus by quoting the very passage from Voltaire's Mercure letter that raised the most objection—"on ait imprimé à Genève avec l'approbation publique, . . . que Calvin avoit une ame atroce . . ." (p. 578a)—he insured that the now smoldering quarrel would flare up again. D'Alembert's commentary on this passage showed how much he meant it as praise:

Nous croyons que les éloges dûs à cette noble liberté de penser et d'écrire, sont à partager également entre l'auteur, son siècle, et Genève. Combien de pays où la Philosophie n'a pas fait moins de progrès, mais où la vérité est encore captive, où la raison n'ose élever la voix pour foudroyer ce qu'elle condamne en silence, où même trop d'écrivains pusillanimes qu'on appelle sages, respectent les préjugés qu'ils pourroient combattre avec autant de décence que de sûreté? (p. 578a)

Of course, this praise was double-edged, aiming as much to condemn conditions in France by implicit comparison as to laud Genevois freedom.

Although he had already said more than enough, d'Alembert made things worse when he turned to expound Geneva's theology. He began by saying many of the ministers no longer maintained the doctrine of the eternity of the pains of the damned, "prétendant qu'il ne faut jamais prendre à la lettre

---

64

Supra, p. 244.

65

A technique that Voltaire had used to good effect in the Lettres philosophiques.

les Livres saints, tout ce qui paroît blesser l'humanité et la raison." (p. 578a) Rather than working through their beliefs one by one, d'Alembert immediately jumped to two general paragraphs summing up his impressions.

Pour tout dire en un mot, plusieurs pasteurs de Genève n'ont d'autre religion qu'un socinianisme parfait, rejettant tout ce qu'on appelle mysteres, et s'imaginant que le premier principe d'une religion véritable, est de ne rien proposer à croire qui heurte la raison: aussi quand on les presse sur la nécessité de la révélation, ce dogme si essentiel du Christianisme, plusieurs y substituent le terme d'utilité, qui leur paroît plus doux: en cela s'ils ne sont pas orthodoxes, ils sont au-moins conséquens à leurs principes. Voyez SOCINIANISME. (p. 578a)

This was a good précis of some of Vernet's basic theological principles, which were both accepted by "plusieurs pasteurs" and were consonant with Socinianism as d'Alembert stated.

He continued to pile on flowers in the second summary paragraph:

Un clergé qui pense ainsi doit être tolérant, et l'est en effet assez pour n'être pas regardé de bon oeil par les ministres des autres églises réformées. On peut dire encore, sans prétendre approuver d'ailleurs la religion de Genève, qu'il y a peu de pays où les théologiens et les ecclésiastiques soient plus ennemis de la superstition. . . . [L]a religion y est presque réduite à l'adoration

66

See the preceding chapter of this study where Geneva's theology and its relation to Socinianism were treated in some detail. When Dupan copied the part of this passage about the utilité of revelation in his letter of 30 December 1757 to the Freudenreichs, he parenthetically noted, "c'est le Vernet". (BPU, Mss suppl. 1539, fol. 140v; see appendix B of this study).

d'un seul Dieu, du moins chez presque tout ce qui n'est pas peuple: le respect pour J. C. et pour les Ecritures, sont peut-être la seule chose qui distingue d'un pur déisme le christianisme de Genève. (p. 578a-b)

Again, there can be no question that the Encyclopédie admired Geneva's religion: tolerance and opposition to superstition were two of the philosophes' major concerns, and d'Alembert said the Genevois clergy were leaders in both. Furthermore, d'Alembert liked their sermons which "se bornent presque uniquement à la morale, et n'en valent que mieux." (p. 578b) His only real criticism was that the Calvinists sang their execrable hymns execrably (p. 578b), which, although true, was rude to publicize and presumptuous to go on to suggest "que Genève se reformer" (p. 578b) her singing.

In his attribution of near-Deism to the enlightened upper classes, d'Alembert was merely reporting what he had seen and heard in Geneva. Accordingly, when d'Alembert heard the Genevois were not pleased with the Genève article, his reaction had an almost uncanny innocence to it. He seemed almost unable to believe he could have offended anyone. See, for example, his letter to Vernes of 17 December 1757 (L, vol. V, Appendix XLVII, letter A190). Voltaire, too, as late as August, 1757, had the same impression as d'Alembert

---

67

Vuilleumier, Histoire, IV, pp. 104-117.

of the Genevois: "Tous les honnêtes gens sont des déistes  
<sup>68</sup>  
 par Christ." (Best. D7357).

In fact, Vernet publically recognized the closeness of his theology to deism although he thought deism was the enemy of piety.<sup>69</sup> This was the crucial difference between the Genevois and the philosophes: whilst the Genevois might fairly, but impudently, be called Socinian, Socinians were pious men who based their doctrine on Scripture, rationally interpreted. Of course, the later Socinians like Vernet and his epigones, in effect, subordinated revelation to reason, making d'Alembert's judgment that "le respect pour J. C. et pour les Ecritures, sont peut-être la seule chose qui distingue d'un pur déisme le christianisme de Genève"<sup>70</sup> a good one. However, the implication that the Genevois should and could easily move to deism ignored the great difference between the deists, who could hardly claim piety as theirs and who scorned the scriptures, and Geneva's reluctant Socinians.

The letters of G. L. Lesage, one of Geneva's scientific community, to d'Alembert illustrate how the Genevans might have misled d'Alembert. Lesage's four letters from 3 August 1753

---

<sup>68</sup>

Supra, p. 260.

<sup>69</sup>

Supra, pp. 197-198 and 210.

<sup>70</sup>

Supra, p. 272.



to 15 April 1757 (BPU, Mss suppl. 517, ff. 3-14) show that Lesage desperately wanted his scientific work published in the Encyclopédie. Furthermore, the letter of 15 April 1757 (ibid., f. 14) indicated that Lesage and d'Alembert got on famously when d'Alembert visited Geneva. However, on 28 December 1757 (ibid., f. 15r), we find Lesage piteously begging d'Alembert not to implicate him in what had been published in the Encyclopédie concerning Geneva's religion. So, whilst there was considerable common intellectual ground between the Genevois and the philosophes and considerable personal attraction, there was also a fundamental difference and misunderstanding in regard to religion.

On 9 December 1757, the Magnifique Conseil heard a report that the recently published volume of the Encyclopédie contained "des insinuations contre nos ministres que les font regarder comme étant déistes et sociniens." They considered an official protest to the government of France but prudently decided against that since France might well have come back to Geneva with an embarrassing request of her own in regard to religion. Furthermore, they said they would again consider what

---

<sup>71</sup> Perey and Maugras, Vie, pp. 169-170, and Chaponnière, Voltaire, p. 68, print the relevant passage from this letter.

<sup>72</sup> Naves, Voltaire, p. 35 prints the relevant extract from the Registres du Conseil.

action to take after they had obtained a copy of the work in question. This time, it would seem, the government of Geneva was less likely to be obliging to Voltaire than they had been in the "âme atroce" affair. To look ahead, we see, however, that when the Compagnie des pasteurs--after their thorough investigation of the article--asked the Conseil to act, they curtly refused.<sup>73</sup> Whether this was an expression of Conseil's usual reluctance to engage in religious controversy, their lack of confidence in their pastors, the general cleavage in Geneva over religion, or other factors is not clear.

Dupan, for one councilman, was not terribly upset by d'Alembert's article. His letter that reported his impressions on reading Genève was a very straightforward resumé, which stressed that d'Alembert extravagantly praised the ministers of Geneva and defended Voltaire's interpretation of Calvin. The part of the article that said the ministers no longer believed in the eternity of the chastisements of hell reminded Dupan of an anecdote about the time of the Reformation in Geneva. A certain baker who served on the council of two hundred was asked by a friend what the council was up to and replied, "Nous venons d'abolir le purgatoire. Ah, compere, pendant que vous aviez la main à la pâte, vous deviez bien tout d'un tems abolir aussi l'enfer!"<sup>74</sup> Quite a contrast to the solemn response of the pastors.

---

<sup>73</sup>Best. D7624, commentary, n.7, published the relevant extract from the Registres du Conseil, séance du 8 fevrier.

<sup>74</sup>BPU, Mss suppl. 1539, fol 141r, to Freudenreich, 30 December 1757; see appendix B of this study.

At any rate, in the middle of December, 1757, it seemed to Voltaire that the city was dangerously turning against him because of what they correctly had guessed had been said in the Encyclopédie. The contents of the Genève article closely followed Voltaire's interests in the city. D'Alembert made explicit what Voltaire hinted in the Essai sur les moeurs about the progress of liberal religion in Geneva,<sup>75</sup> defended the Mercure letter, and marshalled arguments for establishing theatre in Geneva after Voltaire had been disappointed by the authorities' closing his. Not surprisingly, a good many Genevois concluded that Voltaire was responsible for the article that bore d'Alembert's name.

Voltaire's reaction was quick; he wrote d'Alembert on 12 December 1757 (Best. D7512), no doubt after he had heard that Conseil had considered protesting to France:

Quelques uns m'accusent d'une confédération impie avec vous. Vous savez mon innocence. Ils disent qu'ils protesteront contre votre article. Laissez les protester, et moquez vous d'eux. Ils auront beau jurer qu'ils croient la trinité, leurs camarades de Hollande, de Suisse et d'Allemagne, savent bien qu'il n'en est rien; ils n'auront que la honte d'avoir renié inutilement leur créance; mais vous à qui quelques uns se sont ouverts, vous qui êtes instruit de leur foi par leur bouche, ne

---

75

Supra, pp. 238-239.

vous rétractez pas; il y va de votre salut: votre conscience y est engagée. Ces gens là vont se couvrir de ridicule; chaque démarche qu'ils font depuis le tombeau du diacre Pâris, la place où ils ont assassiné Servet, et jusqu'à celle où ils ont assassiné Jean Hus, les rend tous également l'opprobre du genre humain. Fanatiques papistes, fanatiques calvinistes, tous sont pétris de la même m. . . . détremée de sang corrompu.

The first part of this paragraph set out Voltaire's plan of defense, which he stuck to throughout the controversy: he was innocent of involvement in the article, and d'Alembert must not retract what he had written, for the Genevois clergy were just as described in the Encyclopédie. The second part was remarkable on several counts: it shows the complete reversal of Voltaire's original hope in the Genevois pastors,<sup>77</sup> which although it had eroded over the years subsisted late into 1757.<sup>78</sup> But now his fanatical hatred against priestly fanaticism burst forth, and in his rage he saw Jansenist convulsionaries, Catholic and Calvinist murdering priests as one stinking mass of corruption. Furthermore, whilst Voltaire's writings are full of strong, often aesthetically offensive, attacks on Christianity,<sup>79</sup> this particular passage is the only one I am familiar with that used such coarse language.

---

<sup>77</sup> The preceding chapter of this study.

<sup>78</sup> Supra, pp. 264-265.

<sup>79</sup> For example, Voltaire's Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke . . . .

Was Voltaire innocent as he claimed of what d'Alembert had published in the Genève article? Pomeau said, "cet article fameux porte, en toutes ses parties, la marque de Voltaire",<sup>80</sup> whilst Naves concluded that Voltaire inspired the article, which was, however, completely d'Alembert's work.<sup>81</sup> Pappas argued that it was "one of the most apparent marks of esteem which d'Alembert showed toward Voltaire."<sup>82</sup> There can be no question that Voltaire heavily influenced d'Alembert's perceptions of Geneva, but whether or not any particular sections of Genève were written on request from les Délices cannot be said. Pomeau strongly stressed that Voltaire intended the Genève article as a follow up to his attempts in the Essai sur les moeurs and the Mercure letter to wean the liberal Genevois from their residual Christianity,<sup>83</sup> or at least to make them declare their Socinianism. Pomeau, I believe, was correct, and this hope of Voltaire that the Genevois were bound for the deist camp explains his early high praise for them. As Naves suggested,<sup>84</sup> it was

---

<sup>80</sup> Pomeau, Religion, p. 304.

<sup>81</sup> Naves, Voltaire, pp. 38-48.

<sup>82</sup> Pappas, Voltaire, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Pomeau, Religion, p. 305; see also supra, p. 273. Gaberel (Voltaire, chapter VI) in the 1850's took the same line. Gaberel's book, marred by errors and deliberate falsifications, is interesting as evidence that some Genevois were still angry with Voltaire's treatment of their city a century after the fact.

<sup>84</sup> Naves, Voltaire, p. 49.

Voltaire's bitter disappointment in what he saw as the Genevois betrayal of their real religious principles--and of him--that lay behind the violence of his letter to d'Alembert on 12 December 1757 (Best. D7512).

The consequences of the Genève controversy were startling; public opinion in Geneva was stirred up against d'Alembert and Voltaire, and the Compagnie des pasteurs published a defence of their beliefs. In France, the Roman Catholic establishment was outraged by the none-too-oblique critique of their faith in the praise of Geneva's. They eventually got the Encyclopédie's permission to publish suppressed in 1759, and for a while the persons of the encyclopédistes were in real danger. D'Alembert, never a man for direct confrontation, resigned as co-editor of the Encyclopédie and soon withdrew from further contribution to the work. Diderot, who stolidly stayed on, apparently had foreseen the grave danger in the Genève article for he had  
85  
opposed its publication by d'Alembert.

However, the consequence of world historical import from the uproar over d'Alembert's few pages on Geneva was that Voltaire changed his mind over how best to work for

---

85  
Wilson, Diderot, pp. 282-283. Wilson commented, "Perhaps Diderot thought it outrageous of Voltaire--and D'Alembert, too--to jeopardize the fate of the whole Encyclopédie so that Voltaire might see a play in Geneva." (p. 283) See Diderot's letter to Théodore Tronchin of 30 December 1757 (L. vol. V, Appendix XLVII, letter A192).

enlightenment. No longer did he have any illusions that he could establish an effective alliance with the liberal branches of Protestantism: "Fanatiques papistes, fanatiques calvinistes, tous sont pétris de la même m. . . ." Up to this point, all his published works had attempted to discredit Christian intolerance and superstition more-or-less subtly and indirectly. But now, he exhorted d'Alembert:

Je fais comme Caton, je finis toujours ma harangue en disant: Deleatur Carthago. . . . Il ne faut que cinq ou six philosophes qui s'entendent, pour renverser le colosse. Il ne s'agit pas d'empêcher nos laquis d'aller à la messe ou au prêche; il s'agit d'arracher les pères de famille à la tyrannie des imposteurs, et d'inspirer l'esprit de tolérance. (Best. D7499, 6 December 1757)

It would not be excessive, I think, to pinpoint these letters to d'Alembert in mid-December, 1757, as the beginning of <sup>86</sup>Voltaire's "écrasez l'infâme" campaign.

When the Genevois were beginning to get upset, Voltaire wrote Théodore Tronchin: "Je ne sçais pas s'il est dit dans l'encyclopédie que vos prêtres ne croient qu'un seul dieu. Auront ils la lâcheté de répondre qu'on les calomnie?" (Best. D7504, 9 December 1757) As we have seen, much to Voltaire's disgust, they had such "lâcheté". On 23

---

86

For similar judgments, see Naves, Voltaire, pp. 50-51 and Pomeau, Religion, pp. 305 and 308.

December 1757, the Compagnie des Pasteurs appointed a commis-  
<sup>87</sup>sion, with Théodore Tronchin as secretary and including Vernet, to draft a statement of faith that would clear them of their alleged heterodoxy that the Encyclopédie had broadcast to the entire educated world. On 5 February 1758, Voltaire commented to d'Alembert (Best. D7618):

La profession des sociniens honteux est sous presse<sup>88</sup> et presque finie. . . . Ils ont consommé un grand mois à ce bel ouvrage. Voilà qui est bien long, disait on; il faut un peu de temps, répondit Huber,<sup>89</sup> quand il s'agit de donner un état à Jésus-Christ.

Obviously some Genevois did not take this commission too seriously. This same letter to d'Alembert noted that the Conseil refused to let the Compagnie speak for it in the Déclaration. Considering that Théodore Tronchin, the commission's secretary, had been Voltaire's ally in suppressing discussion over the "âme atroce", one is not surprised that the magistrates were cool to the Compagnie. Dupan, for example, reported on 11 February 1758 about the ministers' intention to publish a defense that "je n'ai pas vu un  
<sup>90</sup>laïque qui approve cette demarche."

---

<sup>87</sup>Dupan, on 27 December 1757, commented to the Freudenreichs, on the establishment of this commission, that the ministers were embarrassed because "[d'Alembert] leur auroit fait l'honneur en entier, de dire qu'ils ont assez d'esprit pour ne pas croire qu'il y ait un Dieu, c'est le ton de ces beaux esprits de Paris." (BPU, Mss suppl. 1539, fol. 139v, see appendix B of this study.)

<sup>88</sup>The Déclaration was published, dated 10 February 1758 (Best. D7624, commentary, n.7).

<sup>89</sup>Best. D7631, Voltaire to d'Alembert, 13 February 1757, correctly attributes this "bon mot" to "la Cramer" rather than to Huber. Gabriel Cramer's wife was known as exceptionally outspoken (Perey and Maugras, Vie, p. 82).

<sup>90</sup>BPU, Mss suppl. 1539, fol. 154r, see Appendix B.



91

Their statement began by singling out one of d'Alembert's charges as their major complaint, to wit: that their religion was "un socinianisme parfait" distinguished from deism only by their "respect pour JESUS-CHRIST et pour l'Ecriture" (p. 159). D'Alembert had argued that it was the Genevois rejection of everything "qui heurte la raison"<sup>92</sup> from their religion that made them Socinian. Indeed, this was one of developed Socinianism's characteristics.<sup>93</sup> The Déclaration admitted that their faith excluded all dogma "qui heurte la raison", but denied that that principle was Socinian. "Ce principe est commun à tous les Protestans." (p. 163) However, the Déclaration was wrong on this point; not all Protestants held to this and certainly not the Protestants of previous centuries.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps, since the liberal, Socinian position under Vernet's leadership had dominated in Geneva for a generation by 1758, the Genevois really believed they were orthodox.

---

<sup>91</sup>Printed in full in Vernet, Lettres critiques, I, pp. 158-166; this study cites the Déclaration from Vernet's edition.

<sup>92</sup>Supra, p. 271.

<sup>93</sup>Supra, pp. 42-43.

<sup>94</sup>Supra, pp. 47-52.

Their most effective rebuttal to d'Alembert on this matter was in showing they had more than mere respect for Scripture. All of their clergy had to profess to hold to the doctrine "contenuë dans les Livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament" (p. 160), and they continually referred back to the Apostle's Creed as their guide. This was somewhat more than token respect; but since--following Vernet--they withheld assent from anything contrary to "la Lumière naturelle", it was hardly a strict Biblicism.

What, then, was the state they finally found for Christ? One is struck first of all by a significant omission: the word "Trinity" does not appear in the pastor's statement. In a defense against the charge of antitrinitarianism and near deism, had the accused been orthodox, Nicene Christians, they certainly would have made their Trinitarianism most explicit. Their positive statement on Christ began, "la vie éternelle consiste à connoître le seul vrai DIEU, et celui qu'il a envoyé JESUS-CHRIST, son Fils, en qui a habité corporellement toute la plénitude de la Divinité . . ." (p. 164), which seems to be a close paraphrase from Section IV of Vernet's

95

Traité (1736, p. 50); and was no more orthodox in 1758 than it had been in 1736. The Déclaration continued:

... et qui nous a été donné pour Sauveur, pour Médiateur et pour Juge, afin que tous honorent le Fils comme ils honorent le Pere. Par cette raison, le terme de respect pour JESUS-CHRIST et pour l'Écriture, nous paroissant de beaucoup trop foible, ou trop équivoque, pour exprimer la nature et l'étendue de nos sentiments à cet égard; nous disons que c'est avec Foi, avec une vénération religieuse, avec une entière soumission d'esprit et de coeur, qu'il faut écouter ce Divin Maître et le Saint Esprit parlant dans les Ecritures. (p. 164)

Their fulsome array of superlatives did not make Voltaire's comment to d'Alembert any less true: "Servet sans doute aurait signé cette confession." (Best. D7651, 25 February 1758).

Voltaire's first reaction on reading the Déclaration (Best. D7638, to Bertrand, 18 February 1758) was: "Vos confrères de Geneve disent donc qu'ils ont plus que

---

<sup>95</sup>Supra, p. 203. The entire Déclaration was completely consistent with Vernet's theology as would be expected. Voltaire, marvelling at Vernet's gall in opposing what d'Alembert had published, wrote "Vernet le professeur de théologie, n'a-t-il pas imprimé, dans je ne sais quel catéchisme qu'il m'a donné et que j'ai jeté au feu, n'a-t-il pas imprimé, dis je, que la révélation peut être de quelque utilité? N'avez vous pas vingt fois entendu dire à tous les ministres qu'ils ne regardent pas Jésus christ comme dieu?" (Best. D7539, to d'Alembert, 29 December 1757) See also, Best. D7568, 8 January 1758, where Voltaire reminded Théodore Tronchin, the secretary of the committee preparing the Déclaration, that "votre professeur de théologie" had written on the "utilité" of revelation and had published a catechism which did not even mention the Trinity. Best. D7570 of the same date is a similar note to Diderot.

du respect pour Jesus christ. Hélas ce pauvre Servet avait reconu sa divinité, quoy qu'il n'adoptât pas l'omousion."

This was precisely the same point he had made in the Essai  
<sup>96</sup>  
sur les moeurs (E., II, pp. 246-247) in 1756 and was quite

right now, I think, to say to d'Argental, "la déclaration des prêtres de Geneve justifie entièrement d'Alembert."

However, when he went on to say, in the same letter, "ils se déclarent en un mot crétiens déistes", he went too far.

(Best. D7652, 26 February 1758). D'Alembert, on 28 January (Best. D7607), had proposed a way for the Genevois to disprove

his article. All they would have to do was to sign this simple "profession de foi": "Je soussigné crois comme article de foi, que les peines de l'enfer sont éternelles, et  
<sup>97</sup>  
 que Jesus-crist est dieu, égal en tout à son père." Their actual declaration bore out his prediction that they could never have agreed to sign the profession he prepared for them.

Ritter, however, argued that, on the whole, the Genevois clergy at this time were not Socinian. "Assurément, ces hommes distingués n'ont pas pensé de même sur tous les chapitres de la dogmatique chrétienne: Vernes, entre autres se rapprochait plus que Vernet des doctrines

---

<sup>96</sup> Supra, p. 239.

<sup>97</sup>

Voltaire suggested to Théodore Tronchin on 8 January 1758 (Best. D7568) that the Genevois could use the next volume of the Encyclopédie to clear their name with a clear profession of the Trinity. However, he cautioned, "ils sont dans le cas ou de soutenir hardiment le socinianisme, ou de trahir leur conscience."

qu'on appelait sociniennes . . . ." <sup>98</sup> Perhaps Vernes was more Socinian than Vernet, but it is clear that Vernet was Socinian enough to deserve being so labelled by the philosophers. <sup>99</sup> Spink offered an interesting argument against the Genevois of the mid-eighteenth century being considered Socinian:

A vrai dire, l'accusation de socinianisme n'avait pas de sens dans leur ordre de pensée. Ils ne pouvaient pas rejeter la formule de Nicée, parce que cette formule ne tenait aucune place dans leur théologie. S'ils n'acceptaient pas le homoousios, ils n'acceptaient pas non plus le homoiousios: ils n'acceptaient aucune explication en langue scholastique des écritures saintes. Ils acceptaient ce que dit l'Écriture au sujet du Christ, et refusaient par système de remplacer les paroles de l'écriture par ces mots incompréhensibles. Ils croyaient tout ce que rapporte l'évangile parce que cet évangile était pour eux la parole même de Dieu; ils se contentaient de comprendre ce qui était immédiatement compréhensible sans s'inquiéter du reste. Ils trouvaient qu'on ne s'avance pas en remplaçant le vocabulaire de l'Évangile par le vocabulaire philosophique du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ce n'est pas là du socinianisme.<sup>100</sup>

These Genevois beliefs outlined by Spink are precisely those that constituted the developed Socinianism of the end of the seventeenth century and of the eighteenth. Thus, in my view, Spink has confirmed that which he expressly denied.

From early December, 1757, soon after volume VII of the Encyclopédie was published, until early March, 1758, references to Socinianism in Geneva abound in Voltaire's

98

Ritter, "Rousseau . . . et Vernet", pp. 144-145.

99

Supra, pp. 205-206.

100

Spink, Rousseau, pp. 154-155.

correspondence. When the initial flurry of interest in the Déclaration of the pastors had subsided,<sup>101</sup> the Genève article, the "âme atroce", and Geneva's theology were rarely mentioned. When Voltaire returned from his customary winter season in Lausanne to les Délices around 25 March 1758, he wrote d'Alembert (Best. D7695):

Je ne peux pas ôter de la tête des prêtres l'idée que j'ay été votre complice. Je me recommande contre eux à Dieu le père. Car pour le fils vous savez qu'il a aussi peu de crédit que sa mère à Genève.

In this letter Voltaire also said he was annoyed that d'Alembert was not planning to "voir vos sociniens en allant en Italie." This was the first reference to the Genève controversy in nearly three weeks--a notable contrast to its often more than daily occurrence at the height of the affair--and it was not mentioned again until 7 June 1758 (Best. D7747), when Voltaire renewed his invitation to d'Alembert to stop in at Geneva.

In the preceding brief review of the Genève article and the immediate reactions to it, the attitudes of the French philosophes, the Genevois philosophes, and the Genevois traditionalists towards Socinianism illuminated their

---

101

Dupan reported, "cette affaire est entièrement tombée" on 25 February 1758. (BPU, Mss. suppl. 1539, fol. 160r; see Appendix B below).

philosophical differences. One constant was that they all knew that the charge of Socinianism was extremely important. D'Alembert, in one of his letters to Voltaire (Best. D7573, 11 January 1758), spelled out, with almost geometrical precision why the philosophes dwelt on Socinianism:

bien loin d'avoir eu dessein de les offense par ce que j'ai dit, j'ai cru au contraire leur faire honneur, persuadé, comme je suis, que de toutes les sociétés séparées de l'Eglise Romaine, les sociniens sont les plus conséquents, et que quand on ne reconnoitra, comme font les Protestans, ni tradition, ni autorité de l'Eglise Romaine, la religion chrétienne doit se réduire à l'adoration d'un seul dieu par la médiation de J. C.<sup>102</sup>

This, of course, coincided with Voltaire's long held views on the relation of Protestantism to Socinianism, with the Socinians' self interpretation,<sup>103</sup> and with the received Catholic (Bossuet's) view.<sup>104</sup> Obviously, the religious establishment of Geneva had to defend itself against d'Alembert, or it would have been utterly disgraced in Christendom.

Although he had lost his hope in the liberal Calvinist clergy of Geneva, Voltaire seemed to retain his progressive

---

<sup>102</sup> Compare the encyclopédiste de Jaucourt's letter of 2 February 1758 (Best. D7614) to Jean Louis Labat, a member of Geneva's Conseil, where he said d'Alembert meant the Genève article as a great compliment and he "n'a parle du socinianisme, que parce qu'il a regardé cette secte comme la plus sage et la plus éclairée du Christianisme."

<sup>103</sup> Supra, pp. 53-56.

<sup>104</sup> Supra, pp. 57-60; on 15 January 1758, d'Alembert wrote Jacob Vernes (L., vol. V, Appendix XLVII, letter A195), "je n'ai rien avancé dans l'article Geneve sur la maniere de penser des Ecclesiastiques, qui ne m'ait paru public et connu de tout le monde; j'ai même cru voir que les ministres se faisoient honneur de cette façon de penser, et je pense qu'ils n'ont pas tort, car quand on rejette la tradition et l'autorité de l'église, on ne peut être consequent, selon moi, selon Bossuet et selon mille autres, sans être socinien."

belief that Socinianism was on the ascendent. In trying to convince Théodore Tronchin that d'Alembert really did not need to be refuted, Voltaire wrote, "les trois quarts de l'Angleterre, tous les états du roy du Prusse, la moitié de la Hollande pensent et parlent comme Geneve" (Best. D7579 12 January 1758); and later he wrote in the same vein, "il se fait une révolution dans les esprits" in Berne, in Lausanne, in Geneva, and in England where "tout le parlement . . . pense comme vous." (Best. D7584, to Théodore Tronchin, 15 January 1758). All this was wildly optimistic, but was exceeded on 25 February 1758, in a letter to d'Alembert: (Best. D7651) "On vient d'imprimer le socinianisme tout cru a Neuchatel.<sup>106</sup> Il triomphe en Angleterre. La secte est nombreuse à Amsterdam. Dans vingt ans Dieu aura beau jeu."<sup>107</sup> As Voltaire in this letter was trying to shore up d'Alembert's determination to hold firm and was excited by "la profession servétine" that the Genevois had recently issued, perhaps his exaggeration can be forgiven. At least it was consistent with his published works.

---

<sup>105</sup> See my comments on his similar statements in the Essai sur les moeurs, supra, pp. 241-243.

<sup>106</sup> I have not been able to find out what incident in Neufchâtel prompted this remark by Voltaire.

<sup>107</sup> In fact, sixteen years later, on 17 April 1774, Unitarians in England held their first service, followed independently by the first American church in 1786 (supra, pp. 171-172). Whilst these neo-Socinian churches have survived, their modest numbers and influence hardly constitute a triumph.



## IX

### LATER REFLECTIONS ON SOCINIANISM IN GENEVA (1758-1777)

When the dust had settled from the first scuffles over d'Alembert's attribution of Socinianism to the Genevois, there began a long literary war sparked off by the Genève article. Rousseau, Voltaire, d'Alembert, Vernet, and a horde of lesser theologians and pamphleteers all entered into the battle. Vernet was the centre of the Socinian front of the war. Rousseau and d'Alembert directed their comments primarily to the Déclaration of the Genevois pastors for which Vernet had the major responsibility. Voltaire entered relatively late and concentrated his attacks on the person of Vernet. Therefore, considerable attention will be paid in the first part of this chapter to Vernet, Rousseau, and d'Alembert, whose writings set the stage for Voltaire's entry into the fray. Furthermore, they help explain why the philosophes were so interested in the place of Socinianism in Geneva.

The Socinian question was tied in with two other Genevois problems of the time. First, was the political

struggle among the various classes of the republic, which is mentioned occasionally in this chapter because matters of faith and state were intimately entwined. Second, was the issue of theatre raised in the Genève article. More ink was spilled over d'Alembert's suggestion that Geneva could well afford to allow theatre in the republic than about the Socinian question. This study will not comment on that important issue but will concentrate on the major writers' reflections on Socinianism in Geneva. In addition, some evidence of the lasting effects of d'Alembert's Socinian allegations on the Genevois mind will be presented.

A. Rousseau (1758-1759): Rousseau's great Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert sur les spectacles was the first publication, the opening shot, in the war. Judging from his letter to the Genevois pastor Jacob Vernes on 18 February 1758 (L.616), Rousseau was not eager at first to enter the controversy.

Je n'ai point eu occasion d'exécuter vôtre commission auprès de M. d'Alembert . . . . Au reste si l'article dont vous me parlez est indiscret et répréhensible il n'est assurément pas offensant. Cependant s'il peut nuire à vôtre corps, peut être fera-t-on bien d'y répondre, quoique à vous parler vrai, j'aye un peu d'aversion pour les détails où cela peut entraîner, et qu'en

général je n'aime guères qu'en matière de foi l'on assujettisse la conscience à les formules.

He went on to make it clear that he was hardly the man to defend Geneva's theological orthodoxy:

Mon ami, je crois en Dieu, et Dieu ne seroit pas juste si mon ame n'étoit immortelle. Voila ce me semble tout ce que la Religion a d'essential et d'utile. Laissons le reste aux disputeurs. A l'égard de l'éternité des peines . . . je la rejette.

Thus, in fact, Rousseau went beyond the Socinianism that d'Alembert reported finding in Geneva.<sup>1</sup>

It would seem from Rousseau's next letters to Vernes--Vernes's replies are lost--that the good pastor was shocked by what Rousseau had said he believed. On 25 March 1758 (L.634), Rousseau protested that they had too much in common to quarrel over their minor differences. As d'Alembert had said in the Encyclopédie and the declaration of the pastors had confirmed, Rousseau claimed the typically Genevan feelings for the Scriptures. "Je vous l'ai dit bien des fois; nul homme au monde ne respecte plus que moi l'évangile." However, he quickly spoiled this pious impression: "Mais enfin, c'est un Livre; un livre ignoré des trois-quarts du genre humain."<sup>2</sup> Their cordial disagreement continued until 4 July 1758 (L.664),

---

<sup>1</sup>  
The present study will carefully limit itself to consideration of Rousseau's writings on Socinianism in Geneva. His general religious philosophy and even the general problems raised in his Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert are too complex to be treated in a work on Voltaire and Socinianism.

<sup>2</sup>  
L.664 protested that Vernes had misinterpreted Rousseau's previous letter (L.647, 25 May 1758). On 25 June 1758, Rousseau wrote d'Alembert (L.659), announcing his Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert and enclosing a copy. D'Alembert replied: "Bien loin, monsieur, d'etre offensé de ce que vous avez pu écrire contre mon article Geneve, je suis au contraire très flatté de l'honneur que vous m'avez fait." (L.660, 27 June).

when Rousseau announced to Vernes that "J'ai sous presse un petit Ecrit sur l'article Genève de M. d'Alembert." He explained that it was the Encyclopédie's gratuitous advice to the Genevois to establish a theatre that had offended him, especially since "j'ai vu clairement qu'il ne se faisoit pas un scrupule de faire sa cour à M. Voltaire à nos dépend<sup>3</sup>s." This letter has no mention of Geneva's religion. When Dupan heard that Rousseau was preparing to defend Geneva against the philosophes, he surmised that "Il fait bien sa cour à nos Ministres" (L.680, 19 August 1758)--an ironic coincidence that Rousseau's motives were impugned with the same phrase he had used against d'Alembert and Voltaire.

Rousseau's account in the Confessions of his inspiration to write against d'Alembert was somewhat more dramatic than contemporary documents would have suggested. He said that Diderot had visited him before Volume VII of the Encyclopédie was published: "il m'avoit appris que cet article, concerté avec des Genevois du haut étage avoit pour but l'établissement de la Comédie à Genève." (I, p. 494).<sup>4</sup> He continued that Diderot "paroissoit trouver tout cela fort bien" (I, p.495) although

---

<sup>3</sup>  
On 22 October 1758, after the book was published, Rousseau repeated to Vernes (L.715) that Voltaire was responsible for part of the Genève article but "j'aye eue la discretion de n'en rien dire".

<sup>4</sup>  
References to the Confessions are from the Pléiade edition of Rousseau's Oeuvres Complètes.

this does not accord well with Diderot's correspondence and actions concerning the Genève article.<sup>5</sup> This, Rousseau reported, fired him with zeal to defend his homeland; and in three inspired weeks he wrote the Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert (I, p.495). Whilst the coolness of his letters to Vernes in this period argued against the Confessions' story, the impassioned style of the Lettre itself tended to confirm it. A strange man, Rousseau.

The Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert sur les spectacles,<sup>6</sup> which appeared in Paris on 2 October 1758 (L.715) and of which Rousseau sent twenty-five copies<sup>7</sup> to Geneva on 6 October 1758 (L.701), devoted only the first five percent of its length (pp. 11-19) to defending Geneva's clergy against d'Alembert's description. His major line of argument was that d'Alembert had been careless with his "louanges nuisables" (p.12): "Ignorez-vous que tout nom de Secte est toujours odieux, et que de pareilles imputations, rarement sans conséquence pour les Laïques, ne le sont jamais pour des Théologiens?" (p.12). "Socinian", too,<sup>8</sup> was one of the most insulting theological terms of the period.

---

<sup>5</sup>  
Supra, p. 279.

<sup>6</sup>  
All references in this study to this work will be to Fuchs's critical edition of 1948. His use of square brackets to indicate segments that were in the addenda to the first edition will be dispensed with in the present work.

<sup>7</sup>  
One to Voltaire.

<sup>8</sup>  
Supra, pp. 77-79.

What made d'Alembert's offence even worse was that he had betrayed the confidence of his Genevan hosts. The only way that he could have known their beliefs was from their conversations which should have been kept private (p. 13).

Rousseau confined his discussion of his countrymen to two points. Were the pastors "Sociniens parfaits" who rejected "les peines éternelles" (p.13) as d'Alembert published in the article Genève? The letters to Vernes outlined above revealed enough of Rousseau's theology to show it would have been difficult for him to argue honestly for the traditional Christian position. Therefore, he adroitly sidestepped the issue:

JE NE prétends point pour cela juger ni blâmer la doctrine que vous leur imputez; je dis seulement qu'on n'a nul droit de la leur imputer<sup>9</sup>. . . Je ne sais ce que c'est que le Socinianisme, ainsi que je n'en puis parler ni en bien ni en mal, et même sur quelques notions confuses de cette secte et de son fondateur, je me sens plus d'éloignement que de goût pour elle; mais, en général, je suis l'ami de toute Religion paisible, où l'on sert l'Être éternel selon la raison qu'il nous a donnée. (p. 13)

When one comes across sentences like this one which began by stating he did not know what Socinianism was, then declared that what little he knew about it he did not find attractive, and ended with a brilliant summary of what developed Socinianism was thought to be and the statement that he was the friend of any such religion, one can understand that some of Rousseau's

---

9

"Nul droit", according to Rousseau, because their beliefs were revealed in confidence.

contemporaries found his writing obscure and contradictory. Obscure or not, this enabled him to take up the subject with minimum fear of being charged with either hypocrisy or heresy.

D'Alembert had said that the Genevans' Socinianism consisted in removing all mystery from their religion based Socinianism's first principle that anything "qui heurte la raison"<sup>10</sup> cannot be an article of faith. It was this first principle on which Rousseau based his defense; he simply argued that God could not expect man to believe that which contradicted his God-given reason.<sup>11</sup> "Si un Docteur venoit m'ordonner de la part de Dieu de croire que la partie est plus grand que le tout, que pourrois-je penser en moi-même, sinon que cet homme vieut m'ordonner d'être fou?" (pp. 14-15) However, this did not mean that all mystery was taken out of religion, for outside the realm of geometry "Le monde intellectuel . . . est plein de vérités incompréhensibles." (p. 14, n.2). Of course, then, Protestants excluded "Les mistères qui heurtent la raison" (p. 14, n.2) as they excluded anything that was logically contradiction. In short, Rousseau conceded d'Alembert's point.

Moving on to his second point, Rousseau said "JE NE suis pas plus scandalisé que ceux qui servent un Dieu clément, rejettent l'éternité des peines, s'ils la trouvent incompatible

---

<sup>10</sup>

Encyclopédie, VII, p. 578a; supra, p. 271.

<sup>11</sup>

This was also Vernet's argument (supra, p. 201.) and one which most Christians would allow.

avec sa justice." (p.16) He then went further than the Genevois clergy would go in explicitly affirming the principle of developed Socinianism that revelation was under the dominance of reason.

Mais je soutiens que si l'Écriture elle-même nous donnoit de Dieu quelque idée indigne de lui, il faudroit la rejeter en cela . . . ; car, de quelque authenticité que puisse être le texte sacré, il est encore plus croyable que la Bible soit altérée, que Dieu injuste ou malfaisant. (p.16)

One can only conclude that Rousseau, writing as "citoyen de Genève", should have confirmed d'Alembert's judgment in the minds of the readers of the Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert.

In fact, Rousseau thanked d'Alembert "pour ma Patrie de l'esprit de Philosophie et d'humanité que vous reconnoissez dans son Clergé" (p.16), but returned to his first point that by concluding his "éloge" in sectarian terms d'Alembert had given "à d'autres le sujet d'une accusation très grave" which could well harm those he meant to praise. (p.17). However, the pastors, Rousseau claimed, did not need his help as they had already ably defended themselves in their public declaration<sup>12</sup> (p.17, n.1). He closed his treatment of the republic's faith in giving thanks that Geneva had "un corps de Théologiens Philosophiques et pacifiques, ou plutôt un corps d'Officiers

---

12

Which, it would seem, he had not been able to read (Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert, p.17, n.1; L.634, Rousseau to Vernes, 25 March 1758).



de Morale et de Ministres de la vertu " (p.18)--again a description that did little to promote an orthodox image.

From early November, 1758, through early January, 1759, the reactions to this Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert in Rousseau's correspondence reveal a lot about the social and religious climate of Geneva. In the first place, few people bothered to remark on the relatively short comments on religion he had made; it was his reflections on theatre that interested them. Second, most of the Genevans' reactions followed class lines. Françoise-Charlotte Constant de Rebecque wrote her husband around 4 November 1758 (L.727): "Nous lisons le Rousseau Genevois, rien n'est plus fou et plus fait pour le bas." On first reading, Dupan found the Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert "rempli de radotage, de puerilitez et de contradictions" (L.735), but a little later his judgment had tempered: "Je relis Rousseau et j'y trouve beaucoup de choses sensées sur les spectacles en general, c'est dommage qu'il soit outré dans tons ses sentimens." (L.749). Dr. Théodore Tronchin was one aristocrat who approved of Rousseau's stand on theatre in Geneva although he found much else to criticize in Rousseau's book. (L.734). However, most of those who acclaimed Rousseau blamed the aristocracy for what they interpreted as Geneva's moral decline. For example, the minister Paul-Claude Moultou wrote Rousseau, "Votre Livre es icy le signal de ralliement de tous les bons Citoyens, l'oppobre et l'effroy des méchans . . . Les Riches,

depuis longtems corrompus, ont commencé a corrompre les pauvres en les avilissant." (L.733, around 10 November 1758). Another clergyman, Daniel de Rochemont, commented "S'il y a de la corruption aux extrémités, le corps de la Nation est encore sain." (L.732, around 10 November 1758).

Jean Perdriau and Jacob Vernet, both theologians, were the only ones to discuss the religious segment of the Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert. Perdriau said only "Vous avés defendu notre Clergé attaqué par M. d'Alembert avec les armes de la Dialectique le plus pressante" (L.737, 15 November 1758) before hurrying on  
13  
to the theatre. Vernet was grateful for what Rousseau had published about the clergy.

On ne pouvoit mieux touchez l'article de notre Theologie: c'est précisément ce que devoit dire un laïque dans votre position; je pense que vous serez aussi content de ce que nous avons dit dans notre déclaration. Nous vous sommes obligés de n'avoir pas négligé ce point, et de l'avoir tourné comme vous faites. (L.742, 24 November 1758).

Vernet's approbation of what Rousseau had written on reason and revelation would be proof alone that Vernet was Socinian in his beliefs.

Rousseau's reply to Vernet (L.753, 18 December 1758) began with an expression of relief as Rousseau had been afraid

---

13

Only a fragment of Rousseau's answer to Perdriau has survived. (L.746).

what he said might have been offensive to Geneva's pastors, "car pour bien traiter des matières aussi délicates, rien n'est moins suffisant que la bonne intention, et rien n'est plus commun que de tout gâter en pensant bien faire." Apparently Rousseau had taken Vernet's hint and finally read the declaration of the Compagnie des Pasteurs of 10 February 1758, for he praised it in the warmest terms. Most interesting in this letter is Rousseau's report of a reply he had made to abbé de la Porte who had written in a review of Rousseau's book in the 20 October 1758 issue of the Observateur littéraire that the published works of the Genevois theologians showed them to be Socinian.<sup>14</sup>

Voici tout ce que je lui ait dit à ce sujet. Quant aux mots de consubstantiel; de trinité, d'incarnation, que vous me dites être clair-semés dans nos livres, ils y sont tout aussi fréquens que dans l'Ecriture, et nous nous consolons d'être hérétiques avec les Apôtres et Jésus-Christ.

Servetus, Socinus, any of the anti-Nicene theologians would have answered the same.

Voltaire took little notice of Rousseau's book. Of course, he was interested when it was rumored that Jean-Jacques had written against drama. And, of course, the greatest playwright of eighteenth century France was not pleased to see his first love attacked, as his first comment on the work shows:

---

14

L.753, note explicative d, publishes the relevant extract from La Porte's article.

Roussau en est le Diogene, et du fonds de son tonneau, il s'avise d'aboier contre nous. Il y a en luy double ingratitude. Il attaque un art qu'il a exercé luy même et il écrit contre vous, qui l'avez accablé d'éloges. (Best. D7842, to d'Alembert, 2 September 1758).

This set the tone for his later references to the Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert,<sup>15</sup> which were neither frequent nor extensive. He never mentioned in these letters Rousseau's commentary on Socinianism in Geneva.

B. d'Alembert (1759): Early in 1759 d'Alembert published in the Netherlands a small book called Article Geneve de l'Encyclopédie; Profession de Foi des ministres genevois, avec des notes d'un théologien et réponse à la lettre de M. Rousseau, citoyen de Geneve.<sup>16</sup>

The first forty pages were simply a reprint of the article Genève--the next twenty the Déclaration of 10 February 1758 annotated by an unnamed theologian, who may, I think, have been d'Alembert himself.<sup>17</sup> These notes, in a word, served to justify what d'Alembert had published in the Encyclopédie. For example, take note b on page 45:

---

<sup>15</sup>  
Best. D7864, D7887, D7900, D7920, D7925, D7943, for example, scattered from September to November, 1758, to various correspondents.

<sup>16</sup>  
In 1760 Marc Michel Rey, Rousseau's own publisher, pirated the third section of this work, which he published under the title Lettre de Monsieur d'Alembert à Mr. J. J. Rousseau Citoyen de Genève.

<sup>17</sup>  
The style and general argumentation are compatible with d'Alembert (see, for example, the end of this paragraph).

Pourquoi donc dans l'opinion de la plupart des Protestans, et notamment des Eglises de Suisse et de Hollande, l'Eglise de Geneve passe-t-elle pour Socinienne, ou du moins pour favorable au Socinianisme? Si les Ministres de Geneve n'ont point donné lieu à cette opinion, il faut avouer qu'ils sont fort à plaindre.

D'Alembert had always claimed he had revealed no secrets nor betrayed any confidences, for he claimed all Europe already thought Geneva Socinian. Vernet's fateful change from speaking of the nécessité of revelation to its utilité did not escape mention (p.51, n.f). In general, the anonymous theologian harried the Genevois pastors in his notes for their lack of precision and for their equivocation. His last note put the relevant questions point blank:

On leur demande donc avec confiance,

- 1°. S'ils croient les peines de l'enfer éternelles, en ce sens qu'elles n'auront jamais de fin.
- 2°. Quels sont les Mysteres qu'ils admettent?
- 3°. S'ils croient que J. C. est Dieu, égal en tout à son Pere, et ne faisant avec lui qu'un seul et même Dieu. (p.59, n.1)

These questions are very reminiscent of the profession of faith that d'Alembert had said the Genevois could never sign.

Judging it to be of the least interest to his readers, d'Alembert relegated his discussion of the "sentimens . . . en matiere de Religion" (p.150) of Geneva's ministers to the last five pages of his one hundred page letter. He first repeated the two major points that he habitually used to justify himself. First, he said he had only reported what was already public knowledge

about Geneva's religion which could be easily gathered from published theological works: "Si je me suis trompé dans l'exposition que j'ai faite de leurs sentimens . . . tout autre que moi, j'ose le dire, eût été trompé de même." (p.151). Then, arguing as a good ex-Catholic, he said, "Ces sentiments sont d'ailleurs une suite nécessaire des principes de la Religion Protestante." (p.151). Rousseau had mentioned that the word "Socinian" was alone enough to harm his country's clergy, and d'Alembert (without referring to Rousseau) apologized for too much precision in his terminology. Nonetheless, he continued, Socinianism "sera infailliblement dans quelques années leur doctrine publique." (p.152).

Then, at the end of his commentary, in his beautifully controlled style, d'Alembert pointed out the essential weakness of Rousseau's defense of Geneva's reluctant Socinians:

Vous semblez m'accuser presque uniquement d'imprudence à leur égard; . . . et vous marquez d'ailleurs assez d'indifférence sur ce Socinianisme dont ils craignent tant d'être soupçonnés. Permettez-moi de douter que cette manière de plaider leur cause les satisfasse. (pp. 154-155).

19

Strangely, as their letters to Rousseau showed, the Genevois theologians seemed, at the time, to be satisfied with what

---

19

Supra, p. 298. However, in the Lettres Critiques (1766 ed.) I, pp. 206-207, Vernet took d'Alembert to task for considering Rousseau a worthy spokesman for Geneva. He noted that Rousseau had spent most of his adult life in Italy and France as a convert to Catholicism.

Rousseau had said in their behalf. More strangely, given Rousseau's temperament, Rousseau and d'Alembert remained on good terms for some years after their respective Lettres appeared.

When Voltaire heard of d'Alembert's book, he wrote on

4 May 1759:

Vous avez donc fait réimprimer votre article de Geneve? Vous avez très bien fait. Mais vous faites trop d'honneur aux prédicans sociniens. Vous me les connaissez pas vous di-je. Ils sont aussi malins que les autres. Et les sociniens de Geneve et les calvinistes de Lausanne, et les faquirs et les bonzes sont tous de la même espèce. (Best. D8286).

Voltaire was pleased because this was the clearest way d'Alembert could have shown his refusal to retract what he had said about Geneva, and Voltaire had from the first argued against any retraction. After reading it, Voltaire commented, "Votre livre est charmant, il fait mes délices, au point que je vous pardonne d'avoir vu des prêtres à Geneve." (Best. D8451, 25 August 1759).

C. Vernet: In the summer of 1760, Voltaire's pamphlet entitled Dialogues chrétiens ou préservatif contre l'Encyclopédie

20

Grimsley, D'Alembert, pp. 137ff. L.817 (Rousseau to Chevalier Orlando de Lorenzy, 21 May 1759) shows him to be only mildly annoyed at the ad hominem aspects of d'Alembert's Lettre, which were indeed few and mild. But Rousseau tended to take offense more easily than most men.

21

Voltaire continued good relations with the Calvinist ministers Vernes, Allamand, and Bertrand, but he did not discuss d'Alembert's defense with them. Perhaps that would have strained their friendship too much, but his comments to them would have been interesting.

22

Mélanges, pp. 357-368. For the publication date, see Best. D8410 (23 August, 1760).

was published anonymously, and he disavowed it all his life. The first dialogue, between a priest and an encyclopédiste, was Voltaire's version of the reasons behind the Catholic clergy's opposition to the philosophes. The second dialogue, between the priest and a Protestant minister, began with the priest suggesting an alliance, for all "ecclésiastiques" were in danger when the encyclopédistes "prétendent établir l'empire de la raison." (p.362). After the minister quickly agreed, the priest lamented Protestant tolerance. "Ah! si, comme nous, vous brûliez, vous envoyiez à la potence, aux galères . . . on ne vous reprocherait pas de tomber dans le relâchement." (p.362). To this the minister replied, "mais nous avons eu quelques-uns de ces moments brillants que vous regrettez, et le supplice de Servet doit exciter votre admiration et votre envie." (p.363).

Reassured--"Puisque nous pensons de même, exterminons donc les philosophes" (p.363)--the priest suggested they work together to attack. However, the minister demurred, saying he would praise or damn the philosophes and their work depending on which course paid the better. (pp. 363-364). Although the priest feigned shock at his counterpart's simony, he quickly offered a high enough fee to ensure the Protestant's cooperation. Then, the minister went on to relate how he had come across a manuscript unfavourable to Catholicism, which he sold to Rome rather than publishing it. (p.366). After that, he sought to undermine the philosophes by



gaining their confidence: "je m'adressai au plus dangereux et au plus écouté d'entre eux; je cherchai à gagner sa confiance, et, après y avoir réussi, je lui proposai d'être l'éditeur de ses oeuvres." (p.366). Unfortunately, the minister said, the deal fell through and he lost his chance to make a lot of money. (p.367). On parting, the minister's last words to the priest were, "N'oubliez pas non plus la pension, et souvenez-vous qu'elle est destinée à un pauvre homme." (p.368).

Voltaire, of course, had to deny the authorship of this pamphlet; it was too strong an attack on both Catholics and Protestants to escape the attention of the authorities. Accordingly, Voltaire's letters of September, 1760, included many disavowals. The first, in a letter to Gabriel Cramer on 3 September 1760 (Best. 8431), made it quite clear that Vernet was meant to be the minister of the Dialogues: "Vôtre professeur Vernet, Docteur en Théologie, est cruellement déchiré dans le second dialogue, c: à d: qu'il est peint trait pour trait." What bothered Voltaire about the publication of the Dialogues chrétiens, he wrote Cramer, was not that Vernet had been vilified--"c'est un homme, pour qui j'ai, comme vous, le plus profond mépris"--but rather that the editor had published them under the initial "V". When Théodore Tronchin said he suspected Voltaire of being the author, Voltaire wrote back:

je suis indigné qu'on me croie assez timide pour me vanger ainsi de Vernet par une brochure. Ce n'est pas Vernet qu'on outrage par cette feuille, c'est moy, quand on a l'insolence de mettre la première lettre de mon nom au devant de la feuille. (Best. 8446, 6 September 1760).

One wonders how Voltaire, who was clearly the author of the Dialogues chrétiens, could have brought himself to write that he rather than Vernet was harmed by their publication. After all, if the Genevois had believed the allegations printed in the Dialogues about Vernet, he would have been destroyed.

However, Voltaire even went so far as to write to Michel Lullin de Chateauevieux, of the Genevois Conseil, that he trusted the wisdom of the Conseil, and "il verra si cette affaire vaut la peine d'être suivie; il peut faire brûler le livre, punir le libraire et l'auteur." (Best. 8439, 5 September 1760) And Voltaire hated Vernet because he believed the minister to be a hypocrite: "Je suis très aise, et vous aussi qu'on vilipende un Tartufe." (Best. 8448; Voltaire to Théodore Tronchin, 7 September 1760) On 8 September, the Conseil obliged Voltaire with the decree: "Messeigneurs condamnent led<sup>t</sup> libelle a être biffé, lacéré et brûlé par la main de l'Exécuteur de la haute Justice."<sup>23</sup>

---

23

Best. App. 118, vol. 43, pp. 199-207 contains the records of the Genevois authorities' actions concerning the Dialogues chrétiens. For the decree of the Conseil, see ibid., p. 199.

Poor Vernet did not recognize himself in the distorted picture of the Dialogues chrétiens until stories began to circulate in Geneva which compounded the libels of the Dialogues.<sup>24</sup> Once he realized that he was under attack,<sup>24a</sup> Vernet prepared a long justificatory letter which refuted, in detail, all the allegations made against him and appended the relevant correspondence which supported his case. After studying the case, the Consistoire (Best., App. 118, vol. 43, p. 203), the Conseil (ibid., p. 204), and the Vénéralable Compagnie des Pasteurs (ibid., p. 206) all vindicated Vernet's name. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his letter to Vernet of 29 November 1760, said he was sorry he had heard of the case too late to include comments on it in la Nouvelle Héloïse and added some harsh judgments on Voltaire's behaviour in this affair:

Ainsi donc la satire, le noir mensonge et les libelles sont devenus les armes des philosophes et de leurs partisans! Ainsi paie M. de Voltaire l'hospitalité dont, par une funeste indulgence, Genève use envers lui! (L. 1176)

These hard words were, I believe, just; but Rousseau went on beyond reasonable comment:

---

24

For Vernet's account of his reaction to the Dialogues, see his letter to Jean-Jacques Rousseau of 4 November 1760 (L. 1148) and the report of his testimony to the Compagnie des Pasteurs on 21 November 1760 (Best., App. 118, vol. 43, p. 205).

24a

The letter is given a lengthy resumé in note critique d of L. 1148.

Ce fanfaron d'impiété, ce beau génie et cette ame basse, cet homme si grand par ses talens, et si vil par leur usage, nous laissera de longs et cruels souvenirs de son séjour parmi nous. La ruine des moeurs, la perte de la liberté, qui en est la suite inévitable, seront chez nos neveux les monuments de sa gloire et de sa reconnoissance.

Voltaire generally was a much better man than he was in this quarrel with Vernet and certainly did not have the power to overturn Geneva's traditions single-handedly as Rousseau charged.

After this attack, Vernet published in 1761 his Lettres critiques d'un voyageur anglois sur l'article Genève du Dictionnaire encyclopédique et sur la Lettre de Mr. d'Alembert à Mr. Rousseau touchant les spectacles, which undertook the formidable task of refuting d'Alembert and Voltaire at once. The Lettres critiques were successful and appeared in a third, <sup>25</sup> augmented two volume edition published in Copenhagen, in 1766. They are among Vernet's more vigorous works but never go beyond the bounds of gentlemanly, scholarly dispute. Not only did he refrain from the sort of personal abuse he suffered in the Dialogues chrétiens, he did not even bother to mention that work. Vernet might, however, be faulted for prolixity. To refute d'Alembert's page and a half in the Genève article and his five pages in his Lettre . . . à Mr. J. J. Rosseau devoted to Geneva's religion, Vernet spent at least two hundred and twenty-five pages.

---

25

In this study, all references are to this third edition.

Vernet's arguments against d'Alembert continually returned to two closely related general ideas: first, that d'Alembert had written about Geneva's religion as part of a deist campaign to discredit Christianity; and second, that d'Alembert, following Bossuet and others, believed that Protestant first principles logically entailed Socinian conclusions. Of course, Vernet ~~decided~~ the first and denied the second, both of which were, I believe, correctly attributed to d'Alembert.<sup>26</sup> In regard to the idea that there was a deist conspiracy to erode Christianity, Vernet offered an astute analysis of the source of Voltaire's religious sensibilities. He noted that Voltaire "prit son essor dans le monde" in the time of the Regency of Philip, Duc d'Orléans, "époque d'un luxe libertin, d'une indévotion Epicurienne" (I, pp. 7-8). This general spirit of the times plus his distaste for the Jansenism of his family, Vernet argued, gave Voltaire his "dégoût pour tout ce qui concerne la Religion" and his characteristic style of "raillerie" (I, p. 8). Bolingbroke's influence confirmed these attitudes (I, p.8). That Vernet interpreted the genesis of Voltaire's religious attitudes the same way that many modern critics do<sup>27</sup> is most interesting.

Vernet identified Voltaire as the coryphée (I, pp. 7 and

---

<sup>26</sup>

Supra, pp. 278-279 and 288.

<sup>27</sup>

Supra, chapter III.

passim) of the chorus of philosophes, or as Vernet preferred, philosophistes (I, p. 13 and passim), who raised their voices in the Encyclopédie and other works against the Christian religion. Unfortunately, d'Alembert, who was an excellent mathematician, was drawn into Voltaire's "tourbillon" (I, p. 13) and was lost to true philosophy. Thus, the minister warned, the article Genève was the work of "d'Alembert Voltarien" not "d'Alembert géometre" (I, p.15). As one proof of this charge, Vernet noted that in Voltaire's Essai (1756), the chapters on Calvin and Newton contained statements that Protestants everywhere were moving into the Socinian camp; and he claimed that d'Alembert's Genève was merely a specific example of Voltaire's generalizations. (I, pp. 190-192).

Again, we note that Vernet and the current interpretation

---

28

I cannot trace the Voltarian source for Vernet's reference to Newton. The passage quoted in the Lettres critiques (I, 191) was: "Newton alla même plus loin qu'Arius, ainsi que tout les Sociniens. Il y a aujourd'hui en Europe beaucoup de Savans de cette opinion; je ne dirai pas de cette Communion, car ils ne font point de corps. Ils font même partages, et plusieurs d'entreux reduisent leur Système au pur Deïsme accomodé avec la Morale de Christ." Vernet cited Tome IV, p.176 of Voltaire's works (1756 edition?) as his source.

In an addition made in 1761 to Chapter CLXXXI "De l'Angleterre sous Charles II", of the Essai, we find ". . . théisme a fait depuis des progrès prodigieux dans le reste du monde. . . . Une foule d'illustres écrivains en ont fait profession ouverte. La plupart des sociniens se sont enfin rangés à ce parti. . . . Il faut avouer que, de toutes les sectes, c'est la seule qui n'ait point troublé la société par les disputes . . . les théistes d'Europe n'ont qu'un culte secret . . . : du moins il n'y eu jusqu'ici qu'un très petit nombre de ceux qu'on nomme unitaires qui se soient assembles" (Essai, II, pp. 687-688). In this addition Voltaire linked the "théistes" of Europe to the "lettrés" of China, but other than that, it was his ordinary type of reference to Socinians. Vernet correctly understood the motivation of such passages.

coincide. More evidence for d'Alembert's dependence on Voltaire was that in Genève's treatment of Calvin the two salient points were the defence of Voltaire's "âme atroce" statement and Calvin's dealings with Servetus (I, pp. 47-51) "En nommant Calvin notre Auteur n'a garde d'oublier Servet. Comment nommer aujourd'hui l'un sans l'autre?" (I, p.48). Vernet was dead right in saying the philosophes, led by Voltaire, always mentioned Calvin and Servetus together; it almost seemed that they mentioned Calvin in order to point out that Servetus was burnt whilst Geneva was under Calvin's influence. For example, Voltaire's Essai devoted more than half its treatment of Calvin to the Servetus incident and did not even mention the Institutes. Of course, as Vernet well knew, the Essai was an edifying history designed to teach tolerance and disdain for theology.

One can agree with Vernet that d'Alembert was Voltairian in the Genève article; his justification of the "âme atroce" passage and his stricture on the Genevois prohibition of theatre are enough to prove that. However, the general theory that the very nature of Protestantism led to Socinianism, which Voltaire did hold, was not necessarily borrowed from him by d'Alembert. It was the commonplace interpretation of the eighteenth century,

---

30

<sup>31</sup> Supra, p. 237.

<sup>32</sup> Supra, p. 237.

<sup>33</sup> Compare McNeill's standard The History and Character of Calvinism, which gives Servetus about four percent of his pages on Calvin.

Supra, p. 288.

and there is no reason to assume that Voltaire was the one who introduced it to d'Alembert. Still, as Vernet stressed, it was a very useful theory to the deists that enabled them to posit an inevitable progression from the Reformers to Socinianism to deism--or from Vernet's standpoint, an inevitable degeneration of Christianity to deism. (I, pp. 194, 266-276). In rebuttal to this theory, Vernet said that what Protestants actually believed belied d'Alembert's and Voltaire's allegations. That is, the tableau of Geneva's religion in the article Genève was only the product of d'Alembert's wishful thinking; it was what his theory dictated must be the case rather than a report of what he observed. (I, pp. 267, 272). Vernet's general argument was sound; Protestantism has not uniformly dissolved into Socinianism and deism--it supports an embarrassment of forms. However, Geneva, under Vernet's leadership, had in the mid-eighteenth century become Socinian in the broad sense as d'Alembert reported.

Therefore, whilst Vernet was quite successful in showing that d'Alembert had made some errors in fact and interpretation in the Genève article--he claimed that most of the correct information had been plagiarized from notes Vernet had furnished (I, pp. 18-19) and complained that d'Alembert did not even try to substantiate his charges of Socinianism (I, pp. 113-119, 215-218)--and well revealed the polemical motives behind what was said about Geneva's faith, his attempts to show the Genevois were not Socinians were very weak. His main line of defence was the Déclaration of the pastors of February, 1758,<sup>34</sup> which he claimed "est une de ces

---

34

Supra, pp. 282-284 for my discussion of the Déclaration.



pièces qui par leur nature ne souffrent aucun replique, puisqu'il s'agit d'un fait, qui par-là se trouvent pleinement éclairci" (I, p.198). This only begged the question, for as we have seen, the Déclaration was open to interpretation and could well be interpreted as a Socinian document. However, Vernet went so far as to say that the honorable thing for d'Alembert to have said after reading the Déclaration would have been: "Je n'ai rien à dire non plus sur l'article du Socinianisme, puisqu'un mot de désaveu de leur part doit suffire pour me fermer la bouche." (I, p.207).<sup>35</sup>

Of course, d'Alembert had concluded that the Déclaration had vindicated him and republished it along with theological notes. Vernet protested that these notes were irrelevant; they only demonstrated that the Genevois pastors, proudly following Protestant tradition, did not use the language of scholasticism in their theology. (I, pp. 209, 246-248, 259). Some of the notes were really such disagreements on terminology; but, on the whole, they raised legitimate doubts about the equivocations and ambiguities of the Déclaration, which doubts Vernet did not attempt to dispute. As to the specific questions d'Alembert published in his annotated edition of the Déclaration Vernet only answered them indirectly. The first question asked with great theological precision whether or not the Genevois ministers

---

35

See also Robert Brown's preface to the Lettres critiques (I, p.v) for a similar statement.

36

Supra, pp. 301-303.

37

Supra, p. 302.

believed the pains of hell would endure eternally. Vernet equivocated: "Quant' au mot d'Enfer, je ne conçois pas qu'aucun Ministre ose l'abandonner puisque ce mot est de l'Ecriture." (I, 230) Unquestionably true, but given Geneva's principles of exegesis, individual ministers could interpret "l'enfer" almost however they pleased.

38

"Quels sont les Mysteres qu'ils admettent?" was the second question. Here Vernet repeated what he had said in Traité: that Geneva's Calvinists, along with all Protestants, accepted "mystères" in the scriptural sense of the word; that is "des points encore obscurs", but rejected "des absurditez qui impliquent contradictions." (I, 268). As with the first question, this did not constitute a clear answer and was consistent with Socinianism. The third question asked the Genevois whether or not they accepted the Nicene doctrine of the relation of Jesus Christ to God the Father. I found only one passage where Vernet used the word "Trinité" in a careful reading of the Lettres critiques, which alone suggests his lack of orthodoxy on this matter. He wrote:

pour repousser les railleries perpétuelles des incrédules, par exemple, sur la Trinité, quelcun observe qu'ils ont tort de s'aheurter à des mots ou à des formules Scholastiques, d'où naissant les plus grandes difficultés; au lieu qu'en s'en tenant aux termes de l'Ecriture, ces objections n'ont plus la même force. (I, p.230)

This is interesting in that he used the classical anti-Nicene arguments ostensibly to defend the Trinity against "incrédules".

It is safe to infer that Vernet could not have satisfied d'Alembert on his christological orthodoxy.

Also relevant to the third question was Vernet's reaction in the Lettres critiques to d'Alembert's phrase in the Genève article that said all that separated the ministers of Geneva from deism was "le respect pour J. C. et pour les Ecritures."<sup>39</sup> Like the Déclaration of pastors,<sup>40</sup> Vernet made offended noises. "Du respect! Que cela est mince! Que cela est équivoque!" (I, p.137) To clear up this ambiguity, Vernet distinguished between three degrees of respect; only the highest, which consists of "vénération profonde, . . . entier acquiescement, . . . soumission d'esprit et de coeur qui'n'est duë qu'à Dieu et à sa Parole" (I, 138) would apply to the feelings that he and his colleagues had for Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. These are admirable sentiments, but are hardly precise enough to assuage one's doubts about doctrinal strictness of their faith.

In general, Vernet claimed that d'Alembert did not have first-hand evidence to back up what he had written in Genève; but, in a few revealing pages, Vernet inadvertently admitted that d'Alembert had made some direct observations which contributed to his misunderstanding of Geneva's religion. D'Alembert had consistently maintained in his Lettre . . . à Mr. J. J. Rousseau and in his correspondence that what he wrote in the Encyclopédie was only what he had heard in conversations with Genevois clergy and had

---

39

Supra, p. 272.

40

Supra, p. 284.

read in their books. Vernet admitted that d'Alembert had spoken with some ministers at Geneva, but suggested that their conversations conducted in the Paris salon atmosphere chez Voltaire, were hardly the best places to find out what Genevan piety really was (I. pp.227-229). Furthermore, he observed: "Souvent de jeunes Ecclésiastiques, par respect, par timidité, ne contradisent pas formellement des discours hardis et d'un certain ton, quoiqu'ils les désapprouvent en eux-mêmes." (I, pp.229-230). No doubt Vernet was right; Voltaire and d'Alembert, two of the greatest philosophes and both noted for the brilliance of their conversation, were formidable. <sup>41</sup> Who would dare dispute them in their own parlor? Certainly not the young progressively minded clergymen that met d'Alembert.

In pointing out the artificiality of d'Alembert's contacts with the clergy and the very limited and select number of Genevois he met--to wit, Voltaire's friends--Vernet made his most telling point against d'Alembert in the entire Lettres critiques (I, pp. 231-233). However, on the whole, he failed resoundingly to clear the Genevois of Socinianism which was inevitable given the nature of his theology. In fact, the Lettres

---

41

Dupan reported to Mme. Freudenreich on 18 August 1756: "Je dinai hier, moi indigne, avec des savants chez notre ami Tronchin Boissier, j'étois curieux de connoître Mr. d'Alembert. On y parla de Leibnitz et de Neuton, on y dit que la Philosophie Volfiennne avoit passé de mode comme le système de Descartes, vous jugez bien, Madame, que je ne mêlois pas dans une semblable conversation . . ." (Best D6972, commentary).

critiques, as the Déclaration of pastors earlier, serve as more evidence to support d'Alembert. Nonetheless, as Vernet clearly saw, both d'Alembert and Voltaire were misled by their rarified contacts with Geneva's aristocracy and blinded by their Roman Catholic presumptions about the logically necessary movement of Protestantism to deism and, therefore, fatally misjudged the temper of Geneva as a whole. This was amply proved by the Genevois volcanic anger at d'Alembert's glut of praise in the article Genève (I, p.234).

42

D. Rousseau and Vernet (1764-1766): Rousseau wrote his Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert in the relatively brief period that he was in good relations with his fatherland. After Geneva's clergy and magistrates had united in condemning his theology and politics, Rousseau countered with his Lettres écrites de la montagne<sup>43</sup> (1764), where he again took up the question of Socinianism in Geneva. This time he was on d'Alembert's side:

Un Philosophe jette sur eux un coup d'œil rapide;  
il les pénètre, il les voit Ariens, Sociniens;  
il le dit, et pense leur faire honneur . . . .  
Aussi-tôt allarmés, effrayés, ils s'assemblent . . . ;  
et après force consultations, délibérations,  
conférences, le tout aboutit à un amfigouri où  
l'on ne dit ni oui ni non . . . . (III, pp. 717-718).

Obviously, his statement of 18 December 1758 to Vernet about the

---

42

See Ritter, "Rousseau et Vernet".

43

References to this work are to the Pléiade edition of Rousseau's Oeuvres complètes.

Déclaration had been premature: "La modération, la sagesse, la fermeté, tout s'y trouve: je regarde cette pièce comme un modèle qui, malheureusement, ne sera pas imité par beaucoup de théologiens."<sup>44</sup> (L.753) . Now he pointed out how Geneva's ministers refused to answer d'Alembert's point-blank questions<sup>45</sup> and thus left their laity in "scandaleuse incertitude". (III, p. 717.) In short, he claimed, "Les Réformés de nos jours, du moins les Ministres, ne connoissent ou n'aiment plus leur Religion." (III, p.716).

Vernet, as the leading theological spokesman of Geneva, could not leave these statements unanswered, so he devoted the last chapter of the 1766 edition of his Lettres critiques to them. He began by noting Jean-Jacques's inconsistency in adopting the very position he had earlier attacked. (II, p.291) In his Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert, Vernet claimed Rousseau "n'étoit pas lui-même éloigné des opinions que l'Académicien nous attribue." (II, p.293), but then Rousseau had been fair enough to protest that the Genevois clergy had never adopted Socinian principles. (II, pp.293-294). Vernet noted that Rousseau advanced no new facts to justify his change of mind or to prove his allegations; the only thing that had changed was that Rousseau and the Genevois had quarrelled in 1762 (II, p.294).

Thus, Vernet believed that Rousseau's principle end in taking up d'Alembert's standard and libelling the Protestants

---

<sup>44</sup>

Supra, pp. 299-300.

<sup>45</sup>

Supra, pp. 302 and 314-316.

was a political one, to smooth the way for his return to France by ingratiating himself with both the philosophes and the Catholics. (II, p.296). At any rate, Rousseau's specific charges, such as calling the Déclaration an anfigouri were not to be taken seriously—they were inherently ludicrous as well as inconsistent with Rousseau's earlier statements. (II, pp.295-296). Vernet, I think, here, as usual, did a good job of unearthing his opponents' hidden motives and in pointing out the contradictions and inconclusiveness in his argument. Also, as usual, he refrained from answering--this time even from mentioning--the direct questions put to the Geneva clergy. Rousseau was right in the Lettres écrites de la montagne: "On leur demande si Jésus-Christ est Dieu, ils n'osent répondre: on leur demande quels mysteres ils admettent, ils n'osent répondre." (III, p.717).

46

E. Charles Bonnet: Charles Bonnet, a noted Genevois natural scientist, has left in his correspondence evidence of the lasting resentment that d'Alembert's article engendered in Geneva. His letters also give an insight into the religious sensibilities of a devout, intellectual layman of the period. In 1762 Bonnet entered into a correspondence with Mr. C. de Bentinck in which

45a

In 1765, Vernes (supra, pp. 215-217) published his Examen to refute Rousseau. Like Vernet, Vernes was much better in pointing out Rousseau's inconsistencies than in proving himself and his colleagues orthodox.

46

For Bonnet's comments on Voltaire's Essai que les moeurs, see supra, pp. 245-246.

47

BPU, Ms. Bonnet, Vol. 85: This volume is paginated in the beginning and foliated in the end.

they shared their theological and scientific observations.

Bonnet's letter of 11 June 1762 said:

Vous faites, Monsieur, un excellent distinguo entre la Théologie et la Religion. Le malheur est que celle-ci soit devenue un Science, qu'un Homme en longue robe noire et au menton duquel pend un morceau de toile enseigne mystiquement par Chapitres et par Cathégories. Croirés-vous que j'ai eu le courage de faire un espèce de Cours de Théologie, au moins pour apprendre ce qu'elle n'est pas. Je ne sais comment mon pauvre cerveau est bâtis; mais il ne s'y est point trouvé de fibres théologiques; et je vois avec une grande consolation que le vôtre n'en est pas moins dépourvu. Nous avons donc un sens de moins que ces Doctes; mais nous possédons au moins le sens commun, dont ils ne sont pas si bien pourvus. Graces aux progrès que la Raison a fait dans notre Ville, nos Théologiens sont assez Philosophes pour n'avoir des Mystères que l'idée qu'en avoit ST. PAUL, et sans être Sociniens comme le veut Mr. d'ALEMBERT, ils savent être Chrétiens, et ne damner Personne. Ils n'ont point crié au feu, au meurtre contre cet hardi Auteur de la Psychologie, et ils ont été assez modérés pour faire grace au Livre en faveur de la droiture des intentions de ce Fataliste Chrétien. (pp. 4-5)

That Bonnet defended his national theology against d'Alembert in this his second letter to Bentinck suggests that five years after Genève was published it was still very much in the minds of the Genevois.

Although Bonnet's letter of 11 June 1762 pointedly disavowed d'Alembert's use of the term Socinian to describe Geneva's theology, that latter itself, which exalted common sense interpretations of the Scriptures over the mysteries of theology, was



tinged with the doctrine it denied. Furthermore, it showed how Geneva's scientific men were proud of their advanced thought which put them in considerable sympathy with the aim of the Encyclopédie. In Bonnet's next letter (21 July, 1762) was a spirited attack on the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity in the context of a discussion of an anonymous writer who had been accused of heresy.

Mais au moins vous ne disconviendrez pas qu'il ne sente l'Arianisme. Le voilà donc damné avec NEWTON; il crieront tous deux à St. JEAN qui a dit, mon PERE est plus grand que moi<sup>48</sup> et : St. PAUL qui a dit, il est le premier né des Créatures et le FILS sera lui-même soumis<sup>49</sup> etc. etc. Non, on ne peut retenir son indignation quand on songe à la manière sacrilège et folle dont on a osé interpréter les Ecritures. Le fameux Passage des trois Temoins ne se trouve point dans les meilleurs Manuscripts;<sup>50</sup> en l'admettant pour canonique, j'observe que le mot contentieux de Personnes n'y est point: pourquoi donc l'y avoir ajouté, pourquoi avoir bâti sur cette interpolation un nouveau Dogme! Je renvoie tous ces Docteurs au Chapitre XVII de l'Evangile selon St. JEAN, et je leur demande pourquoi ils n'ont pas fabriqué encore une Duodenité; car les Apôtres n'étoient qu'un<sup>51</sup> comme le PERE et le FILS ne sont qu'un.<sup>52</sup> Peut-on interpréter mieux les Ecritures qu'en les interprétant par elles-mêmes? (pp.9-10).

This was, of course, a standard anti-Nicene argument based on the anti-Nicene exegetical principles of sound philology

---

48

John 14: 28.

49

Colossians 1: 15.

50

I John 5: 7-8. Bonnet was right; compare the King James Version with the New English Bible.

KJV: For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

NEB: For there are three witnesses, the Spirit; the water, and the blood, and these three are in agreement.

51

John 17: 21.

52

John 10: 30; see also 17: 22.

and common-sense interpretation. In his letter of 8 March  
 53  
 1773 to Mr. Végobre, Bonnet again displayed his Socinian  
 way of looking at Scripture:

Rien de plus obscure assurément que les trois  
 premiers chapitres de la Genèse. Je suis persuadé  
 des longtemps, que si l'on creusoit dans les Racines  
 de mots d'Arbre, de Fruit, de Serpent etc. on y  
 découviroit un très beau sens, et qui feroit tomber  
 toutes les difficultés des interprètes et les  
 Ironies de Libertins.

Apparently, reason was sovereign in Bonnet's theology  
 as it was in Vernet's. The general influence of Vernet was  
 very strong in the passages from Bonnet's letters just presented,  
 although I have not come across a passage where Vernet was as  
 outspoken on the Trinity as was Bonnet. Perhaps the  
 delicacy of Vernet's professional position restrained him.  
 At any rate, Geneva's leading theologian had a faithful disciple  
 in Bonnet as illustrated in his long letter of 7 March 1764 to  
 de Bentinck (pp. 29-34), which attempted to refute various state-  
 ments by Rousseau on Christianity using Vernet's principles.  
 One can see how philosophes like d'Alembert and Voltaire could

have been misled to think the Genevois were ready to abandon Christianity when they saw that Socinian methods in theology and Socinian critiques of fundamental doctrines dominated in Geneva under Vernet's influence. However, in fact, the Genevan Socinians were deeply attached to their type of Christianity and, when challenged by d'Alembert and Voltaire to move on to deism, used their liberal theological methods against the philosophes.

F. Voltaire (1759-1777): After the quarrel over the Genève article, Geneva, which had once been Voltaire's ideal "ville philosophique", became a target for his barbs. In the process of refurbishing Tournay and Ferney, Voltaire commented to Tronchin, his banker, on what had spoiled Geneva for him (Best. D8052, 17 January 1759). "Mais mon cher ami j'aime cent fois mieux des terres où l'on est le maître . . . sur le territoire où les prêtres sont maîtres." And he continued to repeat that the Genevois were Socinian, "Il est vray que les prêtres de Geneve et de Lausanne sont des hérétiques qui méprisent St Atanase, et qui ne croient Jesus christ dieu." (Best D8055, 19 January 1759, to Helvétius).<sup>54</sup> Again, in 1767, we find Voltaire denouncing the

---

54

Ages ("Private Voltaire", pp. 91-106) reviewed what Voltaire said in his correspondence about Geneva.

55

Best. D8129, to d'Alembert, 19 February 1759, has the phrase "nos sociniens de Geneve."

theologians of Geneva to d'Alembert (Best. 13504, 4 September and Best. 13708, 26 December). In January 1760 he commented in passing to Gabriel Cr mer, "Quant   vos pr tres je tireray dessus   balle des cr naux de Tournay." (Best. D8714).<sup>56</sup>

While still breathing his sighs of relief at escaping the ireful Socinians of Geneva, Voltaire was plunged again into the same old controversies. Grasset, who had earlier tormented Voltaire by threatening to publish La Pucelle,<sup>57</sup> reared his ugly head again in Lausanne and published early in 1759, anonymously, a compilation called Guerre litt raire ou Choix de quelques pi ces pol miques de Monsieur de V. avec les r ponses pour servir de suite et d' claircissement   ses ouvrages.<sup>58</sup> The Guerre litt raire reproduced some of the Swiss objections against

---

56

See Best. 9290, to d'Alembert, 20 October 1761, for a similar expression: "Je ferai tirer sur le premier pr tre Socinien qui passera sur mon territoire."

57

Supra, P. 219.

58

The history of the very complicated campaign that Voltaire engaged in over this book is made remarkably clear in two studies: Perey and Maugras, Vie, ch. VIII; and Roulet, Voltaire, Ch. VI. In the course of the battle, Voltaire lost Polier de Bottens's friendship, though it should be emphasized, not for theological reasons. In Best. D8002 (27 December 1758.) to de Brenles, Voltaire said he had heard that Grasset had printed some letters under Voltaire's name; at the end of January 1759 (Best. D8068 and 8070), there were reports that Grasset was just then printing the book. The correspondence for the next months was full of references to the Guerre litt raire.

Voltaire's anti-Christian writing (including Vernet's Lettre à  
<sup>59</sup>Formey ), Voltaire's "âme atroce" letter, and several anti-  
 religious writings which were spuriously attributed to Voltaire. <sup>60</sup>  
 Voltaire eventually won his case, insofar as the book was seized  
 and Grasset was refused Bernese citizenship and forbidden to  
 practice his trade at Lausanne. However, Voltaire lost most of  
 his Lausannois friends in the course of the struggle.

In the course of dealing with the Guerre littéraire,  
 Voltaire made some interesting comments about Vernet. He said in  
 early January, 1759, (Best. D8079) that he finally had read the  
 anonymous letter of May, 1757, <sup>61</sup> which had publicly attacked his  
 "âme atroce" statement, and attributed it to Vernet. In this  
 letter to Dr. Tronchin, Voltaire insisted that the only honourable  
 thing for Vernet to do would be to disavow all he had written  
 against Voltaire. Furthermore he pointed out that now that Voltaire  
 was "comte de Tournay", Vernet, who had a country house there, was  
 his vassal. A few days later, Voltaire forwarded to Tronchin  
 the declaration he thought Vernet should sign (Best. D8083, c.6  
 February 1759):

Nous désaprouvons tous ici, et moi particulièrement, la  
 brochure anonyme intitulée Guerre Littéraire . . . ; je  
 suis surtout très fâché de voir mon nom mêlé dans cette  
 brochure en plusieurs endroits. Je déclare qu'il est faux  
 que j'aie jamais eu le moindre démêlé avec Monsieur de  
 Voltaire mon voisin, pour qui j'ai les plus grand égards,  
 et dont je n'ai jamais reçu que des politesses.

---

59

Supra, pp. 263-264.

60

Besterman, Voltaire, p. 393.

61

Supra, pp. 248-251.

Vernet refused to sign this or make any disavowal as he said there was nothing to be ashamed of in his Lettre à Formey which Grasset had reprinted. (Best. D8112, to Théodore Tronchin, 14 February 1759).

The last paragraph of Vernet's letter revealed much about his relationship with his philosophical adversaries:

Si vous faites parvenir, Monsieur, mes réflexions à Mr de Voltaire, comme je vous en prie; n'oubliez pas d'ajouter combien je suis sensible aux expressions obligeantes dont il se sert à mon égard. Elles répondent bien aux marques de politesse que je n'ai cessé de recevoir de lui dans les liaisons que j'ai eu l'honneur d'avoir avec lui: liaisons que je regrette, et que je n'ai interrompues que par une nécessité de bienséance, depuis qu'il a imprimé sous nos yeux des choses qui nous affligent et que nous ne pouvons nous dispenser de réfuter.

He insisted that whatever he had written was not a personal attack on Voltaire but rather the expression of an intellectual disagreement. Finally, as a resident of Voltaire's territory, he offered "les respects dûs au seigneur de Tournex."

Without a disavowal from Vernet, Voltaire went ahead anyway to file a Mémoire and a request for legal action against the Guerre littéraire.<sup>62</sup> The fifth item of the Mémoire was:

La prétendue dispute de Mr de Voltaire avec Mr Vernet, professeur en Théologie, n'a jamais existé. Monsr de Voltaire est seigneur de la terre où Monsr le professeur Vernet a une maison de campagne et le brouillon qui a supposé un démêlé entre deux voisins et deux amis, ne peut être qu'un perturbateur du repos public. (D.103, p.444).

It is amusing, in this exchange, to see Voltaire making such a point of his new-found feudal authority and to see him referring to the head of Geneva's hated "prêtres" in such gracious terms. Within a year Voltaire was to publish his malicious Dialogues chrétiens <sup>63</sup> against Vernet, and had since 1757 assailed him privately, which makes a good case for calling Voltaire a hypocrite in his dealings with his theological opponent. In their disputes, because of his moderation, Vernet usually appeared to have the better character.

At any rate, Vernet became the object of that special, implacable hatred Voltaire had for all those he considered as traitors to the cause of the philosophes; and Voltaire badgered him in letters and pamphlets for twenty years from the time of the "âme atroce" affair. His 1759 statement to the Laussanois authorities was the last time, I believe, that Voltaire ever said anything favourable about Vernet. Following the Dialogues chrétiens of 1760, Voltaire's next major publication against Vernet was the Questions sur les

64 65

miracles in 1765. Then the pastor's Lettres critiques goaded the master satirist to write several items in 1766. In the spring and early summer of 1766 appeared his poem against Vernet, Eloge de l'hypocrisie,<sup>66</sup> and his satire, Lettre curieuse de M. Robert Covelle, célèbre citoyen de Genève, à la louange de M. Vernet, professeur en théologie dans ladite ville<sup>67</sup> --both of which contrast in their light, brilliant, and perfectly fatal cut and thrust to the artless bludgeoning of the Dialogues chrétiens.

The Lettre curieuse de M. Robert Covelle is interesting for several reasons. Robert Covelle<sup>68</sup> was a young Genevois who was convicted by the religious authorities of fornication in 1763 and who refused to submit to the usual penalty of genuflection before the Consistory. This ludicrous event rapidly became a political issue in Geneva, a focal point for the dissatisfaction of the powerless classes against the Genevois authorities. Voltaire

---

<sup>64</sup> M. 25, pp. 357-450; discussed infra, pp. 333-334.

<sup>65</sup> Supra, p. 306.

<sup>66</sup> M. 10, pp. 137-139, where are found the lines:  
 Mais si j'avise un visage sinistre,  
 Un front hideux, l'aire empesé d'un cuistre,  
 Un cou jauni sur un moignon penché,  
 Un oeil de porc à la terre attaché  
 (Miroir d'une âme à ses remords en proie,  
 Toujours terni, de peur qu'on ne la voie),  
 Sans hésiter, je vous déclare net  
 Que ce magot est Tartuffe, ou Vernet.

<sup>67</sup> M. 25, pp. 491-496.

<sup>68</sup> Gay, Politics, 204-5 and passim is a good account of the Covelle case; for Voltaire's account see Questions sur les miracles (M. 25, pp. 406ff.)



took up Covelle's cause against the aristocracy, and in 1769, after six years of intermittent controversy, genuflexion was abolished.

When Voltaire took up his pen for "monsieur le fornicateur"<sup>69</sup> --which title the none too bright Covelle received as a great compliment--it marked the beginning of his political break with the aristocrats of Geneva which terminated with Voltaire as the spokesman and protector of Geneva's lowest classes.<sup>70</sup> When Voltaire introduced Covelle into his attack on Vernet, the Lettre curieuse became a political pamphlet in Geneva as well as another deflation of Vernet.

The Lettre curieuse is in the form of Covelle's account of an imaginary gathering at the home of Mlle. Catherine Ferboz, the mother of Covelle's illegitimate child. At this gathering were Covelle, Ferboz (who had "l'esprit fin et délicat, et joint aux grâces d'une femme qui a fait l'amour la solidité d'une personne qui ne le fait plus"--p. 492), Mlle. Levasseur (Rousseau's mistress), M. Muller (an educated Englishman), and le capitaine Durôt<sup>71</sup> (an outspoken soldier). All confronted "le vénérable Vernet" (p.492) about the manuscript of his new edition of the Lettres critiques, and Voltaire rapidly developed the comic possibilities of the situation having each person there quickly comment on the manuscript.

---

69

M. 25, p. 406 n.4.

70

Gay, Politics, Ch. IV, very well traces Voltaire's political metamorphosis in regard to the Genevois situation.

71

Muller and Durôt are not known to be actual persons.

Durôst suggested Fatras de Vernet as an appropriate title (p.493); Muller accused him of impertinent assaults on all the great philosophes, including Rousseau who, he argued, already had more than enough misery (p.493); Mlle. Levasseur picked up the defence of her Jean-Jacques (p.493); then Covelle remarked that it was in very bad taste for Vernet to have attacked the Essai sur les moeurs as he had earlier asked to be its editor (pp.493-494). When Vernet denied this (p.494), Mlle. Ferboz confronted him with his letters of 1754 to Voltaire<sup>72</sup> from which she then read out the most incriminating passages. Thus Voltaire finally made good his threat from the time of the "âme atroce" crisis to reveal Vernet's complicity in the publication of the Essai. The Dialogues chrétiens had alluded to this, but the Lettre curieuse named Vernet and quoted his letters.

The Lettre closed with Captain Durôst telling Vernet that the only honourable thing to do would be to burn the manuscript: "respectez M. d'Alembert et M. Hume, dont vous n'êtes pas digne de parler."<sup>73</sup> (p.495) "Le vénérable nous promet de supprimer son libelle. Le lendemain il courut le faire imprimer." (p.496). To clear his name from the charges in the Lettre curieuse, Vernet, then, quickly published his

---

72

Supra, pp. 256-257.

73

Of course Durôst mentioned that Vernet had published that revelation "n'était qu'utile". (p.495)

74

Mémoire présenté à monsieur le premier synodic le 30 juin,

which included the full text of all his correspondence with Voltaire along with an explanation of their relations. The Geneva authorities were fully convinced of Vernet's innocence. Voltaire casually mentioned the Lettres critiques again in 1766 in the part of his pamphlet of November entitled Lettre de M. de Voltaire à M.

<sup>75</sup>Hume. There he called them "des lettres de Vernet à un lord qu'il n'a jamais vu." (p.863).

In the summer of 1767, Voltaire published Les Honnêtetés

littéraires, where the twenty-fifth Honnetété<sup>76</sup> was his last major published derision of Vernet. Here Vernet appeared as

<sup>77</sup>Bernet, preacher at Carcassone in Languedoc, who "a fait un libelle de Lettres en deux volumes, contre sept ou huit personnes qu'il ne connaît pas. (p.1008). In these two pages Voltaire was at his sardonic best:

Ami, Servet est mort, laissons en paix sa cendre  
Que m'importe qu'on grille ou Servet ou Larnet?

Tout cela m'est fort égal. Il est un peu enneuyeux,  
à ce qu'on dit, ce Larnet, prédicant de Carcassonne  
en Languedoc. Cependant il a quelques amis. M. Robert  
Covelle, qui joue, comme on sait, un grand rôle dans la  
littérature, lui est fort attaché. (p.1009).

---

<sup>74</sup> M. 25, p. 491 n.1 and Saladin, Mémoire, pp. 68-70.

<sup>75</sup> Mélanges, pp. 859-864.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 1008-1009.

<sup>77</sup> Larnet in a later edition in Voltaire's lifetime (M.10, p. 137 n.2.).

Poor Vernet-Bernet-Larnet was finished off in the twenty-fifth Honnêteté in some editions by a short poem called Maître Guignard, ou de l'Hypocrisie and in others by the Eloge de l'hypocrisie.

Throughout the 1760's, Voltaire was quite involved in Genevois civic affairs, and many of his works of those years have direct and indirect allusions to the "Socinian" battles of the late 1750's.<sup>78</sup> For example, in 1765 Voltaire published the Questions sur les miracles<sup>79</sup> which was triggered by the Considerations sur les miracles (1765) of the Genevois theologian David Claparède.<sup>80</sup> The tenth chapter of the Questions was in the

<sup>78</sup> Even the 1764 edition of La Pucelle may have had an allusion to Vernet, to wit: "Il faut que ce soit quelque maître Gonin de ce temps-là, qui ait été très irrévérend envers le trisagion." (D7, p.539 n.16). The Kehl edition of Voltaire's works (1785) commented about this note of Voltaire's, "Il est probablement ici question de Vernet le trinitaire." Vercruysse (D.7, p.539 n.16) said of Kehl's note that the allusion is not clear; he explained that Gonin was a famous magician whose name had come to mean "crafty" or "sly". The Trisagion is a Greek theological expression applying to the Holy Trinity. Thus Voltaire's note could have been a very subtle way to indicate a covert Socinian, perhaps, Vernet. Vercruysse was right in saying that this "n'est pas claire".

<sup>79</sup> M. 25, pp. 357-450.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 406ff.

form of a letter from M. Robert Covelle to M.V\*\*\* (Vernet), which capitalized on Vernet's role as presiding minister at Covelle's trial for fornication. In the fall of 1766 Voltaire was struck by the idea for a play in which the simple life of the Swiss would be contrasted with the courtly refinement of the French: Les Scythes,<sup>81</sup> a transparent allegory of the Genevois, was quickly written, published, and produced that winter. It showed Voltaire's dissatisfaction with the old-fashioned mores of the Genevois as manifest in their refusal to follow Voltaire's leadership in matters of religion and theatre. Then in 1768, the satirical poem La Guerre civile de Genève ou les amours de Robert Covelle, poëme heroïque avec des notes instructives,<sup>82</sup> yet another work inspired by the fornication-genuflexion crisis, was published from a stolen manuscript.<sup>83</sup> All of these works deserve mention as indirect commentaries resulting from the controversy over Socinianism in Geneva, but they add nothing directly to our knowledge of Voltaire's relationship with Socinianism.

---

81

M.6, pp. 261-338. Baldensperger, "Voltaire", is the major critical work on Les Scythes.

82

M.9, pp. 507-555. Again Vernet's efforts in editing the Essai were recalled (p.518n) and his Socinianism revealed (pp. 519-520) Servetus's death was mentioned (p.519) as was Jean-Jacques's reversal of opinion about d'Alembert's portrait "des prédicants de Genève" (p.528 n. see also supra, pp. 318-322).

83

Besterman, Voltaire, p. 477.

Voltaire's letters also continued to show his interest in Genevois theology and his conviction that the Genevois were hypocritical Socinians.<sup>84</sup> Shortly after settling in at Ferney, Voltaire was amused by a theological dispute in Neufchâtel where a minister had been dismissed for denying the eternity of the suffering of the damned. In December 1760 and January 1761, his letters often refer to this incident in comments like "j'ai ouï dire qu'il y avait . . . des prêtres qui nient la divinité de J:C: et qui avec celà ne veulent pas être éternellement damnés" (Best. 8733, to Bertrand, 29 December 1760). It would seem, then, that if the Swiss Calvinists were not willing to declare unequivocally that they held to the eternity of the pains of the damned in hell as a matter of faith, which d'Alembert had asked them to do if they were not Socinian,<sup>85</sup> they were ready to condemn anyone who unequivocally denied that doctrine.

In general, after his quarrels with them, Voltaire had a very low opinion of the Genevois clergy. In a casual aside to d'Alembert<sup>86</sup> (Best 13504, 4 September 1767), Voltaire wrote:

---

<sup>84</sup>  
As the index to the Besterman edition of Voltaire's Correspondence shows, there are many such letters. I will review only a few of them, chosen to illustrate the general characteristics of Voltaire's comments and important theological and historical points.

<sup>85</sup>

Supra pp. 285 and 302.

<sup>86</sup>

Most of Voltaire's comments about the Genevan clergy were directed to d'Alembert as would be expected after the battle they had fought together.

"Vous connaissez très bien les théologiens de Genève, pédants, sots, de mauvaise foi, et, dieu merci, sans crédit." However, he still thought of Geneva as an enlightened city--in part because the clergy were generally scorned there. "Vous trouverez que Geneve a fait de grands progrès et qu'il y a plus de philosophes que de sociniens." (Best 10363, 1 May 1763). Or again, "Genève surtout commence une seconde révolution plus raisonnable que celle de Calvin . . . On ne peut voir passer un prêtre dans des rues, sans rire." (Best. 135456, to d'Alembert, 30 September 1767). These comments to d'Alembert illustrate that Voltaire had given up on the clergy as a progressive force; now it was "écrasez l'infâme" rather than "séduisez les sociniens."

On 5 March 1768, Voltaire noted to d'Alembert that  
 87  
 Abauzit's heterodox manuscripts were being published: "Cela justifie bien votre article de Genève dans lequel vous avez raison en tout . . . Il n'y a aujourd'hui qu'un seul point sur lequel Genève soit d'accord: c'est pour le mépris et l'horreur que tous les honnêtes gens ont pour Calvin en étant calvinistes." (Best. 13881) Obviously, the Genevois reception of the Genève article still rankled the philosophes. Condorcet wrote Turgot on 27 November 1770:

Ces pauvres Genevois, qui donnaient une retraite à Voltaire, avaient Rousseau pour concitoyen, et que d'Alembert avait rendus dans l'Encyclopédie respectables et intéressants, ont trouvé le secret de chasser Voltaire, de décréter Rousseau et de faire une querelle à d'Alembert. Aussi personne ne s'aviserait-il plus de dire du bien d'eux, et Genève ne

---

<sup>87</sup> Pomeau, Religion, pp. 299-300, notes that the Genevois scholar, Abauzit, may have been heterodox.

sera plus qu'une petit ville de commerce sans gloire. (Best. 15767)

As well as their choler towards the Genevois, some of the philosophers' arrogance comes through here too.

Vernet, of course, was the special object of Voltaire's scorn. He wrote to d'Alembert on 26 June 1766, "ce petit professeur de bêtises nommé Vernet, est l'objet du mépris public." (Best. 12494) and commented to Vernes about the last edition of the Lettres critiques "Pour celles de Vernet, si on peut les écrire ce n'est qu'avec la matière dont Ezéchiél faisait son déjeûné." (Best. 12705, 26 September 1766). Only eight months before his death, Voltaire made his last recorded comment about Vernet. Moulton, reporting a dinner conversation, wrote to J. H. Meister that Voltaire noted that Geneva had given Paris "un philosophe pour l'éclairer, un médecin pour la guérir, et un ministre pour remettre ses finances . . . Il faudrait . . . lorsque l'archevêque de Paris mourra, donner ce siège à votre fameux ministre Vernet, pour y rétablir la religion." (Best. 19670, 4 October 1777).

As Pomeau pointed out, after Voltaire's great effort on behalf of the Calas family (1761-1763), Protestant attacks on Voltaire very nearly stopped. <sup>87a</sup> A. J. Roustan, a Genevois who <sup>87b</sup> published against Voltaire in 1768, was the only exception.

87a

Pomeau, Religion, pp. 342-343.

87b

Ibid., p. 343.



However, Catholics never ceased to defend their faith against his barbs. L'abbe Claude Francois Nonnotte was one of the most popular anti-Voltairians with his Les Erreurs de Voltaire,<sup>87c</sup> which saw several editions. In it were several passing references to Voltaire's writings about anti-Nicenes. He quoted as an example of Voltaire's denigration of orthodox Christianity the passage from the seventh Lettre philosophique where Voltaire claimed the "Unitaires" reasoned "plus géométriquement" than the Catholics (Erreurs, II, p. xi). In commenting on Voltaire's insistence on tolerance, Nonnotte drew attention to the theme of the re-habilitation of heresy in the Lettres philosophiques<sup>87d</sup> --specifically, "il demande grace pour le Socinien ou Arien Newton, pour Locke . . ." (II, p. 263). Finally, he noted (II, pp. 422-425) a supposed self-contradiction in Voltaire's treatment of Servetus's theology in the Essai sur les moeurs.<sup>87e</sup> Compared to the Genevois reactions against Voltaire's treatment of Socinianism, l'abbé Nonnotte's comments are quite meagre. But, then, one could hardly expect a Roman Catholic apologist to be overly concerned with defending the Calvinists against charges of heresy.

Let Voltaire in his Autobiography, written in 1776 when he was eighty, have the last word on his quarrels with the Genevois clergy. Given the religious concerns of Voltaire's entire life,

---

<sup>87c</sup>

This study cites the sixth edition (1770).

<sup>87d</sup>

Supra, pp. 161-169.

<sup>87e</sup>

When Voltaire's comments about Servetus's theology in chapter CXXXIV ("De Calvin et de Servet") that so enraged Nonnotte are considered in context, the contradiction disappears.

we are not surprised to find him return again to exercise the fanaticism symbolized in the burning of Servetus.

88

He reopened the "âme atroce" affair, noting that "some canting humbugs were offended, or pretended to be offended

89

at the expression" in the Mercure letter. Then he quoted

90

Les torts, a poem from late 1757 by a Genevois watchmaker named Rival, which is very interesting as an expression of the middle class's reaction to Voltaire's treatment of Calvin.

It is quoted here in full:

Servet eut tort, et fut un sot  
 D'oser dans un siècle falot  
 S'avouer antitrinitaire.  
 Et nôtre illustre atrabilaire  
 Eût tort d'employer le fagot  
 Pour réfuter son adversaire.  
 Et tort nôtre antique sénat  
 D'avoir prêté son ministère  
 A ce dangereux coup d'état.  
 Quelle barbare inconséquence!  
 O malheureux siècle ignorant!  
 Nous osions abhorer en France  
 Les horreurs de l'intolérance  
 Tandis qu'un zèle intolérant  
 Nous faisait bruler un errant!  
 Pour nôtre prêtre épistolaire<sup>91</sup>  
 Qui de son pétulant effort  
 Pour exhaler sa bile amère  
 Vient réveiller le chat qui dort,

88

Supra, Chapter VIII, Section A.

89

Autobiography, p. 575.

90

On 24 December 1757, Voltaire wrote to Elie Bertrand (Best. D7532): "J'avais vu les petits vers de l'horloger de Geneve. On les a un peu rajustez, mais il est toujours singulier qu'un horloger fasse si jolies choses. Sa pendule va juste, et il paraît qu'il pense comme vous. C'est aussi le sentiments de tous les magistrats de Geneve sans exception." Dupan on 20 December 1757 sent a copy of this poem to Mme Freudenreich (BPU, Mss suppl. 1539, fol. 138f - 138v.) It would seem that Voltaire in his Autobiography changed only a few lines in Rival's poem.

91

In the version quoted by Dupan this line read (continued)

Et dont l'inepte commentaire  
 Met au jour ce qu'il eût dû taire,  
 Je laisse a juger s'il a tort.  
 Quant à vous célèbre Voltaire  
 Vous êtes tort, c'est mon avis.  
 Vous vous plaisez dans ce pais,  
 Fêtez le saint qu'on y révere.  
 Vous avez a satieté  
 Les biens où la raison aspire;  
 l'opulence, la liberté,  
 La paix (qu'en cent lieux on désire),  
 Des droits a l'immortalité.  
 Cent fois plus qu'on ne saurait dire.  
 On a du goût, on vous admire,  
 Tronchin veille à vôtre santé.  
 Cela vaut bien en vérité  
 Qu'on immole a sa sûreté.  
 Le plaisir de pincer sans rire.<sup>92</sup>

Obviously Rival was as little pleased with Calvin as he was with Servetus, but he reminded Voltaire that a guest would be advised to accept the hospitality of his hosts without calling attention to the barbarities of their ancestors. Voltaire  
 93  
 disagreed, and, in his Autobiography, finally published his Les Torts, probably written around Christmas, 1757. The complete poem is as follows:

Non, je n'ai point tort d'oser dire.  
 Ce que pensent les gens de bien.  
 Et le sage qui ne craint rien.  
 A le beau droit de tout écrire.

---

91 (continued)

"Pour le censeur epistolaire" and Dupan noted marginally: "l'auteur de la lettre inserée dans le Mercure de Neufchatel." (BPU, Mss. suppl. 1539, fol. 138r) Voltaire changed it to "prêtre epistolaire", in order I think, to implicate Vernet.

92

Autobiography, pp. 575-576.

93

Best. D7532, see note 90, supra; "Quoiqu'en dise l'horloger, un historien n'a point tort de regarder la conduite de Calvin envers Servet comme très criminelle."

J'ai quarante ans bravé l'empire  
Des lâches tirans des esprits.  
Et dans vôtre petit pais  
J'aurais grand tort de me dédire.

Je sais que souvent la malin  
A caché sa queue et sa griffe  
Sous la tiare d'un Pontife  
Et sous le manteau de Calvin.

Je n'ai point tort quand je déteste  
Ces assassins religieux  
Employant le fer et le feux  
Pour servir le Père céleste.

Oui, jusqu'au dernier de mes jours  
Mon âme sera fière et tendre,  
J'oserais gémir sur la cendre  
Et des Servets et des Dubourgs

De cette horrible frénésie ..  
A la fin tems est passé;  
Le fanatisme est terrassé,  
Mais il reste l'hipocrisie.

Farceurs à manteaux étriques,  
Mauvaise musique d'Eglise,  
Mauvais vers et sermons croques  
Ai-je tort si je vous méprise?<sup>94</sup>

As though it needed any explication, Voltaire said that his Les Torts showed "he preached toleration to the Protestant churches, as well as to the Romish." <sup>95</sup> And in reviewing his life's work for toleration, in which his recurring use of Socinianism was significant, he modestly concluded: "It may be said that he has not been altogether mistaken in his design, and that he has contributed not a little to render the clergy, from Geneva to Madrid, more gentle and humane, and especially to opening <sup>96</sup> the eyes of the laity."

---

<sup>94</sup> Autobiography, p. 577.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 578.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 579.

## VOLTAIRE AND SOCINIANISM OUTSIDE GENEVA (1758-78)

Voltaire's last hope for Christianity seemed to die with the death of his expectations for Socinianism in Geneva. Once safe with properties in Switzerland and France, he quickly began his campaign to destroy what he saw as Europe's great source of fanaticism, persecution, and disorder--that is to say, Christianity. On 30 October 1760, Voltaire for the first time closed a letter with his famous war cry "Ecrasez l'infâme", (Best. 8605) to d'Alembert.<sup>1</sup> In his last two decades, Voltaire published many books and pamphlets against Christianity and worked with astonishing energy to right some of the current injustices due to intolerance. His efforts on behalf of the Calas and Sirven families are the most famous, but in 1773 he asked Catherine, Empress of Russia, and Frederick, King of Prussia,<sup>2</sup> both to help Socinians in Poland, who had been proscribed there since 1660. These two letters, which were far too late

---

<sup>1</sup> "L'infâme" as a synonym for Christianity was first used by Frederick the Great and first to Voltaire in a letter of 18 May 1759 (Best. D8304, see commentary, note 7.)

<sup>2</sup> Supra, pp. 1-2. Note that the letter to Frederick (Best. 17523), p. 2 supra, returned for an instant to his idea that Socinians were thriving in England and present, at least, in Switzerland.

to be able to help the Polish Socinians, were the only references in his voluminous correspondence from 1758 through 1778 to Socinians, other than those which excoriated the hypocritical Genevois.

This lack was symptomatic, I think, of his disillusionment with liberal Christianity. After the Genevois clergy so vehemently rejected the philosophes' praise of their anti-Nicene tendencies, Voltaire no longer believed any body of clergy could help lead the world to enlightenment. His letter to d'Alembert of 26 June 1766 can be seen as a prime expression of this; he began with a spirited exhortation to the philosophes:

Par quelle fatalité se peut il que tant de fanatiques imbéciles aient fondé des sectes de fous, et que tant d'esprits supérieurs puissent à peine venir à bout de fonder une petite école de raison? C'est peut-être parce qu'ils sont sages; il leur manque l'enthousiasme, l'activité. Tous les philosophes sont trop tièdes; ils se contentent de rire des erreurs des hommes, au lieu de les écraser. Les missionnaires courent la terre et les mers, il faut au moins que les philosophes courent les rues; il faut qu'ils aillent semer le bon grain de maisons en maisons. (Best. 12494).

Voltaire here had reverted to his position of 1734 in the seventh Lettre philosophique, sur les sociniens, where he thought reasonable religion had little prospect for success.<sup>3</sup> His years in Geneva had reversed his hopes for the progressive enlightenment of Christianity through Protestantism of the 1756 edition of the Essai sur les moeurs;<sup>4</sup> now all that was left to

---

<sup>3</sup>  
Supra, pp. 160-162.

<sup>4</sup>  
Supra, pp. 238-243.

do was to evangelize against l'infâme. This same letter showed his disgust with liberal Protestants,

Il y a beaucoup de tracasseries politiques à Genève, mais je ne connais pas de ville où il y ait moins de calvinistes que dans cette ville de Calvin. On est étonné des progrès que la raison humaine a faits en si peu d'années. Ce petit professeur de bêtises, nommé Vernet, est l'objet du mépris public.

Now Voltaire measured progress in Geneva by how far its citizens had moved from Vernet, the theologian whose theology once led Voltaire to see Geneva as "un pays rempli de vrais philosophes."<sup>5</sup>

Even though Voltaire had given up on the Genevois Socinians, Socinians still had a place in his campaign against l'infâme. He continued to admire the simplicity, tolerance, and reasonableness of the various anti-Nicene parties throughout the history of Christianity and often contrasted them against orthodoxy in his historical polemics. In reprinting earlier works, he left in his high praise of the Socinians, and occasionally augmented his treatment of them. For example, in the 1761 edition of the Essai sur les moeurs, Voltaire added a paragraph (E.II, p.244) and a sentence (E.II, p.246) on Servetus's theology to Chapter CXXXIV, "De Calvin et de Servet" and a long passage on the "théistes" of England whom, he said, were allied with the "Socinians" and "unitaires".<sup>6</sup> (E.II, pp. 687-688).

---

<sup>5</sup> Supra, pp. 215 and 235, Best. D6821.

<sup>6</sup> Supra, p. 310, n. 28.

In the 1760's and 1770's Voltaire wrote a great deal about  
 the political and religious crisis then racking Poland<sup>7</sup>; however,  
 the Socinians seemed to be mentioned only in one of these works,  
Discours aux confédérés catholiques de Kamienieck en Pologne (1768).<sup>8</sup>

Catherine the Great of Russia had invaded Poland, ostensibly to  
 protect the rights of the Polish Protestants to tolerance; and  
 Voltaire warned the Poles:

Vous avez tiré fort imprudemment sur de petits  
 détachements de soldats, qui n'étaient envoyés que  
 pour protéger la liberté et la paix. Sachez que  
 les Russes tirent mieux que vous; n'obligez pas vos  
 protecteurs à vous détruire; ils sont venus établir  
 la tolérance en Pologne, mais il puniront les intolérants  
 qui les reçoivent à coups de fusil. (p.81)

It is dismaying to see Voltaire justify the imposition of  
 tolerance by force of arms in much the same way that  
 United States officials justify napalming villagers who are  
 misguided enough to resist American imperial democracy in Vietnam.  
 However, from Voltaire's point of view, it was not the occupying  
 troops that were Poland's enemy: "Vous n'avez en depuis longtemps  
 que deux véritables ennemis, les Turcs et la cour de Rome." (p.75).  
 The Turks were enemies because they tried to do what Russia had  
 done, and Rome because she fostered intolerance.

One would have thought his "Be tolerant or I will kill you"  
 was argument enough, but Voltaire took care to assuage the Polish

---

<sup>7</sup>  
 Rostworowski, "Voltaire", pp. 112-121, is a good guide to  
 Voltaire's involvement in Polish affairs.

<sup>8</sup>  
 M. 27, pp. 75-82.



Catholics' fear that if tolerance were allowed then Socinianism would come back to Poland. In the first place, he said, no one intended to implant a colony of Socinians in Poland:

mais quand vous en auriez une, quel grand mal en résulterait-il? Un bon tailleur, un bon fourreur, un bon fourbisseur, un maçon habile, un excellent cuisinier, ne vous rendraient-ils pas service s'ils étaient sociniens . . .? N'est-il pas même évident qu'un cuisinier socinien doit être meilleur que tous les cuisiniers du pape? car si vous ordonnez à un rôtisseur papiste de vous mettre trois pigeons romains à la broche, il sera tenté d'en manger deux, et de ne vous en donner qu'un, en disant que trois et un font la même chose . . .(p.81).

Whilst this was rather funny, it is doubtful that many Polish Catholics would have smiled and taken Voltaire's advice under the guns of the Russians.

Socinianism very briefly appeared in Candide (1759). In Surinam, Candide met Martin, who was judged to have the most pitiful tale of any of the wretches encountered there. Martin had had the worst of all trades in Europe--he had worked ten years "pour les libraires à Amsterdam" (R., p.186)--and his bad luck had followed him to America: "les prédicants de Surinam le persécutaient parce qu'ils le prenaient pour un socinien." (R., p. 186). However, Martin soon confessed to Candide, "mes

---

9  
Gay's study of Voltaire's Politics, Chapter III, Part 2, treats Voltaire's relations with Catherine. Gay does not comment on the Discours aux confédérés but, in general, sees Voltaire's support of Catherine in Poland as one of his least noble acts. (See especially Gay, Politics, pp. 178ff.) Neither does Rostworowski, "Voltaire" comment on the Discours.

10  
Always cited in this study in the Naves's edition of Voltaire's Romans et contes, indicated by R.

prêtres m'ont accusé d'être socinien; mais la vérité du fait est que je suis manichéen." (R., p.187) Voltaire's introduction of Socinianism was, I think, primarily whimsical, but it also was another sting at Calvinist intolerance toward anti-Nicenes.<sup>11</sup> Certainly not to be taken seriously is the letter Voltaire wrote to the Journal encyclopédique on 1 April 1759 (Best. D8239) under the name Demad, where he claimed "mon frère Monsieur Démad, actuellement capitaine dans le Régiment de Brunsvik" wrote Candide to convert the Socinians. Why the Socinians? Because other than denying the Trinity, they also maintained that "Dieu a nécessairement fait de nôtre monde le meilleur des mondes possibles, et que tout est bien." This, Demad noted, was contrary to the central Christian dogma of original sin which his brother was compelled to defend. This letter was obviously a joke.

<sup>12</sup>  
The Dictionnaire philosophique, the chef d'oeuvre of Voltaire's anti-Christian campaign, gave anti-Nicenes a rather prominent place. They, as usual, were handy to hold up against orthodox intolerance and obscurity. And although Voltaire had no

---

11

Both Morize (pp. 137-138) and Pomeau (p. 265), in their respective editions of Candide, note that in the eighteenth century Socinians and Manichees were commonly confused. However, as both men also note, the best authorities then--Bayle and Beausobre, for example--had made clear that the Socinians and Manichees were quite dissimilar. Thus, in this incidental mention of Socinianism in Candide, one sees again that Voltaire was tremendously erudite.

12

This study always cites the Benda and Naves edition of the Dictionnaire philosophique as D.P. Voltaire published five different editions of the D.P. from 1764 through 1769, and from 1770 to 1774 published the Questions sur l'encyclopédie, which are included in the Benda and Naves edition of the D.P. in supplemental notes (D.P., pp. xv-xix).

respect for the Christian establishment, he still feared its power; therefore, he used anti-Nicene arguments to discredit Christian doctrines it was too dangerous to attack openly.

For example, the article "Divinité de Jésus" (D.P., pp. 171-172)<sup>13</sup> was devoted entirely to arguments against the doctrine in question. After outlining the basic anti-Nicene arguments against the divinity of Christ, Voltaire noted, "Crellius, Voquelsius, Natalis Alexander, Hornebeck ont appuyé tous ces blasphèmes par des arguments qui étonnent les sages et qui pervertissent les faibles." (p. 172) The article ended in saying that Socinus succeeded in establishing another "espèce" of Christianity: "il y en avait déjà eu plus de trois cents espèces" (p.172), a reminder of the scandal of the fragmentation of the body of Christ. Voltaire was thus able to present to his readers some of the strongest arguments against a central doctrine of Christianity without maintaining them himself.

Similarly, he quoted from the Encyclopédie "Idées des unitaires rigides sur le baptême" at the end of his article "Baptême"<sup>14</sup> (D.P., pp. 48-49). In the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie article "Enfer", a sentence noted that the Socinians rejected the eternity of the pains of Hell, "mais ils sont hors du giron."<sup>15</sup> (D.P., p.526) "Péché originel" (D.P., pp. 339-340) was another

---

<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, "Messie" (D.P. n. 304-313) was Polier de Bottens' famous work, found also in the Encyclopédie (supra, pp. 228-230).

<sup>14</sup> Encyclopédie, XVII, pp.390b-391a. Except for the first paragraph, Voltaire quoted accurately.

<sup>15</sup> In the same article there was a reference (D.P. p.180) to a Calvinist minister who was deposed for denying the eternity of the punishment of the damned. This was probably based on the Neufchâtel incident of 1760 (supra, p. 335.)

article completely devoted to the views "des sociniens ou unitaires" (D.P. p. 339). The article "Tolérance" (D.P., p.626) had an offhand reference to "un socinien". Servetus appeared in his torments to deny Calvin admission to heaven in "Dogmes" (D.P., p. 173), and Calvinists were attacked elsewhere in the Dictionnaire philosophique. Voltaire identified "L'empesé luthérien, le sauvage calviniste, l'orgueilleux anglican" etc. in "Philosophe" (D.P., p. 603) as "des chiens de différente espèce qui hurlent tous à leur manière", and devoted several paragraphs of "Miracles" to discussing Nicholas Antoine who was burned in Geneva in 1632 for denying the divinity of Christ. (D.P., pp. 587-588).

Naigeon's Encyclopédie article "Unitaire" (XVII, pp. 387b-401a), from which Voltaire borrowed for the Dictionnaire philosophique, was different from most of Voltaire's sources reviewed in this study in that it concentrated on the theological aspects of contemporary anti-Nicenes. Only the last column of the article was historical, and that was a precis of Bayle's Dictionnaire. Naigeon's method for his theological study was "à faire . . . un extrait analytique des ouvrages de Socin, de Crellius, de Volkelius, et des autres savans unitaires." (p.388b) In doing this, he came to the conclusion that all the unitarian doctrines were based on three fundamental principles: "Ces principes, qui sont aussi ceux des calvinistes . . . établissent 1. que la divinité

des Ecritures ne peut être prouvée que par la raison." Second was that every individual believer was free to follow "son esprit particulier" (p. 388b) in interpreting Scripture, without regard to what tradition had taught, and third, that one should not be concerned whether or not any particular belief had had adherents in antiquity.

These were, of course, some of the Socinians' prime  
 16 principles, and Naigeon did a good job of outlining aspects of their theology. Voltaire found Naigeon's schematic treatment of their doctrine handy and also found a congenial general interpretation of Socinianism in the Encyclopédie's "Unitaire". Naigeon argued that Socinianism had gained ground in the course of years of theological controversy and with the general increase of tolerance. Now, he said, Socinianism had permeated all confessions with "racines profondes . . . dont les ramifications se développant, et s'étendant continuellement, ne peuvent pas manquer de faire bientôt du protestantisme en général, un socinianisme parfait." (p.387b). This was precisely what Voltaire had always written about Protestantism, but Naigeon went further than that and said "Les sociniens étoient donc un secte de déistes cachés." (p.388a).

---

16

Supra, pp. 44-46.

This Voltaire never explicitly expressed, but it would seem that it lay in the back of his mind to determine his behaviour towards the Genevois clergy. Perceiving their Socinian tendencies, he had tried to get them to admit they were really deists, which, of course, they really were not.

Two articles, "Antitrinitaires" (D.P., pp. 27-29) and "Arius" (D.P., pp. 33-35) were explicitly dedicated to anti-Nicene subjects. "Antitrinitaires" consisted of a reprint of the most common anti-Nicene arguments against the Trinity taken from the "Unitaire" article of the Encyclopédie (XVII, 393a-393b) and a note against the authenticity of the "Three Witnesses" passage of the New Testament (I John 5:7). "Arius" began with "Voici un question incompréhensible" (D.P. p.33) then asked a series of Trinitarian theological questions about which he decided, "Je n'y comprends rien assurément; personne n'y a jamais rien compris, et c'est la raison pour laquelle on s'est égorgé." (D.P., p.34). The rest of the article argued that Constantine was an evil man who called the Council of Nicea only to keep the empire quiet.

The rather long addition to "Arius" in Questions sur l'Encyclopédie (D.P., pp. 453-457) was quite a typical Voltairian historical treatment of the anti-Nicenes. "Ce qu'il y eut triste, c'est

---

17

Compare the Essai sur les mœurs, supra, pp. 236-243. Since The Questions was so typical, I will not comment extensively on Voltaire's historical interpretations again. My comments on the Essai (loc. cit.) will suffice.

que la persécution commença dès que le concile [de Nicée] fut terminé." (D.P., p.453) was how Voltaire started. Then followed an account (D.P., p.454-455) of the mutual anathematizing and persecution of the centuries-long conflict between the Arians and the Athanasians. "Les deux factions employèrent également l'artifice, la fraude, la calomnie, selon l'ancien et l'éternel usage." (D.P. p.455). Servetus and Gentilis, both anti-trinitarians executed by Swiss Protestants in the sixteenth century, were mentioned (D.P. p.456), and Voltaire said of Calvin: "Calvin fut assez lâche pour le [Servet] faire arrêter, et assez barbare pour le faire condamner à être brûlé à petit feu." (D.P., p.456). The patriarch of Ferney had never forgotten the "âme atroce".

There was a short paragraph on the Polish Socinians which ended "comme leur religion était dépouillée de presque tous les mystères, et plutôt une secte philosophique paisible qu'une secte militante, ils furent abandonnés; les jésuites, qui avaient plus de crédit qu'eux, les poursuivirent et les dispersèrent."

(D.P., p.456). As usual, Voltaire's approval of Poland's Socinians shone through. As to the current state of Socinianism, Voltaire wrote:

Ce qui reste de cette secte en Pologne, en Allemagne, en Hollande, se tient caché et tranquille. La secte a reparu en Angleterre avec plus de force et d'éclat. Le grand Newton et Locke l'embrassèrent; Samuel Clarke, célèbre curé de Saint James, auteur d'un si bon livre sur l'existence de Dieu, se déclara hautement arien; et ses disciples sont très-nombreux. (D.P., p.456)

Some of Voltaire's customary over-optimism about the extent of Socinian survival was in this passage, but was somewhat more tempered than in the Essai sur les moeurs and the Lettres philosophiques<sup>18</sup> some fifteen and thirty years earlier respectively. If nothing else, Voltaire's interpretation of the Socinians was consistent.

In an amazing section (D.P., pp. 608-613) of the Questions sur l'encyclopédie's addition to the article "Religion", Voltaire once again revealed the depth of his emotion against religious intolerance. An archangel appeared to the meditating author:

Il me transporta dans un désert tout couvert d'ossements entassés; et entre ces monceaux de morts il y avait des allées d'arbres toujours verts, et au bout de chaque allée un grand homme d'un aspect auguste, qui regardait avec compassion ces tristes restes (p.608).

The archangel explained that all these millions of people had been victims of Christian and Jewish religious murders, and that it was only Christians and Jews who went to war for religious reasons<sup>19</sup> (D.P., 609). When the writer commented on the piles of gold and silver "surmontées de croix, de mitres, de crosses,

---

<sup>18</sup>

Supra, pp. 242-243 and 159.

<sup>19</sup>

Islam, the winged teacher explained, only rarely had committed such crimes, and always pardoned anyone who begged it and offered tribute. (D.P. p.609).



de tiaras enrichies de pierreries" (p. 609) that were near the charnel heaps, the angel acknowledged these were the goods the Church had taken from those it killed.

Then he interviewed several of the sages in the surrounding groves--Numa, Pythagoras, Zoroaster, Socrates, and others--all of whom agreed on the basic principles of natural religion. Finally:

Je vis un homme d'une figure douce et simple, qui me parut âgé d'environ trente-cinq ans. Il jetait de loin des regards de compassion sur ces amas d'ossements blanchis, à travers lesquels on m'avait fait passer . . . Je fus étonné de lui trouver les pieds enflés et sanglants, les mains de même, le flanc percé, et les côtés écorchées de coups de fouet. (D.P., p.611)

This man explained "avec beaucoup d'affabilité" that he had been so treated by "des hypocrites" (D.P., p.611) because he had taught "Aimez Dieu de tout votre coeur, et votre prochain comme vous-même." (D.P., p.612), the essence of Voltaire's natural religion.

General Summary: Thus Voltaire was attracted to the pacific, simple, and tolerant Socinians. He contrasted them throughout most of his life with orthodox Christians and Jews who, he said, had been so greedy for both the blood and the wealth of those who worshipped God differently than they. One must remember that, when Voltaire was a child, Europe was just emerging from two centuries of religious warfare and that, when he was an old man, Protestants were still condemned to the galleys--and La Barre and Calas had been tortured to death, legally, by Christian fanatics--in France. His hatred of intolerance was not an irrational hatred. When Voltaire, in the Dictionnaire philosophique, had Jesus say he had been killed by hypocrites, Voltaire meant him to condemn all religious persecutors--thus his persisting hatred for all those such as Vernet, whom he saw as hypocrites in the service of religion.

In following Voltaire's relations with Socinians throughout his life, we note that his major literary references to them occur in three works -- the Lettres philosophiques (1734), the Essai sur les moeurs (1756 and following), and the Dictionnaire philosophique (1764 and following). These three may be considered as the representative books of the major phases of Voltaire's campaign against Christianity. The Lettres philosophiques were Voltaire's first serious attack, and in them the Socinians were praised as exemplars of English enlightened religion in order to condemn, by implicit contrast,

French Catholicism. Whilst the tone and weight of the Lettres philosophiques were light, the Essai sur les moeurs was a heavy-weight assault (though the usual Voltairian tone prevailed) on the historical edifice of Christianity; and, again, anti-Nicene movements were used as a contrast to orthodoxy. Voltaire's last great battle against Christianity was waged in the pages of the Dictionnaire philosophique, where he returned to a form of short, sharp essays similar to those of the Lettres philosophiques, but much more outspoken. The role of the Socinians in the Dictionnaire philosophique was primarily that of spokesmen for unorthodox opinions.

Early in this study (p. 3), two questions were posed about Voltaire and Socinianism: first, "Why did Voltaire have such a consistent interest in and high regard for this Protestant group?" On the practical level, it is clear that Voltaire found them very useful in his anti-Christian mission. At the end of the first chapter of the present study (p.46), it was pointed out that the Socinians as an enlightened, tolerant faith that had been destroyed by unenlightened intolerance merited the praise of the philosophes. Furthermore, they offered themselves as examples to throw in the face of traditional Christianity, which is precisely what Voltaire did with them in the Lettres philosophiques and the Dictionnaire philosophique. Additionally, by the device of quoting them--perhaps with scandalized warnings

against their heresy added--Voltaire could safely express ideas dangerous to orthodox tradition.

On the theoretical level, there were two reasons that would make Voltaire want to return again and again to the Socinians. First, their very existence as a Christian body (Christian, at least, in their own opinion) that denied many of the fundamental traditions and doctrines of Christianity was a scandal to l'infâme. As Troeltsch said, "Three infallible 'Churches', unchurching and anathematizing one another, discredited the idea of the Church for which there is no plural."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the persistence of Socinian doctrine cast doubt on orthodox theology. The second theoretical reason is stronger than the first and helps explain Voltaire's consistency in his treatment (and his consistent errors in his treatment) of the future of Socinianism: namely, at the turn of the eighteenth century, there was a generally accepted theory that Protestantism logically led to Socinianism, which was, in turn, a way station on the path to deism.

<sup>21</sup> Bossuet was the major spokesman for this idea; and although Voltaire was motivated in part to do history in order to remove Bossuet's work as the too-Christian standard of historical truth,<sup>22</sup> Voltaire retained Bossuet's idea

---

<sup>20</sup>

Troeltsch, Protestantism, p.89; see also supra, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup>

Supra, pp. 57-59.

<sup>22</sup>

Brumfitt, D. 59, pp. 32-35.

that the first principles of Protestantism entailed a necessary progression from Catholic traditionalism, to orthodox Protestantism, to Socinianism, to deism. He even seemed to retain his hope in this in the face of personal experience to the contrary as can be traced in his major treatments of Socinianism. In the Lettres philosophiques, encouraged by his encounter with Socinianism in England, Voltaire expressed a tempered optimism in the prospects of Socinian success. Twenty-two years later in the Essai sur les moeurs, Voltaire's initial joy in discovering Geneva's "Socinians" expressed itself in his most glowing picture of the inevitable triumph of anti-Nicene thought in Protestantism. However, rather quickly, Voltaire felt himself betrayed by the "sociniens honteux" of Geneva and berated them in his correspondence and in numerous pamphlets. Yet, in spite of his personal disillusionment, we find in the Dictionnaire philosophique another affirmation of Bossuet's theory--albeit much less exuberant than that found in the Essai.

That these differences within a generally constant

---

23

D'Alembert, too, explicitly affirmed Bossuet's interpretive scheme (supra, pp. 273, 288, and 312), as did Naigeon in the Encyclopédie (supra, pp. 350-351). That Genevois Calvinism under Vernet had become Socinian in theology gives some weight of evidence to Bossuet's theory as well as confirming Troeltsch's statement that after the period from 1685-1715 Socinian principles "have . . . irresistibly broken in upon the Protestant Churches like a flood sweeping away the old landmarks." (supra, p. 51).

theoretical framework can be explained in terms of Voltaire's personal reactions suggests another reason why Voltaire's interest in Socinianism lingered over some fifty years. Simply, he wrote about Socinians when he encountered them or when he had thought they might be encountered. For example, in 1722 on his first journey to a country where Protestants abounded, he made his first reference to Socinians;<sup>24</sup> and, his last references were in 1773<sup>25</sup> when he wrote to Frederick of Prussia and Catherine of Russia to see if they might be able to aid any anti-Nicene remnant in Poland. In the same vein, the period (roughly, 1754-1761) when he wrote the most--by far--that he ever wrote about Socinians was precisely that period when he was the most embroiled with them. Conversely, from 1734 to 1754 was his fallow literary period in regard to our sect,<sup>26</sup> and it was then when he had no contact with them.

"Did Socinianism have a direct influence on [Voltaire's] thought?"--the second major question of this study (p.3)--can be answered simply. No, for Voltaire long before he had any solid knowledge of Socinianism, had transcended their degree of heterodoxy to become a libertine deist.<sup>27</sup> There was, however, an indirect influence of Socinianism on his thought as his deist

---

<sup>24</sup>

Supra, pp. 94-97.

<sup>25</sup>

Supra, pp. 1-2 and 342-343.

<sup>26</sup>

Supra, Chapter VI.

<sup>27</sup>

Supra, Chapter III.

forebears had drawn much of their exegetical technique from Socinians, and Socinianism had some place in the thought of Locke and Newton, Voltaire's constant philosophical models.

XI

APPENDIX A

GENEVOIS LETTERS FROM THE AME ATROCE AFFAIR

I. Jean Louis Dupan to Abraham Freudenreich:

J'espere, mon tres cher ami, que bientot je n'aurai plus à vous parler de ma mauvaise santé. chaque jour elle devient meilleure. je tousse moins et ma poitrine se degage. s'il faisoit beau tems je pouvois commence à me promener. mais il pleut tous les jours, il fait froid, et dès que je prends l'air j'en sens l'impression, ce qui m'oblige a me tenir renfermé.

Je ne sais si l'on m'aporter aujourd'hui quelques nouvelles de la ville, en attendant je vais vous parler de la lettre anonime inserée dans le Mercure de Neufch. contre Voltaire. (ceci pourtant entre nous, parce que les amis de Voltaire croient qu'il ne faut pas exciter la fureur de ses ennemis) Vous savez à qui l'on attribue cette lettre, mais il n'est pas le seul autheur ou complice de cette vilaine action, et il y avoit deja une autre lettre donnée au Mer-  
cure. on a arreté le cours de cette cable. La lettre a été retirée, et les auteurs ont promis de se taire. Bien plus, ces zelez devots avoient repandu leur fiel dans



l'esprit de quelques uns de nos principaux citoyens, lesquels étoient prêts à faire au conseil des representations contre Voltaire, cela est encor arreté, et l'on ne doute pas que le principal auteur de la lettre n'ait travaillé à assoupir cette affaire, parce que l'on a en main de quoi le perdre de reputation, si l'on pousoit Voltaire au dernier retranchement. Il le sait, on le lui a dit, et il n'ignore pas comment les gens sensez ont regardé sa lettre: Le Sindic Saladin sans le soupçonner d'en etre l'auteur, lui en a dit sa pensée en compagnie, avec toute la vivacité d'un homme rempli d'indignation de d'horreur pour une si mauvaise action. La peur a saisi le pauvre homme. il a fait à Voltaire un visite tres tendre et tres affectüeuse, et a eté reçu de meme. il sembloit vouloir entrer en quelque explication, ce que Voltaire a evité, et l'on n'a parlé de rien. Vous pouvez bien dire cette visite à Mr. Bertrand. Le pauvre Volt. est bien à plaindre, s'il est imprudent, il paye chèrement ses fautes. Sa timidité le rend encor malheureux. il n'a point de courage, et veritablement il ne peut gueres esperer ici de protection de notre gouvernement, quand il aura countre lui les Ecclesiastiques, les devots, et le peuple.

Je suis bien fagé, mon cher ami, que vous vous tro[Ms torn] aussi incommodé. mais j'espere que la diarrhée hatera[Ms torn] la fin de votre colique, votre mal venoit sans doute

d'indigestion.

Je vous prie de vouloir assurer de mes respects les Excellences et tous ceux qui ont la bonté de s'intéresser pour moy.

on revient de la comédie sans m'apporter aucune nouvelle.

Bonsoir, mes chers amis, je vous embrasse de tout mon coeur.

le 22 aoust 1757

(BPU, Mss suppl. 1539, fol. 126v-127v; holograph)

II. Jacob Vernet to Theodore Tronchin:

Geneve dim. 11. 7<sup>bre</sup> 1757.

M:

Une fièvre quarte qui me retient dans la Chambre  
 m'empêche d'aller moi même vous demander une grâce: c'est  
 de me prêter pour quelques jours votre copie MSS. du Restit.  
X<sup>mi</sup> du pauvre Servet, sur le sort duquel je pense tout com  
 vous. Mais com<sup>er</sup> j'ay de la Biblioth. son l. ouvrage de  
errorib. Trinit.<sup>is</sup> je veux les comparer ensemble et voir des  
 lettres qui y sont contenues pour vérifier et éclaircir  
 certains faits. Car je ne vous cacherai pas que je me mets  
 à éclaircir ce point d'histoire, sur lequel et M. de La<sup>r</sup>  
 Roche et M. de la Chapelle se sont trompés en quelques  
 points; et si je fais quelque usage de mon travail, ce  
 sera d'une manière si impartiale et si modérée que j'espère  
 qu'on en sera content du moins par cet endroit. Je vous

prierai meme d'y jeter les yeux auparavant; au reste je vous promets sancté que je ne tirerai point de copie de votre MSS., quil ne sortira point de mes mains, qu'il n'y restera que peu de jours, et que je vous le remettrai ou en main propre, ou cacheté et par des mains sures, sachant combien cest une piece rare. Jay lhon. detre etc.  
(BPU, Archives Tronchin, 167, pp. 255-226; Tronchin file copy)

III. Jacob Vernet to Theodore Tronchin:

bre  
Gen. 12.7 . 1757

r  
M .

Puis que vous avés de fortes raisons de ne pas communiquer votre M.SS. a quelcun meme qui n'a en vice que l'hon. de nos Reformateurs et qui n'en feroit point d'usage autrem., vous ne me refuserés pas la grace a quelcun de vos moments de loisir d'y jeter vous meme les yeux pour me donner quelques éclaircissem. sur les faits cottés cy dessous, et numerotés, moi en gardant un double, afin que vous n'aiés pas la peine de repeter les questions. J'ay deja vu la notice des pieces diverses contenues dans ce livre telle que la donnée M. de La Roche sur une copie MSS. Je vous epargnerois cette peine, et en meme temps vous garderies votre engagem. de ne point laisser ce livre de vos mains, si vous m'assignés une heure pour le parcourir dans votre cabinet. Jay lhon. etc.

## Questions

- 1° Le nom de l'auteur est-il dans le titre; et quel nom est celui de Villanovanus ou de Servetus
- 2 De qu'elle date sont les 30 lettres adressées a Calv.  
ere re  
cest a d. la 1. et la dern. et de quel lieu?
- 3 Quel nom y prenoit Servet?
- 4 y a t-il qu'elques reponses de Calvin, ou paroît-il qu'il y en ait eu?
- 5 Entre ces lettres de Servet, y en a t-il une que je trouve ailleurs, qui commence ainsi: Quod te principias rerum ignorare dixi, tuo commoda factum est etc. et finit ainsi: Cogita haec quaeso et diligenter lege epistolam meam vicesimam tertiam. Sur ce pied la il faudroit que cette ci fut une des dernieres.
- 6 Paroît-il pas quelcune de ces lettres qu'il eut envoyé a Calvin en 1546 un MSS. pour lui en demander son sentiment
- 7 Ce commercium epistolicum ne commence-t-il point par 3 questions qu'adresse Servet a Calvin, auxquelles celui cy repond, l'autre replique, celui ci duplique, cette portion de leur correspondance est imprimée

(BPU, Archives Tronchin, 167, pp. 226-227; Tronchin file copy)

XII

APPENDIX B

EXTRACTS FROM THE

DUPAN-FREUDENREICH CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT THE

GENEVE ARTICLE CONTROVERSY

I. 27 December 1757:

Nos ministres ont nommé une commission, dont est le Docteur Tronchin comme membre de leur compagnie, pour examiner ce qu'ils doivent faire par rapport à Mr. d'Alembert. Ils sont bien embarrassés. Mr. d'Al. dit beaucoup de choses avantageuses de Geneve et il a cru faire honneur à nos Ministres en les représentant comme dégagés des préjugés absurdes du christianisme. s'il les avoit estimés davantage, il leur auroit fait l'honneur en entier, de dire qu'ils ont assez d'esprit pour ne pas croire qu'il y ait un Dieu. c'est le ton de ces beaux esprits de Paris.

(BPU, Mss. suppl. 1539, fol. 139v; holograph)

II. 30 December 1757:

Je l'ai lu cet article, il est trop long. après avoir parlé de notre histoire, de notre ville, de notre gouvernement, de notre académie, il vient à nos Ministres qu'il loue de leur union, de leur moderation, de leur tolerance, de leurs moeurs, et puis il ajoute, après avoir répété les paroles de

Voltaire sur Calvin et sur Servet, que nos Ministres ne pensent plus comme autrefois, et que plusieurs d'eux ne croient plus la divinité de Jesus Christ etc. que quand on les presse sur la nécessité de la revelation ils conviennent de son utilité seulement, (c'est le Vernet) qu'ils ne croient plus l'enfer ou les peines éternelles, mais seulement des peines à tems qui forment le purgatoire des catholiques.

à cette occasion on a rapellé un vieux conte que Mr. de Fontenelle se plaisoit à repeter. Les catholiques ont toujours trouvé fort étrange que dans nos villes des conseils de Laiques eussent décidé de la reforme et du changement de Religion. Ils disent qu'un jour en 1535 un Boulanger sortant de notre conseil des 200 dont il étoit membre, rencontra un de ses camarades. Bonjour, compere. d'où venez vous? Je viens du 200. Et qu'y avez vous fait? Nous venons d'abolir le purgatoire. Ah, compere, pendant que vous aviez la main à la pâte, vous deviez bien tout d'un tems abolir aussi l'enfer.

(BPU, Mss. suppl. 1539, fol. 140v-141r; holograph)

### III. 11 February 1758:

Il ne guerira pas si bien nos Ministres de ce mal là. j'ai bien peur qu'ils n'en soyent marquez comme on l'est de la petite verole. on dit qu'ils vont incessamment publier une

declaration de leurs sentiments sur les articles touchez par M<sup>r</sup>. d'Alembert. je n'ai pas vu un laïque qui approuve cette demarche. cependant il se trouve quelquefois des étincelles de bon sens hors du corps ecclesiastique.

Mr. Vernet a fait inserer dans la bibliotheque Germanique une lettre critique de l'histoire de Voltaire, je ne l'ai pas vüe. Voltaire a eté tres fâché contre d'Alembert de ce qu'il a fait si mal l'article de Geneve. il n'y a certainement aucune part, mais pour le rendre odieux, nos Ministres insinuent que c'est lui qui est le veritable auteur de cet article, ou qui en a fourni les materiaux. Il y a beaucoup de gens, qui font profession de croire en J. Christ, à qui il faudroit demander s'ils croyent un Dieu.

(BPU, Mss. suppl. 1539, fol. 153v-154r; holograph)

IV. 25 February 1758:

Je reçois dans ce moment le jugement de notre Dame sur la declaration de nos Ministres; cette affaire est entierement tombée, on n'en parle plus ici. J'ai toujours eté du meme sentiment que Mr. Bertrand.

(BPU, Mss. suppl. 1539, fol. 160r; holograph)

## XIII

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC ABBREVIATIONS

- ASJJR Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
- BAM Le Clerc, Jean. Bibliothèque Ancienne et Moderne.
- BB Bibliothèque Brittanique, ou histoire des ouvrages des savans de la Grande-Bretagne.
- BC Le Clerc, Jean. Bibliothèque Choisie.
- BPU Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève.
- BUH Le Clerc, Jean. Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique.
- D. Voltaire. The Complete Works of Voltaire. "Definitive edition."
- D.P. Voltaire. Dictionnaire philosophique.
- DS Diderot Studies
- E. Voltaire. Essai sur les moeurs.
- FS French Studies.
- JL Journal Littéraire.
- L. Rousseau, Jean Jacques. Correspondance complète de Jean Jacques Rousseau. Edited by R. A. Leigh.
- L.P. Voltaire. Lettres philosophiques.
- M. Voltaire. Oeuvres complètes. Edited by Louis Moland.
- M. Voltaire. Mélanges.
- PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.
- PSRL The Present State of the Republick of Letters.
- R. Voltaire. Romans et contes.
- RCC Revue des cours et conférences.
- RH Revue de Hollande.



- RHLF Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France.
- RLC Revue de Littérature Comparée.
- RP Revue de Paris.
- SV Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century.
- Best. Voltaire's Correspondence. Edited by Theodore Besterman.
- Best. D Voltaire. Correspondence and Related Documents.  
Edited by Theodore Besterman in the "Definitive edition" of The Complete Works of Voltaire.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Bibliographies:

Barr, Mary-Margaret. A Century of Voltaire Study: A Bibliography of Writings on Voltaire (1825-1925). New York: Institute of French Studies, 1929.

\_\_\_\_\_. Quarante années d'études Voltairiennes: Bibliographie analytique des livres et articles sur Voltaire, 1926-1965. Paris: Armand Colin, 1968.

Bengesco, Georges. Voltaire: Bibliographie de ses oeuvres. 4 vols. Paris: Perrin, 1882-1890.

Cabeen, D. C., general editor. A Critical Bibliography of French Literature. Volume IV, The Eighteenth Century, edited by George R. Havens and Donald F. Bond. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1951.

Havens, George R. and Norman L. Torrey. Voltaire's Catalogue of his Library at Ferney. SV, IX. Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1959.

Sand, Christopher. Biblioteca Anti-Trinitariorum. Freisadii: Aconium, 1684.

Vercruysse, J. "Bibliographie des écrits français relatifs à Voltaire, 1719-1830", SV, LX (1968), 7-71.

Wilbur, Earl Morse. A Bibliography of the Pioneers of the Socinian-Unitarian Movement in Modern Christianity in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Holland. Prefazione di Delio Cantimori. Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1950.

Also of great help were the annual bibliographies published by the Modern Language Association of America and the Bibliographie in Pomeau's La Religion de Voltaire.

B. Works Cited in this Study:1. Voltaire:

Autobiography. Theodore Besterman's edition of the Historical Memoirs of the Author of the Henriade (1777), which was the English translation of Voltaire's Commentaire historique sur les oeuvres de l'auteur de la Henriade (1776), in Theodore Besterman's Voltaire, pp. 543-601. London: Longmans, 1969.

Candide ou l'optimisme: Edition critique avec une introduction et un commentaire par André Morize. Société des textes français modernes. Paris: Didier, 1957.

Candide ou l'optimisme: Edition critique avec une introduction et un commentaire par René Pomeau. Paris: Nizet, 1959.

The Complete Works of Voltaire. Edited by Theodore Besterman and others. Vols. 2, 7, 59, 81-82, and 86-99 published Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1968-1971. Vols. 100-105 published Thorpe Mandeville House near Banbury, Oxfordshire: The Voltaire Foundation, 1971. The titles published in this continuing, "definitive" edition are:

D.2. La Henriade. Edited by O. R. Taylor. 2nd edition, 1970.

D.7. La Pucelle d'Orléans. Edited by Jerom Vercruysse, 1970.

D.59. La Philosophie de l'histoire. Edited by J. H. Brumfitt. 2nd edition, 1969.

D.81-82. Notebooks. Edited by Theodore Besterman. 2nd edition, 1968.

D.85-105. Correspondence and Related Documents. Edited by Theodore Besterman. Definitive edition, 1969-1971. These volumes include letters D1 through D9106 (December, 1704-July, 1760) and Appendices D1 through D190.

Dictionnaire philosophique: comprenant les 118 articles parus sous ce titre du vivant de Voltaire avec leurs suppléments parus dans les Questions sur l'Encyclopédie. Edited by Raymond Naves. Paris: Garnier, 1961.

Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations et sur les principaux faits de l'histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu'a Louis XIII. Edited by René Pomeau. 2 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1963.

An Essay Upon the Civil Wars of France, extracted from Curious Manuscripts. Edited by O. R. Taylor. SV, vols. XXXVIII-XL, pp. 662-685. Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1965. Reprint from the second edition, London, 1728.

La Henriade: Edition critique avec une introduction et des notes. Edited by O. R. Taylor. SV, vols XXXVIII-XL. Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1965.

Lettres philosophiques: Edition critique. Edited by Gustave Lanson. 2 vols. 4th ed. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1930.

Lettres philosophiques ou Lettres anglaises. Introduction, notes, choix de variantes et rapprochements par Raymond Naves. Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1964.

Lettres philosophiques. Edited by F. A. Taylor. Revised edition (1946). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961.

Mélanges. Preface par Emmanuel Berl, texte établi et annoté par Jacques van den Heuvel. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961.

OEuvres complètes. Edited by Louis Moland. 52 vols. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877-1885.

Romans et Contes. Présentation et notes par Henri Eénac. Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1960.

Voltaire's Correspondence. Edited by Theodore Besterman. 107 vols. Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1953-1965.

## 2. Manuscripts:

BPU. Archives de Saussure. 241.

BPU. Archives Tronchin. 167.

BPU. MSS. Bonnet. 84. Correspondance de Ch. Bonnet avec M. de Vegobre.

BPU. MSS. Bonnet. 85. Supplément au copie de lettres de Ch. Bonnet.

BPU. MSS. Suppl. 517. Correspondence de G.-L. Lesage.

BPU. MSS. Suppl. 1537-1540. Lettres de Jean-Louis DuPan à Abraham Freudenreich.

### 3. Other Works:

Abbey, Charles J. and John H. Overton. The English Church in the Eighteenth Century. 2nd edition. London: Longmans, 1887.

Ages, Arnold. "The Private Voltaire: Three Studies in the Correspondence", SV, LXXXIV (1971), 7-126.

-----, "Voltaire's Biblical Criticism: A Study in Thematic Repetitions", SV, XXX (1964), 205-221.

D'Alembert, Jean le Rond. Article Genève de l'Encyclopédie, Profession de foi des ministres genevois et réponse a la lettre de M. Rousseau. Amsterdam: Châtelain, 1759.

-----, Lettre à J.-J. Rosseau sur l'article Genève de l'Encyclopédie, avec quelques autre pièces. Amsterdam, 1759.

Anastase [Pere Louis Anastase Guichard]. Histoire du Socinianisme, divisée en deux parties. Où l'on voit son origine, et les progrès que les Sociniens ont faits dans differens Royaumes de la Chretienté. Avec les caracteres, les aventures, les erreurs, et les livres de ceux qui se sont distinguez dans la secte des Sociniens. Paris: Barois, 1727.

Ascoli, Georges. "Voltaire: I. Les années de formation (1694-1726)". RCC, XXV, part I (1924), 673-687.

-----, "Voltaire: II. L'état d'esprit philosophique de Voltaire avant le séjour en Angleterre", RCC, XXV, part 2 (1924), 16-27.

-----, "Voltaire: III. L'état d'esprit philosophique de Voltaire avant le séjour en Angleterre" (cont.), RCC, XXV, part 2 (1924), 128-144.

-----, "Voltaire: IV. Le voyage en Angleterre et les Lettres philosophiques", RCC, XXV, part 2 (1924), 275-287.

- . "Voltaire: V. Voltaire et la marquise du Châ-  
let", RCC, XXV, part 2 (1924), 302-315.
- . "Voltaire: VI. L'OEuvre poetique", RCC, XXV,  
part 2 (1924), 417-428.
- . "Voltaire: VII. L'OEuvre poétique" (cont.),  
RCC, XXV, part 2 (1924), 616-630.
- Aubert de Versé, Noël. Le Tombeau du Socinianisme. Francfort,  
1687.
- Bainton, Roland H. Hunted Heretic. Boston: Beacon Press,  
1953.
- Baldensperger, Fernand. "Voltaire contre la Suisse de  
Jean-Jacques: Le tragedie des 'Scythes'", RCC,  
XXXII (1931), 673-689.
- Ballantyne, Archibald. Voltaire's Visit to England, 1726-  
1729. London: Smith Elder, 1893.
- Barber, W. H. Leibnitz in France, from Arnauld to Voltaire:  
A Study in French Reactions to Leibnitzianism, 1670-  
1760. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955.
- . "Voltaire and Quakerism: Enlightenment and the  
Inner Light", SV, XXIV (1963), 81-109.
- Barbier, A. A. Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes. Vol. 2.  
Paris, 1874.
- Barling, T. J. "The Literary Art of the Lettres philoso-  
phiques", SV, XLI (1966), 7-70.
- Barnes, Annie. Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736) et la république  
des lettres. Paris: Droz, 1938.
- Bayle, Pierre. Dictionnaire Historique et Critique. 3rd  
edition. Rotterdam, 1720.
- Bellesort, André. Essai sur Voltaire. 22nd edition. Paris:  
Librairie Academique Perrin, 1950. First published  
in 1925.
- Bengesco, Georges. "Voltaire et la Hollande (1713-1743)",  
RP, XIX, part I (15 February 1912), 794-820.

- Besterman, Theodore. Voltaire. London: Longman's, 1969.
- Bossuet, Jacques B. OEuvres complètes de Bossuet. Edited by F. Lachat. Vol. 15 and 16. Paris: Vives, 1885.
- Brown, Harcourt. "The Composition of the Lettres concerning the English Nation", in The Age of the Enlightenment: Presented to Theodore Besterman. Edited by W. H. Barber, J. H. Brumfitt, R. A. Leigh, R. Shackleton and S. S. B. Taylor. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd for the University Court of St. Andrews, 1967.
- Cassirer, Ernst. The Philosophy of the Enlightenment. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.
- Castellio, Sebastian [Chateillon, Sebastien]. Concerning Heretics, Edited and translated by Roland H. Bainton. New York: Octagon Books, 1965. Reprinted from the 1935 Columbia University Press edition.
- Chaponnière, Paul. Voltaire chez les calvinistes. Genève: Editions du Journal de Genève, 1932.
- Chapuisat, Edouard. Salons et chancelleries au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, d'après la correspondance du conseiller J.-L. Du Pan. Lausanne: Payot, 1943.
- Chewney, Nicholas. Anti-Socinianism: A'IPEZIAPXAI, or a Cage of Unclean Birds. Containing the Authors, Promoters, Propagators, and chief Disseminators of this damnable Socinian Heresie. etc. London, 1656.
- Cheynell, F. Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianisme etc. London, 1643.
- Cochrane, Charles Norris. Christianity and Classical Culture. A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.
- Conlon, P. M. Voltaire's Literary Career from 1728 to 1750. SV, XIV. Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1961.
- Cory, David M. Faustus Socinus. Boston: Beacon Press, 1932.
- Cranston, Maurice. John Locke, A Biography. London: Longmans, 1957.

- De Blanc, Théodore. Principes contre les Sociniens: Où l'on défend les premiers fondements de la religion chrétienne par l'Écriture Sainte et par la raison. Hambourg, 1717-1719.
- Delattre, André. "Voltaire and the Ministers of Geneva", Church History, XIII (1944), 243-254.
- Desnoiresterres, Gustave. Voltaire et la société française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. 8 vols. Paris: Didier, 1867-1876.
- Du Bois-Melly, Charles. Les moeurs genevoises de 1700 à 1760. Genève, 1882.
- Dufour, Edouard. Jacobs Vernes (1728-1791). Essai sur sa vie et sa controverse apologétique avec J. J. Rousseau. Genève: Kundig, 1898.
- Edwards, Thomas. Gangraena or A Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in these four last years, etc. The First and Second Part. 3rd ed. London, 1646.  
Gangraena: Or A new and Higher Discovery of the Errors, Heresies, and insolent Proceedings of the Sectaries of these times, etc., The Third Part, London, 1646.
- Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers. 17 vols. Paris and Neuchâtel, 1751-1765.
- Erikson, Erik H. Young Man Luther. New York: Norton, 1958.
- Falletti, N. Charles. Jacob Vernet, théologien genevois, 1698-1789. Thèse. Genève, 1885.
- Fazy, Henri. Les Constitutions de la république de Genève. Paris: Fischbacher, 1890.
- Fletcher, Dennis J. "The Fortunes of Bolingbroke in France in the eighteenth Century", SV, XLVII (1966), 207-232.
- Foulet, Lucien, ed. Correspondance de Voltaire (1726-1729). Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1913.
- Gaberel, Jean-Pierre. Voltaire et les Genevois. 2nd edition. Paris et Genève: J. Cherbuliez, 1857.
- Gay, Peter. The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.



- Gay, Peter. Voltaire's Politics: The Poet as Realist. New York: Vintage Books, 1965. First published by the Princeton University Press, 1959.
- Godbey, John C. "Fautus Socinus in the Light of Modern Scholarship", The Proceedings of the Unitarian Historical Society, XV (1964, actually published in 1967), Part 1, 66-92.
- Gordon, Alexander. "The Sozzini and their School". The Theological Review, Vol. XVI, (1879) 293-322 and 531-571.
- Grimsley, Ronald. Jean D'Alembert (1717-83). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Gwatkin, H. M. ed. The Cambridge Medieval History. Vol. 1. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924.
- Harnack, Adolph. History of Dogma. 7 vols. Boston: Little Brown, and Company, 1900.
- Hazard, Paul. The European Mind (1680-1715). Translated from the French, La Crise de la conscience européenne (Paris: Boivin, 1935), by J. Lewis May. Cleveland: Meridian Book, 1963.
- . European Thought in the Eighteenth Century from Montesquieu to Lessing. London: Hollis and Carter, 1954.
- Hume, David. Hume on Religion. Selected and introduced by Richard Wollheim. London: Collins, the Fontana library, 1963.
- Jullien, Alexandre, ed. Histoire de Genève des origines à 1798. Genève: Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Genève, 1951.
- Jurieu, Pierre. La Politique du clergé de France. La Haye: 1681.
- Kot, Stanislas. Le mouvement antitrinitaire au XVI<sup>e</sup> et au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Humanisme et Renaissance (1937), 17-58 and 109-156.
- . Socinianism in Poland: The Social and Political Ideas of the Polish Antitrinitarians in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Translated by E. M. Wilbur. Boston: Starr King Press, 1957. First published in Polish in 1932.

Kühler, W. J. Het Socinianisme in Nederland. Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff's Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 1912.

Lanson, Gustave. Voltaire. 7th edition. Paris: Hachette, n.d.

Lantoine, Albert. Les Lettres philosophiques de Voltaire. Paris: Société Française d'Éditions Littéraires et Techniques, 1931.

Le Clerc, Jean. Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne. 29 vols. A la Haye: Chez Pierre Husson, 1714-1727.

----- . Bibliothèque Choisie. 28 vols. Amsterdam: Chez les Frères Wetstein, 1703-1713.

----- . Bibliothèque universelle et historique. 26 vols. Amsterdam: Chez les Frères Wetstein, 177 -1718.

----- . Parrhasiana, etc. 2 vols. [First vol., 2nd ed.] Amsterdam, 1701.

"Letters concerning the English Nation, by Mr. de Voltaire", PSRL, XII (October, 1733), 265-288.

"Lettres sur les Anglois, par Mr. de Voltaire; Lettres philosophiques par M. de Voltaire", JL, tome 22, seconde partie (1735), 346-367.

Littré, E. Dictionnaire de la langue française. 4 vols., plus supplément. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1873-1874. Supplement, 1886.

Locke, John. On the reasonableness of Christianity. Edited by George W. Ewing. Chicago: Gateway Editions, 1965.

Lőrinczy, Dionysius. "The Hungarian Unitarian Church". Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society. Vol. III, (1923), 20-39; (1924), 121-134.

Maimbourg, Louis. Histoire de l'arianisme depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa fin avec l'origine et le progrès de l'hérésie des sociniens. 2 vols. Paris: Mabre-Cramoisy, 1686.

Manuel, Frank E. A Portrait of Isaac Newton. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.

- Marx, J. "Autour des Pensées philosophiques: une lettre inédite de Georges Polier de Bottens", SV, LXXXIV (1971) 99-108.
- Mason, H. T. Pierre Bayle and Voltaire. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Masson, Pierre Maurice. La Religion de J. J. Rousseau. 3 vols. Paris: Hachette, 1916.
- McLachlan, H. Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts. Liverpool: At the University Press, 1950.
- McLachlan, John. Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- McNeill, John T. The History and Character of Calvinism. New York: Galaxy Book, 1967. First published by Oxford University Press, 1954.
- Moréry, Louys. Le Grand distionnaire historique: ou le mélange curieux de histoire sacrée et profane. 4 vols. 9th edition. Amsterdam, 1722.
- "Mr. de Voltaire, Lettres sur les Anglois", BB, tome second, première partie (October-December, 1733), 16-35, 104-137.
- Naves, Raymond. Voltaire et l'Encyclopédie. Paris: Presses modernes, 1938.
- Nonnotte, M. l'abbé. Les Erreurs de Voltaire. 2 vols. 6<sup>e</sup> edition. Lyon: Reguilliat, 1770.
- Nye, Stephan. A Brief History of the Unitarians, called also Socinians. In four letters . . . 2nd ed. London, 1691 [First ed. 1687].
- Ogletree, Thomas W. Christian Faith and History: A Critical Comparison of Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.
- Pagitt, E. Heresiography. London, 1645.
- Pappas, John N. Voltaire and d'Alembert. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1962.

- Pauck, Wilhelm. Harnack and Troeltsch: Two Historical Theologians. New York: OUP, 1968.
- Perey, L. and G. Maugras. La vie intime de Voltaire aux Délices et à Ferney (1754-1778), d'après des lettres et des documents inédits. Paris: C. Lévy, 1885.
- Pomeau, René. La Religion de Voltaire, 2nd edition. Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1969.
- Ree, Thomas. The Racovian Catechism. London: 1818.
- Reist, Benjamin A. Toward a Theology of Involvement: The Thought of Ernst Troeltsch. London: SCM, 1966.
- Ridgway, Ronald S. Le propagande philosophique dans les tragédies de Voltaire. SV, XV. Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1961.
- Ritter, Eugène. "Rousseau et le professeur Vernet", ASJJR, XI (1916-1917), pp. 114-151.
- Robertson, Roland. The Sociological Interpretation of Religion. Oxford: Blackwell, 1970.
- Roget, Amédée. "L'Article "Genève" de d'Alembert dans l'Encyclopédie et la réplique de la compagnie des pasteurs", in his Étrennes genevoises: Hommes et choses du temps passés. 4<sup>e</sup> série. Genève: Carey, 1880.
- , "Moeurs et gouvernement d'autrefois", in his Étrennes genevoises: Hommes et choses du temps passés. 4<sup>e</sup> série. Genève: Carey, 1880.
- Roulet, Louis-Edouard. Voltaire et les Bernois. Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1950.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Correspondance complète de Jean Jacques Rousseau. Edited by R. A. Leigh. Vol. IV-VIII. Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1967-1969.
- , Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert sur les spectacles. Edition critique par M. Fuchs. Genève: Droz, 1948.
- , Oeuvres complètes. Edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959-1964.

- Rostworoski, Emmanuel. "Voltaire et la Pologne", SV, LXII (1968), 101-121.
- Ruffini, Francesco. "Voltaire e Rousseau contro i sociniani di Ginevra", La Cultura, XII (1933), 83-116.
- Saladin, Michel Jean-Louis. Mémoire historique sur la vie et les ouvrages de Jacob Vernet. Paris: Desrey, 1790.
- Sayous, Andre. "Genève au temps de Rousseau et de Voltaire", Séances et travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques, (1936), 372-392.
- Socinus, Faustus. An Argument for the Authority of Holy Scripture. Translated by Edward Combe. London, 1731.
- Spink, John Stephenson. Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Genève. Paris: Boivin, 1934.
- Staum, Martin S. "Newton and Voltaire: constructive sceptics", SV, LXII (1968), 29-56.
- Stephen, Leslie. History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century. 2 vols. 3rd edition. New York: Harbinger Reprint, 1962. Reprint of the 3rd London edition, 1902.
- Strauss, Leo. Persecution and the Art of Writing. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1952.
- . Spinoza's Critique of Religion. New York: Schocken, 1965.
- Torrey, Norman L. The Spirit of Voltaire. Oxford: The Marston Press, 1963. Reprint of the Columbia University Press edition, 1938.
- Troeltsch, Ernst. Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.
- . Renaissance and Reformation (excerpts) in Lewis W. Spitz's The Reformation: Material or Spiritual? Boston: Heath, 1962.
- . The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches. 2 vols. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960.

- Valkhoff, J. and J. Fransen. "Voltaire en Hollande", Article in two parts: I, RH, I (1915), 734-754; II, RH, II (1915), 1071-1110.
- Valette, Gaspard. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Genevois. Paris: Plon Nourrit; Genève: Jullian, 1911.
- Van Slee, J. C. De Geshiedenis van het Socianisme in de Nederlanden. Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1914.
- Vernes, Jacob. Catéchisme à l'usage des jeunes gens qui s'instruisent pour participer à la saint-cène. Genève: Du Villard fils et Nouffer, 1798.
- . Examen de ce qui concerne le Christianisme, la Réformation évangélique, et les ministres de Genève, dans les deux premières lettres de Mr. J. J. Rousseau écrites de la montagne. Genève: Claude Philibert, 1765.
- Vernet, Jacob. Instruction chrétienne, 5 vols. 2<sup>e</sup> edition. Genève, 1756.
- . Lettres critiques d'un voyageur anglois sur l'article Genève du Dictionnaire encyclopédique et sur la Lettre de Mr. d'Alembert à Mr. Rousseau touchant les Spectacles. 2 vols. 3<sup>e</sup> edition. Copenhagen, 1766.
- . Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne; First edition, Sections I-IV, subtitled . . . tiré du latin de M. J.-Alphonse Turretin, professeur en théologie et en histoire ecclésiastique à Genève. Genève: Bosquet, 1730-1736.  
First edition, Sections VI-VII, subtitled . . . tiré principalement du latin de feu M. J.-Alph. Turretin, professeur en théologie et histoire ecclésiastique. Genève: Gosse, 1745-1747.  
 Second edition, livres I-VII, subtitled . . . tiré en partie du latin de feu, M. J.-Alphonse Turretin. Genève: Gosse, 1748-1751.  
 Livre VIII returned to the subtitle of the 1745-1747 first edition of Sections VI-VII. Genève: Gosse, 1755.  
 The third edition reproduced the second, but the subtitles were not constant. Lausanne: Heubach, 1772.

- Voeglin, Eric. The New Science of Politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952.
- Vuilleumier, Henri. Histoire de l'Eglise réformée du pays de Vaud sous le régime bernois. 4 vols. Lausanne: Edition de la Concorde, 1927-1933.
- Wade, Ira O. The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750. New York: Octagon Books, 1967. Reprint of the Princeton University Press edition, 1938.
- . "The Epître à Uranie", PMLA, XLVII (1932), 1066-1112.
- . The Intellectual Development of Voltaire. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- . Studies on Voltaire: with some Unpublished Papers by Madame du Châtelet. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.
- . Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.
- Wilbur, Earl Morse. A History of Unitarianism, 2 vols., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1945-1952.
- Williams, George H. The Radical Reformation. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962.
- Wilson, Arthur M. Diderot: The Testing Years, 1713-1759. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.
- Wright, Conrad. The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America. Boston: Starr King Press, 1955.
- Yinger, J. Milton. The Scientific Study of Religion. New York: Macmillan, 1970.

C. Selected Works Consulted but not Cited in this Study:

1. Voltaire:

Correspondance avec les Tronchin: Edition critique établie et annotée par André Delattre. Paris: Mercure de France, 1950.

Lettres inédites à son imprimeur Gabriel Cramer. Publiées avec une introduction et des notes par Bernard Gagnebin. Genève: Droz; Lille: Giard, 1952.

Lettres inédites aux Tronchin: avec une introduction de Bernard Gagnebin, 3 vols. Genève: Droz, 1950.

2. Manuscripts:

- BPU. Archives Tronchin. 170, 172, 178, 199, and 204.
- BPU. MSS. Bonnet. 24, 25, 26, 42, 44. Lettres de divers savants à Charles Bonnet.
- BPU. MSS. Français. 296-300. Correspondance de Jacob Vernes.
- BPU. MSS. Jallabert. 58. Charles de Brosses à Monsieur Jallabert, Professeur de Philosophie à Genève.
- BPU. MSS. Suppl. 140-141. Autographe lettres du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle concernant Genève.
- BPU. MSS. Suppl. 723. Fol. 90-109, lettres de Moutou à Reverdil.
- BPU. MSS. Suppl. 927. Lettres de Charles Bonnet à Jacob Bennelle, 1756-1791 et s.d.

3. Other Works:

- Ages, Arnold. "Voltaire and the Old Testament: the testimony of his correspondence", SV, LV (1967), 43-63.
- "Voltaire, Calmet and the Old Testament", SV, XLI, (1966), 87-187.
- Baldensperger, Fernand. "Voltaire Anglophile avant son séjour d'Angleterre", RLC, IX (1929), 25-61.
- Bidle, John. The Racovian Catechism. London: 1652.
- Boullier, David Renauld. Lettres sur les vrais principes de la religion . . . On y a joint une defense des Pensées de Pascal contre la critique de Mr. de Voltaire, et trois lettres relatives à la Philosophie de ce Poete. 2 vols. Amsterdam: Chez Jean Catuffe, MDCCXLI.



- Colligan, J. Hay. The Arian Movement in England. Manchester: At the University Press, 1913.
- Crocker, Lester G. "Voltaire's Struggle for Humanism", SV, IV (1957), 137-169.
- Crowley, Francis J. "Voltaire a Spy for Walpole?" FS, 18 (1964), 356-359.
- Daoust, Joseph. "Voltaire et la religion d'après les lettres aux Tronchin", Mélanges de science religieuse, Lille, VIII<sup>e</sup> année, cahier ii (nov., 1951), 249-280.
- de Labriolle, Marie-Rose. Le Pour et contre et son temps. SV, XXXIV-XXXV. Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1965.
- Fletcher, Dennis J. "Bolingbroke and the diffusion of Newtonianism in France." SV, LIII (1967), 29-46.
- Freud, Hilde H. Palissot and Les Philosophes. DS, IX. Genève: Droz, 1967.
- Gordon, Alexander. "Miguel Serveto-Y-Reves". The Theological Review, XV (1878), 281-307 and 408-443.
- Grimm, le Baron de et Diderot. Correspondence littéraire, philosophique et critique, adressée à un souverain d'Allemagne . . . 17v. Paris, 1812-1814.
- Jost, Francois. Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Suisse: Etude sur sa personnalité et sa pensée. Fribourg, Suisse: Editions Universitaires, 1961.
- Labrousse, Elisabeth. "Note à propos de la conception de la tolérance au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", SV, LVI (1967), 799-811.
- Laurence, John [published anonymously]. An Apology for Dr. Clarke, London: 1714.
- Lecler, Joseph S. J. Toleration and the Reformation. 2 vols. London: 1960.
- Léonard, Emile G. Histoire générale du protestantisme, 3 vols. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961-1964.

. . . A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Tong, Mr. Robinson, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Reynolds. Occasion'd by the late Differences amongst the Dissenters. Wherein is Consider'd The Regard Dissenters ought to pay to Human Forms in Matters of Faith, etc. London, 1719.

Lobstein, Paul. "Voltaire et le Christianisme", tiré de la Revue de théologie et de philosophie. Lausanne: G. Britel, 1901.

Locke, John. Works. 10 vols. London: Tegg, 1823. (1963 reprint by Scientia Verlag Aalen, Germany.)

McLachlan, H. The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1941.

----- . The Unitarian Movement in the Religious Life of England. I. Its Contribution to Thought and Learning 1700-1900. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1934.

Niklaus, Robert. "Diderot et Rousseau: Pour et contre le théâtre", DS, IV (1963), 153-189.

Pappas, John. "Diderot, d'Alembert et l'Encyclopédie", DS, IV (1963), 191-208.

----- . "Le Rousseauisme de Voltaire", SV, LVII (1967), 1169-1181.

Philips, Edith. "Le Quaker vu par Voltaire", RHLE, 39 (1932), 161-177.

Prioux, A. "Voltaire et l'histoire de la Lithuanie", in Mélanges d'histoire littéraire et de bibliographie offerts à Jean Bonnerot conservateur et chef honoraire de la Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne par ses amis et ses collègues. Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1954, pp. 133-139.

Raymond, Agnes G. "L'Infâme: superstition ou calomnie?", SV, LVII (1967), 1291-1306.

Rex, Walter. "'Blasphemy' in the refuge in Holland and in the French Enlightenment", SV, LVII (1967), 1307-1320.

Ritter, Eugène. "J.-J. Rousseau et la Suisse, (part II)", ASJJR, XI (1916-1917), 180-189.

- Ritter, Eugène. "Les premières relations entre Voltaire et Rousseau", ASJJR, XI (1916-1917), 60-63.
- Stromberg, Roland N. Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England. London: OUP, 1954.
- Suckling, Novman. "The Enlightenment and the idea of progress", SV, LVIII (1967), 1461-1481.
- Taylor, John James. "Narrative of a Visit to the Unitarian Churches of Transylvania". The Theological Review, VI, No. XXIV (1869), 1-48.
- Tonelli, Giorgio. "The 'weakness' of Reason in the Age of the Enlightenment", DS, XIV (1971), 217-244.
- Torrey, Norman L. "Voltaire and Peter Annet's Life of David", PMLA, (XLIII), 1928, 836-843.
- Tronchin, Henry. Le Conseiller François Tronchin et ses amis Voltaire, Diderot, Grimm etc. d'après des documents inédits. Paris: Plon, 1895.
- . Un médecin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle Théodore Tronchin 1709-1781). Paris: Plon; Genève: Kündig, 1906.
- Vercruyse, J. Voltaire et la Hollande, SV, XLVI. Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1966.
- Waterman, Nina. Voltaire, Pascal and Human Destiny. New York King's Crown Press, 1942.
- Watts, George B. "The 1768 Edition of Voltaire's Les Questions sur l'Encyclopédie, and the Pastors and Authorities of Geneva", The French Review, 24 (1960), pp. 74-77.
- Willey, Basil. The Seventeenth Century Background. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953.
- . The Eighteenth Century Background. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.
- Williams, David. "Voltaire and the language of the gods", SV (LXII), 1968, 57-81.