

Marcel Déléze

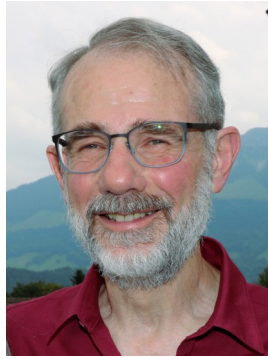
# Resisting religious indoctrination



Sequential version

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*Marcel D el eze* is a retired mathematics teacher. In public schools in French-speaking Switzerland (Valais and Fribourg), he spent his entire life working with chaplains and teachers of religion, religious sciences and philosophy, including a future bishop. He resisted the militancy institutionalised by certain Catholic cantons, which has now subsided, but whose mechanisms have remained in place.



A critical look is taken at various issues such as the history of the Church, clericalism, secularism, morality, ecclesiastical taxation, divine goodness, Heaven, Hell, the inconsistencies of the Bible, truth, Pascal's wager, faith in the face of science, the fear of death, etc. This deconstruction of Catholicism extends to other religions and to agnosticism, leading to atheism.

## **How can we free ourselves from religious indoctrination?**

Read carefully and meditate on the following digital book and say to yourself "This is only one path among many, but by adapting these reflections to my situation, I can find an alternative to subjugation and free myself from the feeling of guilt".

For all those who want to read sequentially, in one document, the whole website “*Resisting religious indoctrination*”: [www.deleze.name/marcel/en/philo/resistance-en.html](http://www.deleze.name/marcel/en/philo/resistance-en.html)



One of the aims of this site is to help people who wish to free themselves from the grip of religion and to protect themselves against enlistment.

Our life is too precious for us to delegate its conduct to a religious authority. To gain our intellectual, philosophical and moral autonomy, we must subject religious propaganda to rigorous criticism.

The example of Catholicism developed here could be adapted, to a large extent, to any other religion.

## **On how to get out of religious indoctrination**

A clear distinction must be made:

- On the one hand liberating oneself, or another person who desires it. This is what my site focuses on by explaining my personal deconstruction/reconstruction path.
- On the other hand, to weaken someone's indoctrination, without that person wishing to diminish his or her attachment to his or her religion. This theme is not dealt with here. Find out, for example, about the method - *street epistemology* - in order to conduct the conversation with a chance of success.

## Overview

The overview combines the functions of summary and table of contents.

## Overview of the first part

### Resisting social control by the Church

*The Church in search of power through the state and the family*

#### Society

By analogy with biology and ecology, it is cultural diversity, including religions, that offers the best opportunities for the adaptation and evolution of civilisations. Development needs freedom and benefits from the plurality of beliefs. It is not religious diversity that is a source of tension, but intolerance. Currently, the West is better characterised by democracy than by Christianity.

It is dangerous to give free rein to a determined religious ideology without opposing it with the counter-powers of plurality and freedom. It is necessary to flee from organisations working to establish an ideologically homogenous society. To guard against this, young people must be informed about the weight of religion on previous generations.

#### Clericalism in French-speaking Switzerland

It is commonly accepted that religion is a personal matter to be dealt with as a matter of conscience. Very well, but that doesn't really correspond to the current situation, and not at all to what I've experienced.

For decades, I have been subjected to massive state interventions in religious matters in French-speaking Catholic cantons. During my five years of primary school, I had to recite the catechism every day and go to Mass in column of two. During the three years of secondary school, religion classes were compulsory. Then, because I wanted to become a teacher, I was obliged to spend another five years in a boarding school run by a religious congregation. I was required to be a committed Catholic and a school catechist.

My feeling is that religion was, and is still in a non-negligible measure, a matter of state against which I feel obliged in conscience to resist.

- In Valais, Catholicism was the state religion until 1973:  
see p. [13](#): *Clericalism, never again!* (testimony).
- Although attenuated, clericalism in the manner of Fribourg is still very present:  
see p. [20](#): *Clericalism and secularism in the canton of Fribourg* (Switzerland).

The state must welcome all citizens equally, whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, non-religious or other. Consequently, it cannot take sides with particular communities, for example by proclaiming itself Christian or declaring that certain religions are entitled to a privileged status. It must display, including in public education, its neutrality with regard to beliefs.

## No religion in the functioning of the state!

### Religions

In Western Europe, we see that age-old religions are crumbling while others are infiltrating. Certainly, we are far from finished with the zealots of True Revealed Faith, which has the oddity of being plural. From it emerges the image of a God who hides, delivers contradictory messages and presents a dissociative identity disorder. The diversity of beliefs reveals that they are cultural constructions devoid of objective foundations. It is unreasonable to obey the propagandists of such an ill-defined God.

Why does man cling to so-called beliefs about the afterlife that are in fact beyond all plausibility? The answer is to be found between our two ears - O revelation -, that is to say in our brain. Religion is a side effect of the illusion that we are immortal. To be content with arguments of authority is a capitulation of the mind.

Religions work to dramatize existence: the eye of God that observes us, sin, Judgement Day, hell (or reincarnation into an inferior being), eternal life, ...

Religion does not provide access to inner peace, as it develops a rhetoric of intimidation that puts the faithful under pressure and demands more and more of them, without end. Whoever does not put up a defence is phagocytised.

Beware of a religion that sanctifies subjugation and obedience: believing will make us captives!

It is not enough to resist a little to avoid extremist drift; it is necessary to resist firmly to avoid the gears of subjection.

- *Being moderate in religion*  
*What values to oppose to barbarism?*  
See p. 37: *Resisting the teaching of the Church: human rights, morality, secular culture.*

### Religious education

The method of religious teaching consists in dramatizing existence: the eye of God watching us, sin, the Last Judgement, hell, eternal life, etc. The aim is to enclose the mind in a system of thought that gives the Church power over your conscience.

Wouldn't it be better to play down the drama of existence? It is better to develop creativity and critical thinking rather than fidelity to a religion or tradition. This principle also applies to the teaching of philosophy.

### Justice

To have the courage to oppose injustice in the name of dignity and solidarity, one does not need to believe in deities. Feeling part of the human community can be enough.

## **The sacred**

The sacred is a feeling, halfway between self-censorship and taboo, a component of which is a paralysing fear. Religious institutions cultivate it in order to numb the critical spirit, reinforce docility, promote subjugation and avoid any questioning.

Only human rights are "sacred", and the Church has paid little attention to them, both in the past and today, for example in relation to gender equality, remarriage, homosexuality and paedophilia.

## **Morality**

In assessing human behaviour, after emphasising selfishness, we tend to underestimate altruism. The cohesion of hunter-gatherer family clans was essential to their survival. The traits of moral behaviour have been selected by evolution and have imposed themselves.

As man is both an individual and a social being, morality was acquired to adapt the individual to society and increase his chances of survival.

Morality is much older than the Church, and the Church cannot claim to be its repository.

An institution which, throughout its history, has flouted human rights cannot be "the" moral benchmark. Progress has not come from a movement of the Church itself, but has been snatched from it by the demands of modernity.

- See p. 55: *Some shortcomings of the Catholic Church in secular morality*

## **Belief, the believer**

The believer holds it to be true that he lives according to God's will, whereas he endorses a ready-to-think established by very human ideologues. It is said that faith moves mountains, but it must be pointed out that these are mountains of human rights deliberately evacuated.

Belief would not be a problem if it were limited to the dictionary definition. Unfortunately, the believer feels held in consciousness of being missionary. The believer holds it to be true that he lives according to God's will, whereas he endorses a ready-to-think established by very human ideologues. It is said that faith moves mountains, but it must be pointed out that these are mountains of human rights deliberately evacuated.

Belief would not be a problem if it were limited to the dictionary definition. Unfortunately, the believer feels held in consciousness of being missionary. It commits the state to supporting certain religious communities, which leads to unequal treatment and exposes non-believers to one-sided and unwanted religious publicity.

## **Ecclesiastical tax**

Ecclesiastical tax is a remnant of clericalism. The State does not have to interfere in the religious life of citizens by organising the financing of the Church.

In the cantons of Fribourg, Jura and Bern, one can be exempted from church tax on leaving the Church. In the cantons of Valais and Vaud, after leaving the Church, one can apply for reimbursement of the parish share of the tax.

- See p. [63](#): *Ecclesiastical (or parish) tax in French-speaking Switzerland*  
Leaving the Church

## Ecology

Ecological awareness will only be able to progress once mankind has truly understood and accepted that nature is not limited to our environment, but that we are an integral part of it. Humanity is a conscious part of the universe.

- See p. [65](#): *Ecology and Judeo-Christianity*

## Power and authority

- See p. [66](#): *The parable of the magic pact*

## About the "Islam and Society Swiss Centre", Fribourg

- See p. [69](#): *Subsidising the lobbies of religious communities? There are alternatives.*

## Testimonials

The state has sharply reduced the social control it exercised, particularly in education, so that individuals are subject to religion. Today, it is the family and relatives who find themselves in the front line, using their influence and, at times, exerting pressure in a shameless manner.

- See p. [71](#): *Resisting pressure from relatives in religious matters*
- See p. [73](#): *Testimonies and contributions*  
*Denouncing the exploitation of guilt feelings*

Indoctrination is also carried out through religious instruction in denominational institutions.

- [How one becomes a miscreant, testimony of a de-baptized person](#) [in French].

# Overview of the second part

## Resisting religious faith

*For the happiness of those who believe in pure spirits, everything that is unverifiable is compatible with reason*

## Prologue

Many feel that they are not very indoctrinated because, as social pressure has diminished, they do not feel pressured. However, they perceive life through myths such as paradise and hell, original sin, the existence of a Saviour, the Last Judgement, etc. They do not feel constrained. This is precisely what I call "being indoctrinated". Before we complain that others are too indoctrinated, it would be good to take an introspective look at the indoctrination that our culture has imbued us with.

Rather than adhering, by chance of birth, to a voluminous catalogue of traditional beliefs, reason, according to the principle of parsimony, asks us to adopt only a minimal set of necessary rules.

## God

"Do you believe in God?" is not the most fundamental question. In the first place, it is not the first one, because, if our death is definitive, its interest is limited. Then, in the event that our soul would benefit from some form of survival, a God who would not judge us and distribute neither reward nor punishment would not worry us.

Faith is built on the belief that a "Supreme Judge" weighs our actions, rewards or punishes us. On earth, a father who would say "*If you are wise, I will always love you; but if you disobey, I will reject you and you will go and live with the evil ogre who makes you suffer*" would be qualified as unworthy. By transforming a tale of this kind into a divine decree, religions indulge in moral blackmail. He who believes himself immortal lives between the anxiety of Judgement and the hope of recompense. "God's love" is a formula that expresses the hope of the clemency of the Judgement, but Hell remains a possible and anguishing way out. Religion powerfully dramatizes life and death, but I do not believe in the God of the carrot and the stick.

The fundamental question is therefore "Am I immortal?". According to established knowledge, the answer is clearly no, because the death of any living being is total and definitive. From then on, with or without faith in God, the threat of Judgement vanishes.

In what image of God can we trust? Is evil a by-product of freedom?

- See p. 75: *Is God good or paradoxical?*

God would have sent us a Saviour 2,000 years ago. However, the human being, more precisely *Homo sapiens*, has existed for about 300,000 years. Isn't it strange that God let mankind macerate in ignorance and error for 298,000 years? Waiting so long before launching a rescue operation does not correspond to the idea we have of a Saviour. Lack of readiness to help does not fit in well with the Church's teaching on God's love and makes the story of redemption dubious and not very credible.

As the Christian episode represents less than 0.7 % of the history of humanity, it is far from being representative of spirituality.

By transforming myths into truths, religious doctrines are undrinkable. Believing is neither a matter of course, nor a duty, nor a necessity. I can legitimately, as a matter of conscience, refuse the religion that has been infused into me.

## Paradise

In Allah's Paradise, every faithful believer will have 72 virgins to deflower. As there is no reason why the God of Christians should be less generous than that of Muslims, jealousy is out of the question. This is nothing to rejoice about because, spread over time, it is infinitely less than one virgin per billion centuries. What frustrations in perspective!



While referring to a hope disconnected from all reality, believers affirm that their faith is necessary for them. This posture is rich in teachings, not about God, but about the springs of human psychology: it is expectation that arouses faith, renamed Hope. In the religion that sells us dreams and mirages, there is something that irresistibly evokes Don Quixote.

### **The menace of hell**

Some avatars of the French adage "*He who loves well punishes well*" are flamboyant.

Churches praise God's love without insisting as much as in the past on the intimidation that accompanies it:

[Matthew 13:41-42] "*The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

Believers hold their breath, but find it right that God resorts to eternal torments. One would have expected a justice more concerned with proportionality, for on earth, even inflicted by the worst sadists, every punishment has an end. Moreover, justice that respects human rights does not resort to punitive torture.

What a striking contrast with the message of forgiveness:

[Matthew 5:44] "*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*".

Unfortunately, any approach that falls under the principle "Do as I say, but not as I do" is unconvincing.

This is an internal contradiction whose enormity seriously discredits the Bible and clearly shows the logical impossibility that the Christian doctrine of the Last Judgement is Truth.

More circumspection should be shown in the face of preconceived ideas. We know that many imaginary and absurd stories are circulating. Hell is one of them, and undrinkable moreover. The appetite for faith must be restrained by the need for coherence.

- [Does hell emit or absorb heat?](#) [in French]

### **Christianity**

In religious thought, rites have magical effects. But to avoid criticism, it is prudent to locate supernatural manifestations in a beyond that is beyond any possible verification. The same applies to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

I too have supernatural powers. An archangel appeared to me in a dream-vision and gave me the title of "*Organiser of the Elected Officials' Agenda*". I can arrange a private and intimate meeting with the person you desire as soon as you and the chosen person are both in the afterlife. This service is offered to you free of charge, but I will give you my bank address in case you wish to express your gratitude.

Obviously, that Jesus Christ is a divine person is a myth, certainly functional since it leads to subjugation and obedience. Seeing God in him is a revelation: that of the effect of indoctrination. Measured by reason, Christian teaching is as extravagant as that of a Brahmin who enumerates the epithets of Shiva.

### **The truth**

Since religion is a cultural matter, reference to the truth is merely propaganda rhetoric.

We must escape the totalitarianism of those to whom "the truth" has been revealed.

- See p. [85](#): *Absolute truth has the major defect of being multiple*

### **Rebuttal of the Pascal's wager**

See p. [89](#): *Four arguments against "Pascal's wager"*:

1. Objection to the Pascal's wager
2. Objection about the probability of the existence of God
3. Refutation of Pascal's wager
4. What minimises loss, Christianity or atheism?

### **Faith, science and epistemology**

Nothing is worse than faith that gives the illusion of ultimate knowledge, for example Catholicism's claim to be the depositary of Truth. Becoming aware of our ignorance leads to a more modest attitude which is also more in keeping with our human condition.

- See p. [107](#): *Faith, science and epistemology*  
with *Some Objections of a Physicist to neo-Thomism*

### **Agnosticism**

The agnostic believes that there is no proof of the existence or non-existence of a creator (or creators) and generally rejects constituted religions. However, as he admits that God may possibly exist, he must consider the possibility, not established but not excluded, of being subject to divine judgment. This is why his position with regard to the religion he has left - or that of his social environment - often remains ambiguous and uncomfortable.

### **Overcoming agnosticism**

- See p. [118](#): *From agnosticism to atheism via the principle of simplicity or Occam's razor*
  - See p. [127](#): *Resisting faith: religious indifference, agnosticism and atheism*

### **De-dramatising death to alleviate life**

"If there is nothing after death, then there is no point in living". This statement suggests that life is a kind of work that deserves pay. Being convinced that I am not endowed with immortality, I could not take the fruits of my actions to the afterlife and the morality of reward-punishment is inoperative.

Religions work to dramatise existence. In addition to death itself, the believer has to face additional trials such as the Last Judgement, and is then directed towards Paradise, after a possible stay in Purgatory, or towards Hell. The verdict is valid for eternity, and it is very frightening. In other religions, Hell is replaced by reincarnation in an inferior being, but the problem remains the same.

My secular heart does not tend towards such a "hope". When religious concerns lead to negative feelings such as fear, it is a measure of mental hygiene to distance oneself from them.

For the atheist, death is a natural event, devoid of the stakes linked to immortality, and therefore de-dramatised. It brings the definitive end of worries and torments. I very much appreciate that life is neither a contest, nor an exam, nor a test with winners and losers. Atheism brings peace of mind, not only in the face of death, but also in everyday life.

One major obstacle, however: this path to serenity is steep for those who believe themselves immortal. Only those who have the mental strength to free themselves from the trap of religious faith have access to it.

- See p. [139](#): *Overcoming the fear of death*
  - See p. [146](#): *Discussion: post-traumatic stress disorder*

### **Freeing oneself from the grip of religion**

When a believer moves away from religion, he or she may experience negative feelings such as guilt or shame.

- See p. [147](#): *Succeeding in the abandonment of faith*  
*Freeing oneself from the grip of religion*  
*Giving coherence to one's life*
  - See p. [155](#): *Freeing oneself from the grip of religion - Discussion*
  - See p. [161](#): *Adepts of Terminus*

### **Philosophical tales**

- See p. [163](#): *From the stick as a gift to the meaning of life*
- See p. [164](#): *The search for happiness*
- See p. [166](#): *Healing*
- See p. [168](#): *Humanity on show*

### **Epilogue**

The truth cannot be established, but the error can be ruled out, which makes it possible to identify the field of research. In order to respond to my need for coherence, I pursued the goal of chasing away contradictions, which led me to reject religious fictions fuelled by the writings fallen from the sky. One must return to the school of common sense and rest both feet on the ground. The exercise of free thought, in particular the opposition to all dogma, requires acceptance of a great diversity of ways of looking at existence. More fundamentally, I aspire to religious indifference. Unfortunately,

because of the weight of religion in my environment, this ideal is out of reach. I support in solidarity all attitudes that encourage resistance to religious indoctrination.

Instead of whining that we live in a society without values and putting our hopes in another world, let's give meaning to the world we live in. Let us reserve our commitment to what is universal, away from the circles of believers. **We want to be characterised by values that are more open and more general in scope than the cult of credulity in a communitarian setting.**

Let us return to the foundations of our Western culture: humanism inherited from the Enlightenment, with human rights, democracy, secularism, the search for the common good and the primacy of reason over faith. Infinity exists in what we can build, create or love.

Let us base school education, not on the authority of the Church, but on the development of reason, critical thinking, independence of mind and intellectual autonomy, within a secular framework.

## **PART ONE**

### **Resisting social control by the Church**

*The Church in search of power through the state and the family*

#### **Society**

By analogy with biology and ecology, it is cultural diversity, including religions, that offers the best opportunities for the adaptation and evolution of civilisations. Development needs freedom and benefits from the plurality of beliefs. It is not religious diversity that is a source of tension, but intolerance. Currently, the West is better characterised by democracy than by Christianity.

It is dangerous to give free rein to a determined religious ideology without opposing it with the counter-powers of plurality and freedom. It is necessary to flee from organisations working to establish an ideologically homogenous society. To guard against this, young people must be informed about the weight of religion on previous generations.

#### **Clericalism in French-speaking Switzerland**

It is commonly accepted that religion is a personal matter to be dealt with as a matter of conscience. Very well, but that doesn't really correspond to the current situation, and not at all to what I've experienced.

For decades, I have been subjected to massive state interventions in religious matters in French-speaking Catholic cantons. During my five years of primary school, I had to recite the catechism every day and go to Mass in column of two. During the three years of secondary school, religion classes were compulsory. Then, because I wanted to become a teacher, I was obliged to spend another five years in a boarding school run by a religious congregation. I was required to be a committed Catholic and a school catechist.

My feeling is that religion was, and is still in a non-negligible measure, a matter of state against which I feel obliged in conscience to resist.

## **Clericalism, never again!**

### *Testimony*

In the canton of Valais (Switzerland), Catholicism was the state religion until 1973, which meant that I spent my childhood and youth in a deeply clerical society. The present text aims to explain, in a particular case, the intimate workings of clericalism, seen from the inside by the teenager I was.

### **The primary school (1955 – 1960, Fully)**

Boys and girls were separated in two different buildings. Although the school was public and compulsory, the typical day began with the recitation of the catechism. The book, consisting of questions and answers, had to be recited by heart. At the end of the book, we would start from the beginning, and so on for the duration of the primary school.

On Sundays, the pupils had an appointment in front of the school to go to mass, in columns of two, under the guidance of the teacher. Attendance was controlled.

In addition to the catechism, there were also courses of religious instruction. In preparation for the first confession, I memorized a list of sins with such insistence that I still know it today:

*Prayers, Holy Name of God, Holy Mass, Parents, Teachers, Comrades, Purity, Theft, Lies, Friday, Pride, Laziness, Duty of State: school, home.*

For the confessional, it was necessary to recite the list and comment on each heading: "*Prayers: I sometimes miss my morning prayers once or twice a week. Holy Name of God: I say swearwords, but no blasphemy*", and so on. "Friday" is a reference to the ban on eating meat on Fridays (still in force today).

As singing lessons, we spent several months preparing the Christmas Mass during which the school children had to sing "He was born the divine child", "Between the ox and the grey donkey", and so on.

I had to take part in the processions of Rogations and Corpus Christi.

One teacher awarded "good points" to students who attended Wednesday morning mass. I went there a few times to make up for my chatter and improve my grades.

The French courses could also contribute to our edification. At the age of eleven, I memorized Victor Hugo's "Awareness", a poem of 68 verses which ends with "*The eye was in the grave and looked at Cain*".

The president of the School Board, who was the parish priest, made periodic visits. He would ask us one question in French, one in arithmetic and one in catechism. This one often came up: "Why are we on earth?". The pupil had to answer "To save our soul", otherwise the teacher would spend a bad quarter of an hour!

At the confirmation, I recited, as it should be, "*I renounce Satan and his pomps*".

### **Politics in Valais around 1960**

Party membership was primarily a question of heredity. One was born "conservative" (former denomination of the Christian Democratic Party) or radical, in the same way as everyone was born Catholic. Before becoming personal, political opinion was first of all a question of loyalty and fidelity to one's family, of *esprit de corps*. Of course, there were a few citizens "who let themselves be bought and turned over", but these defectors were watched, commented on and listed. The frequently asked question "You, whose son are you?" provided information not only on the state of fortune in buildings and farmland, but also on political affiliation.

By a large majority, the Conservatives imposed clericalism. [Historical background: before 1965, religious freedom was not recognized by the Catholic Church, i.e. it was morally legitimate for the state to force individuals to adopt a Catholic attitude]. Representing the opposition, the radical party was anticlerical. As a child, I believed that "anticlerical" meant "*one who is against the clergy but for religion, that is, one who deals directly with God without going through intermediaries*". Despite all the conversations I had overheard, the political aspect had escaped me, which shows that, in Valais, the radicals were moderate, or resigned. The adult radicals were Christians like the others, although less practising: some rarely went to mass, while others went every Sunday, but stood at the back of the church. In some radical families, parodies of the catechism were recited, for example:

*"What is a sacrament?  
- A sacrament is a sack of wheat  
That feeds two idlers  
Like the priest and the teacher"*.

The intonation was more often humorous than sarcastic. It was a way of telling their children "*Don't take everything you are taught at school literally*".

"The blacks" was the nickname given to the conservatives, in allusion to the colour of the cassocks. The most zealous conservatives were going to make a spiritual retreat in Chabeuil (France). Many conservatives were already seeing "those ungodly radicals" roasting in hell. Symmetrically, many radicals imagined "these hypocritical blacks" under the devil's forks. Some conservatives addressed incisive remarks to practising radicals: "*Why go to Mass since you will be damned anyway?*"<sup>1</sup>».

The two camps were organised to meet as little as possible. All the bistros wore the political colours of their respective owners. In my municipality of residence there was a conservative and a radical brass band. No conservative child would have thought of doing gymnastics since the gym society was radical and it was shameless to display one's thighs in public. No radical child would have imagined becoming a boy scout since it was a conservative organization that met in the parish hall. There was a Conservative Children's Christmas and a Radical Children's Christmas which took place at the same time in two different halls: after the children's songs, a Santa Claus handed out an orange and a small bag of peanuts. But the political passions of the adults could not prevent children from all sides from playing together.

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<sup>1</sup> No authentic Catholic can exist outside the Conservative party. According to the doctrine taught, "*Outside the Church, there is no salvation*". So all radicals will be damned.

In another municipality, there was even a mountain pasture for conservative cows and another for radical cows. In yet another municipality, all the citizens were conservative; but there were still two brass bands and two political parties: the whites and the yellows, according to the colours of the instruments of their respective brass bands.

Political affiliation was an important criterion for getting a job. It was obviously impossible to become a state employee without being conservative. In order to obtain a public mandate, companies had to meet unwritten conditions: managers and employees had to be from the right political party. Subsequently, bosses had to control the political opinions of their workers.

1960 marks the end of a period: the evolution of customs, although still discreet, is underway and is preparing to turn everything upside down. The opening up to the world through tourism and television, the need to leave the canton to attend university, and the decline of agriculture will be important factors. Change will be rapid in many areas, but clericalism, which is particularly virulent and tenacious in Valais, will only slowly recede: the ban on unmarried cohabitation will not be lifted until 1995.

### **Secondary level I (1960 – 1963, Martigny)**

There was less religious pressure: apart from a few weekly religion lessons, there was no more catechism, nor was there any control of attendance checks carried out by teachers at Sunday masses. However, as long as the child was of compulsory school age, almost all parents asked their children to go to mass on Sundays, even among non-practising radicals. From the age of 13, without letting it be known, some children no longer went to mass.

As I had to work in the gardens throughout the summer, I saw the start of the new school year as a liberation. I enjoyed school very much and decided to study.

At that time, career guidance was non-existent. I only found out later that I could have attended the science section of the Sion high school.

### **Secondary level II (1963 – 1968, Sion)**

All secondary schools and high schools were run by religious congregations. Barring costly exile, there was no escape from systematic indoctrination.

At the age of 15, I have chosen the training school for primary school teachers in the canton of Valais (*École normale des Instituteurs*). As was only right, I visited the parish priest so that he could give me a certificate of good morals and support my project. Although the Teacher Training College was a strategic element of the conservative regime and my family was radical, I was admitted because I had lost both my father and mother.

We were to enter a boarding school for five years. All of our daily activities were accompanied by prayers: when we got up, at meals, at the beginning of classes, at bedtime. We cohabited with religious people, and five school years is a very long time!

About any breach of good conduct, we were told "*It's unacceptable for a future teacher*". For our leaders, this meant that we were the future catechists of all schoolchildren in the Valais. **Missing**

Sunday mass was sanctioned by a warning. The third warning led to exclusion. This is how my comrade R. D. was expelled from the establishment.

In all disciplines, religious concerns were obsessive. In French, I checked once that the following method worked: by finishing an essay with a verse on gratitude to God for the blessings He showered upon us, I obtained a score that clearly exceeded my usual scores. However, I gave up on this comedy.

We had to avoid referring to "human rights", because the good Christian is first and foremost concerned about his duties; he relies on the Word of God, and not on a profane ideology inherited from the French Revolution. (Historical reminder: Human Rights, condemned by the Church, were rehabilitated by the Second Vatican Council in 1965; our teachers refrained from informing us about this).

We had to follow a course entitled "Sociology" which consisted of reading and commenting on the Pope's Social Encyclicals for a whole school year. "*Socialism and communism are the enemies of the Church*" was the hammered message. One of my classmates asked "What about English Socialism? Should we also condemn it?". The professor, a priest, saw this question as a form of protest. He then went wild, gave us a great lesson on **the duty of obedience: before adopting an opinion, one must first find out what the Vatican's position is on the matter.** He reminded us of the teaching of the Church (still in force today):

*The Roman Pontiff and the bishops are "authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them, the faith to be believed and put into practice." The ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him teach the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for. The supreme degree of participation in the authority of Christ is ensured by the charism of infallibility. This infallibility extends as far as does the deposit of divine Revelation; it also extends to all those elements of doctrine, including morals, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observed. The authority of the Magisterium extends also to the specific precepts of the natural law, because their observance, demanded by the Creator, is necessary for salvation. In recalling the prescriptions of the natural law, the Magisterium of the Church exercises an essential part of its prophetic office of proclaiming to men what they truly are and reminding them of what they should be before God. The law of God entrusted to the Church is taught to the faithful as the way of life and truth. the faithful therefore have the right to be instructed in the divine saving precepts that purify judgment and, with grace, heal wounded human reason. They have the duty of observing the constitutions and decrees conveyed by the legitimate authority of the Church. Even if they concern disciplinary matters, these determinations call for docility in charity. [ ... ] At the same time the conscience of each person should avoid confining itself to individualistic considerations in its moral judgments of the person's own acts. As far as possible conscience should take account of the good of all, as expressed in the moral law, natural and revealed, and consequently in the law of the Church and in the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium on moral questions.*

***Personal conscience and reason should not be set in opposition to the moral law or the Magisterium of the Church.***



The Encyclicals ask us to vote for a Christian party. Questioning the authority of the Church's Magisterium is a serious offence. The conclusion is unassailable: whoever does not vote for the Christian Democratic Party (then called the Conservative Party) is committing a sin. What had to be demonstrated.

Thus, Catholicism essentially consists in recognising this: "*After recruiting me from the cradle, society gave me ecclesiastical authority to which I owe total submission. I am a little Vatican soldier who has to march in step.*"

Clericalism is a collusion between Church and State that aims at total control of society, from political organisation to the consciences of individuals. The state religion has a monopoly on conformist thinking. This exposes the strings of mental manipulation. I felt the revolt swell: in their prisons, the prisoners are freer than I am, because they retain the freedom to think what they want.



#### Religious indoctrination

From that day on, everything was enlightened from another point of view: I understood that I could never renounce the exercise of free will and subordinate my judgement to the authority of the Church. I decided not to delegate to anyone else the task of deciding my opinions. Developing my intellectual self-defence became a vital necessity. I resolved to free myself gradually from the dominant ideology, the weight of which was becoming unbearable. I thought "Everything excessive is insignificant. So Catholicism is insignificant. I refuse to be recruited in this way and chained". Agnosticism and socialism became sympathetic to me but, knowing that an open revolt would lead to my exclusion, I kept a cautious silence.

As I had been taken far away in an unwanted direction and driven into a religious ghetto, the road back to reasonable views could only be long and painful.

Our singing teacher asked us to compose prayers, words and music to vary those at the beginning of the lessons. As we had just studied Jansenism (Jansen's heresy) in the French course, I proposed a theological banana peel: "*Lord, may our prayer serve Your glory as Your grace for our salvation*". It was with obvious trouble that our teacher discarded my project and put an end to the creation of prayers.

The reign of a state religion automatically leads to the reign of a state philosophy. In the course of philosophy, Thomism was the only reference; any other doctrine was stated only to be immediately condemned [Bibliography: Régis Jolivet, Cours de philosophie, Publisher: Vitte]. Under the effect of this ideological harassment, I felt a feeling of suffocation: an impregnable rampart against heresies was rising all around me. During a written interrogation about the evidence of the existence

of God according to St Thomas Aquinas, I took the liberty of challenging it, which earned me a mark of 2 out of 6; the priest professor made it clear to me that the consequences of a repeat offence could be serious.

Since "*Theology is the queen of sciences*", the same book served as a textbook for large parts of the psychology course, a professional branch whose foundations we drew from Aristotle's doctrine. One chapter was devoted to the proofs of the immortality of the soul<sup>2</sup>. We were taught the mixture of genres: God is everywhere. The gaps in the psychology course have been replaced by the "cultural roots" that the Church forged in the 13th century.

Each teacher repressed the personal opinions of the students in his or her own way. In gymnastics class, this gave: "*To philosophize, wait until you are over 40*"<sup>3</sup>.

For the handicrafts, we made a virgin and a Latin cross in wrought iron.

To top it all off, periods of full-time spiritual retreat were set aside for the personal deepening of our religious life.

I feel that the Teacher training college was a deception: I had come there to receive elements of culture, but it was essentially Catholicism that was inculcated there. While they vehemently denounced the indoctrination to communism in the USSR, our teachers could not perceive that they were operating in the same register. Thus, teachers, by trying hard to mould the thinking of others in a narrow and reductive mould, became jailers of a mental prison, a cultural dungeon. While it can be said in their defence that they have been indoctrinated and have only implemented the official positions of the Catholic Church, they can be blamed for the lack of the necessary critical distance in public education oriented towards compulsory education.

The feeling of having been manipulated and instrumentalised in religious matters traumatised and revolted me. This period leaves me with a bitter taste of brainwashing<sup>4</sup>.

One exception however, a stroke of light in the dark: braving the warnings of the Holy See, a young religious taught us with fervour and passion the ideas of *Theillard de Chardin* who tried to merge evolutionism and Christianity. A new spiritual generation, trained at university and showing a measure of intellectual independence, had blossomed. Unfortunately, despite its sympathetic appearance, the process was burning with proselytism.

At the Teacher training college, I received a solid foundation in French and mathematics. I took advantage of the long hours of study to read a lot. I didn't waste my time and, what's more, I was able to enjoy the frank camaraderie that reigned. In 1968, I left the Valais to go to university. The work and the circumstances of life did not bring me back. It later turned out that a lack of basic English was a disabling deficiency.

### **Against the return to true values**

History has shown that a strong influence of the Church leads to harmful abuses, but society has changed a lot since the 1970s. If "today, the Church is no longer like that", it is only to the extent

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2 6th edition, 1959, Proof of the immortality of the soul, p. 233.

3 Riddle: how old was the teacher?

4 In Valais, we rather say "My cup has been well filled and compacted".

that it has been sidelined from power. Since its official teaching has changed little, it is still necessary to guard against its influence.

I learned the following story from the press, which took place in a state school in the Upper Valais. In the spring of 2009, teacher Valentin Abgottspon took down the crucifix that was enthroned against the wall of his classroom. He was ordered to put it back in place under cantonal law, which states that the school must prepare the pupil "*for his task as a human being and a Christian*". Failing to comply, he was dismissed with immediate effect on 8 October 2010.

When I hear pious people moaning about the decline in religious practice and lamenting the good old days when true values were still prevalent, I feel like shouting "Never again!". I rejoice every day that the social control exercised by the Church over society has been eased. As we can see, yesterday among Christians, today among Muslims, a society is all the more backward when religion plays a dominant role in it. It is because I have lived in a clerical society that I knowingly advocate anti-clericalism, secularism and the complete separation of church and state. I include the rejection of the theological faculties outside state universities<sup>5</sup>. It is not the business of the state to legitimise the levying of an ecclesiastical tax by granting ecclesiastical status. Anticlericalism is not a religious opinion, but a political claim.

As for those who claim that "Muslims who want to link politics and religion still think like in the Middle Ages", they would do well to fill their shortcomings in Swiss history. In the heart of Europe and elsewhere, the clerics have not ceased to make their presence felt. For them, knowing that they are deaf to the argument "Other citizens are entitled to the freedom to have other conceptions of happiness", I fall back on "Don't do to others what you don't want to be done to you".

## Epilogue

The Church claims to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, but I fail to see the divine breath that would surpass a mere human construction.

Putting a religious community in charge of public education - claiming to respect the religious beliefs of minorities - is hypocritical. Far too many of my teachers, believing that they have been entrusted with a mission by God himself, have worked to ensure that we adhere to their religious obsession and have thus masterfully illustrated some of the unfortunate consequences of faith. The only credible remedy is the complete separation of Church and State.

Instead of only admitting, in the register of values, the religious, and thus postponing our hopes to another world, let us give meaning to the universe in which we live. Let us return to the fundamentals: humanism inherited from the Enlightenment, with human rights, democracy, secularism<sup>6</sup> and the search for the common good. Let us reserve our commitment to what is universal, away from the circles of believers. Infinity exists in what we can build, create or love. Let us base our teaching, not on the authority of the Church, but on the development of reason and

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5 Of course, the study of religious facts has its place at all school levels in order to understand the evolution of societies, history, culture, literature, etc. However, this teaching must be protected from two aberrations: on the one hand, the confessing approach, which is proselytising, and on the other hand, the amalgam between faith and knowledge, which confuses belief and established facts.

6 To protect minorities, democracy must go hand in hand with secularism.

critical sense in a secular framework. And if an irrepressible need for faith arises in you, know that it is not up to the State to propagate it.

## **Clericalism and secularism in the canton of Fribourg (Switzerland)**

About the collusion between the Catholic Church and the State of Fribourg

### **Diminished, but still very present: clericalism in the style of Fribourg**

In 1978, when I was hired as a teacher in a high school in the canton of Fribourg, it was imperative to have an approved denomination, even to teach mathematics. As I had deliberately omitted the religion section of my curriculum vitae, the headmaster demanded that I add it. In 1980, suspected of having links with a sect, a fellow French teacher was dismissed. The state took care of the teachers' private lives to ensure their ideological conformity. A characteristic feature of intolerance is the demonisation of those who do not share the pseudo-truths of the community. In this context, I had to hide my atheism. This is how I was deprived of religious freedom for many years. As the situation evolved only slowly, I never knew when I regained my freedom of belief.

Clericalism has diminished, but it remains very present. Even today, essential measures such as

- the ecclesiastical tax fixed by law,
- State funding of the Roman Catholic Faculty of Theology at the State University of Fribourg,
- the monopoly of the Christian Democratic Party on the Directorate of Public Education and
- catholic or Reformed religion lessons in public schools.

To this must be added the mentality, heir to a long tradition, which underpins all teaching. An attenuated form of clericalism is the promotion of a humanism based on Christian values. In practice, Christian teachers are allowed to preach the word of God, while others are asked to keep quiet. Feeling assaulted by the plurality of beliefs, the clerical demands that the state be tailored to its faith.

On the contrary, I demand that the rules be the same for everyone. Today, because of the lack of confessional commitment of young people, the clerical system is weakening, but it remains firmly in place. The undivided reign of the conservative party has left us with some beautiful remnants. That it was worse in the past is not enough to justify the current situation. The progress made has served to retain as many denominational privileges as possible that are partially compatible with the evolution of society. If a system is unjust, it is not enough to reduce it; it must be abolished. Current policy must take structural measures to ensure that the mistakes of the past cannot be repeated: it is a matter of moving towards secularism and separating the Church from the State.

### *Question or objection*

*Why are atheists against religions? He who does not believe can simply distance himself from religions, without any animosity.*

Answer

The absence of faith does not imply the struggle against beliefs. There are atheists who are indifferent or benevolent towards religions. For example,

[Michel Bavaud](#) published several books to declare his atheism, but continues to go to mass and pay Church tax. On another level, Buddhism and atheism are compatible. Those who did not live in the era when the Church exercised social control are more inclined to indifference. In any case, a distinction must be made between people and doctrines. It is necessary for all atheists to be tolerant and respectful towards believers, just as it is necessary for all believers to be tolerant and respectful towards atheists.

But doctrines must be subjected to criticism. If my social environment discriminates against me in the name of religion, it leaves me with only two options: to submit or to resist. An environment with a totalitarian tendency incites a brittle tone. A form of defence is expressed by rejection, which is totally different from attack.

By launching the anathema against the unbelievers:

*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. [Mark 16:16]*

Christian religions proclaim an arrogant and sectarian attitude.

Each person has his or her own story. As far as I am concerned,

- during the period 1948-1968, I lived in Valais where Catholicism was the state religion; I underwent 13 years of indoctrination, of which 5 years were brainwashing; the experience of clericalism made me anticlerical [see p. [13](#)];
- the pre-Vatican II Catholicism I was taught did not recognise religious freedom and condemned human rights, which led me to reject Catholicism and to approach agnosticism;
- between 1968 and 1978 I studied mathematics, which contributed to the adoption of a rationalist point of view; the epistemology of the sciences [see p. [107](#)], by highlighting the lack of objective foundations of religions, led me to atheism [see p. [118](#)];
- from 1978 onwards, in the high school where I taught, I was deprived of religious freedom and forced to hide my atheism even in my private life; an example of the misappropriation of the philosophy course for religious purposes [see p. [23](#)] led me to support secularism.

I have suffered the assaults of a society that was trying to maintain old dominant positions, before having to retreat and deploy on new lines that it could defend with less activism and fewer means. I feel I have the right - the same right as that of self-defence - to write that I pass a negative judgement on Catholicism, while respecting Catholics as individuals.

The valiant defenders of the values conveyed by the Church - teachers and political authority combined - the defenders conscientiously prescribed to me what I was to think. If I have received their solicitude with ingratitude, it is because my suffering is neither understood nor recognised. It is the

adherence of the schools in Valais and Fribourg to the objective of the Christian state that annihilates the empathy I desire.

Why does society view resistance to religion with a hostile eye when it favours religious indoctrination through a crypto-clerical policy known as "culture based on Christian values"? Other notices must be present in the public square. I call for more benevolence towards atheists.

**LA LIBERTÉ (the largest daily newspaper in the canton of Fribourg), Wednesday 27 September 2013, FORUM - YOUR LETTERS – RELIGION.**

**Let us dialogue without judging each other. The new book by the writer Michel Bavaud, "L'Évangile de l'athée" (The Gospel of the Atheist), elicits this testimony from a reader.**

*JACQUES POCHON, Domdidier*

*If there is one teacher that I admired and appreciated at the training school for teachers in the canton of Fribourg, for his erudition, his humanism and his open-mindedness, it is Michel Bavaud. I was of course very surprised when I learned that he declared himself an atheist, but knowing his deep faith in man and humanity, it took a deep disillusionment and a long reflection I think for him to take this decision ("LL" of September 21).*

*I appreciate his frankness, independence of spirit and courage. I deeply respect his decision taken in complete freedom, his personal and independent search for the truth. I myself am a deep believer, but not in this limited and exclusive God that every religion claims to possess.*

*Thank you to Mr Bavaud for opening the door to intelligent reflection, dialogue and respect for the opinion of others. On the other hand, I do not understand the reaction of those who show "theological harassment" and those who have sent him insulting messages, thereby proving that they have forgotten Christ's message of love.*

*I myself left the Catholic Church (in 1970) when I discovered the Baha'i faith. It was made clear to me that becoming a Baha'i was incompatible with my profession as a teacher in the canton of Fribourg. Intimidation and mobbing got the better of me, and I went to teach under other skies. This allowed me to discover other horizons and to open my mind to other cultures and religions.*

*Let us dialogue, let us seek the truth together and we will advance love, unity and civilization. There is not just one path to reach the top. Thank you dear Mr Bavaud.*

**About the Representations of the Councillors of State of the Canton of Fribourg:  
On Shrove Thursday, AT THE CONVENT OF THE CORDELIERS YOU WILL EAT**

*Types of official receptions, use of cantonal flags and banners, order of placement in processions, funerals, wines of honour, official congratulations: the 2011 protocol regulations leave nothing to chance. They are weighed down by the weight of history. For example, according to an 1879 agreement between the Cathedral Chapter of St. Nicholas and the Council of State, the anniversary of the Battle of Murten is traditionally celebrated on the third Sunday in June "with a thanksgiving service offered by the government in St. Nicholas' Cathedral". The town council of Murten, the*

authorities "based in Freiburg" and representatives of the army "close to Freiburg" are invited to attend. All these people, as well as the "celebrants and preacher", then share a meal. The Cathedral choir and orchestra are joined for the aperitif. There are many provisions governing religious events, and the protocol regulations devote a specific article to relations with convents. At the beginning of the year, the entire Council of State receives the Cistercian community of Hauterive, in principle represented by its father abbot, to present its vows. In autumn, the invitation is returned: the government is received in Hauterive "for a recollection meal", to which its former members are also invited. Once per legislature, the Council of State invites the community to a meal served at the Domaine des Faverges. This lunch is preceded by a liturgical service. On the other hand, the executive is invited to the convent of the Cordeliers for the meal on Shrove Thursday (the last Thursday before the first day of Lent). And in mid-Lent, he is the guest of the Capuchin convent. LR

Source: La Liberté of Wednesday 13 July 2016

## Religious majority

In Switzerland, the legal religious majority has been set at 16 years of age. From this age, the pupil can decide for himself whether he wants to submit to religious indoctrination, but he is not always asked for his opinion, which makes the following actions, numbered 1, 2, and 3, completely illegal.

### 1. An example of the misappropriation of the philosophy course for religious purposes

Under the pretext that the foundations of philosophy must be carefully laid, with an emphasis on Greek Antiquity, a roundabout method consists of dwelling on Aristotle, emphasising first and foremost the features of his thought that were taken up by Saint Thomas Aquinas and which form the backbone of neo-Thomism.

*«Philosophy fell on me, at the age when one is not wary, at the age when one fears above all mumps. It fell upon me in forced doses of Thomism, hours and hours of a weekly catechism. After having undergone Saint Thomas Aquinas, I acquired a definitive conviction: one cannot be both a saint and a philosopher at the same time, one must choose one's side, reflection or faith.»*

Jean Ammann, *La Liberté* of August 19, 2017, Can philosophers be forgiven?

"Philosophy" instrumentalized by religion is not philosophy, but propaganda. One of its tendentious aims is to "dispose your heart so that God will give it to believe". In a high school in the canton of Fribourg where I taught, the philosophy course was given, from 1977 onwards, by a priest who was zealous for truth: it was there that the future bishop passed the torch of Thomism to the pupil who was to succeed him in the bishopric. This indoctrination, presented as neutral and state-sponsored, was imposed on entire classes until 1994. When the label does not correspond to the content, one can speak of deception. This hypocritical situation made me a supporter of secularism. Let's stop fuelling the misuse of the state in favour of a Church.

I tried to say that I saw a drift in it. The teachers concerned replied that I was not qualified to talk about philosophy. I see there the admission that it is a reserved area. Being less sectarian, I allow them to talk about mathematics.

Can one charitably hope that today philosophy is taught in a neutral way, and that one has given up putting it at the service of a religion?

## **2. An example of the misappropriation of theme days for religious purposes**

South High School, Bulle

Coordination sciences-philosophy - March 5, 2001

To the teachers involved in the *Blaise Pascal* meetings as well as to philosophy teachers

### **Let's set the objectives**

#### **A pivotal century**

For the scientific branches, the choice of the theme *Blaise Pascal* is very favourable. It allows us to develop subjects that are interesting and whose level can be adapted to that of our high school students. I had a lot of pleasure leading the workshop "Pascal and probabilities".

The 17th century was a pivotal century. For the sciences, it marked the beginning of a new era which saw, among other things, the birth of Newton's classical physics. But in order to take this turn, it was necessary to abandon everything that, in Aristotle's doctrine, is contradicted by the facts.

#### **A tenacious tradition**

While I was reflecting on the 17th century, I was caught up by ours. I received a surprising piece of information: in the study of their philosophy programme, some fourth grade classes have just come out of the Middle Ages. With only a few weeks of study remaining, their vision of philosophy will necessarily be truncated and distorted. That Aristotle, St Thomas Aquinas and some Catholic thinkers are taught is normal since they belong to our cultural roots. But, when their part represents the essential or the crowning achievement, a suspicion arises: wouldn't the teaching of philosophy be brought back to its Catholic dimension? Naturally, professors who are not concerned will be able to recognise themselves and will understand that my remarks are not addressed to them.

#### **A daring wager**

We can only encourage the study of Pascal's wager. It is a work that belongs by right to our culture. But it is not appropriate for this theme to refer to the same obsessive preoccupations as those of the philosophy course: "*to dispose one's heart so that God may give it to believe*". Given the general context, the event appears to be a high Mass of Catholic thought, and I am not happy to play the role of con-celebrant.

#### **Let's set the objectives**

In my opinion, a theme day should aim not to lock the pupils' minds into a system of thought, but to open up new horizons. There are so many interesting topics. For example, in an interdisciplinary framework, some elements of epistemology of science could be brought in. More generally, it seems to me that it is necessary to stimulate the critical spirit of the students because there is a crying need.



### 3. Computer interlude

The high school computer technician finished all his e-mails as follows (the excerpt is from 2008):

*IT does not save, but helps - when everything works - in our daily tasks!  
This is better: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." (The Bible - Ephesians 2:8)*

Let's be clear: the proselytizing and propagandistic actions of a civil servant who wants to reconcile computer science and theology may be anecdotal. I see a much more serious problem in the fact that the social environment and the authority consider this behaviour acceptable and normal, even if it is publicly displayed for five years.

It would be impertinent to respond to a homily. The Catholic Church has been able to create a cultural climate in which victims are agreeing. The good shepherd obtains from his flock a submissive attitude.

#### **A mocking or scornful article in *La Liberté***

The book review of Michel Bavaud "The Gospel of the Atheist", éditions de l'Aire, 2013, published in *La Liberté* of Saturday 21 September 2013 and signed Pascal Fleury, ends with these mocking or scornful words:

*... we are waiting for the third volume of the trilogy. Its title would be quite obvious:  
"How I regained faith".*

Would it be a good tone to make fun, not only of atheism, but also of atheists? Is *La Liberté* the newspaper of all the people of Fribourg, or only of those who conform to a certain religious tradition? One can be critical of beliefs, convictions and doctrines - and I would even say that one must - but one principle must be absolutely respected: people are entitled to respect.

The clerical regime in Fribourg has left its mark on the brains of some journalists. It is a question of discrediting atheism, of showing that it is devoid of consistency, while faith remains the only sure value.

The media readily relay religious and inter-religious discourse, but are reluctant to treat a-religious or anti-religious statements in the same way. In Switzerland, about 26 % of the population is without religion. Why is it given so little consideration in the press? I will leave you to reflect on the following point: there are more people without religion than there are Muslims, but the press avoids making them credible and visible. Faith has the advantage of protecting people from doubt.

*The Swiss CVP (Christian Democratic Party) has been in decline for several years. The C (Christian) is perceived as an obstacle by many city dwellers. In 2020, the party changed its name to "The Centre" in order to reach a wider electorate, but without changing its policy. The party continues to push the cantons to support the Christian Churches with the church tax and to promote Christian religious education in public schools.*

Politics and religion should not be mixed. "Religious parties should be replaced by secular parties." This advice given to Muslim countries also

applies to the canton of Fribourg. Switzerland does not need a party that wants to maintain the remnants of clericalism.



The debates of the Great Council of the Canton of Fribourg remain under the sign of the crucifix [photo 2017].

## Call

If, for a Catholic, being a missionary is a moral duty, it is not the same outside the religious community: indoctrinating one's fellow citizens and their children is not a right. I appeal to the supporters of clericalism: practice your religion as you wish, but please leave others alone! The *Kulturkampf* ended in 1887 (to compensate for their loss of influence on the Federal Constitution, the Catholic cantons stepped up their counter-reform efforts), so you can stop fighting and return to civilian life. Thank you to all the brave!

Perhaps an organisation should be set up to help people with religious obsessions?

If you want to give back to God what you think is God's, don't forget to give back to Caesar what is Caesar's!

## What is the role of the state?

Let's set up the elements of the decor: crucifixes are hung in the classrooms and the Council of State has an official place in the Corpus Christi procession. Businesses are subject to church tax, and all taxpayers contribute to the financing, through ordinary taxes, of the Roman Catholic Faculty of Theology.

Does the State consider agnostics and those who are indifferent to religion to be lost sheep that it should, if possible, bring back into the right flock? When Christians proclaim their hope that the coming century will become religious again, do they hope to revive indoctrination? Just as there is a reason of state, can we invoke a reason of Church that prevails over respect for people? Do we live in a crypto-confessional state, i.e. non-confessional in its statements and appearance, but confessional in its interior and functioning? Do supporters of a residual clericalism give their support to Muslims who, in their respective countries, demand that the state be religious?

On the contrary, I believe that the State, not being the arbiter of religious truth, must welcome all citizens in the same way, without making differences, whether they are Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, without religion or others. Consequently, it cannot take sides with particular communities, for example by proclaiming itself Christian or declaring that certain religions are entitled to a privileged status.

In order to maintain their political majority, will supporters of residual clericalism ally themselves with certain religious minorities? Will Pentecostals? Muslims? Buddhists? Scientologists? Raelians be given official status? In Great Britain and Greece, the recognition of religious communities has swollen to the point of giving legal status to Islamic courts.

In my opinion, the state should not support certain religious communities. In order to promote civil peace, the state should mitigate the division of society into religious communities through a restrictive policy of favours. It must demonstrate, including in public education, its neutrality with regard to beliefs.

Religion cannot be indicated on identity cards because of the risk of discrimination. Similarly, it should not appear on any administrative documents, including those relating to taxes. For example, the Constitution of Spain, in its Article 16.2, states

*No one may be forced to declare his or her ideology, religion or beliefs.*

**In the canton of Fribourg, the state collects and registers the lists of Catholics, Protestants and Jews!**

I am astonished not to hear those who want the state to do less, protesting against the recording of this sensitive data. The heading "religion" must disappear from the Fribourg tax declaration.

"Do not mix politics and religion" being a universal recommendation, Westerners cannot only address it to Muslim countries. Church and State must be completely separated throughout Switzerland, following the example of the cantons of Geneva and Neuchâtel. I refuse to allow part of my taxes to be used to support Vatican propaganda.

It is accepted that the school is not politically engaged. The same should be true in religious matters. Instead of focusing on shaping the minds of students by encouraging the dissemination of myths and fables that do not hold water, the Directorate of Public Education would do better to develop the ability to step back and learn critical thinking. Some rudiments of epistemology would highlight the distinction between ideology and objective knowledge. One could become aware that universal truth does not exist and, for example, compare various religions and ideologies from the point of view of respect for human rights. The status of women may be the result of a power struggle in which religion has been instrumentalized. Young people do not need an institution that thinks for them, but to acquire tools of analysis. A framework of thought should be a springboard, not a limit. Since everyone is confronted with various ideologies, many of which are toxic, it would be better to give the student some sort of plumb line to guide his or her judgement rather than asking him or her to accept the first ideology or religion that comes along.

"Critical thinking" is recognised as one of the key competencies of the 21st century by the OECD, particularly in dealing with the wealth of information available in the digital world.

The development of critical thinking is beginning to be introduced as such in teaching. Courses are being given to identify aberrant theories, prevent adherence to irrational ideologies and guard against all the excesses linked to false information: conformism, stereotypes, unfounded beliefs such as astrology, ufology, conspiracy, climate scepticism, homeopathy, catastrophism, etc. And, in a secular society, we can also mention life after death: it is a belief, not an established fact.

Various means can be used, such as verification of sources, elements of reasoning and detection of fallacious arguments, all applied to concrete cases such as certain rumours circulating on social networks:

*Nicolas Gauvrit et Sylvain Delouvé*  
*Des têtes bien faites, défense de l'esprit critique*  
*Presses Universitaires de France (PUF) 2019*

But in the canton of Fribourg, they prefer to teach philosophy filtered through the Catholic catechism.

### **Recognising religious communities**

In 2015, New Zealand allowed the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster to perform marriages, as this Church meets the criteria required by law. Followers wear colanders on their heads to parody religions. In 2016, *pastafarianism* is administratively recognised as a religion in the Netherlands.

Wouldn't it be more reasonable for the State not to recognise any religion as official? If not, I ask that

- [Flying Spaghetti Monster](#),
- Adepts of Terminus [see p. [161](#)] and
- the worshippers of the Big Blue Rabbit [see p. [128](#)]

also become official religions of the Canton of Fribourg.

### **About the "Islam and Society Swiss Centre", Fribourg**

- [See p. [69](#)] *Subsidising the lobbies of religious communities? There are alternatives.*

### **The right constitution**

For Kant, in *Critique of pure Reason*, the just constitution is the one that gives the greatest possible freedom to individuals.

For the partisan of a residual clericalism, would the just constitution be the one that incites individuals to save their souls, with the help of the Church?

*Since the Church carries out social work that is not provided by the State, church tax is necessary.*

The separation of Church and State concerns several issues, among which the financing of the official Churches through church tax is a prominent one. This separation is feasible since two cantons have achieved it: Geneva and Neuchâtel. In hospitals, prisons and centres for asylum seekers, the doors of

these establishments can be opened to outside contributors in order to respond to requests. Any remuneration of external actors must be borne by those who call upon them and the communities that support them. As for charities, the State should favour those that are apolitical and non-religious so that the aid provided is not linked to propaganda, even if it is light or indirect. Public social assistance will be adapted and, if necessary, strengthened. It may not be distributed among religious organisations, as the latter do not cover the entire population.

As the Church is not a public service, it should not be financed as such.

*Secularism is not the solution. Look at what is happening in France, for example.*

This is a mistaken analysis. Secularism makes it possible to live together in good harmony. Unfortunately, some people reject it and oppose it with all their might, including violence. This is the problem.

Do not accuse secularism when it is a question of religious aberrations.

I have suffered the abuses of the religious policies of the cantons of Valais and Fribourg. This is proof that the legislation granting substantial privileges to recognised (not to say official) religions is deficient. It is necessary to give it a secular framework.

*Religious practice is in free-fall and religiosity is declining. Courage: we are moving towards a society where the role of religion will be negligible.*

Religious sensitivity is a turn of mind built on personal dispositions, reinforced and supported by education in a cultural environment imbued with religiosity. Remove social pressure and much of it will evaporate.

For many people who have reached retirement age, religion is seen as the pillar that sustains society. This is no longer the case for young people who see religion as a strictly personal matter. It can be predicted that within a generation, the secular nature of the state will become established and separation from the church will be achieved, including in the cantons of Fribourg and Valais. There are already tangible political signs: some sections of the Socialist Youth and the Liberal-Radical Youth are making such demands. Unfortunately for them, the Swiss method - the so-called consensus method - is not to abolish clericalism, but to wait until the system falls into disuse. Resistance to religious indoctrination, mainly in the passive form, is ongoing.

We should not jump to conclusions. In ordinary human functioning, intelligence is put at the service of feelings, among which we must count fear and religiosity. When faith burns, reason capitulates and subordinates itself to it with zeal and application. This is why religions will not pass.

The evolution of the Muslim world in recent decades provides us with a sad example of a return to fundamentalism. The course of history is not linear. For example, Turkey is moving away from secularism and wants to give a more important role to Islam. Societies are not only transformed by adaptation, but also by resistance to change. We are then reduced to containing religious movements so that they do not become invasive again.

At present, the fragmentation of society into separate religious communities is growing, which should stimulate our vigilance. The only bulwark against a return to the past is the secularism of the state and the school. There will be no end to the struggle against those who want all citizens to live in a society with a privileged religious faith: the minority need only adapt. I have another conception of democracy in which minorities are respected.

*Anti-clericalism is a rearguard struggle*

It was a rearguard education, imposed in the name of "true faith", that aroused my resistance to religious indoctrination. What is non-retrogressive education?

In political matters, I am campaigning for the state to abolish the privileges granted to certain religious communities, such as the right to levy an ecclesiastical tax, to have a confessional window in public education, to contribute to the maintenance of the theological faculties, etc. The state does not have to interfere in the religious life of citizens. Resisting the residues of clericalism remains as relevant as ever!

In 2014, the launch of the popular initiative "For a secular Valais" shows that the issue is on the political agenda. In order to succeed, the initiative had to collect 6'000 signatures in one year. As it only collected 2'000, it was withdrawn. In my opinion, in the future, the separation of church and state will become a struggle throughout Switzerland.

*The situation is not so bad. The canton has, for the most part, already abandoned clericalism.*

I do not understand how this argument would exonerate the State and allow the Church to maintain a status that remains privileged.

When you say "It's not like that any more", you have to understand that it's not like when the Catholic lobby put the State at its service. We have left those times, but not completely. The evolution of the canton is effective, but the credit for it does not go to the Church, who reluctantly underwent it.

Today, in 2019, I am 71 years old. What do I do with the phrase "It's not like that any more"? Are you offering me the opportunity to relive my life in better conditions? And in the history of the canton of Fribourg, what period in the history of the canton of Fribourg should I ignore? And in the history of Christianity? The simple attenuation of clericalism does not satisfy me.

A problem that we consider to be solved may turn out to be one that we want to conceal, consciously or through lack of attention. But no, it is far from over; there are still some nice leftovers: the church tax, the state financing of the Faculty of Theology, the privileges granted to Christianity in education, crosses in public buildings and schools, etc. It is clever of Catholic activists to spread and make people accept the idea that "It's all over", because this defuses all protest, since there is nothing to protest against. We do not want to see that, despite the improvements that have taken place, the weight of religion remains important, including in the functioning of the state. One does not respond to obvious abuses by simply mitigating the biggest ones, leaving in place the whole system that produces them and keeping clericalism to the maximum that social constraints allow.

Whoever adheres to the faith taught is fulfilled by it. If what is asked of us corresponds to our desire, the process is carried out in serenity. Unfortunately, the heaviest aspect of the teaching I have received is the pretension of reigning over the conscience of others. It is then necessary to make an effort to imagine the discomfort of one who must, in conscience, refuse the proposed faith.

Only a few events whose veracity is difficult to dispute have been reported here. The situation would appear much more damning if it were possible to examine the underwater part of the iceberg. Among teachers, for example, there are relatively more openly Christian teachers than among the rest of the population. One explanation could be that when I was hired as a teacher of mathematics and physics at a public college, I was required to add the heading "religion" to my curriculum vitae. It would seem that the label "committed Christian" makes it easier to get a teaching position. The time of the state as a great supporter and sponsor of religion is far from over! Why in the Council of State is the Christian Democratic Party so keen to run the Department of Public Education?

Among the teachers, there are bound to be supporters of secularism at school in the manner of the cantons of Geneva and Neuchâtel. Why don't they dare to express themselves? I put the question to colleagues, who replied: "You have been appointed to a single school on a full-time basis for a long time. My situation is much more fragile". They are thus following the path chosen by society: waiting silently for the changing mores to reduce the role of religion even further.

In the mouths of those nostalgic for the past, I have the impression that the expression "it's not like it used to be" means "what remains of the state's support for Christianity must be maintained". It is true that society has partly freed itself from the weight of the church, but in a heterogeneous way. For example, while the newspaper *La Liberté* emancipated itself from religious tutelage, public education remained under the influence. The canton of Fribourg remains far removed from secularism. That it was worse in the past does not excuse the current situation, and important progress remains to be made. I do not agree with those who think that, since things are better than before, we must bravely support the tools of clericalism that have survived. Who will be the François Gross of the Directorate of Public Education, Culture and Sport, capable of resisting the Catholic lobby?

Behind the denial of the problem lies something deeper, which calls into question the Church's credit, because discrimination has been practised in the name of defending religion. When one takes advantage of an ideology revealed by God, it is not enough to declare "We don't do that any more" to clear oneself, because what is at issue is that clerical political practices, even today watered down, do not seem to have been inspired by a respectful, just and good God. The past tells us about the true nature of the Church.

*Excuse me for telling you like this, but to spend so much time and energy talking about religion, or against religion, you really have to have a problem, don't you?*

The texts on my site relating to religion represent, in quantity, less than one thousandth of the Catholic indoctrination I received over thirteen years.

Fortunately, I am not trying to restore a fair balance! I did this work to resist. Writing clarifies thought, gives it the coherence that takes it out of confused perception.

Most importantly, I feel much better now that some of the nonsense that the school had instilled in me has been removed from my head. In a secular state, the exercise I have been doing would be pointless. It's society that has a problem!

*Your site is very interesting and well argued. I agree with many points. However, I think that religious indoctrination should not be confused with belief in God. It is the extremes that are wrong. I am a deist and I believe in certain things, however, I remain rational and develop my critical mind. It is not comparable to fanaticism, for example. Believing can make sense, it is simply a different perception of things. Existence or non-existence of God, neither of these two alternatives should be posed as a truth, because deep down nobody will know the truth on the subject :)*

There is no confusion since the two subjects, indoctrination and beliefs, are developed and justified independently, with specific arguments.

For me, the important thing is that no authority - be it family, school, State or Church - should catch us in the net of a religious ideology. Everyone must remain free in their choices in spiritual matters. As such, even if it differs from mine, I can only respect and encourage your approach. On the other hand, I distance myself from all those who claim to submit to a Church or any other form of religious authority: the centre of decision is, and must remain, one's personal conscience.

I agree with you that the existence of a Creator is a matter outside the scope of our knowledge. However, in my life experience, clericalism mixes everything up and puts its opponents on the defensive. Since the conservative party is based on faith, it incites its critics to make a critical analysis of religion. I am convinced that a God who points his finger at every man and says, "I will judge you and if my scales are tipped the wrong way, you will be put in a torture chamber" is a belief to be rejected, but I accept other opinions without any problem.

To the defenders of an orthodoxy, I prefer those who demonstrate their intellectual autonomy by freeing themselves from religious tutelage, because this changes everything as regards the claim to reign over the conscience of others. This is the sign of success that I applaud, whatever personal path one chooses.



## Where are the intellectuals of Fribourg?

The queen of science has gone from theology in the Middle Ages to economics today. Like the Fribourg radicals who have changed sides (yesterday's anticlericals now support the residues of clericalism), intellectuals have little criticism to make of the clerical regime. Are they satisfied with a simple attenuation of clericalism or are they usurping their title as intellectuals? For those who are concerned about their careers, the opportunism of those who know where the places of power are is more profitable than the critical spirit. To be recited piously every day: "*Religion, Catholicism in particular, is an excellent thing to support. Vote for the church tax and give public funding to the Roman Catholic theological faculty*".

Why do the many advocates of less state intervention exclude religion from the scope of their principles?

The new generation looks better. In Switzerland, certain sections of the young radicals and young socialists have taken a clear stance in favour of secularism. But their elders are urging them to mute it.

*How did you experience the events of May 1968?*

At that time, I was 20 years old, I was still in boarding school, and I only saw a few rare images of the events of May 1968 that were reported by the newspapers during the weekends. The "*Nouvelliste et Feuille d'avis du Valais*" (the largest newspaper in the canton of Valais) discredited and misinformed the movement. I was effectively kept away from all "subversive ideas" and indoctrinated against all non-Catholic ideologies. It was only much later that I understood what had happened. The events of May 1968 - a revolt against social control - were only the scum of a profound change in society. The motto "Don't coerce more than necessary" changed the distribution of power throughout the Western world. To understand the evolution, one has to know the state of society before 1968.

I am always amazed to hear women say the word "May 1968 supporter" in a contemptuous tone when at that time they did not even have the right to vote. In the Catholic cantons, the good old days are the good old days of true values: the wife had to obey her husband and the children had to go to Sunday mass under the guidance of their teacher. By today's standards, the institutions of family, school, employers, church and state curtailed individual freedoms and commonly practised abuse of authority. For example, the law prohibited cohabitation of unmarried couples. It may be instructive to study the role of certain public schools, such as the teacher training school in the canton of Valais [see p. 15].

## Christian humanism

Christian humanism is a misleading expression: the human side is used as a diversion. It is in fact a theological vision of man in which God is at the centre, a kind of theocracy, draped in democracy, in which the clergy is the guide for the action of the state. That is how I was taught at the teacher training college in the canton of Valais, in the name of the social encyclicals of the Church that we read in class, that the worst enemy of humanity is socialism, and that every true Christian has a moral duty to vote for a Christian party, i.e. for the Christian Democrat party.

Whereas Christian humanism is a city built around a cathedral and a Catholic theological faculty under the patronage of a clerical state, all surrounded by the rampart of Greek and Latin culture, true humanism places the public square, human rights, democracy and secular culture at the centre.

I am wary of humanisms that have a vision of a tomorrow that sings, whether in this world or in another. True humanism refuses to subordinate itself to any religion, otherwise it loses its quality of humanism. Humanism consists in reinforcing the primacy of man over all ideologies that demand submission to other values.

### **The good side of clericalism**

What has ignited in me the critical spirit and pushed me to go and see what is behind the façades of the Church? What is the trigger that saved me from having to align my thoughts with those of the official ideologues of service? Thank you clericalism!

### **Wearing the Islamic veil at school?**

Would it be wise to pass a law banning the wearing of the Islamic veil in schools?

In public spaces the right to wear clothing indicating religious affiliation is guaranteed by human rights law.

Here, the issue is not just about any public place like the street, or public transport. The school is a different setting: teachers are civil servants of the state and as such must respect religious neutrality. Muslim women teachers are therefore not allowed to wear the headscarf in school.

The rest of my remarks will therefore relate solely to the pupils. Initially, I was in favour of a restrictive law, because

- the veil degrades the feminine condition;
- Religious symbols whose size can be heard over several tens of centimetres must be prohibited in public schools;
- hats, caps, turbans and other head coverings are traditionally forbidden in classrooms;
- should Sikhs also be allowed to wear turbans and daggers, as Canada has legalized the wearing of kirpān in public schools?
- Clothing exceptions set a precedent for other exceptions on religious grounds such as exemptions for gymnastics, swimming pools or sex education.

However, I have partly changed my mind, because I am even more afraid that Muslims are locking themselves into their community:

- we must avoid putting children on the sidelines of society and thus depriving them of any integrating influence;
- we must curb the deployment of Koranic schools or denominational schools as alternatives to state schools;

- it would be better to focus on less visible, but more important problems, such as the prevention and detection of cultural abuses such as excision, forced marriages, ill-treatment of women and, more generally, all human rights violations. The State has a duty to protect children. The school doctor should carry out regular systematic checks to detect all forms of abuse.

For the reasons given above, a general ban on headscarves should be introduced with exceptions issued after negotiation with parents and subject to conditions. More specifically, the school authority enters into a kind of contract with the pupil's legal representatives: against the right to wear the Islamic headscarf, the pupil undertakes to respect all school obligations, in particular the acceptance of co-education, the attendance of all classes, every day, including gymnastics, swimming pool (where the bathing cap replaces the headscarf), natural sciences and sex education.

**Religion should remain a private matter. In society, only behaviour matters: let's flee from doctrinaire and intolerant people, as well as from all believers who practice proselytism!**

I do not consider that an ideal society should be religiously homogeneous. We know that civilisations are deadly, but it is to be hoped that humanity is relatively sustainable. Just as biodiversity gives nature the capacity to adapt to changing conditions, cultural and religious diversity gives humanity more resources to face the uncertainties of the future, provided that religious wars and all forms of extremism, radicalism, totalitarianism, state-organised indoctrination, official religion, privileges granted to certain religious communities, etc. are avoided. In order to protect society from the inevitable excesses, the right method is to contain religion in the private sphere and to keep the state religiously neutral.

Unfortunately, the Catholic cantons consider religion to be a matter of state.

State support for certain religious communities promotes the fragmentation of society into distinct communities.

*While the number of Muslims is increasing in Switzerland, the number of practising Christians is in free fall. I see this as a danger to our western culture. To counter it, we must undertake a serious re-Christianization of Western society.*

Christians and Muslims should not be separated into two separate communities, each with its own culture, religion and schools. Each community must avoid investing its energy in indoctrinating its members, coercing their behaviour and promoting proselytism, the aim being to convert the lukewarm and bring them back to the "right path". This is an effective means of generating conflict and intolerance. To find out what happens next, all you need to do is open a history book. Since the Enlightenment, our Western culture has been fighting against these abuses. We must see it as a break with the previous world dominated by religion and authoritarianism. Since then, culture has had the right to a secular space, and every person has the right to religious freedom. Christians, atheists, Muslims, Buddhists and others must blend into the same secular society. In order to avoid deepening confessional divisions, the state must remain

neutral by refraining from intervening, without formalising certain Churches or supporting certain communities.

Today, Swiss public schools must cease to be places of religious propaganda. Just as one does not combat the plague by spreading cholera, it is counterproductive to counter one religion by developing another. It is not the Church that must be put back in the centre of the village, but man and the forum.

We want to be characterised by values that are more open and universal than the cult of credulity within a communitarian framework, namely human rights, democracy, respect for minorities, tolerance and secularism. The Western culture to be defended is precisely there.

The state must welcome all citizens equally, whether they are Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, people of no religion or others. Consequently, it cannot take sides with particular communities, for example by claiming to be Christian or declaring that certain religions are entitled to a privileged status. It must demonstrate, including in public education, its neutrality towards beliefs.

**No religion in the functioning of the State!**

# Religions

In Western Europe, we see that age-old religions are crumbling while others are infiltrating. Certainly, we are far from finished with the zealots of True Revealed Faith, which has the oddity of being plural. From it emerges the image of a God who hides, delivers contradictory messages and presents a dissociative identity disorder. The diversity of beliefs reveals that they are cultural constructions devoid of objective foundations. It is unreasonable to obey the propagandists of such an ill-defined God.

Why does man cling to so-called beliefs about the afterlife that are in fact beyond all plausibility? The answer is to be found between our two ears - O revelation -, that is to say in our brain. Religion is a side effect of the illusion that we are immortal. To be content with arguments of authority is a capitulation of the mind.

Religions work to dramatize existence: the eye of God that observes us, sin, Judgement Day, hell (or reincarnation into an inferior being), eternal life, ...

Religion does not provide access to inner peace, as it develops a rhetoric of intimidation that puts the faithful under pressure and demands more and more of them, without end. Whoever does not put up a defence is phagocytised.

Beware of a religion that sanctifies subjugation and obedience: believing will make us captives!

It is not enough to resist a little to avoid extremist drift; it is necessary to resist firmly to avoid the gears of subjection.

## **Resisting the teaching of the Church: human rights, morals, secular culture**

### **Being moderate in religion**

It is generally accepted that, in religious matters, it is absolutely necessary to avoid becoming radical or extremist. Therefore, we must remain moderate and set barriers that must not be overcome. This implies distancing oneself from religion, making critical judgements, refusing to apply certain sacred texts literally, in short, developing a capacity for independence capable of standing up to the ease of servile obedience. It would be very imprudent to embark on religion without restraint and without being equipped with the means to brake.

What are these limits and how can they be defined? Since they cannot be based on religious values, they are necessarily human values. Common sense and empathy are respectable, but their contours are too blurred and ill-defined to be a reliable reference. I see only one barrier to religious aberrations: respect for human rights.

Religious values are therefore neither absolute nor fundamental. They can only be exercised within a secular framework that encompasses and is superior to it. In fact, our culture is only partially based on religious values drawn from antiquity. More essentially, it is based on secular values that appeared in the 18th century, such as human rights and modern democracy. Religious values must imperatively be subordinated to secular values. They can even be advantageously dispensed with.

It's curious: believers generally claim to be very far from extremism, because you can always find worse. However, religions teach that it is necessary to extricate oneself from softness and to show more commitment to the faith, in short that it is wrong to indulge in moderation.

*« As long as we accept the principle that religious faith must be respected simply because it is religious faith, it is difficult to deny that respect to the faith of Osama bin Laden and the suicide bombers. The alternative, so obvious that it is useless to stress its urgency, is to abandon the principle of automatic respect for religious faith. This is one reason why I do my utmost to warn people about faith itself, and not just about so-called "extremist" faith. If they are not extremist in itself, the teachings of "moderate" religion are an open invitation to extremism. »*

Richard Dawkins

### **What values should be opposed to barbarism?**

How could the Church, which has organised several crusades against Muslims, condemn offensive wars? Is the miracle by which it preaches tolerance, when it has practised ruthless repression by the Inquisition, called "Do as I say, but not as I have done"? The ethical shortcomings are abysmal. The Church's credit rests on selective amnesia.

The question of the basis of values is crucial. For example, what values should be opposed to slavery? The question arises with regard to certain radical Islamist movements. Since the Catholic Church has, with an expansionist aim, supported slavery in the long term and accompanied the slavers, Christian values are inoperative in this context. It is necessary to appeal to secular values such as human rights.

The foundation of the values of the Western world is less in Christianity, as Christian propaganda claims, than in the values inherited from the Enlightenment and developed since then: human rights, democracy, individual freedom, the rule of law, separation of the state sphere from religious spheres, trust in reason, compulsory schooling for all, gender equality, freedom of expression, etc. More than any other cultural or religious values, these secular values are at the root of the success of Western civilisation.

### **The divine message is confused**

Today, one third of the world's population is connected to Christianity to varying degrees. For a divine intervention as major as the coming of Christ, after 2'000 years of intense efforts including crusades, inquisition, religious wars, colonisation and countless conversions obtained by force, the result is disappointing.

From the point of view of those who believe in the Truth, two thirds of humans remain in ignorance or error. Moreover, Christians are divided, not to mention the degree of faith of each one.

Providence and celestial marketing lack effectiveness. In the cacophony of beliefs, no religion takes the ascendancy and fails to impose itself by the evidence of its divine anchorage.

However, instead of judging the Revelation as a partial failure, I see it rather as a fable of human origin, which explains the impossible establishment of a single faith.

I don't complain about it, because the meaning of life, the same for everyone and dictated by a religion, doesn't attract me much.

### **The problem is not homosexuality, but the Bible**

In 2015, the Bishop of Chur (Switzerland), Vitus Huonder, during a Catholic colloquium in Fulda (Germany), read and commented on this verse:

[Leviticus 20:13] *If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.*

As this contravenes Article 259 of the Swiss Penal Code, which condemns public incitement to crime, a criminal complaint has been lodged. Bishop Huonder was cleared by the Swiss justice system on the grounds that this call for murder should not be interpreted as having to be executed. Put more bluntly, the Bible can be taken more or less seriously, but not really. Respect for people comes first.

The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches has opened the door to the introduction of religious marriage for homosexuals. It thus officially admits that certain verses must be ignored and that the Bible contains inconsistencies. However, from a contradiction, one can infer what one wants to infer. One effect of this is that homosexuality is still a problem among Catholics, whereas it is in the process of being accepted among Protestants. Since we cannot trust the Bible, we can consider that it was written without divine intervention by human beings who were not always inspired.

Homosexuality must be accepted as a natural phenomenon without grounds for discrimination. The problem is that the Bible advocates intolerance. A distance from religion helps to alleviate an illusory moral conflict.

### **The enigma of the beginning**

*An enigma is not solved by a myriad of mysteries deduced from heterogeneous texts self-proclaimed divine revelation.*

Michel Bavaud, La Liberté of 30 September 2016

### *Question or objection*

*How can you support homosexuality when it seriously violates the natural order? This is the kind of wandering that those who have lost the compass of religion end up doing!*

Answer

I do not support homosexuality, but I oppose any discrimination against homosexuals.

What belongs to the natural order? That the slave works for his master? Let the wife be submissive to her husband? Too many iniquities have been justified by the natural morality revisited by the opinion-makers of an era. The only moral reference is that which derives from human rights. Its secularism ensures its independence and universality. Tolerance is a value that allows us to live together in harmony.

### *Question or objection*

*Morality is necessary for the proper functioning of society, and religion is necessary as a basis for morality. So religion is necessary for the proper functioning of society.*

#### Answer

Is it reasonable or wise to use myths to solve society's current moral problems? While religion concerns only believers committed to a particular community, morality concerns all human beings. To claim that ethics is ultimately based on the divine nature of Jesus Christ is to claim that the majority of humanity is devoid of morality.

Man being an individual and social being, he is both selfish and altruistic, defending his own interest and the common good, but neither totally selfish nor totally altruistic. Everyone finds an intermediate position of equilibrium.

In the struggle for survival, cooperation brings benefits and plays as important a role as competition. Conscious of his or her dependence on society, the individual feels obliged to shift some of his or her vital concerns to the common good. This disposition of mind, which is the result of natural selection, is the basis of morality.

Fortunately, morality (in the singular) is not based on religions (in the plural). [See p. 55: *Some shortcomings of the Catholic Church in secular morality*]

### **Sin or the expression of an outdated divine pedagogy**

The Catholic education I received puts a lot of emphasis on sin. Of course, on reflection, the notion of sin also covers acts that one has not done, for example not giving help to someone in need, but the first idea that comes to mind is that of prohibited acts, for example, certain acts of a sexual nature.

The Church encourages self-examination, which would be approved if it were not centred on shortcomings, errors, faults and sins. The notion of sin evokes guilt, punishment and suffering, making it negative, paralysing, unconstructive and destructive.

This way of looking at things does not at all correspond to my life experience that there is much more to be regretted among the things one has not done than among the things one has accomplished. It seems more constructive to me to focus my self-examination on what I could do right, to look to the future rather than the past.

This is also the direction that modern pedagogy has taken, in opposition to the traditional teaching of the Church.

### *Question or objection*

*The bad behaviour of some Christians cannot be blamed on religious institutions. "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water!"*

#### Answer

In many cases, it is the Catholic Church as an institution that has acted wrongly, for example: crusades, inquisition, slavery, clericalism, protection of paedophiles, etc. It is not possible to attribute these abuses to a few



individuals. No less than four popes (Eugene IV, Nicholas V, Calixtus III and Sixtus IV) promulgated papal bulls to encourage the slave trade. [See p. 55: *Some shortcomings of the Catholic Church to secular morality*]

To parody the proverb, "Bath water is too brackish for a baby to survive in it". It is therefore without regret that one can envisage one's life outside the Catholic Church, and thus join the majority of humanity.

### *Question or objection*

*The past cannot be judged according to modern principles. Since the law is not retroactive, human rights cannot be applied to acts that took place before 1789 or even before 1948.*

Answer

If the Church declared itself a human institution, you would be right. But since she claims to be instituted by God, holder of the unchanging Truth, inspired by the Holy Spirit and guided by Providence, why has she so often violated human rights?

That the situation has improved, all right, but it is mainly due to external constraints, and two issues remain:

- Does the current improvement wash away all the faults and wanderings of the past?
- From a human rights perspective, is the current functioning of the Church satisfactory?

The behaviour of the Church in the present, and especially in the past, justifies a great mistrust of the legitimacy of divine right which the Roman institution drapes itself in.

On the other hand, in the history of the Church, we cannot neglect what preceded 1789, otherwise the message of Christ would disappear! To maintain that "the past can be ignored, because only the present counts" is an untenable position.

In fact, we must not bury the past: it is by analysing the mistakes made that we can avoid repeating them in the future.

### **About "Why I left the Catholic Church" by Georges Las Vergnas**

[Mail from an Internet user] Destined for the priesthood from a very young age, Georges Las Vergnas asked himself too many questions to stay there. The result in 1956 was the book "Why I left the Roman Church", published at the author's expense. Georges Las Vergnas died in 1986.

While some democrats or even free thinkers benevolently admit that the universal salvation promised by the Church is at the origin of Human Rights, Georges Las Vergnas demonstrates, through the Scriptures and its dogmas, that the Church, since its origins, has been opposed to all progress, whether moral, political or social.

- [Some quotes from "Why I left the Roman Church"](#), [in French] Georges Las Vergnas

## **Catholicism is not a religion like any other**

In the majority of religions, the clergy plays only a facilitating role, a useful but optional one. On the contrary, in Catholicism, through the sacraments and the Mass, the clergy plays the role of an indispensable intermediary from which it derives (or at least drew) reinforced authority. An authentic Catholic cannot pretend to make a direct arrangement with God.

### *Question or objection*

*I have total confidence in the Church, especially since the arrival of Pope Francis.*

#### Answer

I admit that you declare yourself to be a believer and say that you voluntarily submit to the Church's directives. However, I find it necessary to remain vigilant and to adopt **a principle of revision**: in the event of human rights violations, or for any other reason that offends your conscience, you should be prepared to leave the Church and take control of your life. I find it amazing to commit yourself to remain faithful no matter what happens. The perverse effects of this can be seen in certain sects, i.e. in others, but more difficulty in one's own religion. It seems to me to be presumptuous to claim that the Church is safe from any slippage when its history proves otherwise.

### *Question or objection*

*It is faith that gives meaning to life*

#### Answer

If it is a meaning to be freely constructed according to my conscience, I am willing to enter into the matter. Unfortunately, the reference to "faith" probably manifests a completely different intention. If "a meaning" means THE meaning given by THE dogma, then the meaning of life consists in obeying the Vatican.

*«- Tied up? says the Wolf: so you don't run where you want?*

*- Not always, but what does it matter?*

*- It matters so much, that of all your meals I do not want any kind.»*

[La Fontaine, Fables, The Wolf and the Dog]

We can give life another meaning [see p. 163: *From the stick as a gift to the meaning of life*, philosophical tale], for example to live one's life as fully as possible, blossoming on all levels: physical, emotional, intellectual and social.

### *Question or objection*

*We all need a model, and Christ is an example for me.*

#### Answer

The desire to identify with a hero finds its outlet in literature or cinema. It seems excessive to me to project it into religious terrain. Having unfortunately been taught by zealous preachers, I consider that devoting three years of one's life to preaching is an example not to be followed. An unpleasant aspect of religions is the duty of mission, i.e. pestering others. The world lacks people who actively oppose indoctrinators who campaign for organisations with global aims.

The image of the sheep faithfully following its Shepherd displeases me. Why should a model be religious? For example, *Edmond Kaiser* (1914-2000), founder of "*Terre des hommes*" and "*Sentinelles*", was agnostic and unbeliever. And I have a lot of admiration for *Condorcet* (1743-1794) who fought for the abolition of the death penalty and, on the subject of slavery, defended people of colour. It is a fine example of how the enlightenment of reason manages to influence religious, political and social passions.

*Question or objection*

*Your words flow over me without touching me. I am 100% sure that God exists and loves us.*

Answer

- I have spoken about God's love [see p. 75: *Is God good or paradoxical?*]. This love is further strengthened - if that is possible - by the Church's benevolent care for its members:
  - When the Albigensians tried to live their faith outside the Truth, the Church wisely exterminated them. Praise the Church for protecting us from heresy!
  - When the Church went on the Crusade, it showed us the example of the committed Christian. The courageous act is worth more than a thousand sermons. Praised be the Church and her love!
  - When the Church burned witches, it protected us maternally from Satan who was slyly trying to extend his kingdom. Praised be the Church and her solicitude!

Today contaminated by the secular ideas of the French Revolution, the Church has lost its bite and has become softened. In spite of the change in society, man's love for God does not waver: read more in *Charlie Hebdo* (French satirical newspaper). Rather than placing my trust in a myth, I entrust my opinion to the judgment of history which shows that religions cannot serve as a compass and do not protect against abuses.

Selective indignation is a trait that Christianity shares with other religions. Love is really little in the face of ideological blindness. God is nothing more than the image we have of him.

*Question or objection*

*Many miracles have been observed by credible witnesses, which is indisputable proof that religion speaks the truth.*

Answer

All religions are based on miracles. Following your reasoning, all religions tell the truth. Should we therefore practice all of them?

A miracle is everything that man does not understand and that he explains by divine action. Therefore, God works all the more miracles the greater the ignorance of the believer. It would even seem that miracles are far more widespread than the critical spirit!

Personally, I am looking for a natural explanation first. In case one does not find one, I confess my ignorance without finding it necessary to appeal to the supernatural: lightning does not prove the existence of Zeus.

As the universe is governed solely by natural laws, there has never been a miracle, which excludes the Resurrection.

*Question or objection*

*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*

[Saint John 20:29]

Answer

This is the key to the irrational. From this stems the multiplicity of beliefs. Thus, anything can be justified. But a reasonable way remains open: the Bible allows us to be unbelievers, since St. Thomas allowed himself to do so.

*Question or objection*

*Fear of hell keeps us in the Good Way*

Answer

Fear of being tortured leads to fear of hell. But, from one fear, one can draw different consequences.

For me, the fear of being tortured translates into unconditional support for human rights. Who would want to live in a society governed by brute force and lacking respect for people?

As for the fear of hell, I put it in the same category as the fear of ghosts: the fear of fantasies.

## **Revolution in the Kingdom of Heaven**

*«The doctrine of the chosen people is undoubtedly a product of the tribal form of society.»*

Karl Popper, *Open Society and its enemies*

The Kingdom of Heaven is an idealization of the Hebrew kingdoms. An essential part of heavenly bliss certainly lies in the feeling of feeling among one's own people. As for divine contemplation, it irresistibly evokes the privilege of witnessing the Sun King's (Louis XIV) little rising. But the most important thing is yet to come.

On the one hand, spending eternity there seems to me to be too long; I, who can hardly stand shows lasting more than three hours, am afraid of being terribly, endlessly bored. Perhaps the afterlife is not idyllic.

Secondly, and above all, I deplore the fact that this is a kingdom: to achieve happiness, I absolutely need my intellectual autonomy and freedom of thought. I shall hasten to demand a heavenly democracy. May the King abdicate! Long live the republic!

But will I get permission to create a secular party? The Kingdom of Heaven causes me a lot of trouble ... and loses many of its attractions. Immortality thus seems to me hardly desirable.

*Question or objection*

*The Church makes people feel less guilty than in the past.*

Answer

Man is born guilty and must be redeemed. Well no, I was not born guilty! I refuse the injustice of having to pay for a hypothetical original sin.

Swiss inheritance law provides that an inheritance can be refused even if it consists of debts. Why does divine law not grant this possibility to the heirs of Adam and Eve? Where is justice?

Nowadays, religion is often seen as a method of improving one's well-being. As such, it is imperative that it be adapted to the spiritual needs of those who use it. In this context, authority and official doctrine are troublemakers whose roles should be reduced.

On the one hand, the official Church, defined by its dogmas and catechism, is camped in its conservatism. By dint of having multiplied the proclamations of immutable truths and sacred rules, it has become rigid and voluntarily deprived itself of the means to adapt and evolve. On the other hand, the reformists, from the most moderate to the most radical, form a broad constellation. The distinction between believers and non-believers is insufficient: there are all those, and there are many of them, who believe only partially, very much, moderately or only a little. The faithful choose what pleases them as love, and reject what repels them as subjugation to papal authority. Who still believes that missing Sunday Mass and Eucharist is a mortal sin that condemns you to eternal hell? Many Catholics are committed to emptying sin of its former harshness so that only criminals are threatened with hell, thus opening an unimpeded path to eternal happiness. This is the democratisation of paradise. In doing so, in the name of the principle "*Taking official religious teaching to the letter is fundamentalism*", they refuse to believe that the Church speaks in the name of God. Religious sentiment becomes a technique for betterment. Catholics have found this way to free themselves from traditional Catholicism.

Like myths, religions are constantly being reinterpreted. Their current meaning is therefore not fixed. They adapt to the aspirations of those who place their hopes in them. Thus, references to the Bible in my childhood were different from those of today: the presence of the devil was highlighted, whereas it is now considerably reduced.

The majority of people who call themselves Catholics are in fact only half-Catholics, because, obeying their feelings, they prefer to conceal a large part of the catechetical corpus. The Church is a schizophrenic institution whose ministers only proclaim the most presentable part of the doctrine. Some people have a quarrel with the Church, a quarrel of egocentric lovers: each one demands, with harsh reproaches, that the other change, without questioning herself or thinking about separation. Many move away from the Church in a variety of ways, but without breaking up. Only a few go even further and leave the herd.

The resulting varied religious attitudes differ so much from Roman Catholicism that new denominations should be assigned to them. I have the impression that I am witnessing the emergence of new religions. In one, only the acts count, and the Church plays only an optional role. In another, the religion of Love, sin and hell have been excluded; since almost all of us will be saved, religious practices are optional.

More generally, the power of the Church is being strongly altered. However, the Catholic label remains a popular talisman, as it opens the door to Church services such as weddings and funerals whose social anchoring is appreciated. Catholics, even practising Catholics, are increasingly heterodox. The result is a separation between the cultural and the strictly religious aspects of Christianity, leading to the emergence of a kind of secular religion that is insubordinate to Roman authority.

The official doctrine of the Vatican has not changed, but it is no longer followed. This is why the Church makes people feel less guilty than in the past.

These upheavals show that the evolution of society is transforming religious movements. Catholicism is a human construction on which it is difficult for me to see the breath of the Holy Spirit!

A similar movement can be observed among the Protestants. In the Swiss population in 2014, the number of practising Christians will fall to 18 %, while 57 % declare that they have distanced themselves from the Churches, but without having broken the administrative link.

### *Question or objection*

*How do believers react to criticism of Catholicism?*

Answer

In the first contacts, many people agreed with me, because the majority of Catholics are suffering from seeing their Church not conforming to their convictions. Then, when they realise that I am an atheist, they break off the dialogue and move away... I crossed a red line.

Christians who have distanced themselves from the Church are reluctant to talk about religion. I even have the impression that they have put this subject in the same drawer as the theme of death, labelled "To think about it as late as possible".

Moderate Christians most often react in the form "*For me, Catholicism is not the official doctrine that is slow to be updated, but something else entirely*", the said thing differing greatly from person to person. Christianity really practised is something subjective, rather vaguely formulated, emotionally attached and elusive. Objections are considered irrelevant, and it is therefore impossible to subject it to criticism. No argument can touch the faith of even a moderate believer. I wonder, however, whether what we are talking about can still be called Catholicism or whether the official doctrine is in the process of decay.

As for convinced Christians, they are shocked and say for example "Do you really believe what you are saying?" or "You will change your mind as death approaches". On the substance, I answered this last argument [see p. 139:

*Overcoming the fear of death*]. But I retain here that it is inconceivable for them not to believe, that this pathological situation can only be temporary, and that any sensible man can only return to faith. These Christians find themselves unable to put themselves in the place of the atheist and understand him.

*Question or objection*

*The practice of a spirituality is necessary*

Answer

Spirituality is an attitude that tends to bring us into harmony with ourselves, with others and with the environment. It works on introspection so that it reflects a positive image. It is part of the search for well-being and, if possible, happiness.

Contrary to what Christianity teaches us, belief in God is only one way of practising spirituality. Self-examination seems to be a means of progressing along the path of self-satisfaction, but, measured against religious requirements, it tends to develop feelings of guilt and to reinforce a sense of unease, which shows that religious doctrine is toxic and that we need to change it. I have been abundantly watered down with prayers and examinations of conscience without the slightest feeling of harmony. The notion of sin does not seem to me to be the most relevant one to guide our lives, because there is generally more to be regretted among the actions we have not undertaken than contrition for inappropriate acts. Self-examination should be more constructive and focus on what is desirable to undertake, but this requires a life project.

Mystical divagation is a joyful exercise, but too subjective to be generalised. Happiness obtained by a hallucinogenic way is chimerical. Spirituality is too often based on the activation of emotion, whereas awakening to reason is wise and saving.

In my experience, people who talk to me about spirituality often aim to share their faith. That believers practice the spirituality they want, but that they understand that other paths exist.

Buddhist spirituality does not refer to any deity, which shows that spirituality can be completely secular. By nature, it can only be personal and subjective. When it consists of

- to replace anxieties and negative emotions with the lights of reason,
- to get in tune with oneself to face life and death with serenity [see p. 139: *Overcoming the fear of death*],

then atheism offers a good way to practice a secular meditation that includes philosophical, religious, moral, political and historical concerns. Reflecting on man's place in the universe, drawing a boundary between utopia and reality, working to detach oneself from unfounded beliefs, building a coherent representation of the world and putting harmony in our desires, this is still spirituality, and mine is intense [see p. 147: *Giving coherence to one's life*]. One should not narrow one's field of vision by declaring that spiritualities that take other paths than one's own do not deserve the name spirituality.

For me, the central object of spirituality is the full acceptance that nothing in us is certainly immortal. Given the religious culture in which we are immersed, the work to be done on oneself is gigantic.

## **Prayer**

The prayer consists in entrusting a task to "someone who manages" - a super-contractor of problems - which brings a feeling of relief and appeasement.

However, as the proverb "Help yourself and Heaven will help you" rightly points out, it is more effective to deal with problems yourself by taking appropriate action. In a more secular reformulation, it is necessary to take the time to organise one's life, which also brings - more constructively than prayer - relief and appeasement. And above all, the success rate is better.

### *Question or objection*

*The Christian heritage is part of our identity*

Answer

Switzerland's religious diversity does not allow religion to be used as a factor of identity. As I identify less with Christianity than with secular values such as democracy and human rights, I prefer to anchor my cultural identity in the democratic and secular West that emerged from the Enlightenment. It was also during this period that, as the straitjacket on culture imposed by the Church was loosened, the foundations of the sciences that characterise our Western culture were gradually able to be established in their modern meaning: physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, etc. Freedom of thought allows cultural proliferation and encourages development.

Catholicism, on the other hand, feared industrialization, which removed the worker from the influence of the village priest and exposed him to the socialism of urban environments. In order to preserve its religious identity, the state had a duty to protect itself through clericalism. The population was treated like a herd to be led by the good shepherd.

Those who are close to several fountains can choose the source where to drink. If identity has something to do with a society to which one proudly wishes to belong, then I do not aspire to the Catholic identity. The Christian heritage is part of our history, but certainly not part of my identity.

### *Question or objection*

*Who do you think you are to question two thousand years of teaching and tradition?*

Answer

You are right to eliminate the step of forming an informed personal opinion independently. Having discredited free will, religion can be approached in an ideal way to teach subjugation to the authority of Rome and the unconditional obedience of the good people.

Asceticism

Feeling pleasure is, for the Catholic Church, disturbing, problematic,



suspect, even guilty and reprehensible. Real life being elsewhere, earthly life is despicable and meaningless.

Let us begin today the ethereal life to which hope invites us and let us renounce pleasure and human love. The more arid life is, the less we fear to lose it. Welcome to the discipline of happiness!

*Question or objection*

*You have to follow Tradition!*

Answer

Tradition allows us to participate in the wisdom of our ancestors. If Tradition is a primary value, then Christians were wrong to separate themselves from the Jewish Tradition, and they would be well advised to convert to Judaism.

So far, however, it is only a narrow and short-sighted vision of Tradition. It is a question of rediscovering true Tradition, that of the hunter-gatherers, which we have unfortunately lost, but which palaeontologists could try to reconstitute. Unfortunately, since the role of religion in history gives an image of our ancestors which is far from illustrating their wisdom, there is no guarantee that more distant ancestors were wiser.

Traditions evolve, then get lost. If Tradition bears witness to what is permanent in human beliefs, then it operates only for limited periods of time. Since it is periodically renewed, Tradition is only a mirage. To believe that Tradition represents an immutable truth, it must be declared as an exception and refuse to grasp the teaching of history and science. We already know that civilisations are deadly, but believers find it very difficult to accept that religions are also destined to be replaced sooner or later.

*Question or objection*

*We cannot question the entire cultural and religious heritage we have received.*

Answer

Seeing how the Church reacted to Galileo, Darwin and the contraceptive pill, it is necessary to be much more open-minded to welcome new scientific discoveries.

Religious practices have left us great monuments: the Egyptian pyramids, Greek and Roman temples, Christian cathedrals, theological works, etc... Since it seemed impossible that such gigantic efforts had been made in vain, what has been achieved must necessarily correspond to a reality. Excess impresses and convinces. The more you were a believer and megalomaniac, the more you gave substance to the truth.

On the contrary, as the Encyclopaedists have shown us, the development and the great enrichment of culture during the 18th century are, in their

approach, linked to the marginalisation of religions. Beliefs are obstacles to objective knowledge. From this point of view, the difference with Islamic countries is significant.

The oldest roots are not necessarily the most vigorous. For more than two centuries, our western civilisation has developed by overcoming Judeo-Christianity. Our cultural heritage includes beautiful gems such as human rights, democracy, the common good, the arts, sciences, etc. The latter have introduced into culture the idea of testing the foundations of knowledge for their validity and of rejecting without hesitation all elements that do not resist criticism. At the same time, new hypotheses can be envisaged as avenues to be explored.

In this attitude, the most important thing is to remain demanding but open. Wearing doctrinal glasses reduces the field of vision. For example, in the 19th century, the faithful believer in dogmas would have been unable to conceive the theory of evolution. Worse, he devoted all his strength to fighting it. This is why religion is only indispensable to those who have decided to subordinate everything to their faith. Despite the plethora of denominational values, the world lacks a commitment to universal values. I urge all enlightened minds to support a secular culture.

Beyond religion, there are traditions. Unfortunately, it is in the name of tradition that many African women are excised! Before being accepted and followed, every tradition must pass under the yoke of reason and human rights.

### **A parallel can be drawn between European Catholicism and Royalism**

A large part of the Swiss population claims to be Catholic but does not practise it. In the fact that the label does not correspond to the content, I see an analogy with politics in the United Kingdom: attachment to royalty is popular, but democracy in a modern form is practised. For a large part of the population, Christian religions are empty shells that can be decorative.

### **From the clan to the defence of its community**

The tendency of primitive societies to group themselves into clans continues today by regrouping into communities. The aim is to cultivate feelings of belonging to ethnic, cultural, political or religious communities by drawing a clear boundary between members and others.

This state of mind is cultivated by religions. Loyalty and fidelity to the community are cardinal virtues according to which, if one is born into the community, it would be a betrayal to stray from it. A characteristic of "clan culture" is to restrict individual freedom in favour of "the best interests of the community".

The relationships to be favoured are those between members of the community, the others should be reduced to what is necessary and useful. One example: an inter-religious marriage is a waste to be avoided.

The communitarian spirit tends to lead to a bias: "all human beings are equal, especially those who are like us, while others are a little less".

## **A Catholic who protests is not a Protestant**

I know several Catholics who are very religious, but very critical of the hierarchy, and who oppose their moral conscience to the teaching of the Church.

Even though they are Protestants at heart, it is unthinkable that they should officially become Protestants. Rather than placing themselves in an institutional framework favourable to the expression of their faith, they prefer to grumble against the Catholic Church.

Religious affiliation is made up of irrational attachments.

### *Question or objection*

*The reviews published by this site are outdated and out of date. The Church has changed a lot and is no longer grandpa's Church.*

### *Answer*

This is not true. The Church has changed little in relation to the profound transformations of society, and the small change it has made is essentially the result of the influence of secular modernity. It is society that is no longer grandfather's society.

We are witnessing a kind of rebellion of the Western Catholic population against religious authority. Practised Catholicism has been emptied of its confessional content, retaining only a few social conventions that manifest themselves at baptisms, marriages and funerals. Christians are engaged in passive resistance by avoiding systematic indoctrination. The situation has changed because society has become independent of the Church, but the Church is conservative and has not changed in nature. Unlike the faithful, the Vatican stands by its dogmas. It was political movements claiming human rights that demanded the abandonment of clericalism and an end to the protection of paedophiles. Whoever declares "Now it's not like before" insinuates that the Church must be forgiven and given merits that should go to those who have resisted religious indoctrination.

If the situation has improved, the credit does not go to the Church, but to the secularisation of society.

The rapid evolution of Western culture is akin to a revolution in which religious foundations are gradually being replaced by secular ones: the call for human rights instead of references to religious morality, freedom and democracy instead of obedience to civil and religious authorities, gender equality instead of traditional submission to the father of the family, and so on. In a way, the events of May 1968 are a reactivation of the ideals of the 1789 revolution.

I am talking about the way the Church has poisoned the West for more than 1400 years, including in our country quite recently. I was wounded by the religious indoctrination of the public schools I attended, because they had set themselves the mission of saving Catholicism through their students. To say that criticism of the Church is out of place and out of date means that I criticize too late or that I was born too early. Excuse me for talking about my life rather than that of my children. It is a way of hiding the responsibility of the Church by making criticism a guilt, it is kicking it out

of the way in order to avoid looking at the ugly history of the Church and becoming aware of the discredit that goes with it.

A common attitude is that, since the situation has improved significantly, we can now be satisfied with it. I don't think so. On the one hand, it means recognising that there have been periods when the Church could not be trusted, and this may happen again in the future. On the other hand, it means "from now on, things will get better," which is only a hope. By keeping closer to the facts, the situation has simply become less unacceptable, and improvement must be continued. The past cannot be blithely erased for the sole reason that it presents the face of the Church's discredit. A short memory provides little support for a biased ideology.

In order to prove that the Church is behaving well, I am asking for a probationary period which, in view of 1400 years of slippage, can only be long. Let it start today to fully respect human rights: equality between men and women in the Church, non-discrimination of homosexuals, complete separation of Church and State, abolition of the death penalty. There is still a long way to go. In the meantime, I cannot give credit to the Church: as long as it supports archaisms, it remains anachronistic.

*Question or objection*

*In your words flows the venom of settling scores*

Answer

In my regard, it is not exaggerated to speak of brainwashing [see p. 13: *Clericalism, never again!*] and of privation of religious freedom [see p. 20: *Clericalism and secularism in the canton of Fribourg*].

This is why your approach to the issue has the effect of reversing roles and making the Church a victim, which is contrary to the truth. I do not wish to take revenge, but to make the wrongs caused visible, and if possible to have them recognised. I could, indeed, have adopted another attitude, such as obeying the injunction given to me "Shut your mouth and let those who think for you act", but I prefer to militate for a legal framework to be put in place to make it impossible for these dark times to return..

*Question or objection*

*You exaggerate, you are too excessive!*

Answer

Often, the writer approaches things indirectly, through allegories, leaving the reader a large part of the interpretation. The writer suggests, makes the reader dream, which allows the reader to find complicity. I am not a writer, but a professor of mathematics, and I try to express myself as directly as possible, by being explicit and frontal, by not diluting what I say, by avoiding ambiguity and innuendoes, without any other literary pretension than that of being clear, without concern to please, but keeping intact the desire to convince.

He who seeks the truth cannot speak as flatteringly as he who seeks to please. I address those who are sensitive to reason and who put arguments before emotions and emotional movements. If my words are less honeyed than those of charlatans in religious matters, I have nothing to apologise for.

While I am only an individual with a modest social role, the exaggerations and excesses of the Church are global, have lasted for centuries and have not died out today. I join with you in strongly condemning exaggerations and excesses.

### **Beyond the lack of love for the Churches**

In commenting on the de-Christianisation of our society, the lack of love for the Christian Churches is often mentioned. In my opinion, the disenchantment is much deeper.

In order to be taken into consideration, an ideology or religion must satisfy at least the following three conditions: it must agree with the established facts, be coherent and respect human rights. What about Christianity?

For the need to be in tune with the real world, the Bible, especially Genesis, is in profound contradiction with history, be it that of the universe, of the earth, of life and of man.

For the requirement of internal coherence, Christianity contains major contradictions. For example, damnation and Hell are incompatible with the precept of forgiving one's enemies. Indeed, God punishes with eternal, and therefore disproportionate, punishment. Above all, he asks to forgive his enemies, but does not forgive everyone. Other inconsistencies can be pointed out, such as the homophobic verse "Leviticus 20:13".

For the third requirement, if the Catholic Church says it accepts human rights, it does not respect their spirit. For example, it denies women equality extended to priestly functions.

Thus, the reasons for rejecting Christianity go far beyond a simple dislike for institutions and touch the very heart of the faith.

### **Resisting religious indoctrination**

- not only in Muslim circles,
- not only abroad,
- not only against extremists on all sides,
- not only to that of sects,

but also at home, in opposition to Christianity!

## **Religious education**

The method of religious teaching consists in dramatizing existence: the eye of God watching us, sin, the Last Judgement, hell, eternal life, etc. The aim is to enclose the mind in a system of thought that gives the Church power over your conscience.

Wouldn't it be better to play down the drama of existence? It is better to develop creativity and critical thinking rather than fidelity to a religion or tradition. This principle also applies to the teaching of philosophy.

## **Justice**

To have the courage to oppose injustice in the name of dignity and solidarity, one does not need to believe in deities. Feeling part of the human community can be enough.

## **The sacred**

The sacred is a feeling, halfway between self-censorship and taboo, a component of which is a paralysing fear. Religious institutions cultivate it in order to numb the critical spirit, reinforce docility, promote subjugation and avoid any questioning.

## **Morality**

In assessing human behaviour, after emphasising selfishness, we tend to underestimate altruism. The cohesion of hunter-gatherer family clans was essential to their survival. The traits of moral behaviour have been selected by evolution and have imposed themselves.

As man is both an individual and a social being, morality was acquired to adapt the individual to society and increase his chances of survival.

Morality is much older than the Church, and the Church cannot claim to be its repository.

An institution which, throughout its history, has flouted human rights cannot be "the" moral benchmark. Progress has not come from a movement of the Church itself, but has been snatched from it by the demands of modernity.

### **Some shortcomings of the Catholic Church in secular morality**

The Church vigorously combats relativism, the thesis that all religions are equal. In order to do so, it should have been superior to other religions as an institution. Unfortunately, this was not the case. We will see that the Church has never respected human rights, neither in the past nor today.

It is said that history is written by victors. I would rather say that it is rewritten by each power for the people under its influence. The role of the Church has often been presented with partisan benevolence. Believers, generally not very curious, are so one-sided that they are ready to excuse all turpitudes. All religions are exposed to slip-ups because, rather than cultivating moderation, they incite people to do more and more, in an endless bidding war, and develop a propensity for hegemony. God himself cannot modify the past, but the believer, by his ability to revisit history to his own advantage, possesses a power that is infinitely superior to him!

### **The Church is not a credible moral point of reference**

In order to reign over the conscience of individuals, religions have arrogated to themselves the monopoly of morality. On the contrary, let us demand that religions subordinate themselves to moral rules. It is therefore necessary to recall that morality demands the rejection of all religion

- that in the past supported slavery,
- that conducted offensive religious wars with moral justification;
- that imposed the dogma by force, for instance,
  - the crusade against the Albigensians, who were pacifist and unarmed, which constitutes a characterized genocide;
  - the Inquisition; by decreeing that other beliefs are in error, would monotheisms by their very nature be exclusionary? The expression "Jewish deicide" has certainly made the bed of anti-Semitism;

- the witch hunt burned between 50,000 and 100,000 victims between the 15th and the 17th century; all these pyres illuminate with intense fires the last sentence of the Lord's Prayer: "Deliver us from Evil";
- clericalism, accompanied by its moral justification: until 1965, the Vatican did not recognise religious freedom; in the moral order supported by the Church until the 20th century, respect for other beliefs is worth less than the duty of mission, including through coercion; one cannot call "the accident of history" a trait of character that lasted 1,600 years! The power of the Church manifests itself through the exercise of social control and its defence takes precedence over the freedom of individuals; this is a Catholic value that we could do without;
- that has engaged in the trade of indulgences; if the pope has the power to grant indulgences, why doesn't he strive, every day and free of charge, to save as many people as possible?
- that, in order to develop its missions of evangelisation, encouraged colonialism;
- that, until 1965, condemned human rights;
- whose leadership is undemocratic and authoritarian,
- that recognises the death penalty as acceptable;
- that does not respect equality between men and women in its institutions<sup>7</sup>,
- which has shown a lack of respect for unmarried mothers and their "illegitimate" children<sup>8</sup>, from the 11th (Gregorian reform) to the 20th century;
- that is opposed to individual freedoms in the areas of sexuality, marriage<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>, homosexuality<sup>11</sup>;
- that puts the avoidance of scandal before the protection of children from sexual abuse. That there are paedophile priests is shocking, but no more so than paedophile teachers. The Church's error lies elsewhere: while teachers are immediately denounced to the courts and placed away from children, paedophile priests are protected by their hierarchy, simply displaced, and can continue their crimes elsewhere. The Vatican guidelines imposed silence under penalty of excommunication. In the moral order defended by Catholicism, the honour

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7 In the past, the myth of Eve's creation from Adam's rib [Genesis 2:21-22] served as a theological justification for gender inequality. Having partially revised its judgement, the Church today proclaims equality in the dignity of men and women while at the same time prohibiting women's access to the priesthood, with the argument: "It is not the fault of the Church if Jesus was a man". By a similar reasoning, one could refuse the priesthood to black people because Jesus was not black. Another defensive tactic consists in covering the woman with praise by reminding her that "Mary is the mother of God", but without granting her enough dignity to be able to assume the priesthood.

8 Ireland: [Nearly 800 baby skeletons discovered in a former convent](#) [in French]. The interpretation that "ultra-Catholicism is bad but Catholicism is good" runs counter to logic: in fact, the situation improves when Catholicism diminishes in favour of human rights.

9 Remarriage is forbidden.

10 Requiring priests to be celibate means requiring them to renounce a spouse, children and family life in order to have the right to exercise a profession. It is an abuse of power contrary to human rights.

11 The closed attitude of the Church towards homosexuality certainly contributes to homophobia, which is a form of discrimination.



of the Church comes before the integrity of children. If the situation has changed recently, it is not as a result of ethical awareness, but because civil society has forced it to act better.

The behaviours listed above are not imputable to bad Christians, but to the Church itself which justifies them by the application of the following two moral rules:

- a) In order to avoid a greater evil, one has the right to do harm;
- b) Anything that harms the Church is an evil of enormous gravity.

While rule a) is universal, rule b) is partisan and divides humanity into two camps. The evil deeds of the Church are thus morally legitimised.

Catholicism distils a toxic mixture: good feelings for the faithful and the will to power for the Church. The power to set the rules is an enviable position: this way you can avoid being caught at fault. The monopoly of moral conscience protects against bad conscience.

The Catholic Church appears to be such a human institution that no credit can be given to its claim to be inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. Anyone who believes in the divine origin of a moral code with such inadequacies bears witness to the indoctrination he has undergone.

Religions must submit to the secular ethics that derive from human rights.

### **When the Church preached persecution**

The Church of the first centuries rejected all forms of violence and forbade the first Christians to bear arms. Under Emperor Constantine (270 - 337), when a Christian had killed an enemy in battle, he had to do penance to erase his sin.

But the Gospels are ambiguous and contradictory, so they are open to interpretation: in addition to the calls for forgiveness, there is this:

*«But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.» [Luke 19:27]*

In 1095, Pope Urban II launched the first crusade against peoples who represented no threat, an offensive war, pure aggression. Failing to raise mountains, faith can recruit armies. Rest assured, the turnaround was justified and the action morally noble: a few centuries earlier, Saint Augustine (354 - 430), father of the Church, had sanctified the "just persecution" by adding a new directive to the doctrine: "The worshippers of false gods must be exterminated for love".

*«So if we want to be right, let us say that the persecution of the ungodly against the Church of Christ is unjust, while there is justice in the persecution of the ungodly by the Church of Jesus Christ. (...) The Church persecutes in order to remove error; the ungodly in order to precipitate it. Finally, the Church persecutes her enemies and pursues them until she has reached and defeated them in their pride and vanity, in order to make them enjoy the benefit of the truth; the ungodly persecute by returning evil for good, and while we have only their eternal salvation in view, they seek to take away our portion of happiness on earth. They breathe so much murder that they take their own lives, when they cannot take the lives of others. The Church, in her charity, works to deliver them from perdition in order to preserve them from death; they, in their rage,*

*seek every means to make us perish, and to satisfy their need for cruelty, they kill themselves, as if not to lose the right they believe they have to kill men.»*

Will it be said that the Church evolved under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

The conversion of the people to Catholicism was only rarely voluntary, because the people would have to take the religion of the prince, and the prince obeyed the interests of his office. This is how Christianity became established in the West for a long time.

Religions have had a profound impact on history. Is it for the good of humanity? This remains to be proven. The desire to propagate absolute truth is a generator of oppression. Can it be established that the wars of religion<sup>12</sup> have claimed fewer victims than all the crimes of villainy?

### **When the Church supported slavery**

In the original Christian Church, according to the doctrine of St. Paul, slavery was accepted as a natural and legitimate practice, but a Christian was not to hold another Christian in slavery. Later, the Church condemned the slavery of the American Indians. But its attitude towards the slave trade, initially organised by the Portuguese from 1441 onwards, was less glorious: a series of papal bulls approved and encouraged it:

- 1442 *Illius qui* (Eugene IV) ratifies the conquests of Prince Henry the navigator in Africa.
- 1452 *Dum diversas* (Nicholas V) gave the King of Portugal full latitude to subject the Saracens, pagans and other non-believers, or even reduce them to perpetual slavery.
- 1455 *Romanus Pontifex* (Nicholas V) encourages Henry the Navigator to impose Christianity, possibly by force, on the "Saracens and other infidels"; he counts on the progress of the conquests to obtain conversions, gives his approval to the commercial monopoly of the Portuguese in Africa, and hopes that the natural populations will soon be converted to Christianity.
- 1456 *Inter cætera* (Calixtus III = Alfonso Borgia) states that the administration of the new Portuguese possessions and their interests must be entrusted to the order of Christ, the brotherhood of Henry the Navigator; it authorises the enslavement of the infidels, i.e. legitimises the slavery of the blacks.
- 1481 *Aeterni regis* (Sixtus IV) grants the conquered lands in Africa to the King of Portugal.
- 1493 *Inter caetera* (Alexander VI = Rodrigo Borgia) divided the lands of the New World, both known and yet to be discovered, between Spain and Portugal. The Pope granted these two kingdoms full authority and power over the new territories, with the mission of encouraging the natives to embrace the Catholic religion. This bull marked the beginning of Spanish colonisation in America.

A theological justification for slavery has been put forward, in which the children of Canaan<sup>13</sup> are likened to black people:

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12 In opposition to the religious attitude, Richard Dawkins said: "I cannot imagine that a war was fought in the name of atheism. (...) Who would want to go to war in the name of an absence of belief?"

13 Canaan is the son of Ham, and Ham is the son of Noah.

[Genesis 9:25-27] *He said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers." He also said, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem<sup>14</sup>! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend Japheth's<sup>15</sup> territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth."*

The French theologian Bellon de Saint-Quentin, in his Dissertation on the slave trade and commerce of the Negroes of 1740, writes:

*"It is lawful to have slaves and to use them; this possession and this service are neither contrary to natural law, nor to the divine written law, nor even to the law of the Gospel".*

Dare we claim that the Church is carrying out a divine plan?

Serfdom is a different status, but treated in a similar way. In spite of the campaign led by *Voltaire*, the last serfs in France were those of the abbey of Saint-Claude (Jura) who remained in their condition until the French Revolution of 1789.

Neither the passage of time nor the whitewashing of consciences, the fruit of Church propaganda, can excuse the past.

### **Whoever has encouraged moral regression cannot hold the truth**

[Matthew 12:33] *«Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.»*

Insofar as it does not present a partisan vision of the facts, history turns a scathing denial to the Church's claim to be the depositary of immutable truth.

One line of defence calls for a divine pedagogy that would be progressive to adapt the moral rules to the human possibilities of the time. On the one hand, this concession makes divine intervention unnecessary and makes it possible to understand the Church as a completely human institution. On the other hand, examples showing that the Church has officially preached moral regressions prove the vacuity of the argument.

A second line of defence uses the distinction between Christianity and the Church. However, since the highest authorities of the Church encouraged slavery in order to broaden Christianity, this argument cannot be invoked.

Conclusion: The Church cannot be trusted to regulate the ethics and moral conduct of society.

My aim is not to stigmatise the past, but to speak out against those who want to apply an archaic ideology today and perpetuate it.

According to Stanley Milgram, *"A significant proportion of the population will do what they are told to do [...] as long as they feel that the order comes from a legitimate authority"*. Today, by ceasing en masse to obey Roman directives, Western Catholics are placing their religious authorities in a situation of illegitimacy.

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14 Shem is the ancestor of the Hebrews.

15 Japheth is the ancestor of the Gentiles.

## **Modernity appeared with the end of the trusteeship exercised by the religious authorities**

In Thomism, ethics is based on natural law, and natural law is referred to the natural order of things: each individual, king and slave alike, has a defined place in society. Is it not in the natural order of things that the master orders and the slave obeys? Since in nature we find diverse and contradictory situations, nature is not allowed to show what is natural, but it is the doctrinal authority which decrees natural law.

In the Enlightenment, it was the philosophers who denounced the Inquisition and called for the abolition of slavery. Voltaire, Diderot and Condorcet condemned the idea that one man could belong to another, that slavery was a natural status and stressed that men were equal:

*Mortals are equal, it is not birth  
it is the only virtue that makes the difference.* [Voltaire]

The proclamation of human rights was made in opposition to the Church. Placing Christianity at the source of human rights is a dishonest recuperation.

The specificities of Western culture developed from the 18th century onwards with modernity, characterised by a certain rationalism, insubordination to religious authority and the opening up of a secular space. The ideal of a monolithic society having been abandoned, the shell is broken, and great horizons open up for exploration. The natural sciences have freed themselves from the tutelage of the Holy See and have been able to flourish. A new civilization is emerging with a radically new operating principle: whereas a monarchy of divine right postulates that all wills must bend to the king's will and that the primordial qualities of subjects are obedience and fidelity, democracy values independence of spirit, including in religious matters, and assumes that every citizen can express its own opinions.

The founding values are secular, such as human rights, the separation of church and state, and the pursuit of the common good as a secular political project that respects minorities. Its values are universal and its influence is global. Individuals can escape social constraints and become independent from the community from which they come, which could be called "spiritual democracy". Society has become tolerant of freedom of expression, which is evidence of a revolution in mentalities. It is to this articulation of history that I locate our most significant cultural roots, even if others, older ones, can be taken into consideration<sup>16</sup>.

All these developments were acquired against the will of the Church. In return, the Church has, to a certain extent, humanised itself through contact with reason. It had to condemn slavery and renounce the monarchy of divine right and the coronation of kings. It resisted until 1965 before accepting religious freedom<sup>17</sup> and Human Rights. But this recognition of principle is not actually realised. Even today, men and women do not have the same rights and are assigned different functions. Faced with their marital status, people are treated unequally depending on whether they are single, cohabiting, married, separated, divorced or remarried. Homosexuals are discriminated against. However, paedophilia, though verbally condemned, has so far been virtually tolerated

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16 It would be improper to describe as "Judeo-Christian" a civilisation whose most significant foundations have only been laid for about 200 years. Judeo-Christianity provided the space-time framework, but not the substance!

17 Denying religious freedom served to justify clericalism.

provided it is discreet. In a pluralistic society, tradition is no longer sufficient to establish such moral conceptions. A church based on obedience to authority should remain confined to a bygone past. If the two cultural references, Judeo-Christian on the one hand and modern on the other, coexist in our society, they can only coexist in an individual at the cost of a certain dissociative identity disorder.

A radical change in the ethical order is underway. All discriminatory ethics must be placed in the archives of history. Freedom and equality are fundamental values that must have their place among the sources of ethics. Unfortunately, the civilising influence of secular values is difficult to recognise, as they may overshadow religious values. If we think that it is desirable for world peace and the good of the people that the Islamic world de-Islamise somewhat, we must consider that the secularisation and de-Christianisation of our Western society, far from being a tragedy, represents a definite progress.

Education occupies a strategic position. Is its function to pass on religious propaganda and indoctrinate, or to develop intellectual autonomy and critical thinking? The Church has defended its influence. Thus, in Valais, through clericalism, in the form of the state religion, teaching remained under the control of the Catholic Church until 1973 !<sup>18</sup>

### **Against relativism**

Even today, the facts still belie those who claim that religion develops attention to others. Let us quote Pius IX, *Nostis et Nobiscum*:

*"Let Our poor recall the teaching of Christ Himself that they should not be sad at their condition, since their very poverty makes lighter their journey to salvation, provided that they bear their need with patience and are poor not alone in possessions, but in spirit too".*

For the Church, the submission of believers to the established order is more important than their well-being.

The main effect of credulity that stimulates the fear of God's judgement is not to make one altruistic, but obedient. In the USA, it is the most religious parties that carry out the most unfavourable policies for the poor. In comparison with Sweden, which is known for its lack of faith, it can be said that social democracy does much better than practised Christianity. It is better to alleviate social injustice than to develop Christian charity.

Moreover, among Catholics, there is a moral bias that makes them pay more attention to sexuality than to social responsibility. While a Protestant shopkeeper wonders whether he has been honest with his customers and employees, the Catholic boss makes his self-examination of the impure thoughts he had when he met his secretary. This has not been without consequences for the business world: the Protestant regions have seen a much greater economic development.

To varying degrees, religions tend to discriminate against women. While some religious movements are open and tolerant, others have a disturbing attitude: some Muslim groups even call for the application of Sharia law. Religions have appropriated morality in order to strengthen their power.

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<sup>18</sup> See p. 13: *Clericalism, never again! (testimony)*

Each one develops it in its own way, sometimes smelly. The various religious morals are far from being equivalent. A reference ethics, universal, is necessary.

### **Universal morality is based on the secular ethic of human rights.**

The secular morality of human rights has progressed in society and tends to supplant religious morality. Thus, since Vatican II, the Church has had to recognise religious freedom, partially renounce clericalism and, very recently, stop protecting paedophile priests.

Faith-inspired universalism, e.g. "Catholic" means "universal", is a conquering and imperialist vision of a faith. Moralizing intimidation must be resisted.

On the contrary, the universalism of human rights is a freely accepted consensus based on reason. Human rights are not natural rights in the sense of Aristotle, but the product of an enlightened decision: no one wants a world ruled by force and violence.

Since religious morality is only a particularism, only the secular ethics that derive from human rights can be the foundation of morality and become the measure of all religious morality. By this yardstick, taking gender equality or respect for homosexuals as an example, Catholicism ranks higher than Islam, but lower than European Protestantism. Since 1948, the values defined by the universal proclamation of human rights<sup>19</sup> transcend<sup>20</sup> the diversity of religions.

## **Belief, the believer**

The believer holds it to be true that he lives according to God's will, whereas he endorses a ready-to-think established by very human ideologues. It is said that faith moves mountains, but it must be pointed out that these are mountains of human rights deliberately evacuated.

Belief would not be a problem if it were limited to the dictionary definition. Unfortunately, the believer feels held in consciousness of being missionary. The believer holds it to be true that he lives according to God's will, whereas he endorses a ready-to-think established by very human ideologues. It is said that faith moves mountains, but it must be pointed out that these are mountains of human rights deliberately evacuated.

Belief would not be a problem if it were limited to the dictionary definition. Unfortunately, the believer feels held in consciousness of being missionary. It commits the state to supporting certain religious communities, which leads to unequal treatment and exposes non-believers to one-sided and unwanted religious publicity.

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19 Elements of traditional morality that are not mentioned in Human Rights lose their obligatory character and come under individual freedom.

20 Transcendence consists in the emergence of a new phenomenon that exists to a higher level.

## Ecclesiastical tax

Ecclesiastical tax is a remnant of clericalism. The State does not have to interfere in the religious life of citizens by organising the financing of the Church.

### Ecclesiastical (or parish) tax in French-speaking Switzerland Leaving the Church

*In Switzerland, 31,772 people left the Catholic Church in 2019. This is a quarter more than in 2018, while in 2018, also a quarter more departures were observed compared to 2017.*

*The trend is similar in the Protestant Churches in Switzerland. The number of departures increased by 18 % in 2019.*

Source: Swiss Institute for Pastoral Sociology (SPI)

In the cantons of Fribourg, Jura and Bern, one can be exempted from Church tax on leaving the Church.

- [In the canton of Fribourg, how do you get out of the Roman Catholic Church?](#) [in French]
  - [Questions about leaving the Church in the canton of Fribourg](#) [in French]
- [Leaving the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Fribourg](#) [in French]
- [In the canton of Jura \(Switzerland\), leaving a recognised Church](#) [in French]
- [In the Canton of Bern, leaving a national Church](#) [in French]

In the cantons of Valais and Vaud, one can, after leaving the Church, ask for the reimbursement of the ecclesiastical part of the tax.

- [In the canton of Valais, leaving a recognised Church](#) [in French]
- [In the canton of Vaud, leaving a recognised Church](#) [in French]

In the cantons of Geneva (GE) and Neuchâtel (NE), Church and state are separate. There is no Church tax.

The cantons of NE and GE have achieved a clear separation between state and Church. All religious communities are subject to private law, although three of them (the Evangelical Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Christian Catholic Church) are considered "institutions of public interest" in NE, and are "recognised as public" in GE.

### No to church tax!

The state must welcome all citizens equally, without making differences, whether they are Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, of no religion or others. Consequently, it cannot take sides with particular communities, for example by claiming to be Christian or declaring that certain religions are entitled to a privileged status. It must demonstrate, including in public education, its neutrality towards beliefs. I advocate that Fribourg should follow the example of the cantons of Geneva and

Neuchâtel by achieving a complete separation of Church and State, which implies, among other things, that the State should abolish the privileges granted to certain religious communities such as

- the participation of the State in the levying of church taxes
- the maintenance of a proportion of Catholic or Reformed religious education in public education;
- the financial participation of the State in the maintenance of the Roman Catholic theological faculty, etc.

*Let us eliminate the residues of clericalism* (see p. 20). The state has no business interfering in the religious life of its citizens. As a political institution representing all citizens, the Council of State has no business parading in the Corpus Christi procession. I refuse to allow any of my tax money to be used to support Vatican propaganda. Westerners cannot recommend to Muslim countries that they "*do not mix politics and religion*" without doing so at home. We want to be characterised by more open and universal values than the cult of credulity in a communitarian framework, namely human rights, democracy, respect for minorities, tolerance and secularism. This is precisely the Western culture to be defended.



# Ecology

Ecological awareness will only be able to progress once mankind has truly understood and accepted that nature is not limited to our environment, but that we are an integral part of it. Humanity is a conscious part of the universe.

## Ecology and Judeo-Christianity

*«Fill the earth and subdue it», and other biblical injunctions.*

### Giving humanity a future on earth

We have a problem: water pollution, soil pollution, lack of drinking water, lack of water for irrigation, deforestation, soil impoverishment, near depletion of non-renewable resources such as coal, oil and metals, increase of CO<sub>2</sub>, global warming, extinction of animal species, etc. We cannot be proud of the traces we are leaving: plastic particles and chemicals are everywhere, in the oceans, on land and in the air.

In order to make the future look less bleak, principles based on sustainability must prevail.

### What does the Bible say?

To solve an existential problem of humanity, it is natural to have recourse to a wisdom reputed to be eternal.

*«God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.» [Genesis 1:28]*

Man is placed outside nature and above nature. The incentive for growth expressed here can be expressed in various ways, including that of liberal capitalism. The injunction to exploit natural resources does not come with limits to be respected. This Judeo-Christian conception has contributed to bringing our civilisation to an impasse.

In a text published by the prestigious journal *Science* and entitled [The Historical roots of our ecological crisis](#), *Lynn White* shows that the roots of our problems are "largely religious" and that the ecological crisis we are experiencing will deepen until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no other reason for existence than to be at the service of mankind.

Would God be a bad counsellor? A more plausible interpretation can be given: the Bible is only a human construction without divine input. It is necessary to distance oneself from it in order to build a better future.

Nature is neither external nor subordinate to us, because man is part of nature. To destroy nature is to destroy ourselves.

# Power and authority

Religion in search of power

## Authority: the parable of the magic pact

How can power and authority be established on an unshakeable foundation? The following parable explains how this can be achieved.

### A decision without certainty

One of our distant ancestors, the chief of a hunter-gatherer clan, is thinking about tomorrow. In order for his people to have food, he must take effective action. What to do? Go hunting on the western plain? Go fishing in the southern river? Go picking in the northern forest. Whatever his choice, there is no guarantee of results. He cannot rely on any certainty, but he is forced to make a decision. This decision is informed by reason, since each option has a good chance of being profitable for him. His experience will help him to make, if not "the right" choice, at least a sensible and defensible choice in front of his clan.

### The magic pact

He also knows that he is taking an unavoidable risk for which he bears a heavy responsibility. If he comes home empty-handed, his authority will be challenged: several members of the clan are just waiting for a good opportunity to take his place as chief. This is why he will seek the support of his relative who is the clan shaman.

Tacitly and unconsciously, by defending their interests over the generations, they converge towards the idea<sup>21</sup> of attributing the decision to a deity, which relieves them of all responsibility. Their official role is to make the gods favourable. Popular discontent is preventively deflected. In case of failure, prayers and offerings to the spirits are made. This religious practice is decreed indispensable for the survival of the clan and is therefore obligatory.

The status of chief is solemnly declared "of divine right". One function of the shaman, who has become a priest, is, as the representative of the gods, to legitimise the power in place, which in return gives a privileged place to the official religion. Opposing the divine will is even more serious than insubordination to the chief and demands exemplary punishment. The chief's concession - sharing power with the priest - is largely compensated by the strengthening of their common authority.

The successes of the powerful and the rich have thus become manifestations of the benevolence of the heavens. By orienting the discourse towards the divine will, earthly power can no longer be challenged. Here lies the real magic, the effectiveness of which can be verified in many societies.

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21 A tacit agreement whose realisation is diluted over several generations may be unconscious on the time scale of individuals.

## A red thread of history

At the time of his coronation, the King of France, in order to be considered God's lieutenant on earth and to base his legitimacy on divine law, had to swear to "*expel from the lands under his jurisdiction all heretics denounced by the Church*".

Reciprocally, the Pope granted the King of France the right to appoint candidates to the major benefits - bishoprics, abbeys - who were then invested by the Pope (Concordat of Bologna, 1516, between Leo X and Francis I). The king thus acquired power over the Church, which reinforced the convergence of interests.

As for the fate of the people, according to the principle "*The religion of the ruler was to dictate the religion of those ruled*", the faith of the subjects had to be aligned with that of the prince. In a context where the will of the greats was impervious to tolerance, while propaganda was radicalised, the religious wars of the 16th century could develop in a climate of unlimited hatred. Paradise is exclusively reserved for those who fight Error with determination. There is no salvation for the lukewarm. Killing is not enough: it is necessary to gut, enucleate, emasculate, drown, in short, to show contempt for the other, since the latter is not human, but demonic.

Pope Pius V unreservedly encouraged the massacre of Protestants. In 1569, he wrote to Catherine de Medici:

*«Full of confidence, you must, in agreement with your son the most Christian King, use all your strength to avenge the insults done to Almighty God and His servants, by treating the rebels with just severity. It is only in this way that, having inflicted on them the punishment that their crimes deserve, the Lord will allow himself to be convinced. Spare no means, no effort, that these execrable men may perish in the torments due to them.»*

Pius V was beatified and canonised. That he became a Catholic model undermines the moral authority of the Papacy and does not make one want to be faithful to the Church!

In order to organise an efficient administration, it is wise to adopt the moral principle that "one must sometimes, for a greater good, accept to do evil". Abuse of authority is justified by the best interest. Naturally, "only authority has the competence to decide what is best". And if, in order to contain a challenge, recourse to repression should prove necessary, reference to the divine will can easily justify its rigour.

For example, the Church can explain that it is in no way responsible for the excesses of the Inquisition, since it limited itself to pointing out where the doctrinal error nested. As for the execution of sentences, it can wash its hands of them because the sentences were the responsibility of the secular arm.

God is very useful in justifying privileges. So it was with the royalty of divine right. Who would dare challenge royal authority when it was willed and instituted by God himself?

*"Let us never cease to hold the people under the sceptre of tyrants; let us protect the thrones, they will protect the Church, and despotism, child of this union, will maintain our rights in the world" [i.e. the privileges of the nobility].*  
The Marquis de Sade, in *The new Justine*

In the Church-State couple, there is a truly magical dimension, with infinite explanatory power.

Only a few characters have had the courage to raise objections to the incitement to defend an unequivocal truth. Thus Sebastian Castellion (16th century) who said:

*"Killing a man is not defending a doctrine, it is killing a man".*

### **The sacred**

God is a universal panacea, because He is the answer to all questions. He is also a source of power for those who speak in His name. The definition of what is sacred, as well as the establishment of a hierarchy in the sacred, is strongly influenced by the interests of the elites and the type of political regime in place.

In the notion of the sacred, the idea that it is the Authority, designated by the clan or society, that sets the foundations of the way of thinking without any possibility of questioning by individuals, is imposed. It is not God, but its representatives who decree divine law, codify it and compel conformity. In pre-republican or non-secular societies, the sacred and authority are intimately linked. This is why any reference to the sacred must be contrasted with the question "*To what authority is it referring? Which power does it tend to reinforce?*"

## About the "Islam and Society Swiss Centre", Fribourg

### Subsidising the lobbies of religious communities? There are alternatives.

A few years ago, the Faculty of Theology, associated with the bishopric and the conservative party, reigned over Fribourg society. It was the golden age of true values: children went to Mass in columns in pairs under the guidance of the teacher, and women knew how to stay in their place.

Society has evolved by distancing itself from religions. No longer do all citizens campaign for religious truth. We have finally begun to follow the message brought by the Enlightenment.

But believers persist: in order to solve society's problems, the state needs to strengthen the role of religious communities: a stronger Faculty of Theology, more religious ideologues, more imams, and so on.

The danger: young people are becoming radicalised on the internet. The remedy: the creation of a "Swiss Centre for Islam and Society" within the Catholic Faculty of Theology, partly financed by public funds. There is no connection, unless it is a question of hiding the excess of religion by more religion. For the Faculty of Theology, it is above all a good opportunity to expand by taking advantage of federal subsidies. The Christian Democratic Party has skilfully manoeuvred.

After having justified the Vatican's hold on even the bedrooms of Catholics, theologians today preach the coalition of believers of all stripes, but well-meaning and subsidised. "*Believers of all countries, unite!*" An alliance against whom? We are not told, but homosexuals, agnostics and atheists do not feel part of it. Are they worse citizens than others?

Why is the state so keen to put all citizens in labelled lockers: Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, etc.? However, other attitudes are not a problem and are more conducive to civil peace, such as remaining ambiguous, refusing to commit oneself under a flag, declaring oneself to be indifferent or "without religion". But, contrary to the public interest, the majority of politicians distribute privileges and proclaim "Faith is good. Certain religious beliefs, in their non-extremist forms, should be supported". Thus, some concessions are granted to other religious communities so that Catholics can continue to enjoy traditional benefits.

The Faculty of Theology at the University of Fribourg was established at a time when Catholicism was the state religion. This foundation is now obsolete. If all the privileges acquired were to be perpetuated, we would still be under the royalty of divine right. Let us put an end to the misappropriation of the State in favour of religious communities! The State does not have to share the militant vision of believers of all stripes and must remain neutral in religious matters. This implies a complete separation of Church and State. In order not to favour the hold of religions on society, framework conditions must be put in place that discourage the partition of society into separate religious communities. The state avoids encouraging, supporting or formalising certain religious communities, distributing privileges and funding. Thus, the Faculty of Theology, and with it the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society, should be a private foundation, completely outside the state and without public funding. Support for various religious communities fragments society and amplifies sources of conflict. It is better to apply a policy of distancing which is called secularism.

Naturally, the university should maintain a Department of Religious Sciences, free from any confessional affiliation, i.e. completely secular.

The University has an important role to play in religious issues, but especially in respect for democracy and human rights. However, the Catholic Church first condemned religious freedom and human rights. Dating from the Council Vatican II, the rehabilitation is recent. In matters of gender equality and the defence of the sexual integrity of children, the Church only partially and rather weakly applies human rights. As the Faculty of Theology is not in the best position to give lessons, it would be better to leave such teaching to other faculties.

### **For a Swiss Centre for Human Rights**

The question of the basis of values is crucial. For example, what values should be opposed to slavery? The question arises with regard to certain radical Islamist movements. Since the Catholic Church has, with an expansionist aim, supported slavery in the long term and accompanied the slavers, Christian values are inoperative in this context. It is necessary to appeal to secular values such as human rights. The foundation of the values of the Western world is less in Christianity, as Christian propaganda claims, than in the values inherited from the Enlightenment and developed since then: human rights, democracy, individual freedom, separation of the state sphere from religious spheres, etc.

The State must invest in the development of the fundamental values that allow us to live together in harmony. Why not create a Swiss Centre for Human Rights? Switzerland could claim to play a leading role in this area. To carry out certain activities, such as imam for example, the state should require adequate further training.

It is at all school levels that human rights education should be given, insisting that all religions and ideologies are obliged to submit to it, without restriction or avoidance.

## Testimonials

The state has greatly reduced the social control it used to exert so that individuals are subject to religion, especially in education. Nowadays, it is the family and relatives who are in the front line, using their influence and, at times, exerting pressure in a shameless manner.

### Resisting pressure from relatives in religious matters:

*practising religion, baptising children, getting married in the Church, having a religious funeral ceremony, etc.*

### Guideline

In an adult relationship, you should not accept an asymmetrical relationship in which a third party imposes conduct on you. Demand a dialogue between equals, as well as balanced relationships that respect the other's freedom.

*Mail, extract made anonymous*

*Can one "hide" one's exit from the Church from one's relatives, for example one's parents?*

Answer

It is necessary to inform any person who might - if necessary - be called upon to organise your funeral. Depending on your family situation, this may be your parents, spouse, siblings, children or other close relatives. To be on the safe side, several people should be informed. It is possible to leave others in the dark.

By expressing their expectations, those among your family and friends who are believers may put some pressure on you, but "hiding" your exit from the Church from them is a regrettable attitude. Like them, you have the right to affirm your convictions, to defend your religious freedom, to not conform to their wishes in every respect, to hold your head high and to behave like an adult. Think that if they learn that you are hiding the truth from them, their disappointment will be compounded by your mistrust. Letting those around you believe the opposite of your last wishes can be, at your death, a source of family turmoil.

*Mail, extract made anonymous*

*My wife doesn't accept that I don't go to Church any more.*

*At the moment, I am experiencing a terrible inner struggle. A bit of history: At the time, I was an atheist and I met a very religious girl. She was quite open-minded and I didn't see any "problem". She often went to meetings in Church, and I became attached to her, so I decided to go with her one evening, because I wanted to see what was going on there. As time went by, I went more and more with her. At first for her - maybe even to please her - and then I "fell into it". Within a few months I converted, proposed to her and we got married.*

*To tell the truth, I didn't agree with everything, and the more I read the Bible, the more doubtful I became. After a few months, my doubts having taken over, I realised that the bible is full of contradictions, that the three monotheistic religions stem from the megalomaniac side of the Jews (I am not racist). Recently, I announced to my wife that I didn't want to go there any more. And there, the drama!*

*Today I am in inner conflict, because I see that she is sad, and I am also struggling with my guilt and fears. It is confusion. I was much happier before religion! No matter what people say, all religion is a sect, because free will is not real. Do you have any advice? Testimonials?*

Answer

The priority is to protect you. Remind your wife that you have long shown understanding for her spirituality and that, in return, you expect a gesture from her in the form of tolerance towards you. Try to reach some sort of agreement with her. Explain that

- Your commitment to her is primarily conjugal and, in religious matters, you have tried to go a long way with her, out of love for her.
- Unfortunately, religious conviction has not reached you - faith cannot be decided, you cannot continue your life by pretending; it cannot force your freedom of conscience.
- In short, you sincerely tried, but to no avail. But that doesn't take anything away from the love you have for her.

For your part, in confirmation of the commitments made at the time of marriage, you respect her faith and religious practice and you accept that your children (future, possible) be brought up in your wife's religion. In return, you ask her to respect your religious freedom, to understand that you are following a different religious path from her, and to accept that you no longer go to Church. Tolerance has to work both ways, and she has to give up pressuring you.

Do not try to take her away from her faith. As long as she wishes to remain connected to her community, the chances of success are very low, and the only result would be to escalate the conflict. Tell her that as long as she will not pressure you, you will not criticize her religion. When she puts pressure on you to go with her, explain your position again: without faith, going to church would be an empty, insincere and even hypocritical process.

Generally speaking, in this kind of approach, one should only move forward with very clear positions that can be defended firmly. If your position is presented as a definitive state, the situation should stabilise fairly quickly, at least that is to be hoped. While waiting for the storm to pass, you have to be patient. On the other hand, if you suggest that you may still change your mind, the pressure may become relentless.

So you have to hold firmly to the announced line otherwise, from what I can guess, you are phagocytised and you lose your freedom. Don't go back to Church, not even once, ever!

Some people accept to be submissive. Freedom is not given to us: it is a territory that must be maintained and, if necessary, reclaimed.



## **Testimonies and contributions - Denouncing the exploitation of guilt**

I feel concerned by any testimony about intensive indoctrination accompanied by the exploitation of feelings of guilt.

In my personal experience, I have been plagued from within by moral conflicts in which I felt trapped. I had to find a way out. I started by developing my critical mind, which resulted in a multitude of thoughts that I put down in writing, often a simple sentence whose themes, inspired by daily life, jump from one subject to another. The solution was within me - it was to be coherent with oneself - but it still had to be freed from the social straitjacket by resisting traditional ways of thinking about life.

Much later, I grouped these "thoughts" by theme, and I realised that they formed a fairly coherent whole, provided I filled in the gaps and composed linking texts. And there I felt the immense satisfaction of having been able to express myself, of having left the zone of obscure and confused feelings, of having resolved my inner conflicts and of finally feeling peace.

I don't feel empowered to give advice. However, I encourage you to express yourself, because writing clarifies thought and forces coherence. We can start by listing the facts, what happened.

Crushed by the weight of the Authority, victims often feel incompetent. This feeling must be overcome by the need to survive and ensure, if not personal happiness, at least a decent life in which our needs are recognised without being distorted by "duties" that express a little too much of the will of the social environment.

It is much more difficult to describe the feelings and moral conflicts in which one has been locked up, in short to justify the pain felt, but it is worth talking, expressing oneself, describing how religion cultivates and exploits guilt to better enslave. We must point out the poison and let it out.

Such writings may remain private, but to have them intended for readers gives them a welcome motivation to support a demanding task. As testimonies have a reconstructive value, I gladly collect them. If you are tempted by the adventure [["Contact" link](#)], they will initially remain private. Only at a later stage could they, if you wish, be published on my site, for example by making the author anonymous, all the more so as they could be of service to many other people in a similar situation.

### **Testimony of a de-baptized person**

Indoctrination is also carried out through religious instruction in denominational institutions.

- [How I became an unbeliever](#) [in French], Jean-Jacques Bonnin, Angoulême, France

## SECOND PART

### Resisting religious faith

*For the happiness of those who believe in pure spirits, everything that is unverifiable is compatible with reason*

#### Prologue

Many feel that they are not very indoctrinated because, as social pressure has diminished, they do not feel pressured. However, they perceive life through myths such as paradise and hell, original sin, the existence of a Saviour, the Last Judgement, etc. They do not feel constrained. This is precisely what I call "being indoctrinated". Before we complain that others are too indoctrinated, it would be good to take an introspective look at the indoctrination that our culture has imbued us with.

Rather than adhering, by chance of birth, to a voluminous catalogue of traditional beliefs, reason, according to the principle of parsimony, asks us to adopt only a minimal set of necessary rules.

#### God

"Do you believe in God?" is not the most fundamental question. In the first place, it is not the first one, because, if our death is definitive, its interest is limited. Then, in the event that our soul would benefit from some form of survival, a God who would not judge us and distribute neither reward nor punishment would not worry us.

Faith is built on the belief that a "Supreme Judge" weighs our actions, rewards or punishes us. On earth, a father who would say "*If you are wise, I will always love you; but if you disobey, I will reject you and you will go and live with the evil ogre who makes you suffer*" would be qualified as unworthy. By transforming a tale of this kind into a divine decree, religions indulge in moral blackmail. He who believes himself immortal lives between the anxiety of Judgement and the hope of recompense. "God's love" is a formula that expresses the hope of the clemency of the Judgement, but Hell remains a possible and anguishing way out. Religion powerfully dramatizes life and death, but I do not believe in the God of the carrot and the stick.

The fundamental question is therefore "*Am I immortal?*". According to established knowledge, the answer is clearly no, because the death of any living being is total and definitive. From then on, with or without faith in God, the threat of Judgement vanishes.

In what image of God can we trust? Is evil a by-product of freedom?

## **Is God good or paradoxical?**

### **The divine nature**

Between the God of the Christians, the Supreme Being of the philosophers and the fictitious mythological being, there is room for an infinity of possible representations. Reducing God<sup>22</sup> to an alternative - existence or non-existence - is an oversimplification designed to hide the underlying question of divine nature. However, before giving God a face, it is impossible to ignore the existence of misfortune and evil, otherwise one would fall into an intellectual swindle.

### **Misfortunes, suffering, arbitrariness, imperfections and cracks**

Why does God create people who are handicapped from birth?

Why did God create diseases?

Why does God allow suffering to develop beyond biological utility?

Why are some people condemned to misfortune for the rest of their lives?

Why did God create natural disasters?

Why did God create drug addiction?

Why does God subject some people more than others to the temptation of drugs?

In short, the existence of a single God proves that Good begets Evil, but it is difficult to accept that misfortunes, imperfections and arbitrariness stem from a deliberate divine will.

### **In what image of God do we trust?**

Man is reluctant to consider malevolence in God and his works. Believers primarily consider a God of love. However, the existence of evil, unhappiness and suffering must be taken into account, and, if we hold fast to the omnipotence of God, we cannot avoid adding at least one of the following corrective options as an attenuation:

- [*the God of Justice*] God is good, but in his circle of friends, he only accepts those who show great courage. Life on earth is a kind of exam that one must pass to be saved. He scrupulously records, in his infinite memory, all our good deeds and all our turpitudes in order to draw up a balance sheet; those who fail the exam will go to hell where they will be severely punished for eternity; "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:16), but then, why did they create them so weak?
- [*the mysterious and dark God*] God is good, but the ways of the Lord are impenetrable; believing in God requires the acceptance of many mysteries; faith is blind trust; the existence of evil is described as a "mystery"; not only is the explanation hollow, but contradictions must be allowed to become part of the world view ;

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22 The subject is temporarily restricted to monotheisms.

- [*the sorrowful God*] Jesus Christ suffered on the cross; God is good, but it is useful for man to suffer, because pain is atonement and is part of the path to salvation; merit is simmering in suffering transformed into an offering;
- [*the temporarily arbitrary God*] Some humans are entitled to a fairy-tale life, while others are only entitled to permanent unhappiness, but these are only temporary trifles, because there is a catch-up in the afterlife;
- [*the God who delegates*] God has created beneficent beings - angels - evil beings - demons - and beings that can be influenced - humans - whom he allows to act. He will take over later, after the Last Judgement, and in the meantime, he observes the spectacle that he has created for his greater glory;
- [*the indifferent God*] God is almighty, but he is neither good nor bad, he does not care about the humans he has abandoned to their fate, he hovers above all these details;
- [*the God of holes*] God is invoked to make up for a missing explanation. God is the artisan of all that we do not understand;
- [*the Great Planner*] decides when and where the next earthquake, Ebola epidemic, accident to a loved one, etc. will occur. I don't see how this kind of belief would comfort me;
- [*the tyrannical God*] If you are a good Christian, God will reward you with eternal happiness; if not, you will be punished with endless torment. While emotional blackmail is considered unworthy of a mother, the divine way of intimidation is much worse;
- [*the mythical God*] God does not exist, or He is only an impersonal and blind force.

On the one hand, the list is not exhaustive. On the other hand, since these different faces of God are not all incompatible with each other, it is possible to combine several explanations. We realise that it is not simply a question of knowing whether a Creator exists, but of understanding what lies behind the word "God".

To make his choice, the human being can only analyse the coherence of the discourse and its adequacy to reality. Since no one can pronounce on the divine nature, the reasonable and prudent man should at the very least reserve his commitment and declare himself an agnostic.

### **Is evil a by-product of freedom?**

From a more personal point of view, only the last explanation [the mythical God] makes sense, because the others do not fit our need for justice. At the game of life, I was very lucky to be born in Switzerland and in good health. Others, less fortunate, were born handicapped and disabled in a slum in Bangladesh. How can we be satisfied with the Christian explanation that evil is a by-product of freedom?

- For the evils which depend on man and which are explained by the temptations to which he is constantly exposed, it is doubtful whether a thoughtful Father would have voluntarily created serious dangers so that his child would have the choice to succumb to them. For one who knows in advance what is going to happen, this would seem more like a trap than a

gesture of love. And if man is not as good as he should be, it is because he was created as such.

- Not all disasters, diseases and hardships are man-made. Nature is often unjust, sometimes even cruel. To explain the misfortunes that afflict humanity, the myth of original sin describes a collective and trans-generational punishment, which is an unacceptable justification. Would God have deliberately wanted a child to be born a quadriplegic? To conceive an infinitely good Being, whose manifestations are visibly arbitrary, is an offence to justice and reason.

The aim is not to accuse God, but to test the coherence or inconsistency of the teaching of the Churches in order to assess the degree of trust that can be placed in Christian religions. One insufficiency of monotheisms is to make God the creator of the worst as well as the best. How to reconcile belief in an infinitely good God with horrors that do not come from man? Are natural disasters divine punishment? Have the victims been informed of the reasons for their disgrace?

### **Without imperfection, perfection is incomplete.**

God felt the inadequacy of his perfection. To break his boredom, he decided to create an imperfect world.

The result was worthy of the Almighty. Since then, each day has brought its share of surprises and astonishment which can be told in the manner of the daily news: a war here, an earthquake there, an attack, an epidemic, and so on.

Thus, God has overcome the dissatisfaction of his perfection and is no longer bored ... unless the preceding account is so absurd that the only way out is to admit that such a God cannot exist.

Here is a reasoning by the absurd: let us show that the adoption of the hypothesis "The Creator is just and good" leads to a contradiction, which proves that the hypothesis is false. Let us take the example of homosexuality.

On the one hand, the Creator endows certain human beings with an attraction for people of the same sex. This attraction can be so strong that it is irrepressible. On the other hand, the Bible severely condemns such behaviour and punishes the protagonists with eternal fire. The contradiction is blatant.

We deduce that it is false that "The Creator is just and good". The Bible's description of God must be rejected.

Logic teaches us that, in a system that contains a contradiction, we can "deduce" anything. This is what happens with religions.

### **Is God good to the living?**

When a human being is struck by a misfortune, is it a divine punishment? Is God trying to test his faith? Does he attribute a redemptive suffering to him? Does he make him suffer the consequences of original sin?

Being born in a refugee camp is a punishment, but what is the fault? Unrelated to their merits, some people are condemned to suffering whose only limit is death. Thus it happens that earthly hell precedes future, hypothetical, and probably imaginary sins. Should these trials be accepted as the consequence of Adam and Eve's sin, a just and measured punishment? The idea of a paradoxical God who plays dice, for example to distribute cruel, disabling or fatal diseases to children, offends common sense.

About the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, Voltaire writes:

*One hundred unfortunate miles that the earth devours,  
which, bloody, torn and throbbing still  
buried under their roofs, end without help  
in the horror of torments their lamentable days  
with the half-formed cries of their exhaling voices  
to the frightening spectacle of their hot ashes.  
Would you say these are the salutary laws  
of a benefactor who did everything by his choice?*

One hecatomb follows another in an endless succession: the tsunami of 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean killed more than 250,000 people; the earthquake of 12 January 2010 devastated Port-au-Prince, Haiti, killing 300,000 people. Since "for God, nothing is impossible", we can wager that the record will be broken.

Some see them as divine punishments that strike only sinners who have deserved their fate, while others, in their irrational desire to see it as love, go so far as to claim that the Lord puts those he loves the most to the test more harshly!

When everything is going well, it is reassuring to think that Someone is in charge. But whether misfortune occurs, frustration requires a guilty party. Since it cannot be God who follows impenetrable plans, it is we who are guilty. And that's where religion comes in!

This is how Jean d'Isieu, in *Signed Catherine* published in 1960, puts the following words in the mouth of a priest who addresses a young girl permanently confined to a wheelchair:

*«Like a nun in her convent, Catherine, you are there in your armchair. This is the cloister that the Lord Himself chose for you.»*

To share responsibilities, telling a fable is not enough. Misfortune strikes people every day, and religion celebrates divine love. Actions are certainly divine, while words are only debatable. To be credible, an explanatory theory must not be contradicted by the facts observed. What is apparent is unjust, but the believer imagines that God makes the necessary corrections in the invisible. In short, one should believe the opposite of what one sees.

To punish out of love, convincing justifications must be presented, and the diversity of religions shows that the information has been insufficient. If, on the one hand, the arbitrariness of the Almighty grants no protection or rights to the weakest and, on the other hand, religious doctrine forbids us to attribute indifference to Him, then religion gives us such a contradictory and aberrant representation of Heaven that it can only be erroneous. It is an inconsistent and immature thought to

believe in a God who is full of goodness, but who does not respect human rights. What is more important: the "truth" of the doctrine or the truthfulness of the facts?

The polytheistic conceptions of Antiquity were in better agreement with daily experience: the gods of Olympus were capricious and distributed blessings and misfortunes according to their changing moods; translating into a more modern vocabulary, we would say "at the whim of natural laws".

It is claimed that faith is a support in life's difficulties, but I have often observed the opposite: when bereavement or illness occurs, the believer may rebel against what he feels is injustice, while the non-believer shows a better acceptance of natural laws.

When parents, having lived in accordance with their religion, lose a child, they ask: "*Why is this happening to us? What have we done to the good Lord to deserve this?*". Belief in a Creator generates the artificial problem of divine, sometimes hostile mood swings.

On the contrary, in a non-religious vision, events are not the result of the will of a demiurge and do not obey any plan. The question of why is objectively irrelevant and is reduced to an expression of uneasiness. It seems less dramatic to me to simply think "**I was unlucky. But since chance had neither intention nor memory, I was not personally targeted. No evil spirit pursues me, just as no angel protects me. Man is not pursued by the curse of original sin. Since the future is neither predetermined nor written down, everything remains open, including happiness.**"

In an even more constructive attitude, we can ask ourselves "How can we overcome this difficulty? What are the objectives to aim for?", which questions, not the meaning of life, but the meaning I want to give to my life. It would be an opportunity to grow up and behave as a responsible adult.

In the category "He who loves well punishes well", the Church has understood the heavenly message well. Thus Joan of Arc was judged by a bishop, condemned for heresy and burned alive, then, 25 years later, cleared and rehabilitated, and finally canonised in the 20th century. The suffering granted is a sign of love since it is redemptive.

### **Will God be good in the afterlife?**

[Matthew 5:29] *«If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.»*

[Mark 9:43] *«And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.»*

What a nice atmosphere, full of warmth, kindness and love! And let him be reproved who would see it as implacable, vengeful and barbaric justice.

In the French proverb "He who loves well punishes well", I see less the expression of wisdom than the search for an unfounded justification for dubious practices.

*«I propose to compare:*

- *Bluebeard: I give you all the keys to the castle and you can open all the doors except this one. If you disobey, it is death.*

- *Yahweh: I give you all the trees of Eden, and you can taste all the fruit of them, except this one. If you disobey, it is death.»*

Michel Bavaud, [Little reflections of an old man](#) [in French]

I understand that the work of the theologians is difficult: they are faced with a mountain of absurdities with the task of reducing them or, at least, getting around them.

## Is God paradoxical?

### Original sin

*«**Garden of Eden: Yehudic irresponsibility.** This Yehvah places in the same place the man, the woman, the two forbidden trees and a tempting snake. Either he is stupid or unconscious, or he voluntarily wishes an accident to happen. What about parents who would leave two children alone in a garden with petrol, matches and a little cousin who is a pyromaniac? Let's admit that some parents are humanly fallible or unconscious. Do we wonder about the seriousness of a god who is humanly fallible or unconscious? If Yehvah, supposedly omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent is neither fallible nor unconscious, it is because in this case it is perverse and criminal. He does everything possible to ensure that mathematically a fatal accident occurs in order to grant himself the right to punish in addition.»*

Yaacov Levy

*«**Conceptual and moral aberration.** The woman is accused of original "sin" for having tasted the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. De facto, she did not know good and evil before tasting the fruit. Ipso facto she was unaware of evil and could do no harm. In extenso she is innocent because she was not conscious. Certainly responsible but not guilty. Once again the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent god of mercy unjustly punishes an act that he himself has provoked. By whom will Yehvah be punished for wilful endangerment and iniquity? Because in any court of law, Eve would be innocent and Yehvah condemned.»*

Yaacov Levy

To put the Redemption in perspective, we must not lose sight of the fact that it follows the curse of original sin by which the descendants of Adam and Eve were condemned even before they were born. Redemption, the essential effect<sup>23</sup> of which is a lifting of the punishment for certain persons, resembles less an act of love than a partial correction of an injustice.

If the Revelation has followed a plan, the plan has failed. God would have manifested himself 2'000 years ago. Since man (Homo sapiens) has existed for about 300,000 years, isn't it strange that God allowed mankind to macerate in the mist for 298,000 years? Waiting so long before launching a rescue operation does not correspond at all to the idea we have of a rescuer or a saviour. Did his infinite love fail?

Moreover, as the multiplicity of religions testifies, the proclamation of the Good Word has been botched. While the Coca-Cola brand is universally known and everyone knows how to distinguish the original from the copy, why hasn't God been able to do the same? Assuming that we know what

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<sup>23</sup> I am not talking here about the means used, which escapes all logic.



"true faith"<sup>24</sup> is, the abandonment of so many humans to error, ignorance or uncertainty tends to discredit the thesis of the divine origin of Revelation. God would judge us on the basis of "rules of the game" of which only a minority of human beings have been educated. Some were born further from Paradise than others, and the sense of justice is hard to find. We may feel that we are being forced to participate in an unfair game.

The emergence of Christianity possesses the characteristics and imperfections of a human creation. On a global scale, no divine message emerges from the background, except to consider that God is voiceless or that He invites us to a guessing game. The objection cannot be lifted by speaking out against religious relativism. Moreover, among Christians, only a minority of the elect will be saved<sup>25</sup>. Would Redemption be limited to a narrow lifeboat, reserved for the privileged few?

Another implausibility lies in this: God cannot ask men to forgive their enemies and, in defiance of consistency, threaten poor sinners with the worst punishments<sup>26</sup>. Can one trust a Being who seems to act according to the principle "Do as I say, but not as I do"?

*«First of all, one must disobey. This is the first duty when order is threatening and cannot be explained.»*

Maeterlinck, Ariadne and Bluebeard

The Church's explanation, its recourse to mysteries, is content to throw a wordy veil over incompatibilities that discredit doctrine. It is also to be devoid of any critical spirit to the point of renouncing the use of reason.

Logic dictates that any theory containing an internal contradiction can prove any assertion, as well as the opposite assertion. Such a theory is not an acceptable rational explanation; it must be corrected or abandoned. The serenity of the heart cannot be established in the confusion of the mind. That God is ineffable is acceptable, but He cannot be absurd. The believer certainly sees this as a problem, but, in all inconsistency, it does not call his convictions into question. Faith is blind trust, which shows that this feeling ignores reason. To accept to live in contradictions is to condemn oneself to perpetual malaise. To trust in spite of everything in a very real God, one must close one's eyes so as not to see the misery, cover one's ears so as not to hear the complaints, and pray a lot, on both knees, to the point of dizziness!

### **God is a myth or an impersonal force**

Man is endowed with reason. Unfortunately, this does not mean that he is governed by reason because, more often than not, he puts his intelligence at the service of his passions. However, despite age-old speculative efforts, theologians have failed in their attempts to present a coherent doctrine and have had to resort to the expedient of the mysteries, showing that faith is a motley amalgam, an inconsistent tinkering, of which no mind has been able to put the pieces together. To assert that evil is the fruit of freedom is clearly incongruous. Even if God is only indirectly responsible, it would be foolish to maintain that He has nothing to do with it. It is unreasonable to place the ultimate responsibility on a spiritual being, endowed with goodness and love, who would

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24 See p. 92: *On the likelihood that a given religion is true.*

25 See p. 103: *What minimises loss, Christianity or atheism?*

26 See p. 139: *Overcoming the fear of death* under the heading "The Christian understanding of divine justice".

follow an indecipherable plan. Instead of overcoming the paradoxes of traditional religions by putting common sense on the back burner and taking refuge in the irrational, I prefer to abandon the above-mentioned religions. God - the supreme vanity of man who believes himself to be "chosen" - is neither good nor paradoxical, because he is mythical. The probability that "true faith" will be nested in one of the monotheisms is slim. God is good as Pegasus is winged.



God is good as Pegasus is winged

Knowing that our brain has a natural propensity to create myths and to make them evolve, we can enrich our culture while having the distance to consider myths for what they are: wonderful, but fictitious stories. God is only the mirror of human concerns. This is why it varies from one culture to another and evolves throughout history.

At first glance, the existence of a Creator is a secondary issue. It is more important for us to know whether it is true that we would be eternal and that our post-mortem happiness would be conditioned by our religious practice. It is therefore the God who judges, rewards and punishes whose existence I seriously doubt.

To explain inconsistencies, disasters, misfortunes, injustices and arbitrariness, the impersonal chance of nature is more satisfying to the mind. Without intention, nature, which mixes goodness and cruelty, has many qualities. She designed us and we are a conscious part of the universe. We can therefore respect and love it as our mother and as ourselves.

As we have not found any supernatural being to whom we should shoulder part of our responsibilities, it is therefore up to us men to assume the consequences of our decisions and the course of our history.

God would have sent us a Saviour 2,000 years ago. However, the human being, more precisely Homo sapiens, has existed for about 300,000 years. Isn't it strange that God let mankind macerate in ignorance and error for 298,000 years? Waiting so long before launching a rescue operation does not correspond to the idea we have of a Saviour. Lack of readiness to help does not fit in well with the Church's teaching on God's love and makes the story of redemption dubious and not very credible.

As the Christian episode represents less than 0.7 % of the history of humanity, it is far from being representative of spirituality.

By transforming myths into truths, religious doctrines are undrinkable. Believing is neither a matter of course, nor a duty, nor a necessity. I can legitimately, as a matter of conscience, refuse the religion that has been infused into me.

## Paradise

In Allah's Paradise, every faithful believer will have 72 virgins to deflower. As there is no reason why the God of Christians should be less generous than that of Muslims, jealousy is out of the question. This is nothing to rejoice about because, spread over time, it is infinitely less than one virgin per billion centuries. What frustrations in perspective!

While referring to a hope disconnected from all reality, believers affirm that their faith is necessary for them. This posture is rich in teachings, not about God, but about the springs of human psychology: it is expectation that arouses faith, renamed Hope. In the religion that sells us dreams and mirages, there is something that irresistibly evokes *Don Quixote*.

## The menace of hell

Some avatars of the French adage "*He who loves well punishes well*" are flamboyant.

Churches praise God's love without insisting as much as in the past on the intimidation that accompanies it:

[Matthew 13:41-42] *"The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Believers hold their breath, but find it right that God resorts to eternal torments. One would have expected a justice more concerned with proportionality, for on earth, even inflicted by the worst sadists, every punishment has an end. Moreover, justice that respects human rights does not resort to punitive torture.

What a striking contrast with the message of forgiveness:

[Matthew 5:44] *"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"*.

Unfortunately, any approach that falls under the principle "Do as I say, but not as I do" is unconvincing.

This is an internal contradiction whose enormity seriously discredits the Bible and clearly shows the logical impossibility that the Christian doctrine of the Last Judgement is Truth.

More circumspection should be shown in the face of preconceived ideas. We know that many imaginary and absurd stories are circulating. Hell is one of them, and undrinkable moreover. The appetite for faith must be restrained by the need for coherence.

- [Does hell emit or absorb heat?](#) [in French]

## Christianity

In religious thought, rites have magical effects. But to avoid criticism, it is prudent to locate supernatural manifestations in a beyond that is beyond any possible verification. The same applies to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

I too have supernatural powers. An archangel appeared to me in a dream-vision and gave me the title of "Organiser of the Elected Officials' Agenda". I can arrange a private and intimate meeting with the person you desire as soon as you and the chosen person are both in the afterlife. This service is offered to you free of charge, but I will give you my bank address in case you wish to express your gratitude.

Obviously, that Jesus Christ is a divine person is a myth, certainly functional since it leads to subjugation and obedience. Seeing God in him is a revelation: that of the effect of indoctrination. Measured by reason, Christian teaching is as extravagant as that of a Brahmin who enumerates the epithets of Shiva.

# The truth

Since religion is a cultural matter, reference to the truth is merely propaganda rhetoric.

We must escape the totalitarianism of those to whom "the truth" has been revealed.

## Absolute truth has the major defect of being multiple

In the physical world, truth is either a proven fact or, in a theory, it is a proposition that is derived from axioms.

Whereas science establishes only provisional truths at the cost of gigantic efforts, religious truth is absolute, immutable and is simply given to us to believe. What a contrast! Truth-seekers therefore have a great advantage in avoiding science and entering religion.

*In the religious field*

*The truth is given. It only asks to be listened to. We have immediate and unimpeded access to it.*

In the scientific field

The search for truth is a difficult and demanding task. The study of science gives us a lesson in modesty.

*In the religious field*

*The only truth is the word of God. For example, for the Catholic Church: "God is the Author of Sacred Scripture. The divinely revealed truth contained and presented in the books of Sacred Scripture has been recorded there under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit". It is enough to believe in it.*

*The Catholic Church adds dogmas, including that of pontifical infallibility. Believing in it is obligatory. In the end, truth is defined by obedience to the Vatican, which proclaims the truth.*

In the scientific field

What is true is what is verifiable. There is no science without verification: other teams have to redo the experiments, observations, and reasoning independently. Authority, however prestigious it may be, is not an acceptable argument. On the contrary, providing evidence that contradicts a famous character can bring glory.

*In the religious field*

*By its divine origin, the truth is absolute and immutable. Any attempt at change is heresy, unless it is a reform led by the supreme authority. The "absolute truth" is part of the rhetoric of indoctrination which serves to establish the authority of the Church. Dogmas are the expression of the successive crises of authority emanating from the caste of bishops.*

In the scientific field

### Principle of revision

Truths must be constantly updated to reflect new data. It follows that truth is evolutionary. A scientific model reflects the knowledge of the moment; it is the best possible model, without being able to judge the perfection of its

veracity. For example, the astronomical model of Ptolemy, with the Earth at the centre of the world and the circular motion of the stars, was scientific before anything better was found. Science is not capable of presenting the ultimate truth.

In a few rare fields, mainly in mathematics and logic, definitive truths can be issued. But these disciplines, limited to the study of the coherence of intellectual constructions, do not affirm anything about the real world.

#### *In the religious field*

*Together with the duty of mission, absolute truth is a slippery slope. Since it is absolute, it cannot be contradicted or refused. Out of moral duty and love of neighbour, everything must be done to convert all men to the true faith. Short is the distance between Truth and intolerance. History has kept painful stigmata of it. We can mention the crusades, the killing of heretics, clericalism, etc. Whoever passionately seeks the Truth finds conflict. Theology is a sister of the Inquisition: one decrees the truth, the other sanctions those who deviate from it. When it begins with a capital T, Truth can be murderous. In the search for the truth, the greatest danger is to believe you have found it.*

*From the 18th century onwards, with the separation of Church and State, public life gradually freed itself from absolute truth and its depositary, ecclesiastical authority. If the particularity of Catholicism is to hold the Truth, then this privilege must be shared with the claims of all other religions. In the secular space, truth has become relative, more realistic and more modest. Enlightened by reason, it is also more human, more civilised and more tolerant.*

#### In the scientific field

The exposition of facts and rational argumentation are enough to convince. Truth has a force of its own that makes it impose itself. The use of force is senseless. Imposing the truth does not belong to truth, but to dictatorship.

#### *In the religious field*

##### ***Demarcation criterion [as per Karl Popper]***

*Ideologies are irrefutable. Thanks to their flexibility of interpretation and their relative independence from reality, there is no argument that can deny them, nor any fact that can contradict them. But competing ideologies have the same qualities, which shows their partly arbitrary character. This is how they can be distinguished from the sciences.*

*For this reason, the alliance between a religion and a philosophy can be very comfortable. This is how Thomism was able to establish itself as an impregnable fortress in which the follower is convinced that he knows the essentials of everything. For example, a Thomist does not believe in God - that would be falling into the heresy of the Faithful - but knows that God exists, as St Thomas Aquinas demonstrated. What pride! Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) already said that "The Church's error is to believe that there is only one way to philosophize: that of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas".*

*Even today, neo-Thomism remains the official philosophy of the Church. But if, as it should be, the true philosopher has the modesty to admit that he has*

*few definitive answers to the questions he asks himself, then the neo-Thomist is nothing but a presumptuous and pretentious. Lack of modesty is called arrogance.*

In the scientific field

**Demarcation criterion** [as per Karl Popper]

Truths are refutable (or falsifiable), i.e. they are subject to being contradicted by observations or experiments. For example, Michelson-Morley's experiments led Einstein to completely overturn Newton's classical physics.

Truth and error are not symmetrical. A single experiment is enough to prove that a theory is false. On the other hand, repeated experiments do not show that a theory is true, but only that the theory is, according to current knowledge, compatible with the facts. In the end, it is not possible to know whether a theory is true, but false theories can be discarded.

*In the religious field*

*Ideologies are numerous and contradict each other. Each religious current has its own specific truth which is brandished like the flag of a clan: "My religion is the true one, and I deplore the fact that everyone has their own. If all human beings were properly enlightened, they would all have mine!". If, in matters of faith, a religion sanctifies obedience and elevates it to the dignity of virtue, beware: believing will make you captive!*

In the scientific field

Truths are universal. The same science applies to all people.

We smile at childish statements such as "*My father is the strongest, yours sucks*". Adult statements such as "*Your god is a false god. Only my God is the real one*" would also be a reason to smile if they did not lead to exclusion, discrimination, conflicts and wars.

### **Absolute Truth is propaganda rhetoric**

When man becomes attached to an idea and decides not to question it any more, he calls it truth. The opposite of truth is not only lies, but also conviction seasoned with naivety and lack of critical thinking. The thirst for truth leads one to believe in chimeras and, when it is absolute, truth manifests the will to exercise the monopoly of ideology. While scientific truth is universal, isn't it pungent that absolute and immutable truth has the major defect of being multiple? May the gods first arrange among themselves to send us a common message! But since the gods were created by men, the cacophony of beliefs can flourish.

Worse, these imaginary beings have very real effects. The desire to propagate absolute truth generates oppression. Is it possible to establish that religious wars have claimed fewer victims than the total number of heinous crimes? The vanity of believing oneself to be the depository of the Truth has largely contributed to the feeling of superiority and encouraged the paternalistic attitude that prevailed during colonisation. Heine wrote "*Men will get along when no one has the claim to hold the truth*".

### **Better than Truth: reasoned decision making**

Truth is a theoretical and ideal notion. In the real world, it is reduced to an estimate of the degree of uncertainty. Since "absolute truth" is only adherence to false knowledge, let us reserve our commitment to what is universal and flee from the circles that cultivate Truth. Everything that is fundamental, such as humanism inherited from the Enlightenment, human rights, democracy, respect for minorities, the search for the common good, is not based on Absolute Truth but, in better conformity with the human condition, on decisions that it would be unreasonable not to take. Who would want to live in a society governed by brute force and lacking respect for people?

It is necessary to escape the totalitarianism of those to whom the truth has been revealed. Religious Truth is not necessary for the smooth running of society. Let us base our teaching, not on the authority of the Church, but on the development of reason and critical sense within a secular framework.

### **Moral**

Do you think you have touched the Truth? By renouncing to impose it on others, you can rise even higher and reach wisdom.



# Rebuttal of the "Pascal's wager"

## Four arguments against "Pascal's wager": objections, rebuttal and reversal

### The historical dimension

In the way we look at the past, we must keep a sufficient critical distance.

- On the one hand, the historical description must be factual. Pascal's wager must be approached with neutrality, placing him in his own time and not judging him by current criteria. At the time, the calculation of probabilities did not yet exist. It was Pascal who took the first steps in the creation of a new chapter in mathematics, for which we are indebted to him (see [The genesis of probability calculus](#) [in French]). Pascal is a great spirit that I respect. Concerning the calculation of limits and the convergence of sequences, rigorous definitions were only established in the 19th century.
- On the other hand, I denounce a way of presenting the history of Western culture when it is imbued with a missionary spirit. In particular, certain Catholic circles have made Pascal's wager a tool for 21st century indoctrination. More generally, this attitude tends to affect all those who attribute a sacred value to spiritual traditions.

My criticism does not focus on Pascal as a historical figure, but on the belief that his wager would still be relevant today.

### Reducing the scope of the Pascal's wager

The Wager is reserved for people who admit a priori the following hypotheses:

- the human soul is immortal;
- deities observe us and judge, reward or punish us;
- we can influence our future in the afterlife through appropriate behaviour;
- rituals can arouse divine favour.

For those who do not fully subscribe to it, there is nothing to save, nothing to gain, so the Pascal's wager is irrelevant.

### First objection to the Pascal's wager What kind of bets should be put on the table?

#### The bet is our Christian commitment

Pascal suggests that the player can participate in the wager by not putting any bets on the table. Does he mean that "Believing does not commit you to anything"? The stake is our life, our conscience, our freedom; it is infinitely precious to us; we don't want to play dice with that.

In most religions, the clergy plays a facilitating role in the relationship between the faithful and God, a kind of "religious coaching", considered useful but auxiliary. From this point of view,

Catholicism is a singular religion: on the one hand, the clergy exercises a necessary and inescapable role through the sacraments; on the other hand, through the Magisterium of the Church, it exercises supreme authority over personal consciences. The relationship with God passes through the mediation of the clergy, who introduce their own demands, to which the faithful are obliged to submit.

*«The Roman Pontiff and the bishops are "authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them, the faith to be believed and put into practice." The ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him teach the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for. The supreme degree of participation in the authority of Christ is ensured by the charism of infallibility. This infallibility extends as far as does the deposit of divine Revelation; it also extends to all those elements of doctrine, including morals, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observed. The authority of the Magisterium extends also to the specific precepts of the natural law, because their observance, demanded by the Creator, is necessary for salvation. In recalling the prescriptions of the natural law, the Magisterium of the Church exercises an essential part of its prophetic office of proclaiming to men what they truly are and reminding them of what they should be before God. The law of God entrusted to the Church is taught to the faithful as the way of life and truth. the faithful therefore have the right to be instructed in the divine saving precepts that purify judgment and, with grace, heal wounded human reason. They have the duty of observing the constitutions and decrees conveyed by the legitimate authority of the Church. Even if they concern disciplinary matters, these determinations call for docility in charity. In the work of teaching and applying Christian morality, the Church needs the dedication of pastors, the knowledge of theologians, and the contribution of all Christians and men of good will. Faith and the practice of the Gospel provide each person with an experience of life "in Christ," who enlightens him and makes him able to evaluate the divine and human realities according to the Spirit of God. Thus the Holy Spirit can use the humblest to enlighten the learned and those in the highest positions. Ministries should be exercised in a spirit of fraternal service and dedication to the Church, in the name of the Lord. At the same time the conscience of each person should avoid confining itself to individualistic considerations in its moral judgments of the person's own acts. As far as possible conscience should take account of the good of all, as expressed in the moral law, natural and revealed, and consequently in the law of the Church and in the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium on moral questions. Personal conscience and reason should not be set in opposition to the moral law or the Magisterium of the Church.»*

Let us beware of a religion that sanctifies obedience: believing will make us captives. When I realised that I had to align my opinions with all the positions taken by the Church's Magisterium, it seemed unacceptable to me to renounce the principle of free examination. While even prisoners retain their freedom of thought, Catholics are deprived of it.

With obedience, the doctrinal background to be taken over is excessively heavy. We can legitimately refuse to submit to religious indoctrination, to chain ourselves to precepts, to practice rituals, to say prayers, to let ourselves be guided by the clergy, to take on a ready-made attitude, and

to be constantly pursued by haunting preoccupations. In short, not all of us have the vocation to behave like sheep under the guidance of good shepherds.

To be saved, believing in God is not enough. God vomits up the lukewarm ones<sup>27</sup>. A docile and total commitment is required. In particular, the following people are in an irregular situation and have to worry about their eternal salvation:

- those who deliberately miss Mass or the Sunday Eucharist<sup>28</sup>;
- the divorced and remarried<sup>29</sup>;
- homosexuals;
- people living with a partner;
- couples using artificial means of contraception.

One understands why "*many are called, but few are chosen*"<sup>30</sup>.

Whoever asserts that in Pascal's wager there is nothing to engage - this is the Church's interpretation - would deserve to have his nose lengthened like that of Pinocchio.

To overcome the constraints, many contemporaries chose to be believers, but to keep their freedom from dogmas and their independence from the clergy. This state of partial emancipation is generally not enough to free them from the guilt of living in disobedience. They spend a lot of energy convincing themselves that they can still obtain eternal salvation.

### **What should be optimised? The example of the game of the 10 farms**

For all good, a farmer owns a farm that allows him to feed his family. He is offered the chance to flip a coin on his farm. If he wins, he will receive 10 farms similar to his own in the region where he lives. If he loses, he must give up his farm.

Although the expected benefit is clearly favourable, it would be foolish to accept this game: **if we are offered to bet something irreplaceable, we are not looking for a maximum winning, but for minimum losses!**

### **Do you have to wager?**

Each culture builds the divinity or deities that symbolize its aspirations<sup>31</sup>. Is it worth sacrificing one's life for a hypothetical reward? Popular wisdom has created the aphorism:

*One "This is for you" is, it is said, better than two "I will give it to you".*

*One is sure, the other is not.*

[La Fontaine, Fables, The Little Fish and the Fisherman]

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27 Revelation 3:16 «So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.»

28 Those who deliberately fail to attend Mass or the Sunday Eucharist commit a grave, i.e. mortal, sin.

29 Divorce is a serious offence against natural law. The fact of contracting a new union, even if it is recognised by civil law, adds to the seriousness of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery. Adultery is a mortal sin.

30 Matthew 22:14

31 See the second objection p. 92: *The likelihood that a given religion is true.*

## **Second objection to Pascal's wager**

### **On the likelihood that a given religion is true**

#### **If God is, who is?**

One of two things: "God is, or he is not." This is an irrelevant, even smoky way of approaching the question of God's existence. It can only be reduced to an alternative if one specifies which God one wants to talk about. Between "a Creative Force", pantheism and the "God of Christians", an infinite number of distinct divinities can be envisaged. However, for Pascal's wager to make sense, it is necessary to admit that it is quite probable that the soul is immortal, that we can influence our future in the afterlife from now on, that there are deities who observe us, judge us<sup>32</sup>, reward or punish us, that rituals can arouse divine favours. This is, roughly speaking, what Pascal calls the god of philosophers. These implicit assumptions, which seemed weak at the time, are now perceived as rather far from the obvious. In order to complete his reasoning and reach the God of the Christians, Pascal then devotes almost half of his *Thoughts* to the apology of Christianity in order to build a fragile bridge between the god of the philosophers and the God of the Catholics. It is a question of overcoming a new pitfall: the longer the list of dogmas - and Catholicism is not stingy about it - the greater the probability of being wrong.

In the exploitation of the Pascal's wager for propaganda purposes, the approach is often simplified. Since believing in God is not enough to win paradise, the real issue is the faith that saves, hence Catholicism. Under a disguise, the question asked is in fact "Do you adhere to the true faith?"

#### **Monotheisms**

Pascal suggests that the probability of God's existence is  $\frac{1}{2}$ . This assessment, conceded to people who might have doubts, is questionable. While the question of divine existence can be answered with a single word, it takes an entire library to describe each monotheism, which consists of a multitude of assertions whose veracity raises so many questions.

Christianity is only the fourth monotheism, after

- the cult of Aten of Pharaoh Akhenaten,
- Zoroastrianism, preached by Zarathustra, whose creator god is called Ahura Mazda,
- and Judaism, whose god, called Yahweh, is said to have revealed himself to Moses<sup>33</sup>.

He is not the last since the fifth is Islam, whose god is called Allah. Why should the fourth be truer than the first or the fifth? By making God the creator of Evil, monotheisms are tainted by internal contradictions that discredit them and make them unlikely [see p. 75: *Is God good or paradoxical?*]

It was not God who created the world in seven days, but men created five different unique Gods! Christianity is divided into many different religions: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, as well

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32 This psychological tendency is probably based on our ability to observe and judge ourselves, which may give us the impression of being observed and judged.

33 The use of the written form is an advantage over cults that are transmitted by oral tradition. The Torah - that is, the Old Testament - is a syncretism: the myths of creation and the flood were borrowed from the Babylonians; the angels, the archangels, the Apocalypse and the Last Judgement come from Zoroastrianism; the immortality of the soul comes from ancient Egypt; the resurrection of the body appears in the Greek version of the Book of Job. The use of "divine interventions" is purely mythical.

as a multitude of Protestant currents and various sects, which leaves much more room for error than for truth.

Since, on a global scale, each religion is clearly a minority, the vast majority of believers are necessarily in error. But, naturally, it is the other beliefs that are wrong. All other religions were created by man, but ours is exceptional because it was created by God himself. Mired in a network of cultural conditioning, the believer allows himself to be carried along by religious conformism. Wearing doctrinal glasses greatly narrows his field of vision.

Faith in absolute truth<sup>34</sup> is the expression of an excessive pretension. Pascal's approach is typical of philosophers who bring everything back to certain peculiarities of the culture in which they are immersed. A widespread form of ethnocentrism consists in making the whole world revolve around one's religion, in the way Ptolemy made the sun and the celestial spheres revolve around the earth. In order to gain objectivity, one has to step back.

Ongoing globalisation also affects cultural conceptions. In the long term, a more relative perception of religions will necessarily have to be established. One might wonder why the majority of gods are sexist. I can see only one explanation: religions were created by male human beings.

### **The number of religions is unlimited**

The human imagination has filled the sky with the most diverse deities. Each particular culture honours its own and blames others. Is God single<sup>35</sup> or multiple, personal or impersonal, unchanging or evolving, caring or indifferent, all-powerful or limited, distinct from or confused with the universe?

After death, will we live eternally, temporarily, cyclically in reincarnations, or will we disappear? Will we live in the Kingdom of the Dead, the Kingdom of the Ancestors, the Kingdom of the Underworld, the Kingdoms of the gods, the Kingdom of God, or are there other outcomes, e.g. a Paradise Democracy, a Perfect City? <sup>36</sup> Will we preserve a body, a sensibility, an affectivity, an individuality, a conscience, a freedom? Can we influence our fate in the afterlife from the earth? By what rites, by what practices? For example, in Buddhism, there is neither God nor gods: the question of Pascal is unrelated to the ultimate meaning of existence, which is the management of suffering and evil<sup>37</sup>.

How many distinct and incompatible religions are there? Taking into account past, present and future religions, they are innumerable. Like civilisations, religions are also deadly<sup>38</sup>. The first monotheism, the cult of Aten of Pharaoh Akhenaten, was ephemeral. The second, Zoroastrianism, after having developed in ancient Persia, was considerably weakened. The third, Judaism, was divided into fratricidal factions which included the different forms of Christianity and Islam.

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34 See p. 85: *Absolute truth has the major defect of being multiple*, with a note on Thomism.

35 The oneness of God does not prevent the furnishing of Heaven with a whole supernatural bestiary that can rival polytheistic religions; besides the Trinity, we can see angels, guardian angels, archangels, seraphim, cherubim, thrones, Satan, devils, incubi, succubi; their diversity is further multiplied by the fact that each of them can take on different appearances such as serpents, goats, etc., and each of them can also take on different forms.

36 Perfection has the defect of being multiple, as the diversity of the gods shows us.

37 Methodologically, we should have started with "*Is the question of God's existence relevant?*" and then seen that it is possible to answer it in the negative.

38 Variation on an idea by *Paul Valéry*.

In view of the fact that human beings (*homo sapiens*) have existed for 300,000 years, today's religions are extremely young (Christianity is only 2,000 years old). The rate of renewal of religions is sufficiently high to raise doubts as to whether any of them are immortal. A radical change in the economic system upsets the value system. In the Neolithic period, the practice of agriculture upset religious practices in order to bring Heaven into line with the new way of life. Today, the development of science and technology may be such a revolution that it could durably transform cultures, civilisations and religions.

To those who claim that religions are limited in number, I challenge them to make an exhaustive list: on the one hand, the beliefs of the Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras could not be reconstructed; on the other hand, new religious currents<sup>39</sup> are constantly emerging. In addition, many people distance themselves from the doctrine they have been taught<sup>40</sup>, so that the belief system they adhere to is personal to them.

Finally, why shouldn't the ultimate explanation be hidden among possibilities that humans can't even consider? How can the religions of extraterrestrial civilisations be taken into consideration? Is their number nil, finite or infinite? There is no guarantee that the list, even when extended in this way, contains the true faith. Man has great difficulty in accepting his ignorance. The number of religions is potentially infinite<sup>41</sup>.

### **The likelihood that a given religion is true**

The probability in question here can be broken down into a number of conditional probabilities, as outlined below:

A1 = event "Our soul is immortal";

$p(A1)$  = probability that our soul is immortal.

A2 = event "God exists as a personal being endowed with intelligence, conscience, freedom and power";

$p(A2 | A1)$  = probability that God exists, knowing that our soul is immortal.

A3 = event "Our moral behaviour has an influence on our future in the afterlife, and God judges, rewards or punishes us";

$p(A3 | A1 \text{ and } A2)$  = likelihood that our moral behaviour will influence our future in the afterlife, and that God will judge, reward or punish us, knowing that our soul is immortal and that God exists.

A4 = event "The true God is the God of the Bible and the faith that saves is Catholicism";

$p(A4 | A1 \text{ and } A2 \text{ and } A3)$  = probability that the true God is the God of the Bible and that the faith that saves is Catholicism, knowing that our soul is immortal, that God exists,

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39 For example, this "ultimate religion" appeared in 2013. See p. *161: Adepts of Terminus*.

40 Beware: refusing to believe in a single constituent element of a religion means declaring that it is not "the true" one; it also means attaching oneself to a different "religion".

41 i.e. without an upper bound.

that our moral behaviour has an influence on our future in the afterlife and that God judges, rewards or punishes us.

The probability discussed in this article is the product of these conditional probabilities

$$p = p(A1) \cdot p(A2 | A1) \cdot p(A3 | A1 \text{ and } A2) \cdot p(A4 | A1 \text{ and } A2 \text{ and } A3)$$

Each of the four factors must be non-zero for the product to be non-zero. Thus, the existence of God is not sufficient to found the argument of the Pascal's wager.

Bearing in mind that

- Eternal hell is a disproportionate and therefore unjust punishment;
- a loving mother does not engage in cruel blackmail, and it is improbable that God behaves less well than she does;
- no mother would throw some of her children into hell,

the probability that God will reward or punish us is nil:

$$p(A3 | A1 \text{ and } A2) = 0$$

As developed above, since the number of religions is potentially infinite, the probability that the Bible is true is nil:

$$p(A4 | A1 \text{ and } A2 \text{ and } A3) = 0$$

Moreover, the contradictions contained in the Bible reinforce the result:

[Matthew 13:41-42] «*The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*»

[Matthew 5:44] «*But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*».

The precept "Do as I say, but not as I do" is hardly convincing.

**The probability that a given religion is true is zero.**

Religious relativism is supported by the gods themselves, who have striven to perform "miracles" in all religious communities, however diverse they may be. By choosing a doctrine at random, for example that of the family where nature gave birth to us, the probability that it is true is therefore nil. Claiming that "a given religion has a positive probability of being true" is an act of faith that does not stem from reason.

**Pascal's wager.**

If, as we have established, the probability of obtaining an infinite winning is nil, the expectation of winning is indeterminate, and Pascal's wager is ruined.

## Rebuttal of Pascal's wager

### Teaching Pascal's wager

It is legitimate to put Pascal's wager on the school curriculum. But it happens that some teachers, with little respect for secularism, develop this theme beyond what is required by the culture to make it a missionary tool, the aim being to prepare the pupils to welcome the faith<sup>42</sup>. When ideology prevails over the critical sense, the pupil must perceive it clearly. Reason then requires a counterweight to be opposed to it.

### Pascal's wager

*«But your bliss? Let us weigh the winning and the loss, betting that God is. Let us consider these two cases: if you win, you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, that He is, without hesitation.»*

Blaise Pascal, Thoughts, 1670

### The reasoning behind Pascal's wager is circular

Let us temporarily assume the value of one chance in two for the probability that God exists. If this is the case, one gains eternal life in Paradise, and the gain is infinite. If not, one loses nothing. The choice seems easy to make.

However, one must be wary of hidden assumptions. First of all, in the object of the wager, there is not only the existence of God, but also that the Catholic religion would be true and that religious practice would lead to Paradise. Secondly, it is prudent to examine what is covered by the term "infinite".

In mathematics, infinity appears as the limit of sequences. Consider for example the following suggested sequence:

- in a game with a zero bet, every time you try, you win a thousand euros randomly every other time;
- in a game with a zero bet, every time you try, you win a million euros randomly every other time;
- in a game with a zero bet, every time you try, you win a billion euros randomly every other time,
- and "so on".

However, the earth's resources are limited. To pronounce the "so on", one must admit that the supernatural exists. In other words, Pascal implicitly assumes the existence of God, which constitutes a vicious circle, a circular reasoning.

### Generalised formulation of Pascal's wager

Initially, Pascal's wager was supposed to support the Catholic faith. But its central element - the possibility of a gigantic gain - is not specifically Christian and can be adapted to any doctrine that promises much. Its versatility even allows its principle to be exploited far beyond the religious

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<sup>42</sup> See p. 24: *An example of the misappropriation of theme days for religious purposes*



realm. Its general formulation is: "The more wonderful the promise, the more justified it is to bet on it".

### **Variations on Pascal's wager**

An advertisement is displayed: *"If you buy this product, you will be happier. If you give it up, you are depriving yourself of a great service. Weigh the pros and cons, and don't hesitate to buy it!"*.

A speech by a politician: *"I'm going to improve the future of society, and you will be able to enjoy it at your leisure. It's worth betting on me: I'm counting on your vote!"*.

A healer who asks to have faith in his powers: *"If you trust me, your illness will disappear and you will be able to live a long time. Why not try, since there is so much to be gained?"*

The Christian priest who speaks in the name of Jesus: *"If you follow me, you will be rewarded with eternal happiness. Become my disciple, and your gain will be infinite!"*

### **Beyond charlatanism**

An unverified hypothesis remains a hypothesis whose confirmation or rebuttal is postponed to the future. On the other hand, an "unverifiable hypothesis" loses its status as a hypothesis to become a fable or an ideology.

The principle of Pascal's wager puts the gullible to sleep by the immediate comfort provided by the hope of a miraculous payoff. The huckster is indifferent to true and false, for he is concerned only with pleasing, to his greatest advantage. **While the promises of charlatans can be invalidated by the absence of expected results, those of religious propagandists, being absolutely unverifiable, go further than charlatanism.**

### **For lovers of mathematical expectation**

In the context of Pascal's wager, the bet, which is the Christian commitment, is fixed, or at least capped. In what follows, we assume it to be constant. Two variables remain: the winning and the probability of winning. In all games of chance, the more you aim for a high winning, the lower the probability of winning. For example, if you bet 1 euro, it is a fair game to be able to win 1000 euros with a probability of 1/1000; in another game, if you bet 1 euro, it is a fair game to be able to win 1,000,000 euros with a probability of 1/1,000,000. In this context, we can affirm that, when the winning tends towards infinity, the probability of winning tends towards 0.

What happens if the mathematical expectation of the net winning  $E$  of the game is non-zero? The formula to be considered is as follows:

$$p = \frac{E + \text{bet}}{\text{winning}}$$

While the players to whom the wager is addressed expect a net winning expectation close to zero, i.e. a game that is not too biased, believers imagine an immense net winning expectation. But this doesn't change anything: even if  $E$  is worth a billion, when the winning tends towards infinity, the probability of winning tends towards 0.

If the probability of winning is positive, to make the winning tend towards infinity is tantamount to admitting the supernatural. But this cannot be hypothesised, since that is precisely what we want to prove. In the context of games of chance, the two assertions "the winning is infinite" and "the probability of winning is a real positive" are incompatible.

The above principle can now be corrected: «The more wonderful the promise, the less likely it is. And, in the end, it is implausible.»

To reinforce by another argument that "the probability of obtaining an infinite winning is null", we can refer to the document *On the likelihood that a given religion is true* [see p. 92], which brings us to the following situation:

$$E = -bet + (winning) \cdot p$$

where  $(winning)$  tends towards infinity and  $p$  tends towards 0.

We are faced with an indetermination of the type "infinite times zero". Thus the mathematical reasoning comes to an impasse, and the conclusions drawn by Pascal are unfounded.

## Mathematical aspects of Pascal's wager

Pascal's wager draws its arguments from the framework of games of chance.

### The mathematical model of game theory

Many contemporary commentators formalise Pascal's wager with game theory, the foundations of which were described in the 1920s by Ernst Zermelo and developed by Oskar Morgenstern and John von Neumann in 1944. As Pascal died in 1662, it is an anachronism to interpret Pascal's wager by means of game theory, and there is a great risk of betraying his thought.

Moreover, infinity is treated as an entity, which poses problems of realism that we will discuss later.

### Huygens' mathematical model

The first person to successfully pursue Pascal's work on games of chance was the Dutch mathematician and physicist Christiaan Huygens. In the period 1655 - 1657, while Pascal was still alive, he generalised Pascal's method to the case where the transition probabilities are unevenly distributed. He was also the first to use the term expectation (*Hoffnung*). It is this historical way of formalising Pascal's wager that seems relevant to me and that I have retained.

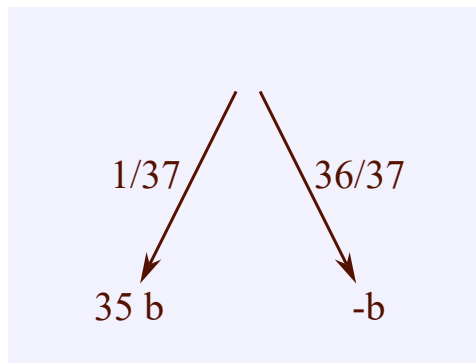
As far as infinity is concerned, it will not be treated as an entity, but as a limit.

### The example of roulette wheel: bet on a single number

The play mat has 37 squares numbered from 0 to 36. Playing "single" consists in placing the bet, noted  $b$ , on a single square. If the chosen number comes up, the player wins 36 times the bet, which is the gross winnings from which the bet must be deducted to obtain the net winning. In our model, we do not take into account what the player usually leaves for the casino staff. The random variable of the game is



$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} -b+36b=35b & \text{with a probability of } 1/37 \\ -b & \text{with a probability of } 36/37 \end{array} \right\}$$



The mathematical expectation of the net winning is

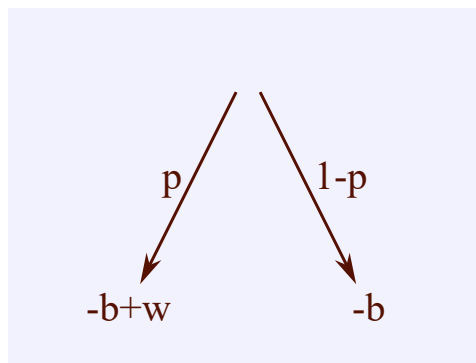
$$E=35b \cdot \frac{1}{37} + (-b) \cdot \frac{36}{37} = \left(-\frac{1}{37}\right) \cdot b$$

This means that, over a large number of games, the player loses on average 1/37 of his bets to the casino. It is a game with negative mathematical expectation.

### The formula for mathematical expectation

To generalize, let us consider a game of chance in which, for a bet  $b$ , you can get the winning  $w$  with a probability  $p$ . The random variable is

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} -b+w & \text{with a probability of } p \\ -b & \text{with a probability of } 1-p \end{array} \right\}$$



The mathematical expectation of the net winning is

$$E=(-b+w) \cdot p + (-b) \cdot (1-p) = -b+w \cdot p$$

Remember

$$E=-b+w \cdot p$$

From the latter formula is derived the expression of the probability:

$$p = \frac{E+b}{w} \quad \text{where } w > 0$$

Conditions  $0 \leq p \leq 1$  result in  $0 \leq (E+b) \leq w$

## The case of fair games

If the mathematical expectation of the net winning is zero, the game is said to be fair. The probability of winning is then  $p = b/w$ . For example, by betting 1 €, it is a fair game to be able to win 1000 € with a probability of 1/1000; in another game, by betting 1 €, it is fair to be able to win 1,000,000 € with a probability of 1/1,000,000. When the winning is huge, the probability of winning is tiny. With a constant bet, if the winning tends towards infinity, the probability of winning tends towards 0:

$$p = \lim_{w \rightarrow \infty} \frac{b}{w} = 0$$

## Case of games with high mathematical expectation

If the mathematical expectation of the net winning is positive, a generous sponsor is needed to contribute to the financing of the winning. While the players to whom the wager is addressed wait for a mathematical expectation close to zero, i.e. a game not too biased, believers imagine an immense mathematical expectation. Suppose for example that  $E$  is worth a billion times the bet. Since  $(E+b)$  is constant, the limit probability remains zero:

$$p = \lim_{w \rightarrow \infty} \frac{E+b}{w} = 0$$

i.e. with a constant bet, however great the mathematical expectation, when the winning tends towards infinity, the probability of winning tends towards 0.

To be convinced of this, consider the following sequence of winnings:  $10(E+b)$ ,  $100(E+b)$ ,  $1000(E+b)$ ,  $10000(E+b)$ , and so on. The corresponding probabilities will have the values:

$w$	$p$
$10(E+b)$	0.1
$100(E+b)$	0.01
$1000(E+b)$	0.001
$10000(E+b)$	0.0001
...	...
$\infty$	0

To obtain this result, it is not necessary for the mathematical expectation to be constant, but only for its absolute value to be capped by an upper bound, i.e. there is a number  $E$  such that, for all winnings,  $|\text{mathematical expectation}| \leq E$ .

In the end, Pascal's wager is unfounded.

## Discussion

*Question or objection*

*I still have a doubt. For me, the probability that God exists may be small, but positive.*

Answer

Let's take a specific Church that offers you salvation on the condition that you pay it, for example, €100 per month. The probability that this is true is small, but one can have a doubt and judge that this probability is not nil. If you do not make the payments, it is because you do not support to the end the idea of taking into account events of low probability. What is the reason for this? Presumably because it is impossible to take into account everything that might possibly be possible. You have to decide what is serious and credible, and reject everything else.

Personally, I don't have the kind of doubt that your question evokes, because I firmly believe that I am not endowed with immortality. So Pascal's wager is pointless.

*Could it be envisaged that, with  $w$  tending towards infinity,  $E$  also tending towards infinity?*

1. We would end up with an indeterminacy of the "infinity over infinity" type; the limit probability would be undetermined, and we would have failed to show that the limit probability is positive.
2. Pascal concedes that the probability of winning could be  $1/2$  and decrees that the bet is zero. Thus, for him, the formula to consider is  $E = w/2$ . For example,
  - if a game allows you to win 1000 €, you would win an average of 500 € each time you try it with a zero bet;
  - if a game allows you to win 1,000,000 €, you would win an average of 500,000 € each time you try it with a zero bet;
  - if a game allows you to win 1,000,000,000 €, you would win an average of 500,000,000 € each time you try it with a zero bet;
  - By prolonging this family of fairy tale games to infinity, we obviously obtain a miracle, in this case Pascal's wager.

Unfortunately, as natural resources are finite, to go to the limit, it is necessary to assume that the supernatural exists. But this approach consists in assuming that God exists in order to prove that God exists. It is a vicious circle. We can conclude that, if the probability is fixed, the winning cannot be stretched to infinity.

3. If the aim is to convince sceptical players, it is unconvincing to call for an act of faith that requires accepting a priori that the game is miraculous, as this is a characteristic of scams. Since you have to be a believer for the wager to be convincing, the wager loses much of its substance: it is not intended to incite non-believers to become believers, but only believers to become practitioners.
4. One would have accepted as a hypothesis that "when  $w$  tends towards infinity, the mathematical expectation  $E$  also tends towards infinity", which is an avatar of Pascal's Wager as described in point 2

above. Now, in a reasoning, admitting what one wants to demonstrate as a hypothesis is called a vicious circle.

5. By making a promise - paradise - which commits a third party over whom he has no control - God - the supporter of Pascal's wager implements a process similar to that of a swindler. On this subject, read the fourth objection [see p. 103: *Reversal of the wager*].

*What to answer to "The probability of obtaining an infinite winning may be close to 0, but it does not tend towards 0! It is a real positive fixed"?*

1. The approach consists in situating Pascal's wager among the games of chance whose winnings are gigantic, close to infinity. The expression "when the winning tends towards ..." simply means that a comparison is made with neighbouring games whose winnings are gigantic, close to infinity.
2. One should be able to approach the infinite winning through a sequence of increasing winnings and observe the impact this has on the probability of winning. Let us name  $\epsilon$  the "fixed positive real". We can calculate the winning  $w = (E+b)/p$  which corresponds to  $p=\epsilon$ : it is  $w_\epsilon = (E+b)/\epsilon$ . As the mathematical model produces a sequence of probabilities that tends towards zero, the consequence is that all winnings that are greater than  $w_\epsilon$  correspond to probabilities of winning that are less than  $\epsilon$ :

$w$	$p$
...	...
$w_\epsilon$	$\epsilon$
$10 w_\epsilon$	$\epsilon/10$
$100 w_\epsilon$	$\epsilon/100$
...	...
$\infty$	$\epsilon$ or 0?

Uneasiness.

3. The limit is the continuous extension of the mathematical law of the game. When the so-called "fixed positive real" differs from the limit, it means that we are in the presence of a jump, a discontinuity, and that the mathematical law of the game is not respected to the end. **In a game of chance, the two assertions "the winning is infinite" and "the probability of winning is a positive real" are incompatible.** Pascal's wager is not in the line of games of chance, but in a break with them. Pascal's reasoning goes beyond the framework in which he placed himself. If it is a kind of miracle, it will have to be explained, preferably by reason rather than by faith.
4. Moreover, by substituting the assertions "the winning is infinite" and "the probability of winning is a real positive" in the formula  $E = -b + w \cdot p$ , we obtain an infinite mathematical expectation, which can be approached by "if the promise of winning is gigantic, then

one is almost certain to become immensely rich". This is an assertion that the victims of charlatans wrongly feed on.

## **Reversal of Pascal's wager What minimises loss, Christianity or atheism?**

God does not promise paradise, but Judgement Day. By making a promise - Paradise - that commits a third party over whom he has no control - God - the proponent of Pascal's Wager is using a process similar to that used by swindlers. Since the wager focuses on the reward of paradise, if, more honestly, we also take into account hell, we come to the opposite conclusion.

Since the number of religions is unlimited<sup>43</sup>, in order to simplify the reasoned choice, let us choose two clear-cut positions, a family of religions and an absence of religion: Christianity and Atheism, and compare them.

According to Christianity, our path of life<sup>44</sup> ends by splitting in two: on one side purgatory<sup>45</sup> then eternal paradise, on the other side hell and eternal suffering. Certainly the most interesting perspective is paradise. But, according to Luke 13:23-25,

*"Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'"*

Matthew 22:13-14 says something similar:

*"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen.'"*

And again [Matthew 19:24]:

*"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."*

Thus, the number of losers is far greater than the number of winners. Hell is eternal and represents an infinite loss. From the Christian point of view, on statistical average, there is, in death, more to lose than to gain. For a moderate Christian, death is an infinitely unfavourable event<sup>46</sup>. I'd rather not go to Santa Claus if he's going to give out more punches than presents. Many contemporaries have applied themselves to sweetening Christianity. However, to downplay the importance of sin and hell, they are no longer Christians, but followers of a personal doctrine.

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43 See the second objection [p. 92: *On the likelihood that a given religion is true*].

44 Is the imperfection of creation a manifestation of divine solitude? Could the spectacle of life on earth be, for the Creator, only a kind of reality show intended for his entertainment? Is man only an actor forced to serve in a gigantic and cruel life-size role-playing game? It is better to think that man created God in his own image.

45 Concerns only a part of Christians, especially Catholics.

46 Fear enables the Church to strengthen its power over consciences.

The clear face of man constructs religion as a means of softening reality. At the same time, his dark side fills religion with dreadful dangers that inspire fear and dread. Salvation is reserved for a highly motivated and committed elite. The common man is the loser. Overall, religion loses its saving value and becomes negative. This is the inconsistency of the Bible.

For the atheist<sup>47</sup>, our life ends with our definitive disappearance, our total annihilation. From the point of view of the calculation of probabilities, for death, the mathematical expectation of the net winning is nil. Atheism proposes a less unfavourable death than Christianity. Consequently, the calculus of probability recommends that we do not follow up Pascal's wager.

Let's sum up: On the one hand, if the Last Judgement does take place, the most probable final destination is hell. On the other hand, if the Last Judgement does not exist, nothing happens after death, neither reward nor punishment. In any case, there is no point in investing in faith.

While the religious tradition proposes to us to succeed in our death, contemporary man is primarily concerned with succeeding in life. Isn't one of the fundamental functions of belief to alleviate our fears? We can rightly refuse to spend our existence oppressed between the carrot and the stick.

To gain freedom, all you have to do is adopt the right perspective. Since we only have one life, we don't want to play the dice: we have to make the choice that, in the worst case, allows us to live in the perspective of the least damaging end possible<sup>48</sup>. Since it is better to fall asleep forever than to risk suffering eternally, the atheist can envisage his existence in a relatively more serene and less anxious way than the Christian.

### Mathematical model of the Wager that minimises losses

If the Last Judgement takes place, what is the probability of reaching paradise? 10 %? 1 %? To conduct the calculation, it is enough that this probability is lower than 1/2, let us say 49 %. The random variable is then

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} -b+w & \text{with a probability of } 0.49 \\ -b-w & \text{with a probability of } 0.51 \end{array} \right\}$$

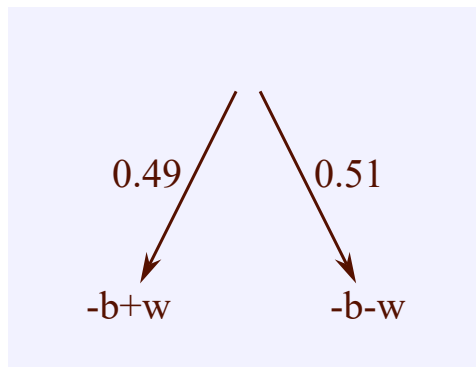
- in  $(-b + w)$ ,  $(+w)$  designates an immense winning that will be stretched towards the infinite to represent paradise;  $(-b)$  is the bet and represents the religious commitment;
- in  $(-b - w)$ ,  $(-w)$  represents an immense loss that will be made to tend towards minus infinity to represent hell.

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47 A point of view of a particular current of atheism has been adopted here. Others are closer to agnosticism. Finally, some admit forms of survival in the afterlife without any relation to deities, for example in Buddhist traditions.

48 In other words, choose according to the criterion of the lesser evil.





The mathematical expectation of the net winning in the case where there is Judgement Day is

$$E = (-b + w) \cdot 0.49 + (-b - w) \cdot 0.51 = -b - 0.02 \cdot w$$

If we make the winning  $w$  tend towards infinity, the expectation of this case tends towards minus infinity:

$$E(\text{with Judgement Day}) = -\infty$$

On the other hand, in the case where there is no Judgement Day, the winning is nil, so the expectation of the net winning is equal to the loss of the bet:

$$E(\text{no Judgement Day}) = -b$$

You are therefore invited to a game with two outcomes, both of which are unfavourable. In such a situation, the best choice is to refuse to play. Pascal's wager is a game to be avoided.

Given that everyone, often by religious clan, sets its own dogmas, none of which are universal, the believers who incite me to participate in their arbitrary "game" are not credible.

## Conclusion

The possibilities that cannot be excluded by evidence are so numerous and varied that a bet can only be placed on those that are solidly supported. The others must be deliberately ignored.

The probability of the existence of a personal God is too low for there to be any interest in getting involved in religion, and even lower still for a God who would have dictated guidelines to us. In Pascal's wager, the game is not worth the candle. One can, without damage, give up betting and move away from the gambling table of beliefs, because it is more useful and constructive to invest one's time and energy in the secular field.

Wisdom consists in detaching oneself from utopias, i.e. practising religious indifference.

## Exploitation of the wager

The indoctrinators use the method of slippage a lot: believing in God implies - or at least we are led to believe - adhering to Catholicism, the only true faith. And, against all logic, the amalgam works:

because they believe in God, many people feel morally obliged to be Christians. The state can then be committed to imprinting these "truths" in the minds of all schoolchildren.

## **Epilogue**

What if, instead of betting on God, we wager on man: humanism inherited from the Age of Enlightenment, human rights, democracy and the quest for the common good?

What if we reserved our commitment to what is universal, away from communities of believers?

What if teaching were to be based not on the authority of the Church, but on the development of critical thinking, independence of mind and intellectual autonomy, within a secular framework?

Wouldn't reason be better served?

## Faith, science and epistemology

Nothing is worse than faith that gives the illusion of ultimate knowledge, for example Catholicism's claim to be the depositary of Truth. Becoming aware of our ignorance leads to a more modest attitude which is also more in keeping with our human condition.

## Faith, science and epistemology

### From subjection to emancipation

In relation to religion, the history of science is essentially that of the passage from subjection to emancipation.

In 391, Emperor Theodosius I decreed that Christianity was the state religion of the Roman Empire. By banning "pagan" cults, he established a widespread and institutionalised intolerance to which the ecclesiastical authorities adhered. For example, in 393, he had the Olympic Games banned because they were considered too pagan.

The authoritarian attitude of the Church is based on the doctrine of the "just persecution" of St. Augustine (354 - 430):

*"If we want to be true, then let us say that the persecution of the ungodly against the Church of Christ is unjust, whereas there is justice in the persecution of the ungodly by the Church of Jesus Christ. (...) The Church persecutes in order to remove error, the ungodly in order to precipitate it. Finally, the Church persecutes her enemies and pursues them until she has reached and defeated them in their pride and vanity, in order to make them enjoy the benefit of the truth; the ungodly persecute by returning evil for good, and while we have only their eternal salvation in view, they seek to take away our portion of happiness on earth. They breathe so much murder that they take their own lives, when they cannot take the lives of others. The Church, in her charity, works to deliver them from perdition in order to preserve them from death; they, in their rage, seek every means of destroying us, and to satisfy their need for cruelty they kill themselves, as if not to lose the right they believe they have to kill men".*

[Letter 185 from Augustine to Boniface, military prefect in charge of the repression of the Donatists]. The Christian lobby had this excerpt removed from Wikipedia.

The hunt for heretics is open. It lasted about 1,400 years.

In 1233, Pope Gregory IX entrusted the court of exception "*Inquisitio hereticae pravitatis*" with the task of unmasking and condemning heretics and insincere Catholics. The Inquisition will immediately show brutality in the repression of the Cathars.

In the 13th century, in his work of synthesis bringing together Aristotle's philosophy and Catholic theology, Saint Thomas Aquinas gave the West the benefit of the sciences of Greek Antiquity. Unfortunately, his doctrine was fixed in the official teaching of the Church. All scientific work could only be done within this strict framework. Theology being the queen of sciences, the natural sciences were at its service.

The church authorities carefully monitored all publications. By a bull promulgated in 1501, Pope Alexander VI forbade the printing of works without permission or prior examination throughout Christendom, on pain of excommunication. Authors, printers, peddlers and readers are all punishable. Thus, in 1545, a simple reader, Lazare Drilhon, apothecary in Toulon, was burnt at the stake for having hidden thirty Protestant-inspired works in a chest. But lighter sentences could be pronounced for less serious faults: split nose, severed hands, sliced ears, pillory, galleys, gallows, etc....

Paul IV, who became pope after leading the Roman Inquisition, instituted the "*Index librorum prohibitorum*", i.e. the list of prohibited books, in 1559. In the aftermath, Giordano Bruno was burned alive in 1600 for claiming that every star is a sun surrounded by planets in an infinite universe. And Galileo's trial is not an anecdote, but an inevitable consequence of a totalitarian system.

From the 17th century onwards, as the virulence of the Inquisition diminished, the sciences emancipated themselves from the Church and from Aristotelian "knowledge". They became autonomous, which allowed them to develop as we know them.

In universities, science faculties were subordinate to theology faculties. One of the first science faculties to achieve equal status with the theological faculty was that of Göttingen, in 1737, thanks to the spirit of the Enlightenment endorsed by George II, King of England and Elector of Hanover.

In 1759, Pope Clement XIII published the encyclical "*Damnatio, et prohibito*" which put the Encyclopaedia by Diderot and d'Alembert on the Index. Religion condemns scientific knowledge because it threatens faith.

By separating itself from the natural sciences, Thomism was revived in the 19th century in the form of neo-Thomism. Even today, it is still part of the official teaching of the Vatican. Congenitally deprived of a principle of revision, it is frozen in sclerosis.

If the sciences have finally freed themselves from the centuries old tutelage of the Church, the same cannot be said of philosophy. Some philosophers are privileged. While scientists have to make great efforts to obtain bits of truth, neo-Thomists can boast that they have direct access to absolute truth, but only if they remain chained to the Vatican's directives.

After more than three centuries of divorce, faith and science are compatible, but only insofar as they deal with disjointed areas. The profound antinomy between them is justified by completely different value systems and criteria of truth.

While religion is still rehashing ancestral myths and only slowly and reluctantly evolving under the pressure of social transformations, science is rapidly advancing our knowledge of nature. The apparent stability of religions is perhaps reassuring.

That Isaac Newton was simultaneously an ardent alchemist and the father of classical physics shows that the production of a work meeting the criteria of modern science does not imply that the mind of its author is entirely rational. More generally, among many scientists, religious feelings and rational science coexist in the most diverse ways, sometimes at the cost of a certain dissociative identity disorder.

## The explanatory fields

*«Miraculous healings prove that men prefer lies that make them feel secure to truths that worry them.»*

Michel Onfray, Haute École

Causes are traditionally classified as supernatural or natural, which is expressed by divergent behaviours. A supernatural explanation refers to religious practices such as prayers, pilgrimages and offerings, the outcome of which is left to chance. On the other hand, natural explanation is part of the development of knowledge and techniques that lead to effective capacities for action on reality.

Two visions of the world confront each other:

- In one that I would call "magic", the universe is governed by dark, mysterious forces on which certain people (healers, priests, magnetizer, seers, ...), through rituals (prayers, laying on of hands, religious ceremonies, pendulums, crystal balls, ...), can exert a certain power (healing, transforming bread into the flesh of Christ, predicting the future, ...).
- In the other, which I would call "rational", the universe is exclusively governed by the laws of physics, chemistry and biology.

In other words, the decisive question is that of the attitude in front of a mystery:

- The scientist collects clues, explores explanations, tests hypotheses, etc. Symbolically, he could be represented by the activity of a Sherlock Holmes and qualify his attitude as rational. Thus, he perceives the emergence of man as a continuum of evolution;
- The religious kneels down, enters into a relationship with an afterlife that he perceives emotionally, and submits to a so-called "law" dictated by the culture of his ancestors. This is how he sees an abrupt rupture in the evolution of the species: at a certain moment, a hominid received an immortal soul.

**It is unsatisfactory for the mind to believe that what we perceive through scientific knowledge is not representative of what exists.** I find it hard to believe in deities who would react to rituals like activating a machine by pressing a switch. On the other hand, I find it a pity that the offer of supernatural services is so narrow: there are no cancer healers, and so many human needs are not covered! Would the gods be stingy?

In the days when all illness was treated with bloodletting or enemas, it was better to call a priest rather than a doctor to the bedside, but times have changed. Since a disease can be prevented by vaccination or cured by an antibiotic, it is neither a fatality nor a divine punishment. Since one of the functions of religion is to protect us from misfortune, medical progress and the development of insurance companies are two reasons why religious needs are declining.

Some images are detrimental to a healthy understanding of our universe. Such is the case of the Great Architect who is imagined drawing up a Plan that contains all the details of the future without leaving anything to chance, sets all the destinies, and controls the course of the history of the universe in order to reach the Final Cause fixed from all eternity. With such conceptions it is impossible to understand the spirit of current science.

According to Karl Popper, while the characteristic feature of science is not to seek the truth, but to flush out error, the specificity of religion is to declare a truth that lies outside the experimental field and which, therefore, can neither be invalidated nor given credit.

According to proven observations, nature evolves by trial and error, without any pre-established plan, by taking advantage of opportunities, without intentionality and without purpose. Science explains the history of the universe, the earth, life and mankind by laws in which chance is able to create, select and orient. Chance is a scientific necessity. Unfortunately, despite cultural progress, our brain has remained prehistoric and has a natural penchant for anthropomorphic explanations. It is difficult to admit that the future is not written anywhere and that we are not determined by destiny. Man's freedom bears the full weight of his responsibility.

Belief serves to ward off the fear of chance and to introduce into nature an intentionality, reassuring for the feelings but disturbing for the reason: "*We don't have control over events, but there is someone who does. We can influence our future through prayer*". Since observation of the effects is not conclusive, it is enough to pretend that they will unfold in the afterlife.

### **Divine interventions**

To believe that misunderstood phenomena are of divine origin is an archaic attitude. For example, volcanoes, lightning, eclipses and the passage of a comet were, in ancient times, divine manifestations.

It is estimated that a pharaoh had to devote 30 % of his time to rituals in favour of the gods. In spite of the debauchery of the means used, I bet the effectiveness of their "magical power" is questionable. In all likelihood, the priests of today's religions are no better than those of antiquity in terms of the results obtained.

At a given time and in a social environment where people believe in phantoms, it is easy to find people who will testify to having seen phantoms. The same goes for ghosts, werewolves, demons, angels, yetis, UFOs, aliens and other ectoplasms. Such testimonies are useful to shed light, not on the hidden riches of nature, but on the sometimes aberrant functioning of the human mind.

Before Pasteur, the incessant renewal of animalcules was explained by spontaneous generation. For example, the maggots appearing "spontaneously" in the meat, we saw "by evidence" a plethora of divine creations. Today they are natural phenomena. Epidemics - plague, cholera, leprosy, syphilis, etc. - have changed in nature: once unstoppable divine plagues, that is to say punishments, they have become microbial infections to be fought, often successfully.

Isn't it curious that one can protect oneself from the divine wrath by simple hygiene measures, which would place God and pathogenic bacteria in the same category of dangers? As the AIDS pandemic has shown, however, belief in divine curses, which would only deserve laughter, is taken seriously by believers. Worse still, it is exploited to stigmatise certain categories of "sinners" and remains a boon to missionary activity.

We can postulate that the rare observations that might seem miraculous today will be natural phenomena tomorrow. Thus God, in the past more active than Hercules, has been driven out of the field of admissible explanations and now finds himself in partial unemployment.

It is in the interest of the powerful and the rich to make it look as though events are taking place under the influence of divine interventions. They can thus place their privileges under the protection of God. Providence consecrates those who have succeeded; the losers will find consolation in another world. This is an excellent doctrine to defend the established order. It is easy to understand why those in power are usually ardent defenders of religion [see p. 66: *Authority: the parable of the magic pact*].

If man has been able to reduce the scale of certain calamities, such as diseases, it is certainly not thanks to prayers or religious ceremonies, but to the development of science and technology. Anyone who refuses to explain illness by natural causes will easily find a thousand other explanations. However, if misfortune is a heavenly punishment for evil deeds, why are the rich less exposed than the poor? And why does it also affect innocent children? The blind way in which misfortune strikes, unrelated to merit, cannot be a matter of divine justice [see p. 75: *Is God good or paradoxical?*].

To see the supernatural in a natural phenomenon, for example in a birth, is to strip nature of its richness and depth and to transpose the intangible into fantasies. If everything that is unexplained were to be supernatural, we would benefit from an inexhaustible palette of universal explanations, a sort of pharmacy full of panaceas of thought. Explaining the existence of something - universe, life, human being - by a divine creation only takes us a tiny step forward, because the problem of God's existence is still inexplicable. Moreover, this explanation is very short and poor; we have the impression that we have said everything, but learnt nothing. God and his mysteries do not make the world more intelligible. Recourse to the mysteries is the expedient of the one who is short of arguments. If the world is a whim of the gods, there is nothing to understand; all that remains is to submit and pray.

At the heart of the believers' reasoning are arguments that proceed from the following model: "Since science is incapable of explaining the origin of life, it is that it was created by God". Following the same pattern, we can imagine ancient Greeks thinking: "Since no natural physical phenomenon can explain lightning, it necessarily comes from a personal and voluntary intervention of Zeus". In order to avoid admitting that he is ignorant, the human being follows the leaders who have opinions on everything, and the most inspired are the priests. Faith allows doctrine to be fixed in such a way that any questioning becomes useless.

Indeed, many things are unexplained and, at present, inexplicable. But, that our ignorance serves to justify belief in God is an argument that is inadmissible, because it is based on a vacuum.

One can rightly be wary of those who know so well what God wants. Thus, after the earthquake in Lima in 1746, the Viceroy of Spain decreed the appropriate penance: women's skirts had to be lengthened in order to fight against the true cause of divine punishment: lustful thoughts.

Does God personally intervene each time an egg is fertilised to breathe life into it or to create an immortal soul? Do people who suffer from dissociative identity disorder, with two consciences, have two souls or two half-souls? Creationists deny evolution and call for an act of the Creator for each species. If God is free and acts in impenetrable ways, then nature is essentially incomprehensible; divine action blurs natural laws and impedes knowledge of reality. Imagine for a

moment that prayers were answered; then all medical experiments on the effectiveness of medicines would be distorted!

During the famine of 1788, perceived as a manifestation of heavenly wrath, religious ceremonies and processions, if possible with relics of Saints, were multiplied to obtain divine graces. Prayer confirms fatality and encourages resignation<sup>49</sup>. On the other hand, in 1815, France alleviated the famine by importing wheat from Russia.

To justify the existence of God, the following argument is often used: "So much natural beauty and so much complexity can only be the product of supernatural intelligence". By removing the rhetorical aspects of the formula in order to extract the mechanism from it, the argument becomes : "If we don't understand it, it's because God did it." This is probably why ignorant people have the most unshakeable faith. If we want to encourage the understanding of nature through the development of science - when God is the measure of the ignorance of the laws of nature - it becomes desirable to avoid faith in an explanatory God.

Of course there are miracles: they appear everywhere in advertising slogans, for example: "*Lose 20 kg in 2 weeks, effortlessly*". That such claims can be taken seriously shows that the human brain accepts fables that please it. Religious beliefs are mounted on the same mechanism.

Since science exists only because God is silent, it bears witness to the absence of divine goodwill. Since the Trinity is a mystery, the Incarnation is a mystery, the existence of hell is a mystery, the existence of evil is a mystery, the explanatory power of Catholicism is derisory. The belief that "*confused, esoteric, hermetic, symbolic thought is richer and more lovable than clear thinking*" keeps its supporters in a dreamlike, subjective, obscurantist world, unrelated to reality.

On the contrary, a rationalist hopes that God, if he exists, will reduce his role to that of spectator. Since "miracles" are rare and unproven, the observation of the world is compatible with this hypothesis. While the religious posture denies chance and replaces it with divine design, the sciences have driven out the final causes from their explanations; but the believer imagines God manipulating the chance of nature. A God who acts only through the laws of nature is useless, since prayers, cults and offerings do not influence the course of events. The appeal to an external force that has no effect on the functioning of the system shows that the scriptwriter is bad and resorts to the expedient of *Deus ex machina*. In short, faith and science are compatible, because the Creator remains invisible and is forgotten.

However, love of truth and love of faith are generally incompatible. The former teaches mistrust of appearances and unfounded assertions, while the latter cultivates trust in the tradition that cements the sense of belonging to a community. It follows that truth must set faith aside, and that faith cares little for objective truth.

By attributing to the pre-Christian gods a gigantic, but not infinite power, as well as flaws, the peoples of the Antiquity were more attuned to the world as it presents itself to us and possessed a philosophical awareness less unrealistic than many of our contemporaries.

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49 "Thy Will Be Done, O Lord".



Since faith does not clarify the mysteries we face, it is better to leave the question open to scientific curiosity. Instead of remaining fixed in "absolute truth", knowledge, even modest, is attested and can be enriched to become more relevant.

In short, since we can understand the workings of the universe without divine intervention, God's explanatory role is not of great interest. Contrary to the religious attitude, which offers only a hollow and sterile paradigm, scientific openness is a fertile ground whose developments are prodigious.

Science teaches us to formulate hypotheses, test them and reject all those that are inconsistent or do not agree with the facts or are not necessary, thus eliminating religious beliefs.

From the previous developments, I retain the following postulates:

- All phenomena observed, whether explained or not, are natural.
- It is rationally advantageous to avoid recourse to the supernatural. In particular, it is constructive to look for natural explanations for any alleged miracle.
- The supernatural is totally imaginary.

### **Epistemology: some objections of a physicist to neo-Thomism**

The 19th century was the century of triumphant science. It was then common to think that the enterprise of science was coming to an end, that everything real was scientifically explainable. There were still a few gaps, but they would be filled over time. It later turned out that these were not simple gaps, but difficulties so serious that the whole of physics had to be reconstructed. Thus, in the 20th century, relativistic and quantum physics were born.

On this occasion, the most fundamental concepts were questioned. We can speak of a real intellectual revolution that forces us to break away from traditional ways of thinking. Any philosophical system that did not take these new elements into account would disqualify itself.

To fully appreciate what follows, let us recall that, in philosophical matters, the Catholic is "free", but only insofar as he remains linked to neo-Thomism.

### **On the distinction between deep thinking and high thinking**

By etymology, deep and high thoughts are antagonistic:

- Deep thoughts are close to the basics and as such depend on few hypotheses. This is the case, for example, with the philosophical work of Karl Popper.
- On the other hand, higher thoughts are perched above a vast cultural construction based on an abyssal list of assumptions such as belief in God, faith in the dogmas of the Catholic Church, trust in the authority of the Pope, etc. A good illustration of this is given by Thomistic philosophy.

It is obvious that the more numerous the hypotheses and the higher the edifice, the more questionable and fragile the thought is.

### **On the inadequacy of common sense and evidence**

The way of conceiving time, space and matter - in the ordinary or classical sense - is well adapted to the macroscopic world in which man evolves. On the other hand, it proves inadequate for the physicist who hunts down elementary particles. Although the mathematics of quantum mechanics allows us to describe the real world very precisely on a subatomic scale, it is (currently?) impossible to intuitively represent phenomena, because the usual macroscopic concepts (such as "particle", "wave", etc.) are inappropriate. The functioning of the universe escapes spontaneous understanding.

The world is too complex to be directly understood by intuition. Many of the laws of physics are far removed from common sense. Few people understand the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. The laws of nature are far from obvious. True objectivity is not possible. In any experiment, the fact that the observer is a man plays an irreducible role. This difficulty is overcome by the notion of inter-subjectivity.

The physicist can rely on experience. How does neo-Thomism guard against the inadequacies of common sense, intuition and evidence?

### **On the hypothetical nature of knowledge**

Any scientific theory or model is based on the choice of concepts and axioms, which inevitably involves an element of arbitrariness. The validity of laws is only established a posteriori by a process that controls the consequences.

In physics, control is exercised through criticism, observation and experimentation. In other words, we do not know if the theories in use are really correct, but we do have criteria for rejecting the false ones. The physicist knows that the fundamental laws of physics are "hypotheses that have not been disproved so far". This is expressed by saying that physics uses "revocable models". Repeated observations do not prove a law, but only support an existing model or formulate a new model. The notion of scientific truth has been relativised: the truth of a model has a provisional character: it is only valid as long as no observation contradicts it. It is said that science obeys the "principle of revision". Induction can never provide definitive proof that a physical theory is "true". There are no certain theories<sup>50</sup>, only hypothetical but well-tested theories, and false theories.

Conversely, neo-Thomism does not admit the impossibility of demonstrating the first axioms of a theory. It also rejects the hypothetical or revisable character of its speculations. It presents itself from the outset as a miraculous theory that exposes "absolute and immutable truth". Its faculty of interpretation is such that no fact or event could invalidate it. Doesn't the neo-Thomist feel any discomfort in claiming this singular privilege?

### **On the existence of a principle of causality**

In a probabilistic, and therefore non-deterministic theory, the word "cause" takes on a radically different meaning from the classical definition. Quantum physics has abandoned the classical principle of causality. There are phenomena that have no cause<sup>51</sup>. The same causes do not always produce the same effects<sup>52</sup>. It has even been established that it is a true hazard, i.e. not produced by

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50 In this context, true and false are not symmetrical.

51 For example, the disintegration of a nucleus of a radio-active isotope.

52 The state of a quantum particle is expressed by probabilities.

hidden determinism<sup>53</sup>. Contrary to what Einstein said "God does not play dice", we know today that the evolution of reality is not predetermined: the future is neither contained in the present nor written in advance.

In such a context, can a general principle of causality still be invoked? Why should the general principle of causality not admit exceptions? This can be seen as one more argument against Thomistic proofs of the existence of God.

### **On the universality of a principle of causality**

The physicist knows that each theory defines its own notion of causality. For example, Aristotle claimed that the speed of a body was caused by a force, which Newton corrected by linking the force to the acceleration. Thus, in classical physics, speed has no cause<sup>54</sup>. The notions of causality in the various physical theories - relativity, quantum mechanics - are incompatible with each other. There is no precise definition of causality valid for all physics. The description of causality is a horizon towards which we are tending (grand unification theory), but which is still largely unknown. Identifying causality is a project, an objective. Therefore, in neo-Thomism, how could the general principle of causality be universal without being extremely vague, ill-defined, even utopian?

### **On the nature of a principle of causality**

In pre-university education, the emphasis on "final causes" can be a barrier to understanding the natural sciences. To those who argue that it is better to have concepts from antiquity than nothing at all, I reply that it is better to adopt 21st century perspectives.

### **On the invalidation of Aristotle's philosophy by the natural sciences**

Aristotle's philosophy supports fixism (plant and animal species have remained unchanged since the dawn of time) and essentialism (each plant or animal species is characterised by an essence that defines it).

These conceptions have been invalidated by Darwin's theory of evolution. Variations within the same species are not anomalies, but the rule. These variations, at the basis of the functioning of life, are the engine of evolution.

There is no such thing as pure form, because nature does not seek to reproduce models or patterns identically.

In high school, it is dangerous to develop Aristotle's thinking insistently without giving him the necessary warnings.

### **On the borderline between philosophy and science**

The natural sciences take a certain risk by making assertions that could be disproved by the facts. A single experimental fact is enough to disprove a theory. A theory is scientific because it asserts the impossibility of certain events.

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53 Nicolas Gisin, *The unthinkable randomness*, edition Odile Jacob.

54 It is not even possible to distinguish between immobility and uniform rectilinear movement.

For example, according to Aristotle, the universe is closed and full, therefore emptiness does not exist. If a place seems empty, it is full of air. It would be inconceivable for a place to escape the Creator. Torricelli was the first, around 1640, to highlight the emptiness by means of a barometer. Aristotle's physical theory was gradually put into the archives. It should be noted in passing that the reasoning thus contradicted is of a theological nature, which gives no credence to this type of argumentation. Only a theologian can believe that theology is the queen of sciences.

Contrary to scientific theories, philosophical constructions are based on choices whose consequences cannot be denied by observations. They are therefore irrefutable. According to Karl Popper, they are thus positioned in the field of doctrine and ideology. To reveal the arbitrary nature of their content, it is enough to compare them with competing theories.

Consequently, the authority argument plays a negligible role in the sciences, but is central in philosophy.

### **About the two cultures**

Our society is the meeting point of two cultures: the first with a literary core, which has its roots in Greek Antiquity; the second with a scientific core, which did not really develop until the 17th century after fleeing from the bosom of Thomistic philosophy. It is to be seen as a real revolution through which culture went from the royalty of philosophy to the democracy of the arts and sciences. In each of these two worlds, the background knowledge, the concepts that serve as a reference for the discourse, the play of evocations and analogies, everything is different. What resists oblivion is artistic; what resists criticism is scientific. The artist who calls himself an intuitive has a propensity to imagine relationships and quickly forms an opinion, without the requirement to establish whether these relationships are truly real. There is a greater cultural gap between a writer and a physicist than between a French-speaking writer and an English-speaking writer. On either side of the gap of incomprehension, intellectual attitudes are antinomic: in the first, respect, admiration, even devotion to cultural heritage and the sacredness of tradition; in the second, the testing of the capital transmitted<sup>55</sup>. The distance between these two cultural postures makes dialogue difficult.

For many people, the two cultures are stored in separate, watertight drawers, leading to a kind of split personality: on the one hand, the man who respects a tradition, usually religious, and who, in expressing his culture, imposes an arrogant monologue on nature, and on the other, the rational man who modestly submits his scientific theories to the test of observation and experimentation. But it is not reason that governs the human being.

To be credible, a philosophy with global pretensions cannot be the exclusive domain of one of the two cultures. A new vision of the world remains to be built. It will certainly be more modest<sup>56</sup> and less pretentious than neo-Thomism.

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55 We should not oppose "exact sciences" and "human sciences", because the so-called exact sciences are neither perfectly exact nor inhuman. All sciences are made by men and for men. The borderline is elsewhere, between those who use a scientific method and those who do not, especially the arts. However, as there are degrees in rigour, the borderline is a little blurred.

56 «Humility is the antechamber of all perfections.» Marcel Aymé, Clérambard.

## **No credible philosophy without independence**

A state university must be secular, because a partisan environment biases knowledge. In Fribourg, the Catholic theological faculty is influential. Philosophers who put themselves at the service of a religious ideology are like architects who, ignoring the negative reports of geologists, draw up plans for the seventeenth floor of a building destined to collapse. In an officially Catholic university and heir to the *Kulturkampf*, their situation curbs their independence of mind and discredits them by profiling them as propagandists. The impact on the teaching of philosophy at upper secondary level is obvious: even if presented in a less dogmatic way than in the past, ways of seeing, thinking and judging are Catholic subjects that are protected as reserved areas [See p. 20: *Clericalism and secularism in the canton of Fribourg*], despite the context of public education. While philosophy should be the awakening of reason and critical thinking, I have too often encountered official ideologues in my colleagues.

According to *Karl Popper*, the philosopher cannot be the one who seeks the truth, but the one who flushes out error. In my opinion, only a minimal philosophy, i.e. one that limits itself to a small number of essential decisions and draws the consequences, can be universally applicable. One of the conditions for the development of the sciences is the complete renunciation of recourse to pure spirits, occult forces or a demiurge writer. Presumably, the same should be true of philosophy. In order to strengthen its credibility, it should renounce the art of justifying unfounded religious dogmas with pretentious rhetoric.

Theology, which has renounced its reign over the sciences, must also abandon its pretensions to philosophy, as well as a tendentious way of interpreting history. A theological faculty, characterised by a confessional commitment and subservient to doctrinal authority, has no place in a state university. Academic freedom draws on other sources.

For those who want to base their knowledge on solid foundations, the Faculty of Theology appears as credible as an implausible Faculty of Astrology. I have a different conception of the role of the state. In place of the Faculty of Theology, I would like to see a "Department of Religious Sciences", free from any confessional affiliation, that is to say completely secular.

## **Agnosticism**

The agnostic believes that there is no proof of the existence or non-existence of a creator (or creators) and generally rejects constituted religions. However, as he admits that God may possibly exist, he must consider the possibility, not established but not excluded, of being subject to divine judgment. This is why his position with regard to the religion he has left - or that of his social environment - often remains ambiguous and uncomfortable.

## **Overcoming agnosticism: parsimonious monism**

### **From agnosticism to atheism via the principle of simplicity or Occam's razor**

#### **On the borderline between philosophy and religion**

The two central questions of philosophy are "1. How do we deal with the uncertainty of the future, i.e. what to do with our ignorance?" and "2. What rules will I adopt to govern my life?"

- The response of the believers is "Ignorance no longer exists since the Revelation". The rules to be followed have been recorded in The Book.
- The response of agnostics is "Since we know nothing, we renounce engaging in religion, but we do not exclude that God exists and judges us. According to the precautionary principle, it is better to take this into account and act with the prudence of the believer". The rules to be followed are multiple and contradictory. Each person chooses those which seem essential to him or her. Often, the agnostic defines himself in relation to a religion he has left, but with which certain links remain.
- The atheists' answer is "Since we know nothing, we are not going to conform to mere hypotheses and we will act outside any religion". There are no rules to follow, except those we freely make for ourselves and freely consent to.

Agnosticism is an easy position to take, but it is difficult to argue that credit should be given to simultaneous and contradictory assumptions. And declaring that the Last Judgement is tainted by uncertainty does not relieve one of one's sense of guilt. We will show that atheism is an extension of agnosticism through the principle of simplicity.

#### **Agnosticism**

The agnostic is aware of the limits of human knowledge and accepts them. If our parents' beliefs had been different, what would it be like for us? The wonder in front of the beauties of nature tells us that the complexity of reality is beyond us, which contributes to throwing fog on beliefs. What do we know about the existence of deities: God, god or gods? The supernatural offers an unlimited number of explanations. We are fed with various assertions, without credible proof. If there is "something" in the afterlife without our knowing what it is, it is because "the afterlife" has not informed us of it. So we don't have to worry about it.

What happens to the human soul when we die? We do not know. Among the countless religions that exist, which is the right one (assuming one is true)? If we accept to believe in one religion, wouldn't it be just as justified to believe in another? Isn't faith a cultural heritage which, like a language or a tradition, is neither true nor false, but simply given to be practised as a socio-cultural conformism?

The existence of evil is an offence to divine perfection. Christians verge on incoherence by simultaneously maintaining that God is necessary to explain the world and that the existence of evil is a mystery [see: p. 75: *Is God good or paradoxical?*]. But the theologians have a universal method<sup>57</sup> capable of solving any problem: "*It is a mystery, but he who has faith places his trust in Jesus Christ*". Implausibilities and contradictions dissolve in faith. Since the goodness or omnipotence of God should not be betrayed, would it not be more sensible to simply say: "*The explanation of the world and the existence of God are mysteries*"?

To believe is to adopt one doctrine among countless doctrines. He who says "It is true for me" renounces objectivity to confine himself to a subjectivity, generally shared by a community and maintained under the name of "Tradition". Not to accept the limits of our knowledge is unreasonable. A question is interesting to the extent that it can constitute a field of research. On the other hand, when dealing with a desperate question, investment should be limited. Multiplying hypotheses ad infinitum is sterile. Adopting one narrows the field of vision. To believe in a multipack of ready-made dogmas is to submit to the arbitrariness of the chance of birth and often, in the name of tradition, to allow one's private thoughts to be dictated by one's social environment. It sometimes means renouncing the use of one's critical spirit out of loyalty to one's surroundings or in response to the expectations of one's family. Many people feel constrained by the positions of their loved ones and protect their free will through discretion, silence and seemingly conformist behaviour. Even if a person declares himself or herself a member of a religious community, lack of commitment can sometimes be seen as a passive form of agnosticism. Just as a true democracy can only be established if every citizen feels free to distance himself or herself from the political party of his or her parents or community, religious freedom can only be individual and affirmed.

Random historical circumstances are not enough to define a truth. One must remain open so as not to feel too bothered by new scientific hypotheses. It is foreseeable that even greater upheavals than heliocentrism or the theory of evolution will soon arise.

Agnosticism is superior to faith in mysteries. In the midst of uncertainty<sup>58</sup>, let us avoid taking sides. In spite of the ardent desire to fill the gaps in our knowledge, it is better to be satisfied with our modest attested knowledge rather than resort to religious expediencies. Faith is a bulwark designed to mask the abyss of our ignorance, but wearing doctrinal glasses narrows the field of vision. The agnostic is often a partisan of relativism: "All religions are equal". The believer has given in to the temptation, in a pretentious drunkenness, to imagine himself in God's confidence. Adherence to a belief is a leap beyond reason, a plunge into the emotional unconscious, an irrational act.

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57 A universal method to solve all problems, mathematicians dream of it, but, knowing that it does not exist for them, they look at the theologians with envy.

58 If you argue that your religion is based on serious evidence, ask yourself why countless others brandish as much "evidence" as yours.

In the first instance, agnosticism is the only rationally defensible philosophical position. Any other attitude, subject to what follows, is merely ideological propaganda, since it lacks founding evidence.

### **The principle of simplicity [or Occam's razor]**

What would you think of a person who would maintain that "*When no one is watching, the doves' heads are covered with a halo*"? As the assertion cannot be disproved by observation, it seems compatible with reason. For the happiness of those who believe in the spirit world, everything that is unverifiable is compatible with reason. But inevitably there will be an opponent with sectarian tendencies to claim "*No, it is not a halo, but a pointed hat made of pink felt*", which will highlight the arbitrary nature of the assertion. No biologist can adopt one of these assertions with the argument that it is not possible to prove the contrary. Science is not agnostic.

A foundation of all science is the principle of simplicity. If we have no credible evidence, it is because neither the halo nor the pointed hat exists. This is not a matter of deduction or absolute certainty, but of intellectual attitude, of logical posture: subject to revision principle<sup>59</sup>, our way of seeing the world must be as simple as possible that is compatible with observation. The elimination of arbitrary assumptions [or Occam's razor] allows the emergence of a purified vision of the world, stripped of subjectivity<sup>60</sup> and adapted to the exchange between individuals. Simplicity is necessary for the understanding and rationality of reality, as well as for the establishment of science. By avoiding quarrels whose origin is imaginary, but whose consequences can be sadly concrete, the principle also has a pacifying effect that can be seen in scientific activity. Consider the following statement which we will use below:

The whole of what could potentially exist is contradictory and therefore cannot constitute exploitable material. Rather than tolerating objects or beings whose existence is unverifiable, it is more reasonable to reject them from the corpus of knowledge and ignore them. Thus, their possible existence, without being denied, is deliberately set aside.

### **The agnostic's embarrassment**

Doubting means giving some credence to contradictory assumptions. Reason feels unsatisfied. Faced with the great diversity of religions, the agnostic is perplexed. Living in a universe confined by opaque curtains behind which friendly, hostile or indifferent, but unknowable spirits may be waving, gives rise to an unpleasant, burdensome and agonising feeling.

The agnostic is often in an ambiguous attitude with the religion of his social origin:

- on the one hand, he has severed the formal administrative ties and no longer participates in the community's worship activities;

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59 The principle of revision makes it possible to adapt the theory to new data. Saying that "an object does not exist" implies "within the framework of our current knowledge". The principle of revision responds to an evolving truth. Unchangeable truths exist only in a few restricted fields, mainly in mathematics. But believers claim that they are at the foundation of their respective religions, which shows that they are not only absolute, but also multiple.

60 The irrational has a place, for example in the arts, psychology and so on. Perhaps this is the ultimate dilemma: in philosophical matters, do we trust reason or feelings? The practice of several genres does not require mixing them.



- on the other hand, it gives its consent to essential constitutive elements of this religion, typically a deism which retains certain acquired cultural traits, for example the idea of a possible Last Judgement; to name this state, it would be appropriate to use the expression "Christian agnosticism".

Desiring to be ready in the case, not established but not excluded, where he should undergo divine judgment, the agnostic may feel morally bound to lead a virtuous life, which, given his upbringing, is not unrelated to the religion he has left. Guilt remains as an eventuality, and therefore as a permanent feeling. In this way, the agnostic keeps part of the weight of religion in his heart.

Is the agnostic right not to get involved? If a person hesitates between several beliefs and obeys the adage "Two precautions are better than one", why wouldn't he try to practice several religions in parallel? Some agnostics say they do not believe in God, but in the Great Enigma. Would this expression designate a superposition of deities which, in the manner of a quantum object, would be formed of states "exist" and "do not exist" simultaneously?

Cultivating doubt is good, but developing critical thinking is necessary. For example, it cannot be ruled out that flamingos turn blue when no one observes them, but anyone who wants to avoid drowning in mental confusion will refuse to integrate this option into his or her world view.

Does any belief have sufficient relevance to be considered a credible hypothesis? If one of them is true, but without knowing which one, should we respect all religions, including those that despise human rights?

Our hunter-gatherer ancestors had to draw up a hunting plan, even though they had no guarantee of success. The attitude "I don't know, so I don't do anything" is untenable. Although philosophically founded, the position "Only the uncertain is sure" is pragmatically infertile, and the principle of simplicity pushes us to overcome it. Making choices and taking action, even when the available information is incomplete, are necessities of the human condition. Uncertainty and indeterminacy, which generate discomfort and stress that take us away from happiness, can be overcome by choosing sides. It is possible to choose to shake or stop shaking.

In the absence of a doctrine, it is necessary to have a definite attitude towards the challenges of life.

### **Against moral relativism**

In moral matters, from the moment that the application of Sharia law is rejected, a position has been taken against relativism: religions and the various religious currents are not equivalent and can be judged according to their respect for human rights. A commitment inspired by the critical approach of the Enlightenment can be the basis for a reasonable choice.

### **Towards atheism**

Life is a strange thing: we all have to play a game where nobody knows the rules. Reason, according to the principle of parsimony, requires us to adopt only a minimum set of necessary rules<sup>61</sup> rather than adhering, by chance of birth, to a voluminous package of traditional beliefs. The

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61 I am thinking of the secular morality that flows from human rights [see p. 55: *Some shortcomings of the Catholic Church in secular morality*].

desire for certainties can give us the promise of mirages. Limited in understanding the real world, unable to see the future, but far-seeing in the spiritual world of a community, this is the state that most humans attribute to themselves.

*"Living without fairy tales is more difficult, that's why it is so difficult to live in the 20th century."* [Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard]

When the truth is incomplete or unpleasant, faith cannot fill it in or embellish it with imaginary knowledge.

After passing through Occam's razor, the agnostic becomes an atheist. Personifying good and evil is a literary process that should not be taken literally. If God doesn't interfere with us, it makes no difference whether he exists or not. If God exists, He is playing hide-and-seek with us, and if He wishes to hide, we must respect His will of incognito by completely ignoring Him. The universe remains confined by opaque curtains, but the decision is made to ignore a hypothetical presence in the afterlife as long as no clear signal is perceived. Unlike the followers of relativism, he thinks "Since religions that refer to the divine are not seriously founded, I dismiss them all".

The simpler the explanation, the better. All alternative explanations that use a complex and arbitrary apparatus such as that provided by religions should be rejected. To be wise consists, among other things, in remaining lucid on the frontier between what we know and what we don't know, and thereby avoiding believing.

### **God, the meaning of life and freedom**

The limits of our universe are defined by the cosmological horizon. From the afterlife, we can draw nothing, neither knowledge nor matter to guide our lives. The "Word of God" comes from the collective imagination. Since we have no tangible sign of the existence of God<sup>62</sup>, we can refuse to settle our lives on an improbable being about whom opinions disagree. Religious feeling, probably selected by evolution to strengthen the cohesion of the clan, reveals our ignorance of the human brain. The "something" that we guess beyond what our consciousness perceives is not a spiritual entity, but our unconscious. Filling the inner void with an idol solves nothing. Transcendence is less a matter of philosophy than of psychology or the fantastic arts. The frenetic search for an ideal, and therefore unreal, father figure expresses a form of immaturity. Man is not governed by fate, like a toy subject to the whims of the gods, but is a free being, responsible for his own destiny within the binding limits of the laws of nature. Life does not have a meaning in itself, nor does it have the same meaning for all humans, but it can have a meaning for every person. When it comes to the question of the meaning of life, the most common attitude is to adopt the ideology of one's social environment, without the critical hindsight to perceive the arbitrary nature of the collective imagination. The fact that the meaning of life is beyond comprehension does not mean that "Someone" is taking care of it. The meaning of life is not revealed by a Book: produced by personal consciousness, it is up to each person to define it. Only man is the generator of meaning<sup>63</sup>. Without

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62 Without excluding the existence of an impersonal and blind force.

63 What is the purpose of the bird you saw passing by? If you are a little discouraged, you can say that it is useless. If you have an ecological mindset, you will say that it fulfils a function in a global system. If you are in a poetic phase, you will say that its beauty delights you, and that this is enough to justify its existence. In any case, it is not the bird that makes sense, but you decide what it means.

desire, life empties itself of all constructive impulses. Infinity exists in what we can build, create or love. When man carries love in his heart, it is not the love of God, but the love of life. In contrast to religion, which is the feeling of having a boss to whom one can be accountable, atheism consists of perceiving oneself as an independent entrepreneur. In a first approximation, there are two kinds of individuals: on the one hand, the assisted (the sheep) who call upon their religious authority (the good shepherd) for guidance<sup>64</sup>: "What meaning should I give to my life?"; on the other hand, the autonomous who build a future for themselves: "What life projects will give meaning to my existence?" The believer must follow a predefined model; obedience allows him to escape the responsibility of choice. The unbeliever can exercise a kind of "spirituality" that is broader, more creative, less stereotyped, more personalised. Values are not exclusive to the Churches. There are so many things to love, to understand or to build! To find a path of personal development, religion is only one option among others, probably not the most judicious. For example, committing oneself to the common good often allows one to value oneself. For my part, I give meaning to life with the aim of achieving my fullest potential on all levels: physical, emotional, intellectual and social. Everyone has an idea of what a successful life is and tries to get closer to it but, along the way, has to correct his orientation out of necessity or by changing his tastes, the most important thing being to bring his intentions and actions into harmony.

Let us illustrate the point with the following analogy: a person received a travel voucher as a gift. If the destination is not prescribed, should he complain about it and refer to an institution that will define the route imposed by tradition? As far as I am concerned, the freedom of travel left by the travel voucher is a value I refuse to give up.

Freedom is demanding as to what to do with it. If life has a definite meaning, I am condemned by the duty to follow it. If life has no given meaning, I am free, either to grumble against the nonsense of existence, or to build a life project that gives meaning to my life. The most beautiful freedom is that of creating. The one who is not interested in anything engages in the impasse of nonsense. "The nonsense of existence" is a feeling of lost, jaded or depressed people who don't know what to devote their time to<sup>65</sup>. The expression "the search for meaning" is to be replaced by "the construction of meaning". A secular education<sup>66</sup> for spiritual autonomy could, according to the principle "Become who you are"<sup>67</sup>, help those who think vicariously and find comfort in delegating to an authority the task of regulating their lives. In the end, life has no other purpose than to live it, but it still needs to be organised so that it can be lived in its fullness.

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64 In the 20th century, the Catholic priest still exercised ecclesiastical birth control in confession. Every married woman of childbearing age had to justify herself if she had not had a child for more than a year.

65 There are at least three reasons not to know what you want:

- lack of knowledge of the physical and social environment;
- lack of self-knowledge;
- the absence of desire, as long as it can be distinguished from the desire for inactivity, carelessness or laziness.

The last case being a pathological one, I'll leave it out of my remarks. So there are two remedies left:

- information, training and culture;
- introspection and psychology.

66 Switzerland does not go down this path because, in order to maintain their influence, Christians prefer the state to support certain well-chosen religious communities.

67 «Wie man wird, was man ist», *Ecce Homo* (1888), Nietzsche.

## The unity of the real is opposed to immortality

The claim that human beings are endowed with an immortal soul is arbitrary. To convince ourselves of this, let us look at the answers given by various cultures. Specifically, let us examine how many souls we possess:

- no immortal soul
  - in Buddhism (the soul does not survive after death; reincarnation does not imply an immortal soul);
  - at Epicure;
  - for atheists;
- an immortal soul in the religions of the Book;
- six souls among the Yekuana of Venezuela;
- ten souls among the Vietnamese;
- 90 souls in the Tai-Deng of Laos.

Where several souls exist, they generally have different fates depending on whether they are good or bad.

By simply saying "the soul" for all the cases considered, it can be immortal, or disappear and then resurrect, or be reborn a certain number of times and then dissolve. From another point of view, it can live spiritually without a body, or live in a new body, or live in the old resurrected body. Such diverse becoming is a sign of imaginary theories without any serious basis.

By resorting to the unverifiable, the supernatural offers great possibilities of explanation. Here I propose one more: men are transformed into *Peter Pan* and women into *Mary Poppins*.

Finally, the notion of "soul" is a cultural trait without any objective foundation. Since we have no observable clues as to what happens to the human soul<sup>68</sup> when we die, the immortality of the soul must be eliminated by Occam's razor. We do not have to consider the survival of the soul.

Immortality is a utopia, a fantasy, a denial of death. Carried away by their revolt against reality, believers plunge into a wonderful and heavenly world. I prefer to limit my desires to what is possible and stick to the truism "When you are dead, you are dead".

Let us not be the victims of a rigorous Cartesian division between "material things" and "things of the spirit". I cannot envisage life as being the intersection of two worlds, one being material and made up of inert atoms, the other being immaterial and containing life-carrying or life-infusing entities. The universe cannot be reduced to what can be seen through the spyglass of Catholicism: matter is not inert like the components of a clock, but is capable of spontaneously self-organising<sup>69</sup>, structuring and ordering itself: life and intelligence are natural phenomena. Thus, the main organ of vision is not the eye, which is certainly necessary, but the brain, which processes and analyses visual information. Just as life does not need the divine breath to appear, the mind can emerge when

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68 Do people with a split identity with two distinct consciousnesses have two souls or two half-souls?

69 In the "dissipative systems" introduced by Ilya Prigogine.

the necessary conditions are met<sup>70</sup>. The universe in which we live includes our emotions and thoughts, which do not require a separate spiritual world to exist. Supernatural beings and other spirits exist only in the psyche of individuals. The spiritual dimension exists, but it is subjective. We are parcels of the natural world where a little reason and freedom has been formed. Since our consciousness only lights up for a limited period of time, we have the impression that we are only a passing observer. Beyond this appearance, **consciousness does not come from another immaterial world, man is not an itinerant spiritual being, but a conscious part of the universe**<sup>71</sup>. It is foolish to believe that we would be "*foreigners and exiles* [1 Peter 2:11]", beings of an extraterrestrial nature undergoing trials. The parallel worlds that some people see as spiritual are in fact inner, dreamlike, mythical and imaginary worlds that are modulated in infinite subjective variations. The body and the soul are two aspects of the same reality, as we say the front and the back. Nature, which gave birth to man, societies and their cultures, is much richer and more complex than the human being. If the universe is not enchanted, there is nothing to prevent us from perceiving it as enchanting and marvelling at it. I am convinced of the profound unity of reality<sup>72</sup>. This point of view has the advantage of opening up to science the study of the interactions between body and mind. For example, when we describe software as immaterial, we must remember that information is part of the physical world. Fake, the opposition between the material and the spiritual is detrimental to a correct understanding of the universe in which we evolve. Natural selection has favoured our attachment to survival. By phantasm, our life would be immortal. Religions were built to support this unrealistic hope. Neither the Earth nor the Sun, nothing is eternal. Immortality, outside the universe in which we live, does not concern us. Surviving in a spiritual world means living in the imagination.

### **Religion, Damnation and Redemption**

Since we have no credible evidence that at least one of the religions is true<sup>73</sup>, it is very likely that none of them is true. Unestablished elements cannot be used as a basis for a rule of life. Where the agnostic, avoiding judgement, says "I am not a believer because I don't know what to believe", the atheist is more categorical: "Better nothing than the first religion that comes along", i.e. "I am not a believer because no religious current is credible enough to merit adherence, so I reject them all". Isn't it vain to seek happiness in a place where it cannot be? Belief is a particular mode of mental functioning whose function is, like psychosis, to escape from reality. Apart from its role in the struggle for power, religion is an archaic therapy designed to relieve people in whom existential questions cause emotional disturbances<sup>74</sup>. "At first sight you are damned, but religion can save you; it gives meaning to your life". It's an aberrant procedure to bring comfort by means of an escape

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70 See for example [Collective intelligence](#) [in French]

71 In religion, the idea of "connecting" is central. If one thinks one is a stranger to this world, one can feel connected to the beyond. I prefer to think that there is only one world and, as we are all on the same planet, I feel directly connected to other humans.

72 Those who like to file what they find in labelled drawers will say that it is a form of "philosophical materialism", but I prefer to use the expression "**parsimonious monism**" which means monism based on the principle of parsimony.

73 If we can enter into the subject of the human nature of Jesus Christ, it is difficult to do the same about his "divine nature". How to disentangle historical fact, myth and belief? It is of course legitimate to cultivate myths, but only on the imperative condition of admitting that they are allegories.

74 According to Sigmund Freud, religious rites, like the obsessive manifestations of neurosis, serve to protect oneself from anxiety.

from a decree of damnation. Isn't it better to observe that the so-called damnation is a nightmarish myth with no connection to reality? We are not damned, we are mortal. It is a drift in values to devalue our lives in favour of a mythical elsewhere. Our concerns are better invested in the "here now". Becoming an atheist is a way to avoid being blackmailed by religion about what would happen after our death. While religious ideology may be good for some people, it has devastating effects on others. Just as a healthy person is not subjected to medical treatment, a man who has established his inner peace has no need to commit himself religiously. While myths are an inexhaustible source of culture, inspiration and reflection, it is not reasonable to become so involved in a particular myth that it becomes an Absolute. Religious obsession is a pathology, even though it has been culturally and socially valued and is still widespread. It is a characteristic of childhood that the confusion between the real and imaginary worlds. People who are dependent on religion can be prescribed treatment by means of a substitute spirituality [see p. 161: *Adepts of Terminus*]. On the other hand, too many believers are keen to share the benefits of religion with others<sup>75</sup>. The teaching of religion should be limited to religious facts, without any partisan spirit.

### **We can't let a myth dictate our behaviour**

Everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds<sup>76</sup>, because there is no other. But we can, to some extent, choose our future. Atheism is not a belief, but a reasoned choice where the utopia of faith is overtaken by freedom. If we are not children of God, we are born of stardust<sup>77</sup>. An organising principle exists: the laws of nature. By asserting that man is a natural being, research on the human being is placed on fertile ground. Despite the spectacular progress in biology, our understanding of life remains superficial. As for the explanation of intellectual faculties, we are still in the early stages. While explanations based on pure spirits are sterile, science aims to explain why and how order and regularity emerge from chaos. Fundamental questions, such as the origin of universe<sup>78</sup>, are for the moment beyond the reach of human knowledge. Reality still conceals many mysteries<sup>79</sup>, but we have no other credible way, no magical shortcut, no divine revelation<sup>80</sup>. To go far, we have to go a long way in the same direction. How can we choose our course and keep it? My only compass is rationalism, which is not a doctrine, but an intellectual attitude, a way of approaching problems. The effects of this method can be appreciated in the choice of arguments and the logical articulation of discourse: sticking to the facts and exercising a systematic criticism of any argument of authority or transmitted by a tradition. Beyond our knowledge lies only ignorance.

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75 Sometimes I envy the believer: I wish I could have prayed "Lord, protect me from all those who practice proselytism".

76 Allusion to *Candide*, by Voltaire.

77 According to the expression of the astrophysicist Hubert Reeves.

78 To explain the Big Bang, theorists propose, among other things, models in which our universe would be a spatio-temporal bubble appearing in an infinite and eternal meta-universe which would generate, via an infinite big bang, an infinite number of universes endowed with different physical laws. The Big Bang from which our universe comes from would be a white fountain, that is to say the rebound following the collapse of the black hole where the universe that preceded ours would have been concentrated. Another hypothesis could be more plausible: quantum mechanics does not deal with reality, but only with the information we have about it. Physics also tends to become modest.

79 Nothing to do with religious mysteries: these are mere gaps, and not theological expedients to hide inconsistencies and contradictions.

80 Aware of the limits of science, I do not associate myself with positivism or scientism. I do not claim that science can explain everything. On the contrary, I affirm that, in our modest and hypothetical knowledge, gaps do not have to be filled by acts of faith.

Additional hypotheses are nothing but arbitrary complications that fuel fuelling futile quarrels. We cannot allow a myth to dictate our conduct. For a better adaptation to the human condition, let us replace the supposed quietude of religious certainty<sup>81</sup> with the jubilation of exploring the unknown.

By engaging in the arts, we can humanise and enrich reality and, through a poetic vision, achieve wonder.

## Resisting faith: religious indifference, agnosticism and atheism

### *Question or objection*

*Numerous accounts testify, in a circumstance of imminent death, to the passage through a tunnel, the end of which is brightly illuminated. One can see there an opening to an afterlife.*

### Answer

When brain activity is disturbed, visual areas spontaneously produce geometric shapes. It is the organisation and functioning of the visual cortex that is thus reflected, which has nothing to do with the revelation of an afterlife.

*I have the intense feeling of living under the benevolent protection of a guardian angel. I feel that someone is watching over me.*

You generally feel lucky. On the other hand, slum dwellers in Bangladesh should not often see angels passing by. Angels have their darlings. Why this privilege over those who are unlucky? Is it necessary to understand that an important part of humanity has to live under the malevolence of demons?

I suggest looking for more natural explanations. If your character is worried or pessimistic, you tend to compare the events that happen to you with those you fear. You then feel lucky. Or perhaps you simply have the lucidity to appreciate how lucky you are.

As far as I am concerned, I sincerely hope that the course of my life does not depend on spiritual beings, both good and evil, who play skirmishes, as in bad children's stories.

About divine love, see p. 75: *Is God good or paradoxical?*

*Since faith allows us to live better, it doesn't matter whether it is true or not. It's the result that counts: I live happier in the perspective of eternal happiness.*

The argument that applies to an outside witness becomes inoperative for the person concerned, because as soon as he or she realises that he or she no longer cares about the truth, his or her faith loses strength and hope fades. Turning uncertainty into absolute truth and living according to unrealistic expectations are forms of lies whose placebo effect cannot be the basis for happiness.

With the prospect of the Last Judgement and the threat of purgatory or hell, the believer perceives death as an event with an uncertain outcome, and therefore highly dramatised. Atheism brings a more soothing vision: death is

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81 An ironic expression for the opposite, namely religious anxiety [see p. 139: *Overcoming the fear of death*].

a natural event with no stake in it. Peace of mind more conducive to happiness is granted to those who trust reason. On the other hand, believing that faith is superior to reason condemns one to live in religious anxiety. Peace is displaced to the other world and reserved for the chosen ones.

Read p. 139: *Overcoming the fear of death*

*A religion is true because every believer sincerely desires it to be true. Thus, all religions are true.*

The need to believe is based on the following principle: "The religion I practise is the true one because I desire with all my heart that it should be so". This is an admission of bias that undermines the credibility of the argument.

It is other people's religions that are false. Since the others are in the majority, each religion is declared false by the greatest number. The diversity of beliefs reveals their arbitrary character masked by the religious conformism that is imposed in the immediate vicinity of each believer.

Read p. 92: *On the likelihood that a given religion is true*

### **Respect for religions**

Human beings are entitled to respect, without exception. On the other hand, all ideologies and beliefs can be subjected to criticism according to criteria of rationality and respect for human rights. For example, the atheist can criticise Islam just as the Muslim can criticise atheism.

Is it offensive to attack a religious symbol? As an example, consider blasphemy. To take a step back, imagine a religion that reveres the **Big Blue Rabbit** and has decreed, among other things, that it is forbidden to depict the "Big Blue Rabbit" under penalty of stoning. Should all humans who have drawn a blue rabbit be stoned? It is better to take preventive measures:

- the blue ones must be removed from the coloured pencil boxes;
- In schools, it should be taught that animals should only be drawn with very small ears, or no ears at all.

The basic question is to understand and admit that it is allowed to live and evolve in a cultural basin other than one's own, but with a major restriction: religions and cultures are not equivalent, because one can assess how they respect human rights and religious freedom.

**And one can never ask anyone, believer or not, to submit to confessional rules that are not one's own.**

*It is destiny, it was written*

Whoever believes in destiny does not need to look left and right before crossing the street. Indeed, if it is not written down, no vehicle is going to run him over and he is safe. On the other hand, if it is his fate, even looking left and right, he will be surprised by an accident. Taking precautions, protecting oneself, all this is useless. Fatality will surprise him whatever he does. He doesn't bear the responsibility for what happens to him. This is very convenient, because he is thus relieved of worrying.



In Offenbach's operetta *La Belle Hélène*, Hélène cheats on her husband, King Menelaus, with the liberating argument "*It's fatality*". It is laughed at, because recourse to an inescapable fate is only legitimate in the face of events over which one has no control. But, from Hélène's point of view, this is indeed the case since she attributes the situation to the will of the gods. To each his or her role: to the gods the responsibility, to her the enjoyment of life.

Some people engage in risky behaviour: extreme sports, taking drugs, speeding at the wheel, etc. When we try to warn them about the danger, an argument is often put forward: "*if it is written that I must die now, I cannot escape my fate; if not, I risk nothing*". This is a variant of "God decides" as in Russian roulette.

Belief in destiny is attractive because it removes responsibility and fear. Unfortunately, it does not protect against stupidity. By following the reasoning, you can take any risk you want, even try to commit suicide: if it is not your time, you will come out of it unscathed. We bet?

Reason encourages us to identify the elements on which we can act to improve our lot, and to remain indifferent to anything beyond our field of action. We are not completely powerless, and our future depends at least partly on our behaviour. We therefore have a share of responsibility towards ourselves.

*Why is there something rather than nothing? Why are we on earth? What is the meaning of life? Why is there so much suffering in the world? Why does evil exist?*

The word "Why" has several distinct meanings:

- exploration, the search for a possible explanation, scientific curiosity, etc.;
- an ultimate and definitive explanation in the certainty of the First Truth.

While the first attitude should be encouraged, the second is desperate and sterile. The question "Why is there something rather than nothing" also applies to the existence of gods. Why should there be a god who is benevolent towards us?

*«Is there so much to know?  
What happens to the best days?  
Where do first loves go?  
Where does the scent of roses fly? [...]  
Isn't it wiser to ignore?»*

[Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille, *Manon*]

Why is it so difficult for us to admit that we don't know? It's raging that we don't know the whole story and we would have liked a better world. But are these sufficient reasons to promote a mythical story to the rank of absolute truth in order to build an ultimate explanation? I prefer to think that "Knowing that one does not know is the beginning of wisdom".

**Our existence is not an enigma to be understood, but an opportunity to be lived.**

*I cannot accept that man is only an animal.*

The animal nature of man is hardly disputed. The question is what is specific about man compared to other animals. Part of the problem may stem from contempt for animals, a feeling that needs to be suppressed.

The traditional Western vision grants man a human essence that places him in a position completely separate from nature. Tradition teaches us that a deep gulf separates man from the animal: while man possesses an immortal soul, the animal does not. Add to this the injunction of Genesis "Fill the earth. Rule over every living creature", and he who has received such a teaching must refuse to be just an animal.

Today, science is building a new way of looking at nature. We share 98 % of our genetic code with the chimpanzee. We are discovering that animals have many cognitive processes similar to ours. In the tree of life, man is only a small branch in the immensity of the tree. The whole evolution of science shows a continuity between animal and human: use of tools, tool making, culture, self-awareness, etc. It is, therefore, no longer insulting to be called an animal.

*«The Darwinian revolution will be complete when we abandon our arrogance [...], admitting that Homo sapiens is but a tiny twig, barely born yesterday, on the luxuriant tree of life.»*

Stephen Jay Gould

We have no serious evidence that man is a supernatural being, i.e. produced by the intervention of a spirit, according to a different process from that of an animal. The spiritual dimension exists, but it is subjective. Nature is not our environment, because we are part of it. The meaning of the word "animal" must be extended and enriched so that man can find his place in it. Perhaps you will agree to say that "man is a natural being"?

If, as an alternative, you think that man is an extraterrestrial spirit on trial on Earth because of the curse of original sin, you are in the realm of fantasy tales.

I prefer a natural, perishable flower to an immortal, dried or synthetic flower, but I am amazed at those who say they prefer a flower that is both natural and immortal. Giving an instinctive answer is unrealistic. Anyone who complains that the stones are too hard, I call them ridiculous. Believers imagine a fabulous and enchanted world where Christ has risen and where they will live eternally in divine happiness.

To think that the search for immortality is in vain is neither a modern idea nor is it linked to atheism, as shown by one of the oldest known texts, the "Epic of Gilgamesh". Our beauty is not that of a diamond, but that of a sensitive being who can, during the time of a lifetime only, love and think.

*Only the fear of God can keep people on the right path. That is why the atheist is amoral.*

In the Middle Ages, in order to prevent attacks on people and property, the justice system threatened to apply the worst tortures. But deterrence was limited, as misery was the cause of petty theft and it was common to see thieves praying to avoid being caught. Now we know that threats,

intimidation and repression alone are measures of limited effectiveness, as can still be seen today in the fight against drugs.

Until recently, popular pedagogy considered that only the fear of corporal punishment encourages children to behave well. Nowadays, it is considered wrong to mistreat children. There is now a different conception of education.

To believe that only the fear of God and the fear of hell can keep people on the right path is a simplistic, partial and reductive vision of humanity. It is a very sad image to see only the selfish side of mankind. It is important to have a less despicable opinion of oneself.

On the contrary, it is a widespread attitude to be respectful in order to be respected and kind in order to be loved. Living in society requires respect, otherwise the situation becomes unbearable for everyone. It is not necessary to adhere to a religion to realise this. As far as I am concerned, I do not want to live in a world governed by brute force, and I am committed to the defence of human rights.

Man being an individual and social being, he is both selfish and altruistic, defending his own interest and the common good, but neither totally selfish nor totally altruistic. Everyone reaches an intermediate position of equilibrium. In the struggle for survival, cooperation brings advantages and plays as important a role as competition. Conscious of his or her dependence on society, the individual feels obliged to shift some of his or her vital concerns towards the common good. This disposition of mind, which is the result of natural selection, is the basis of morality. It seems simplistic to me to think that the atheist is devoid of morality since morality exists outside religions.

It is wise today to stop believing in the educational value of abuse and to give people more respect, more education and more confidence. In short, I would rather believe in man than in hell. True humanism is not religious.

*I'm pretty much an atheist*

Some people told me that they were "almost atheists" because they doubted the existence of God. But no, this position is that of agnosticism, not atheism.

Other people call themselves agnostics, while being part of a Church and participating in worship beyond the simple respect of social conventions. This is an intermediate state between belief and true agnosticism.

It seems to me that few people can define themselves in a coherent way. The majority are spread over a wide range of ill-defined intermediate positions. By navigating from doubts to hesitations, one can easily go from a counter-sense to a contradiction. It is an ordinary state of those who have been drowned in the smoke of indoctrination.

### **My definition of atheism**

Since there are several variants of atheism, I will clarify here the meaning I give to this term.

**The atheist does not believe in the judging God,** i.e. he rejects the sequence of beliefs: « *Human beings have a form of survival; when they die, they are judged and then rewarded or punished* ».

Thus, if God exists and if something of us survives after death, which is not established, there is no reason to believe that God gives us good and bad points to reward or punish us in the afterlife. In other words, I don't believe in the God of carrots and sticks.

This definition does not pronounce on the existence of a creator God and may be compatible with pantheism.

On the other hand, it disqualifies moral retribution. Thus, it also excludes religions which, without mentioning God, announce reincarnations, with or without cycles, which depend on moral behaviour.

However, my personal position goes further than this definition since I do not believe in any form of survival after death, which greatly simplifies all these philosophical questions. To put it bluntly, I use the expression "strong version of atheism".

*Atheism is a belief very similar to a religious belief.*

This article is a follow-up to [*From agnosticism to atheism via the principle of simplicity*, see p. 118], but can be read as a stand-alone section.

You seem to confuse "Believing that God does not exist" with "Not believing that a god exists". Atheism simply consists in considering as unfounded any belief in one or more deities. One must first agree on the meaning of the words. A creative force is of interest to philosophers, but much less to mere mortals. The God we are talking about here would weigh our actions, record them in his infinite memory, judge us, allow himself to be influenced by ceremonies or prayers and sanction us according to the jurisdiction of our respective religions. In another culture, but in the same vein, after reincarnation, the shape of the new body (vegetable, animal or human) would depend on our merit.

On the other hand, some atheists believe in a creative God who does not judge us. They believe that the attributes of the God of the Bible were imagined by man in the image of kings. Since our behaviour has no consequences in the afterlife, we can completely ignore God. My personal position is a bit different: beyond physics, we can imagine whatever we want; there is no reason to choose a possibility to believe in it. The atheist does not necessarily deny the existence of God, but in all variants he definitively puts all divinity into oblivion. In short, the atheist is "he who lives without God".

It is not a question of establishing that God does not exist, but only that the probability of the existence of a personal God is too low for there to be any interest in getting involved in religion, and even lower still for a God who would have dictated guidelines to us. The possibilities that cannot be excluded by evidence are so numerous and varied that we cannot reasonably bet on any one of them. Atheism is also the realisation that no one - no conscious and compassionate higher force - cares for us. In Pascal's wager, the game is not worth the candle. The atheist renounces the bet and moves away from the gambling table of beliefs; he finds it more useful and constructive to invest his time and energy in the secular field. Wisdom consists in detaching oneself from utopias, i.e. in practising religious indifference.

It is incongruous to equate atheism with a religion. Between unbelief and a system of beliefs, there is total asymmetry. Atheism is an extremely compact act of faith since it is reduced to saying no to religion. It has little to do with a religion whose description requires at least one book and, more usually, a whole library.

Belief requires a creed, and atheism has none. Where the believer asserts that his God is true and that others are usurpers, the atheist sees illusions everywhere. It would be better to say: atheism, like every religion, is an ideology.

The atheist does not belong to a Church, i.e. to a spiritual community guided by pastors or leaders. He sees himself as an independent and autonomous being.

To use the terms "faith" and "belief" in connection with atheism, one must first have emptied these words of their religious content. Unfortunately, those who use them are often unable to do so. This is why I prefer to speak of "atheistic convictions". Whereas the believer aims to believe as firmly as possible, the atheist wants to reinforce his or her opinion that we must stop believing.

The atheist does not claim to hold the absolute truth directly dictated by God himself. He is satisfied with the modest lights of human reason. The mathematics I have taught has been atheistic. Thus, whenever I have said " $3 \times 1 = 3$ ", I have deliberately omitted to mention the exception " $3 \times 1 = 1$ " for the mystery of the Trinity. Atheism is, together with religious indifference, a means of freeing us from the imperialism of religions which claim to dictate not only our behaviour, but also our thoughts.

While the faithful submits to the commandments of his religion to avoid Hell and reach Paradise, the atheist remains insensitive to religious blackmail. To say that atheism is a kind of religion is as absurd as saying "*Abstinence is a kind of drug*".

While many believers are willing to write an essay entitled "What I believe", my site could be subtitled "What I refuse to believe". As stated in my tax return, I have "no religion".

When it comes to beliefs, humanity is sick of the maxim "Better a religion than nothing" to which the atheist replies "Better nothing than the first belief that comes along".

For some believers, it is inconceivable to "believe in nothing". In order to cure their dependence on religious faith, I offer them a substitute religion: see p. 161: *Adepts of Terminus* (to be used with discipline and caution, like methadone).

*Is religious belief a belief like any other?*

This question can be answered by carrying out a survey and observing, using statistical methods, whether the intensity of religious belief can be correlated with other beliefs such as astrology, fortune-telling, palmistry, numerology, horoscopes, various superstitions, the intervention of spirits in daily life, telepathy, premonition, miraculous healings, the power of healers, the power of dowsers, homeopathy, etc. My hypothesis is that the

correlation is positive, i.e. that there are people who are globally more credulous than others, in other words that credulity is only slightly selective. I postulate that the attitude of credulity consists in seeing the world as governed by occult or magical forces, as opposed to the rational posture which sees the universe as obeying natural laws. However, only a true scientific study can establish such a conclusion.

*He who adopts an atheist stance displays an extraordinary pride.*

What can be said of those who believe that their Church is the repository of absolute Truth? What to think of one who sees himself as a chosen one with a special bond with God? Perhaps it is not a question of pride but of megalomaniacal pretensions? The depths of the unconscious being opaque, this kind of judgement is out of place and cannot be used as a serious argument.

### **Atheistic rationalism**

In many detective novels there is a character who explains events through the action of supernatural forces. But in the end it is always the inspector who is right, because he is based on rational arguments. Unfortunately, in society, police inspectors are in the minority.

To assert, like Pascal, that "Man is a thinking reed" is an obvious error. Before being rational, man is first and foremost an emotional being.

Rationalism is certainly not a spontaneous attitude. It can only develop from a critical attitude that exposes the emotional attachments that are at the basis of religions.

*«The doctrine of the chosen people is undoubtedly a product of the tribal form of society.»*

Karl Popper, *Open Society and its enemies*

This is why a parallelism can be drawn between

- the decision to adopt human rights in place of the religious morality of one's social environment;
- the decision to adopt atheistic rationalism in place of the religion of one's social environment.

In both cases, the movements are the same: from the guts to the brain, from a tribal way of thinking to universality and from an infantile state eager for the marvellous and supernatural to the age of reason.

*The atheist is not credible.*

I have heard believers, in particular two retired teachers, support the following theses:

- A sensible person cannot sincerely be an atheist, because the existence of God is obvious and it is impossible not to believe in anything. The atheist can therefore only disguise his true thoughts, deceive and lie.

- An atheist cannot be trusted. One must reserve his trust for true believers.

I sincerely hope that the sincerity that emerges from my testimony constitutes a denial of such "theses". To be an atheist is a reasonable, defensible and honourable position.

*As an atheist, you do what you reproach believers for, namely preaching and trying to indoctrinate.*

The movement that you denounce goes from the propagandist to the population: advertising, canvassing, etc. As far as I'm concerned, it's the opposite: it's the Internet users who are looking for texts that answer their questions. I defend my point of view on the internet, it is true. However, only those who want to read me read it. My wife is Catholic, and I have always respected her faith. I refute that my behaviour is proselytizing.

I have not, like Catholicism, set up a system of indoctrination on a planetary scale. I behave better than the public school which subjected me to a very marked ideological education. I am content to defend myself. I am not at the level of action, but of reaction, that is to say, of resistance. "Removing indoctrination" is not indoctrinating! My main message is:

«Beware of "ready-made thoughts" that you are being asked to adopt. Do not capitulate to arguments of authority. Don't allow yourself to be dictated to. Take advice from a variety of sources. Subject ideologies to the criticism of reason. Maintain your intellectual autonomy.»

It is therefore a discourse to fight against religious propaganda. If you break your chains, it is not to accept a new straitjacket! Atheism is a path, not a goal. Other paths of liberation exist: agnosticism, rationalism, religious indifference, anticlericalism, etc. In this attenuated and open form, it seems acceptable to me to militate against militancy.

Let us be inspired by the Enlightenment movement which consists essentially of this:

*“the removal of the man from the state of guardianship for which he himself is responsible. The state of guardianship is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guardianship of another.”*

Was ist Aufklärung ? Emmanuel Kant, 1784

*By becoming aware that they are largely a minority, shouldn't atheists learn to doubt?*

To put the question in context, 8 % of Swiss people declare themselves to be atheists, which corresponds to around 650,000 people (in 2015). Atheism has become a relatively common attitude.

While the majority of the population positions itself along the axis of the heart "I hate / I love", the rationalist prefers the axis of the brain "Irrational / Rational". It is clear that the first attitude seems more sympathetic: the discourse of atheists is less sexy than that of religious preachers, who are able to make more promises than honeyed advertisements appealing to dreams.

Unfortunately, even inspired by the Holy Spirit, the majority do not always show the right path. Against the advice of the Church and the whole of Christendom, Galileo dared to claim that the Earth is not fixed and immobile at the centre of the world. Renouncing the critical spirit and allowing oneself to be guided by the Church is a dubious choice.

In the world, believers are in the majority, but Christians are in the minority. Will the latter start to doubt?

### **Crosses in public spaces**

The cross is, like all instruments of torture, the shame of humanity. The cross is a symbolic and purified version of the crucifix which represents the Calvary of Christ. The crosses placed in public spaces and on mountains proclaim the triumph of Christianity and its reign over society. Some are "mission crosses", which says a lot about the spirit in which they were erected. For me, they also evoke the crucifix in the classroom where, as a child, I had to repeat the catechism. I am relieved that this period is over, but for anyone who has received a Christian education, the cross remains a symbol that is undeniably religious.

Today, the tendency is to lighten the Christian heritage of a part of its substance in order to make what is left of it more acceptable. Passing the cross off as a unifying symbol that also has a secular interpretation - a man with open arms - is a historical misinterpretation. The past questions us, and we distort its messages. Perhaps the cross will one day become a secular symbol, but the announcement seems premature to me.

Crosses in public spaces cause discomfort to those who do not feel connected to an established religion. They must nevertheless be received as cultural heritage, and whoever accepts them in the landscape does not necessarily indicate adherence to a religion. On the other hand, I find it more problematic to defend crosses ardently, but not what they represent.

The adjectives attached to the cross are not without consequence. If the cross is a symbol that everyone interprets in their own way as religious or secular, then Christian activists can continue to erect new crosses in public spaces. I am thinking in particular of the ostentatious one on the edge of the A12 motorway in Châtel-Saint-Denis (Switzerland). Will this continue? It bothers me to pass under a cross that says to me "I bear witness to the Christian faith of this country" when it is my land and I don't feel Christian. **Believers do not only worship God, they also worship to speak on behalf of everyone.**

Since yesterday's society was permeated by religion, a consensus had been reached on the presence of crosses. With the de-Christianisation of Western Europe, public manifestations of faith become less ostentatious. Today's crosses divide, especially those that are intended to be hung in every classroom. Given the diversification of religious feelings, I am opposed to the erection of new crosses. Religious movements should not be allowed to take over the public space, be it mountains or schools. Since the cross is a predominantly religious symbol, erecting a new one is a partisan and inappropriate act.



## The funeral cross

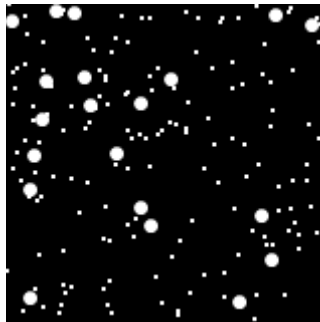


I find it in bad taste to place funeral ceremonies under the omnipresence of the crucifix.  
A religion that elevates suffering to the status of a model falls into a kind of moral masochism.

It is difficult to do worse, unless you represent an impalement.  
Perhaps I am wrong to renounce a Catholic ceremony:  
just the thought of it could dissuade me from dying!  
More seriously, I don't want a cross on my coffin or on my urn.



A new secular funerary aesthetic remains to be created.  
Believers appreciate the symbol "Light at the end of the tunnel".



Atheists prefer the symbol "Dissolution in the universe".

*I prognosticate that you will regain faith at the approach of death.*

Religious hope is anxiety-provoking and overwhelming,  
see p. [139](#): *Overcoming the fear of death*.

## Meditation

The practice of meditation allows, among other things, to relax and de-stress. These effects are explained by the slowing down of the metabolism (heart, lungs, brain). A state of consciousness of inner peace can take hold. Meditation also consists of getting rid of anxiety-provoking beliefs.

To ward off negative emotions, classic exercises consist of concentrating on your body, typically on your breathing. Personally, it is enough to focus on an emotionally neutral subject such as a mathematics or computer problem. An impersonal preoccupation soothes the deep movements of the soul. Whether religious minds like it or not, rationalism has a spiritual function. Awakening consists in becoming aware of the vanity of faith.

Just as rest is essential for the athlete but cannot be the main component of his training, the practice of meditation is a factor of well-being but cannot be a life goal.

### **Buddhist Karma**

Reincarnation is very trendy: it is a kind of ecological recycling of souls.

According to the Buddha's teaching, my present state (my suffering, my joy, my perception of the universe, my destiny, etc.) is the result of my past acts. In particular, my suffering is explained by my past lives full of negative emotions. My future is determined by the quality, positive or negative, of my present actions.

On the contrary, I think I have only one life and believe that the evolution of the universe is governed, not by the consequences of respecting moral rules, but by the natural laws of physics.

### **An inexhaustible source of inspiration**

*Intelligence is not magic, you just have to think of something stupid and say the opposite.*

[Coluche, French humorist]

I was asked where I get my ideas, where the material that forms the framework of my texts comes from. I didn't have to go looking for them, because they imposed themselves on me. Throughout my life I have been surrounded by believers who have overwhelmed me with Christian visions mixed with neo-thomistic philosophy. By taking the opposite side of each thesis, I have frequently come up with something that makes sense.

This absurd behaviour can be explained: the believer speaks of love to hide the fact that he is governed by fear, which deprives him of his brain and leads him to subordinate his reason to the Doctrine.

### **Tartan and religion**

If we had to choose a tartan, we would be guided by our favourite colours and personal tastes. A Scot could not do this, as it is his duty to wear the tartan of his clan, family, or institution.

This is often the case with religion: children adopt their parents' religion. In order to preserve the harmony of the relationship with the relatives, doubts should not be shown.

In the Western world, the situation is changing because social pressure is decreasing. At present, it should be accepted that everyone can give up wearing the "tartan" of their family, and even, may not wear any "tartan" at all. What folklore loses is gained by individual freedom.

## De-dramatising death to alleviate life

"If there is nothing after death, then there is no point in living". This statement suggests that life is a kind of work that deserves pay. Being convinced that I am not endowed with immortality, I could not take the fruits of my actions to the afterlife and the morality of reward-punishment is inoperative.

Religions work to dramatise existence. In addition to death itself, the believer has to face additional trials such as the Last Judgement, and is then directed towards Paradise, after a possible stay in Purgatory, or towards Hell. The verdict is valid for eternity, and it is very frightening. In other religions, Hell is replaced by reincarnation in an inferior being, but the problem remains the same.

My secular heart does not tend towards such a "hope". When religious concerns lead to negative feelings such as fear, it is a measure of mental hygiene to distance oneself from them.

For the atheist, death is a natural event, devoid of the stakes linked to immortality, and therefore de-dramatised. It brings the definitive end of worries and torments. I very much appreciate that life is neither a contest, nor an exam, nor a test with winners and losers. Atheism brings peace of mind, not only in the face of death, but also in everyday life.

One major obstacle, however: this path to serenity is steep for those who believe themselves immortal. Only those who have the mental strength to free themselves from the trap of religious faith have access to it.

## Overcoming the fear of death

What to do with our uncertainties? Should we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the fear of the unknown and the future? Should we eradicate doubts by clinging firmly to a faith?

The atheist is sometimes asked to explain how he overcomes the fear of death without seeking refuge in a religion.

### What do religions offer on their display shelves?

God is not an end in itself, but only one of the possible means to achieve the goal. I take it as proof that religions have given the most diverse answers to the question of the existence of God: a multitude of gods, a few gods, three gods in One, one God, or none.

Buddhism is not concerned with secondary issues such as deities or God, but with what happens after our death, and teaches that the cycle of reincarnations depends on a reward-punishment logic in relation to our behaviour. Comparing this to the Last Judgement, we can see two avatars of the same concept, which shows that deities are not the central object of religions, but a rhetorical means intended to confuse us with the discourse "*If you believe in God, then you must practice our religion in its entirety*" according to the logic of the "*He who takes the finger takes the arm*". We must rise up against this rationally unfounded argument, because God is of the order of desire, not of necessity<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> According to Freud [The Future of an Illusion, 1927], religious belief is an illusion that responds to an archaic aspiration of the child. But "an illusion is not the same as an error, nor is an illusion necessarily an error. ..." What

But what then is the central question of religions? Religion seeks to give credence to the thesis of retributive morality in order to better reign over the faithful. It claims to protect us against misfortune in general, and death in particular, by promising us eternal life, or at least the extinction of suffering, and a certain form of happiness under the condition of being a docile practitioner.

However, since life seems to me to be sufficiently full of dangers of all kinds, I do not see the advantage of adding fictitious dangers situated in the beyond such as occult forces, the devil, the Last Judgement, Purgatory<sup>83</sup>, hell, reincarnation in an inferior being, etc., to it. For example, Christianity holds a double discourse: on the one hand the promise of eternal happiness, and on the other hand the threat of the Last Judgement and hell.

[Matthew 22:13-14]: *"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are invited, but few are chosen".*

In short, death is a shipwreck in which there are not enough lifeboats. A quotation from [Georges Las Vergnas: Why I left the Roman Church] sheds an edifying light on Redemption:

*"If Adam drags all men into his fall, Jesus Christ does not save them all. Adam is therefore more powerful in evil than Jesus is in good".*

To be saved is the hope that gives meaning to life<sup>84</sup> but, as we are all sinners, there is concern. For example, according to the Catholic catechism,

- *"Those who deliberately fail to attend Sunday Mass are committing a grave sin", which is enough to send you to hell!*
- *"Divorce is a grave offence against natural law. The fact of contracting a new union, even if it is recognised by civil law, adds to the seriousness of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery. Adultery is a mortal sin".*
- Couples using artificial means of contraception are in an irregular situation and are not allowed to receive the Eucharist.

The Bible says that only a few will be saved:

[Matthew 7:13-14] *"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it".*

And he insists:

[Matthew 19:24] *"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God".*

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characterises an illusion is that it is derived from human desires".

83 Naturally, the dangers of the afterlife depend on religions. Thus, purgatory only concerns Catholics.

84 Let us bear in mind that being saved presupposes that we have first been condemned by original sin: we are born damned and must be redeemed. According to the catechism, to the question "Why are we on earth", we must answer "To save our souls".

Hell tortures the believer, not after death, but before! Those who are most sensitive to fear are the most exposed.

Fear is useful because, by protecting us from certain dangers, it is a factor of survival. However, it becomes harmful when it is generated by imaginary dangers.

*«Am I to believe that heaven, jealous of its glory, explains itself to humans only by making them tremble?»*

Louis Fuzelier, *The Gallant Indies*

## **The Christian understanding of divine justice**

Until the 17th century, the justice of men wanted torments to be inflicted on the guilty: whipping, iron collar, pillory, torment of the wheel, drawing-and-quartering, torture, burning at the stake and other cruelties of all kinds was commonplace. Christianity has this same vision of justice inherited from the Roman Empire. By extrapolation, hell is a normal continuation. Suffering is atonement. Divine justice "*sin* → *purgatory or hell*" is built on the human model "*fault* → *prison or death penalty*". In this spirit of vengeance, I beg you, dear believers, not to see any theological problem: this is only a banal divine mystery, as there are so many.

*"God, who preaches forgetting faults, does not lead by example and asks us to be better than he is."*

[Georges Las Vergnas, *Why I left the Catholic Church*].

From the 18th century onwards, as unnecessary cruelty was gradually condemned, the justice system used more expeditious methods, such as the guillotine or the firing squad. Making the guilty suffer was no longer an objective. Today, human justice, at least in Western Europe, has shifted to the "*blame* → *prison* → *education* → *rehabilitation*" model. Torture and the death penalty have been abolished. This development has, it seems, not yet reached Heaven. On the contrary, by resorting to infernal cruelty, so-called divine justice puts Christianity at odds with society. How human and dated is the face of God! Are we to believe that divine intentions are part of ancient culture? Compared to the Buddhist view that the main problem facing man is the management of suffering, the Christian posture is an aberration.

Everyone can see for themselves that the ordinary course of life has nothing to do with fair and benevolent justice. Dreaming of justice realised in another world serves to conceal this unpleasant truth, even if this justice has merciless features.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church in § 1036:

*"Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where "men will weep and gnash their teeth"."*

Thus, for divine justice, the murderer who repents is saved, while the usually virtuous man who has committed a mortal sin without having had time to repent is damned. The circumstances of death

take precedence over behaviour during life. By dying at a bad time, some are less fortunate than others. Not everyone is redeemed. In spite of this new reason for anguish, why does the Christian accept to give his faith to a random justice<sup>85</sup>? The word "Equality" that appears on French town halls is certainly not engraved on the pediment of Paradise.

## **Overwhelming and anxiety-inducing hope**

In order to keep us in its nets, religion cultivates the fear of Last Judgement. Fear induces docility. There is something even worse than *Big Brother*: the eye of the One who will come to judge the living and the dead. However, the dramatisation of death, transmitted by indoctrination, does not help us to live. If the fear of death can lead one to hope for an escape route, the remedy is worse than evil, and ineffective moreover: faith does not protect us from the fear of death, as I can verify among my acquaintances. Since hope must be accompanied by the fear of losing paradise and the anguish of falling into hell, it is better to live in the perspective of a definitive disappearance. Rather than hoping to gain a hypothetical and anguishing eternal life, it is better to benefit from eternal peace.

The swindle develops in three stages: making people believe in an imaginary danger, then presenting oneself as a saviour and, finally, promising the moon.

One does not protect oneself from nightmares by performing rites, but by becoming aware that they are out of reality. Fear being a bad counsellor, it is better to get rid of it than to suffer it in conjunction with faith.

Moreover, religion cultivates the guilt that can poison our existence. Man's ability to judge himself is called conscience. In an attempt to give an objective reality to this subjective feeling, man has created God and Judgement Day in his own image. Religion can be interpreted as the adult version of the blackmail exerted on children by some unworthy parents: "*If you are wise, your mother will give you a big hug. But if you do anything stupid, the wicked witch will come and get you*".

In Buddhism, the cycle of reincarnations - which can be likened to eternal life - must be broken: the proposed ideal is to attain enlightenment and the end of individual existence through fusion in the One-all. Eternal life is a hell of suffering from which one must liberate oneself by dissolving.

Wisdom commands us to let go of everything that is beyond our control and to concentrate our efforts on what we can influence. On the contrary, the religious spirit attributes to rites and prayers magical effects capable of changing post-mortem destiny. It devotes all its energy to attracting the good graces of what is outside its sphere of influence. This attitude makes him vulnerable to religious blackmail. I do not believe in the happiness of being a believer, because the illusion of faith only brings artificial satisfaction tainted by the uncertainty of dogma and the fear of damnation. The path to inner peace necessarily passes through the neutralisation of religious anxiety.

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85 It is not a question of putting God on trial, but of showing that monotheisms, since they contain internal contradictions, do not have sufficient credit to win acceptance. See p. [75](#): *Is God good or paradoxical?*

## Three attitudes

In the face of death, the first attitude is to deny it: we are immortal. This is the position preached by the majority of religions. At first, this thought may seem comforting. To flee danger, we take refuge in an imaginary world. But, apart from being totally unrealistic, facing eternity seems to me to be very worrying. Compared to the idea of perpetual sleep, the idea of living eternally seems much more frightening to me: I cannot wish for an uncertain and ill-defined fate in an afterlife full of threats. Think of your loved ones who have died. They were certainly good people, but who can claim to be without sin? Were they able to repent and receive forgiveness? In times of uncertainty, do you feel the consolation of religion? Eternal life is a poisonous gift that can be left to believers without regret. Avoid supporting Churches and organisations that teach or spread unfounded fears.

One way out is not to think too much about death and, for those whose character is not too worried, to stand in religious indifference.

A second attitude consists, in a movement of revolt, in refusing death. But living in revolt or denial spoils the quality of life. As a safeguard, it is vital to overcome the fear of death.

There remains the third attitude which consists in accepting our death as an irremediable disappearance. It is then necessary to de-dramatise death.

## The great barter of fears

Religions propose that we replace the fear of death seen as a definitive disappearance with a list of other fears that relate to the afterlife:

- the fear of the Last Judgement;
- the fear of Purgatory and Hell;
- the fear of finding oneself without a body, or with the defects of one's present body, or with a perfect body with loss of identity;
- the fear of not finding those we love, or the fear that some beings we love will be damned;
- the fear of always having to act in an ideal way, better than in a convent;
- the fear of being bored forever;
- depending on the teachings: the fear of being reincarnated in an animal;
- and this list is endless, for such is the human imagination.

It seems uncertain to me that barter is advantageous, as it resembles the method which, to cure oneself of a headache, consists of pinching one's fingers in a doorway. Sometimes you have to refuse a method that works.

While fear protects us from danger, pathological fear exhausts us with false threats.

## Accepting to be mortal in order to live without fear

Believing in eternal life because one desires it shows that one has a real problem, not with the afterlife, but with one's desires. The wise man puts himself in harmony with nature: rather than fearing death and demanding immortality, he learns to love life, even in its finiteness. From this point on, the question of the existence of God is an intellectual exercise without consequences.

Resistance consists in understanding that the obligation to believe in eternal life is unfounded. Existential fear therapy involves setting aside the religions of salvation: every indoctrinated person must, during his or her lifetime, mourn his or her immortality. The sacrifice is not great, because it allows, as a compensation, to free oneself from the fear of fictitious dangers, in particular of the Last Judgement. It is a thousand times better to endure existential anguish without a crutch than to be blackmailed by mortal sin that sends you to hell.

Wisdom comes through the acceptance of death as a natural phenomenon. We must agree to stand aside to allow the history of humanity to move forward. Real life" is not in the past, nor in the future, nor in the hereafter, but here and now.

## Fear of the end of life

Like everyone else, I am afraid of the suffering that could precede death. But today, in developed countries, we can trust medicine, especially palliative care. Moderated by this perspective, the anguish of experiencing death should no longer prevent us from enjoying life. Fearing the period of life before death is distinctly different from the fear of death.

## Death participates in the bubbling of life

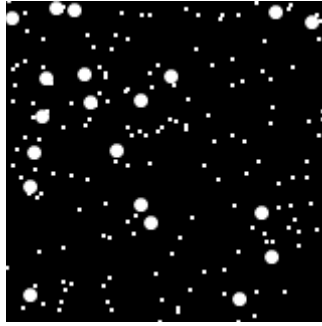
Death is, like sexual reproduction, a driving force of evolution. At the level of a living species, natural selection benefits - not longevity - but reproduction. We die because it is advantageous for the survival of the species. Without death, life would have remained at the amoeba stage, and we would not exist. Immortality is too resistant to evolution to be creative and constructive in exploring the possible. Of course we live, but it is above all nature that lives through us and, in nature, death is the beginning of renewal. Contrary to our spontaneous intuition, death is the mother of diversity, culture and adaptation to change. It is therefore not a divine punishment since we owe life to it.

## Death, a haven of peace

Concern for the future should be in proportion to the time we have left to live. By being eternal, one can worry without limit. It seems horrible to me to believe that life is a trap from which we must be saved. On the other hand, for those who acknowledge that they are mortal, the object of worry - what remains of life - diminishes irremediably over time.

«*For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*» [Genesis 3:19]. To die is to dissolve into the universe and plunge into an eternal nothingness. Once accomplished, death can no longer frighten me because all my perceptions will be extinguished: I will no longer be there. My consciousness will disappear, all my regrets will be erased and all my worries will evaporate. So I have nothing to fear, neither the last judgement, nor a reincarnation in an inferior being.





The symbol "Dissolution in the universe" advantageously replaces the cross.

Do you find it unbearable to disappear forever? We must put things into perspective, because a much worse possibility is envisaged by believers: to roast in Hell for eternity. It seems more reasonable to me to believe in an afterlife that is less risky and less frightening. More than death, it is Hell that should shock.

I very much appreciate that life is neither a competition, nor a lottery, nor an examination, nor a selection test with winners and losers in the afterlife. Atheism is neutral: no reward or punishment. Moreover, there are only winners since each of us has obtained a life, albeit limited in time, but a life nonetheless. Time is counted, but it is given to us. As for those undermined by feelings of guilt, that the slate is wiped clean can be seen as a kind of secular redemption.

Subjectively, I perceive death as a state of total appeasement of suffering, of liberation from anguish, of definitive resolution of all worries, of perfect calm, of peaceful sleep. In short, I see it as a highly desirable state.

It can be painful to leave one's family, to sadden one's loved ones, to leave one's works. But there is no need to be reassured since there is nothing to fear. Atheism is the privileged path to serenity. I feel closer to happiness in atheism than I did in faith.

### **What remains of a human life?**

From another point of view, we do not die completely: we leave our children, our works, the traces of our work and activities, as well as our influences on relatives and society. The world would be slightly different if we had not lived, and each of us can claim to have had some influence on the direction of the future of the universe. Life does not end with the death of an individual, for each has his or her place in the history of mankind, at a specific place on the time scale graduated in hundreds of thousands of years. Our actions have an impact on the future of humanity and, however modestly, influence the course of history, which engages our responsibility towards future generations.

### **Towards the death of fear**

Fear is an instinctive emotion coming from the amygdala. It can be contrasted with consciousness and reason, which develop in the neocortex. It is better to face one's fears than to conceal them.

By summoning God, the devil and the Last Judgement to the bedside of the dying, religion makes death a dramatic event that leads to anxiety about the afterlife. Emotion is a bad counsellor, and mirages are emanations of fear. Those who place faith above reason are condemned to religious

anxiety. On the contrary, atheism, by reducing death to a natural event, offers an interpretation that is de-dramatised, devoid of stakes and free of fear. The future can be contemplated in peace and quiet.

## Overcoming the fear of death - Discussion

This text is a follow-up to *Overcoming the Fear of Death* [see p. 139], but can be read as a stand-alone document.

### Post-traumatic stress

*Mail, extract made anonymous*

*It just so happens that one of my relatives was attacked a few weeks ago. He felt weak, ashamed and guilty and is now turning in an extreme way to the Catholic religion (having grown up in a Catholic family, he never questioned his faith but it had never had a big place in his life, never conditioned his thoughts, his every move). He expresses, as you mention, a great fear of death and hell (which obsesses him), convinced that he is not a good person and that he must constantly redeem himself in the eyes of God. He thinks he has opened his eyes and rediscovered life and death as a result of his aggression. He even tries to convince me despite the fact that I am an atheist.*

*Do you think it can just be a phase? Could it be the only thing he has found in order to get answers and to which he is trying to "hang on" following the trauma he has experienced? How to act in this kind of situation? How to help him, how to get him out of this mystical delirium? I am very worried about him.*

Answer

Your message aroused my interest because it raises an interesting but difficult question.

It is impossible to have a discussion on a rational basis with someone who is under emotional strain. In my opinion, one should avoid taking the discussion to the religious level, as any effort to do so will prove ineffective or even counterproductive.

All attention should be focused not on the symptoms, but on the causes, i.e. on how to reduce the feeling of fear. In this case, it is the result of a trauma caused by an aggression.

I suggest you do a search on the internet by writing  
*post-traumatic stress*  
in the search field.

Usual therapeutic methods of a psychological nature have only limited effectiveness. A new, more effective treatment exists, and it consists of the following: under medication, the patient recalls the traumatic event. In a few sessions, typically six, the memory of the traumatic event disconnects from the centre of emotionality and ceases to be disturbing.

Any approach, whether spiritual or psychological, requires the cooperation of the person concerned. The influence of someone close to him or her and whom he or she trusts could be decisive in convincing him or her to enter therapy. As a starting point, one can start from his feelings of unease.

Another pitfall will be to find a centre that practises post-traumatic stress therapy.

I am not a specialist, and every case is different. Therefore, I limit myself to giving leads. I am aware that reality is complex and cannot easily be shaped to our liking.

## **Freeing oneself from the grip of religion**

When a believer moves away from religion, he or she may experience negative feelings such as guilt or shame.

### **Succeeding in the abandonment of faith Freeing oneself from the grip of religion Giving coherence to one's life**

Religion cultivates anxiety better than happiness.

### **Overcoming psychological and social resistance**

Religions stir up misguided feelings that generate inner tensions, such as sin and guilt. By virtue of original sin, the Judeo-Christian, victim of a curse, is born punished, sinful, potentially guilty, and must redeem himself. In order to face dangers, even imaginary ones such as hell, supernatural protection, such as that of the sacraments, is deemed necessary. Under the weight of such intimidation, all that remains is to pray, confess one's sins and atone. The one who succumbs to the feeling of guilt is trapped: he will have to perform ritualised acts to alleviate anxiety and follow precepts supposed to appease the deities. Man has a sickly propensity to anguish needlessly and to torture himself. It is not convenient to stop believing, because it means admitting that our life has, until now, been guided by mirages.

Those who move away from religion usually face psychological difficulties. It is difficult to abandon all religious practice, because it is a message of distancing addressed to all those who have encouraged it. How can abandonment of faith be achieved by overcoming negative feelings such as guilt or shame? How can we escape the religion of those close to us and face the gaze of others?

### **Autonomy of consciousness is of the order of vital necessity**

When I announced publicly that I was leaving the Church, several people told me that I had a lot of courage. This surprised me, because I have never felt this way.

For me, the ingredients of the process were different. I was brought up in a culture where religion was at the top of the agenda, and I wanted to escape from this ideological framework by building a defence against the missionary aggression of the social environment, by refusing to submit to a doctrinal straitjacket, by expressing the imperative need to protect my freedom of conscience, by

expressing indignation at the behaviour of the Church in the course of its history, by revolting against the religious indoctrination provided by the public schools, etc. It is a question of moving from being a docile member of a community characterised by an archaic vision of the world to a person with an autonomous way of thinking, all of which is seen as a vital momentum.

*"He who says nothing consents"  
means "He who does not consent  
must express himself".*

The approach is not a decision supported by the will, but responds to an internal necessity. I was asked "why did I do it?". I suspect that these people approve of society being shaped by a particular religion called "the" religion; however, for the sake of charity, let us assume that this is not a reproach, but a real question. Since society has made me a Catholic, it seems natural to ask myself: do I assume or decline the inheritance? It seemed necessary to me to escape the grip of religious ideologues. I don't like to talk about effort, because restraint would have cost me more. I don't understand why so many people refrain from critical work, self-censor themselves, and walk with their heads down in the silence of submission. This attitude is irresponsible, because it leaves the field open to religious activists. I simply want to do my job as a man, and one cannot become a truly accomplished human being without conquering one's autonomy and freedom of conscience. We are not victims of Fate; on the contrary, we must have the foresight to take our lives into our own hands.

It is an epistemological necessity for everyone to question the status of man: not be satisfied with what is said about it, discard what is not established, get rid of unrealistic desires and simply seek what is real. If we seek what warms the heart, we seek in our aspirations. It is in the real world that we must look for.

From another point of view, I have received messages from people who are suffering from having been heavily indoctrinated, who are trying to free themselves from moral dilemmas, who want to resolve conflicts of loyalty, or who are immersed in a painful situation caused by the faith of those around them. These suffering beings tell me that reading my texts does them a lot of good. Since my site meets a need, it was worth putting it online.

### **The journey towards coherence is a search for inner unity.**

We can no longer, as in the past, ask society to be coherent since it has a duty to respect individual freedoms. Today, in a pluralistic environment, the dominant discourse is that teachings based on tradition are all respectable. For example, parents, the school or the Church teach without flinching that

- genesis according to the bible and the theory of evolution are both "true" in their respective ways;
- God is good, but mankind is burdened with misfortune; after the appearance of man (homo sapiens), God waited about 300,000 years before bringing the Revelation; with such a reaction time, He could never have obtained the slightest lifesaver's patent;
- since the Bible is full of obscurities and contradictions, we can make it say what we want it to say;

- the Church is holy, but its history sets a bad example;
- you are commanded to believe in miracles such as the resurrection of Christ, and even in repeated and commissioned miracles such as the transubstantiation of the Eucharist;
- pontifical infallibility must be admitted, with all the obedience it implies;
- Prayer offers effective protection against misfortune, which does not correspond to the observed facts: prayer comes up against the daily experience of God's silence; whether one prays or does not pray makes no difference beyond the effects of chance;
- the cause of all suffering is the sin of Adam and Eve; to believe that this is not a myth but a credible explanation requires a dose of naivety incompatible with common sense;
- sincerely regretting one's sins and asking God for forgiveness is not enough: one must still confess to a Catholic priest and obtain absolution; the Church has established itself as an unavoidable and indispensable intermediary;
- our only good - the life we live - has no value in comparison with the life after death;
- and dozens of other inconsistencies, contradictions, unfounded assertions, implausible beliefs and senseless superstitions.

Since our cultural reservoir is nothing more than a de-structured jumble, individuals can no longer use it as a mental skeleton without going through a severe sorting process. What is acceptable for society - which must avoid hurting its members - is no longer acceptable at all for the individual, who must ensure its unity. For someone who does not want to give up the exercise of his or her judgement, the ordeal is unbearable. It is imperative to build a coherent vision of the world. A vision in scattered pieces, for lack of sufficient credit, does not allow one to have confidence in the future. While the promises of charlatans can be invalidated by the absence of expected results, those of religious preachers are absolutely unverifiable. When thought is corrupted by inconsistency, feelings are destabilised by insecurity.

The man who has his eyes constantly raised towards the zenith of the sky loses sight of the horizon where the landmarks that would allow him to move forward are to be found.

Unable to identify with a culture with disparate components, anyone who claims to be a thinker is forced to clean up the mess in order to escape the unease and establish the necessary coherence. Faced with the magnitude of the task, many capitulate: Tradition replaces reflection, and the magic of celestial spirits replaces the laws of nature. The unconditional followers of Tradition can justify excision or sharia. Instead of building a personal philosophy according to their conscience, too many people allow themselves to be dictated to and allow their conscience to be reshaped. To see billions of human beings spending their lives tidying up their ideas in drawers whose borders are protected by taboos is a representative image of generalised nonsense, as well as of absurdity promoted to the rank of dogma.

In the scale of values, I place the need for coherence far above the desire to please and the need for wonderful. The feeling that life has meaning stems from the harmony between thoughts, emotions and actions. This is why inner coherence gives meaning. It is part of a more general project of personal development that supports the process of bringing a human being to full maturity. Establishing coherence is a task that everyone must accomplish in order to avoid malaise, or even to avoid falling into a dissociative identity disorder. Religion often has a disruptive role, especially for those who have questions. What is discordant must be extracted from within oneself. Everyone must find his or her own balance, because we lack psychologists who specialise in religious detoxification. All human beings are obliged to do so, but most of them botch the operation or leave it to the nearest religious authority who replaces contradictions with mysteries and trust in God. The community of believers puts pressure to prevent any questioning. All the data is available and, for the most part, widely known, but few draw the consequences. The only thing that is missing is the ability to go beyond the indoctrination received to conclude with lucidity, i.e. to make arguments take precedence over attachment to faith.

If you want to dedicate your life to triumphing over time and death, adopt a religion.

We don't choose the cultural cage that imprisons our consciousness, but many choose to stay in it and are content to lengthen the chains a little. The believer does not even imagine that he can choose his way, since the path is given and it is his duty to follow it. To truly free oneself from the grip of religion, one must give oneself the right to think for oneself, that is, no longer feel morally obliged to align oneself with a supposedly true doctrine. The question of the meaning of life is too important for me to entrust to a questionable authority the task of deciding what to believe. I am horrified at the idea that life could have a meaning, the same for everyone - in this case dictated by the Vatican - which would oblige me to follow that meaning in submission and obedience.

It was, fortunately, only a nightmare, and I woke up: I was no longer a hostage of the Kneeling tribe who, under certain conditions, promise happiness in another world and who generously associate immediate guilt with many sins. Since ideological systems have difficulty in curbing their hegemonic and totalitarian tendencies, one of the missions of philosophy should be to provide a framework for the exercise of individual freedom in which each person can define the meaning of his or her life, which is a personal matter. The "revelation" lies deep within oneself and is expressed through a life project. Openness to pluralism and diversity is a necessary virtue. Individual freedoms can partly combine and, through democracy, become popular will. Since authority comes from below, it cannot fall from the sky.

*«The pioneering spirit does not consist in finding new ideas, but in getting rid of certainties and habits that hold us prisoners of old ways of thinking and acting.»*  
[Bertrand Piccard]

The removal of internal conflicts is a mental hygiene imperative that requires getting rid of dissonant elements. It is a process of de-cluttering, lightening, stripping and cleansing. Rather than a faith with infantile roots, it is better to accept with humility our state of ignorance. Since there is no

point in escaping from one religion to fall back into another, it is by developing a personal philosophical vision that one can drive away inherited beliefs. Renunciation implies the dissolution of emotional ties with all forms of esotericism, including religious ones, and the overcoming of all related taboos. To mark the difficulty of freeing oneself from superstition, we can recall the biblical message:

*"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to" [Luke 13:24]*

which, in our context, takes on a new meaning.

On the other hand, to talk about a superhuman effort to be made would be misplaced since it involves leaving an uncomfortable, even painful position. I speak of a path, but it is in fact the deconstruction of a gigantic doctrine, followed by the reconstruction of a minimal philosophy within which personal projects can find a place and make sense.

Most ideologies, religions and Soviet communism, use the same arguments: real life is not here now, but in the bright future; the present must be sacrificed to a mythical future happiness. It is in the name of a bright future that both the Inquisition and the Gulags were justified. Selective indignation does not express an aspiration for justice, but a partisan spirit, without concern for consistency. Rather than placing my trust in a myth, I entrust my opinion to the judgment of history, which shows that religion cannot serve as a compass and that it does not protect against abuses.

On the contrary, my opinion is that real life is here now, and that happiness must be sought here now. Let us learn to savour the precious present time that flows within us instead of soaking up utopias. Whoever, in order to justify his actions, renounces appealing to the will of God or to the sense of history (better called religious ideology, respectively historical utopia) reinforces his personal responsibility towards his children and humanity.

The idea of a supreme watchmaker betrays a deterministic conception of science that is now outdated. The believer, in his inability to believe in a world that would not be augmented by marvellous, remains insensitive to the sufficient depth of nature. Everything that is added to naivety by myth is subtracted from reality and impoverishes the rational understanding of the universe. To appeal to superstitions is a kind of denial of reality that only adds problems to our shortcomings, because contradictions bring more suffering than ignorance. Enriching and embellishing one's life with religious beliefs is an illusion that can only be deflated by presenting insurmountable disadvantages. Our ancestors did it, but I wouldn't go so far as to pretend that it was a success. There is no evidence that the success of the missionary deployments of colonisation produced any less damage than the failure of the crusades. Religious ideologies have too strong a propensity for totalitarianism. Absolute Truth being madness, wisdom is found in doctrinal parsimony. One can kill in the name of a religion that promotes feelings of identity, but certainly not in the name of a reasoned refusal to get involved in a religion. As a way of defusing feelings of identity, culture in the broadest sense is a more appropriate domain. According to the principle of parsimony, reason requires us to adopt only a minimum set of necessary rules. Believing as little as possible is an objective that has a double aspect: personal and pacifying. Spirituality must aim at detachment from

dependencies whose necessity is not proven, in particular the extinction of the desire to believe. Harmony does not develop from desire, but from coherence.

We must build new references and recognise that science generates culture. As far as I am concerned, the epistemology of science has played a decisive role. Confidence in reason and self-confidence are not foreign to the process.

### **There are several paths open to those who stray from the faith**

Since religion is an inappropriate way of responding to a widespread fear of the future, in order to overcome what is felt to be a need, it is necessary to acquire a certain amount of confidence in the future. An unavoidable step on the way is to honestly face the ultimate test:

- *Overcoming the fear of death*, see p. 139.

This phase in the evolution of mental dispositions plays a founding role for me. It is less a question of saying yes to death than of saying yes to the life that precedes death, a whole life whose fulfilment must be accompanied.

The path towards inner unity must be marked out, otherwise it could lead to a radical or extreme position, i.e. dangerous for others. Before embarking on this path, we must set up safeguards, set ourselves an impassable limit: respect for human rights. This is respect for people, without exception. On the other hand, ideologies and religions can all be questioned.

The diffuse feeling of guilt  
- unfounded - can be cured.

Those who have been indoctrinated must first de-indoctrinate themselves. It is well known that rational arguments have little effect on believers. It follows that, in order to move away from faith, one must first identify the emotional attachments and work to weaken them. Reason can only take over when emotions and feelings have been calmed. A personal process can more easily succeed if it can be carried out within the framework of a coherent discourse. Propaganda that religion is good and brings salvation should no longer be accepted without discussion. To do this, two tools are to be preferred: the critical analysis of religion and the study of the behaviour of the religious community, without complacency. Reason imposes a rigid but broad framework. It is not that of a straitjacket, but that of the door to freedom.

Here are four ways:

#### **1. Religious indifference**

You shouldn't waste your time with questions that nobody can answer. It is better to drive vain and sterile concerns out of our minds. Religious indifference is, in my opinion, the ideal attitude. Unfortunately, given the indoctrination I have undergone, I feel unable to follow this path. I confess that I find it difficult to be "detached", I feel irremediably "mobilised", but I imagine that it should be easier for those who have been little indoctrinated. The path should not be so easy, because I have met people who claim to be indifferent but who, against all logic, remain members of a Church.

#### **2. Agnosticism**

God being, for the agnostic, a possible being of whom we know nothing, that he can judge



us is a hypothesis that cannot be excluded. The agnostic must convince himself that multiple and contradictory hypotheses cannot be taken into account. Such a guessing game cannot engage our responsibility. But, to internalise this posture, a maturation, often long, is necessary.

### 3. Atheism

- Nothing is supernatural, everything is natural. There has never been a resurrection or a miracle. Isn't imagining oneself immortal a denial of reality and a renunciation of wisdom? He who firmly believes that his individual conscience will not survive him does not have to worry about God.
- The divine Judge is nothing but a mental representation of my ability to judge myself. For my part, the anxiety of God's judgment and the diffuse feeling of guilt have totally disappeared with my atheism [see p. 118]. All I need to do to be at peace is to remain coherent, because when one is in order with oneself, one perceives a harmony that brings well-being.
- Of course, to decree it is not enough since it is a secular spiritual journey to be accomplished. It is easier for those who have assimilated well the state of mind in which the sciences are practised. Given the renunciations I had to make, I didn't have an enlightenment that would have made me instantly atheist. On the other hand, one can decide one day to become one, and then work towards the goal, see p. 164: *The search for happiness*, a philosophical tale.
- The apparent despair that believers see in atheism can be overcome, in the way that man easily accepts that stones are hard: he can take advantage of them, for example to build buildings, perhaps smaller, but much more solid.

### 4. A low intensity religion

By taking your place in the vast, multifaceted zone between those who strictly follow a religion and those who live resolutely outside any religion, you can be content to reduce the feeling of guilt, and bear the remaining part. This is the path most frequently taken, the most elastic, the one that involves the least questioning, and therefore the easiest. On this subject, read p. 155: *Discussion*.

This list does not claim to be exhaustive. It should be seen less as ready-made answers than as a state of mind that could perhaps allow some people to chart their own course. All of these pathways can be seen as methods of personal development leading to a state of well-being, or at least betterment.

### How I got rid of negative feelings

The human being is crossed by contradictory feelings that complicate the situation by coming in turn to beg for spontaneous trust. In order to reduce inner tensions and to have a compass at one's disposal, a rational approach must select the most relevant feelings and sculpt them.

For those who have been heavily indoctrinated, getting religion out of one's mind is a real nightmare. I had to overcome many scruples, moral, social, theological and philosophical obstacles.

To accomplish the work that led me to let go, the mathematician that I am has been constantly stimulated by a visceral allergy to contradictions. I have studied each question in depth, which has resulted in so many sections of my website [Resisting religious indoctrination](#). Wherever I looked, the conclusion was invariably the same: the religion I was taught does not hold water.

I could have been born into a family with different beliefs. As a result, I consider myself to have inherited an arbitrary religion, endorsed by chance. I don't feel obliged to take it over. Conscience being an individual matter, I do not feel bound by a trans-generational duty of loyalty. The aspiration to be a fulfilled human being prevails over the religious aspect of social conformism. Those who take a hostile view of my opinions do not respect my individual freedom; it is therefore not for me to bear the burden of guilt for a fault that is theirs.

The guilt of betraying my community has affected me very little. If it is the fear of rejection, shame on them. I feel a kind of pity for people whose spirits have been imprisoned by the indoctrination they have undergone. I feel compassion to see them struggling with certain conflicts of conscience, imaginary for me, real for them. As long as their faith does not cause them too much suffering, I avoid any proselytism. This is my way of respecting them, despite the fact that many of them have not spared their missionary efforts.

The shame of having accepted an aberrant doctrine for too long has never touched me. On the contrary, I am proud that, despite the intensive and massive indoctrination I have undergone, I have been able to demonstrate a strong resilience.

### **Taking action: publicly displaying one's spiritual orientation**

Everyone has to find the path that suits his or her particular situation. I started by writing "thoughts" on loose sheets of paper that I put together in a folder. At first they seemed disparate, but after a while, once rearranged, a certain coherence emerged. This step allowed me to start from a base that could be called "Here is my opinion". As this opinion was presented in a communicable form, it became possible to express it socially.

Then, proceeding in steps, I displayed my spiritual orientation, first in my family and then publicly. In any case, it is necessary to show a lot of perseverance, and above all to never accept to give up.

### **Asking for help**

Faced with the difficulties that one may encounter when leaving one's religion, the help of people who have gone through it, or who are in the same situation, can be beneficial.

The website [Recovering from Religion](#) is an international non-profit organisation that provides assistance to people leaving their religion: discussion groups, help and advice.

### **Letting go**

The journey towards liberation from the grip of religion, when it is successful, leads to the letting go that follows the fainting of the Last Judgement. The new mental landscape thus freed from the mysteries of the theologians - which in fact cover up contradictions - is very enjoyable for those who are in love with rationality. It celebrates the victory of harmony over tension.

I find it regrettable that many leave the Church without notifying their family circle on the pretext that they want to avoid hurting their loved ones. Anyone who justifies himself by accusing his social environment of lack of understanding betrays his uneasiness in the face of his own convictions, which he finds difficult to assume. He probably wants to hide his feelings of guilt or shame, which means that letting go is not achieved. Silence expresses submission to the gaze of others.

Religion attributes great value to the human person. Some constructive aspects of this attitude can be recycled, among which I place self-respect, dignity and honour. Unlike other mammals, man lives upright.

A transparent social attitude contributes to making peace with oneself. In my opinion, one can verify that one has reached the end of the journey if, after leaving the Church, one is able to say publicly:

*I have left the Church and I am not hiding from it. I am "without religion".*

On a personal note, I even add: *"I was a tortured Catholic. Now I am a happy atheist."*

I remain aware that happiness can take other paths, but I am convinced that all the paths leading to it are necessarily long and demanding since they require nothing less than giving coherence to one's life. I am not asking anyone to imitate me, but I hope that everyone will be able to unblock their independence of mind and find the path that suits them. It would be a pleasure for me to collect the testimony of a personal approach. You can leave a comment on my blog [mazze-en.blogspot.com](http://mazze-en.blogspot.com)

### **A substitution therapy**

In the event of a blockage, the approach must be reworked. One could, for example, read in its entirety «Resisting religious indoctrination» (sequential version).

Repeated failures are symptoms of religious addiction. When a believer experiences withdrawal symptoms, treatment consists of using substitute spirituality:

- *Adepts of Terminus* [see p. 161] (to be used with discipline and caution, like methadone).

The treatment is also indicated for detoxification cures for victims of religious obsession.

### **Freeing oneself from the grip of religion - Discussion**

This part follows on from *Succeeding in the abandonment of faith*, [see p. 147], but can also be read as a stand-alone article.

#### *Question or objection*

*Even if they are convincing from a rational point of view, there is something that atheists do not understand in religion and in the attachment of believers to their faith because they have not experienced a religious adventure.*

## Answer

Attachment to religion is quite natural. Indeed, human beings do not primarily care about the truth, because they first ask for reassurance. Against the scarecrow of the Last Judgement, a protection must be built. The desire to believe is often formed in childhood, then invested in faith. It is quite normal that, in a first movement, the survival instinct and the attachment to the missing persons take precedence over a reflection with a concern for objectivity. But, since religion takes us out of reality, it is reasonable to go beyond this spontaneous reaction which turns into fantasy. Giving precedence to desire is a form of pride that a lucid adult should renounce. I prefer to see the worries and tragic aspects of life manifested through the arts.

If you have been given a positive image of religion, you will tend to look upon it with benevolence. On the other hand, if your image of religion is negative, you will want to distance yourself from it. In order to distance yourself from religion, there must be a strong motivation to do so from the start, otherwise nothing will change. If you don't have a problem, you don't want to change. Or the opposite is true: those who want to avoid questioning themselves declare that they do not have a problem. It is more rewarding to be strengthened in one's beliefs than to be destabilised. No argument will take away the faith of a convinced believer.

Many people realise that religion has unacceptable elements. The dividing line is this: those whose minds operate in a religious mode conclude that religion must be reformed, but retained; others see the need to abandon religion. It depends, therefore, on the ability to come to terms with a lame religion whose embarrassing elements are deliberately concealed.

At the beginning of the desire to distance oneself from religion, there is a state of dissatisfaction, or the feeling of being under the weight of oppression, or an intimate wound. It may be the absence of religious emotion or a painful experience: a bereavement, a long stay in a closed community, or some other trauma. For example, I receive testimonies from people who are terrified at the thought of the Last Judgement and who are trying to assuage their fear. For me, it was five years of boarding school as a student in a school run by a religious congregation, and later a teaching position in a school that was both public and crypto-Catholic (i.e. public on the outside and Catholic on the inside). The weight of religion is expressed through social coercion.

At a certain point you feel that the cup is full, that it's enough, that it's time to react, that you have to get out of there. Whoever has become aware of having fallen into a trap finds the necessary energy to want to get out of it. So you have to back-pedal, turn the road upside down until you reach a crossroads that offers an escape route. If the decision to back-pedal is based on resentment, the backward movement will be more intense. Many atheists have had a real religious experience, but it ended badly. It is not a question of ignorance, indifference or incomprehension, but of disappointment, refusal and rejection of religion.

The ensuing reaction can only depend on one's past. The concern to believe "well" must give way to the desire to believe "less". It is a question of

entering into a process of de-indoctrination. We implicitly make a list of things we are not willing to give up. Depending on the person, these may be: the existence of God, God is good, Providence, the Ten Commandments, eternal life, paradise, the protection of a guardian angel, the comfort of a community, the protective effect of prayer, the hymns of Bach, the smell of incense, the taste of religious ceremonies, a relationship with a spiritual guide, childhood memories, and much more. Here it is necessary to realise that the longer the list, the more difficult it will be to find a way out. My personal position has made it not too difficult for me, because the only thing I really care about is respect for human rights. While the "believer on the path of least belief" has to be careful with his emotional attachments, the atheist is characterised by his ability to travel light. It is precisely this kind of liberation that he who wishes to distance himself from religion must aim for.

The intensity of the attachment is a cursor on which it is necessary to act, otherwise we will remain in place. Initiating a spiritual process of dissolving attachments is therefore essential, but the result is usually only partial. Everyone does what they can, given the situation they find themselves in. I am constantly amazed to see how believers can accept, without showing the slightest shadow of critical spirit, as anaesthetised, the multitude of absurdities that their pastors make them swallow. It would be unseemly to respond to a homily that is received as a moral injunction. The ability to distance oneself from religion can be seen as a test on the theme: "*To what extent am I capable of critical thinking?*".

The means used depend on the culture of the subject. If someone has been indoctrinated by putting the bible at the centre, he or she will have to distance himself or herself from the bible, identify the contradictions, see that the bible allows one to support any thesis according to the excerpts that one wishes to highlight, become aware that the interpretation received requires accepting the authority to which one has a duty to obey, that this authority is debatable, etc. If the indoctrination was more concerned with the duty of submission to the authority of the Church and the teaching of neo-Thomism, one can see in my personal website what tools of defence can be used. I leave open here other configurations whose variations are infinite.

My intermediate conclusion is that the way out is necessarily personal, and that it would be useful to publish, not one testimony such as mine, but a thousand varied testimonies.

It would be unrealistic to make the expression "to put an end to religion" a social programme, because too many people indulge in the supernatural. For many, Christianity is reduced to a vague religiosity that has little to do with formal education. The majority of those who stray from religion tinker with a personal religion. They do not wish to live without religion, but to experience emotions outside institutional religions.

Since it can be harder to stop believing than it is to stop smoking, many believers are tempted to make individualized accommodations.

"Believers on the path of least belief" generally think that atheism is not adapted to their needs and does not suit them, because they put the protection of their emotional attachments before the desire for coherence. They are therefore led to find a personalised way out that spares them conflicting interests, at their convenience. Their mental universes are furnished with taboos, each believer having his own, none being universal. It is a question of finding the point where the repulsive forces (obedience, duty, obligation, fidelity to the community, original sin, personal sin, guilt, sacrifice, renunciation, last judgement, purgatory, hell, ...) are compensated by the attractive forces (love, forgiveness, saving one's soul, paradise, eternity, guardian angel, solidarity of the community, happiness, ...). Typically, by putting the notion of sin into perspective:

*missing Sunday Mass, having sex outside of marriage, remarrying, etc., are not mortal sins, but small venial sins; as long as no one has been killed, God, being good and just, will not punish us disproportionately with eternal hell,*

Religion became almost sympathetic but, situated outside of Roman Catholicism, it became personal. For people who cultivate another sensibility, but in the same movement of an à la carte religion:

*The Church of Rome having gone astray in the course of its history, I return to a Christianity closer to its origins, and I nourish myself on the Bible.*

Other believers fall into the contradiction of wanting to detach themselves from their faith while affirming that their religion is sacred. I haven't listed the possible solutions, but I don't know of any that can convince me, because what is sought is not coherence, but a balance of feelings, in a position that can only be personal, subjective and difficult to transmit, and therefore not very credible for others, but which answers the adage:

*«It doesn't matter if religion is well-founded, as long as it brings me beautiful emotions.»*



To develop one's potential, it is better to be firmly rooted in the earth than in the Bible.

As for becoming an atheist, this is something else that implies a change of paradigm and requires, at least during a transitional period, real self-sacrifice. But this does not prevent me from feeling solidarity with any attempt to abandon faith, whatever the path taken. It is possible to explain

why some atheists have an attitude that is perceived as aggressive, while others have a rather restrained behaviour and words.

- The former were usually heavily indoctrinated, so the path to atheism was steep. They understand religion very well since they come from it. The emotional bonds formed by religious experience were not considered intangible data, but as material to be eroded.
  - In order to dissolve sentimental attachments, they fuelled their rejection of religion with a thousand arguments about unacceptable and intolerable defects. As their inner struggle has been lively and has mobilised a debauchery of energy, it can spill over into the public domain. Unfortunately, this is my case, which is reflected in the writing of my site, which is also a therapeutic means of aiding reconstruction. Changing one's point of view in order to start thinking about everything differently, in a renovated setting, cannot be done overnight.
  - A variant that is clearly visible on the internet is crude atheism, which manifests itself in contempt, insults or insults. Those who practise it differ from the previous ones by their difficulties to rationalise and their shortcomings in the means of expression, but they share the same goal of developing the de-sacralisation and dis-love of religion.
- The latter, often less indoctrinated, more easily arrived at atheism through religious indifference. Having never been in a state of crisis or revolt, they have a more discreet social behaviour.

To return to the question asked, one who is only at the beginning of the process of distancing himself feels all the more misunderstood that the atheist is far away from him, which is normal. He who is far away perceives another landscape. On the other hand, if he thinks that the space between them is impassable, it is either because his relations with religion have been rather cordial and his motivation to leave the faith is slim, or because he feels totally unable to extricate himself from religion. That said, no one is obliged to disengage completely from any belief. However, I welcome every step in this direction, however small it may be. Whoever moves away from religion finds himself in a phase of deconstruction of bonds.

After having gone around the problem, we come back to the starting point because we can't get out of this question:

*«In my backtracking which, by its nature, is an operation of de-love, am I determined to radically question fundamental, substantial and emotionally charged elements of religion and then, if necessary, to renounce it?»*

### **From now on, I stop believing**

Before returning to the theme of faith, let us dare to make a comparison. In order to stop smoking, one must first desire it. Motivation can be found, for example, if one feels deleterious effects on one's health, such as coughing, bronchitis, shortness of breath. You may also want to spare your loved ones. But good resolutions are not enough, and support is usually very useful, for example a trusted person who acts as a coach.

The same goes for belief. First you have to feel the need to stop believing. This can be based on the painful effects of faith, such as feelings of guilt, fear of hell, disappointment after prayers without any concrete effect, confrontation with injustice, lack of divine breath on the Church, etc. All those who nourish their existential anguish with disturbing spiritual forces feel a malaise from which they wish to free themselves. But this is not enough, because we still have to act.

*I don't believe in Hell.*

*I don't believe in a God who is judge and avenger.*

*I don't believe in Heaven.*

*I don't believe in the Last Judgement.*

*I don't believe in eternal life.*

To accompany you on your "de-spiritualising" journey, you can draw on the free downloadable e-book

- The whole site "[Resisting religious indoctrination](#)" in one PDF document

*And afterwards, don't you feel withdrawal symptoms?*

Lovers of sweet coffee hate plain coffee because they find it too bitter. But if he is motivated, he can get used to reducing the amount of sugar, in successive stages, to zero. Afterwards, he is likely to find sweet coffee unpleasant.



## The ultimate religion: Adepts of Terminus



«Adepts of Terminus», also known as AT (in French, AT and "Atheist" are pronounced in the same way, LOL), take their name from the fact that they believe that people's lives have an end. Their religious thought achieves the synthetic and rectifying fusion of deism and atheism. As such, AT thought represents the crowning achievement of the philosophical and religious evolution of humanity.

### Foundations of the AT doctrine

When they die, individuals are weighed, not according to their behaviour, but according to their faith. "Terminus" is the true name of the spiritual force that carries out the sorting.

Terminus is righteous, venerable, full of goodness, and His spirit is devoid of all vengeance. The cult of Terminus consists in attributing only praiseworthy intentions to Him. Terminus asks men to forgive their enemies, but, unlike false gods who do not follow the commandments they have given, He does not threaten poor sinners with the worst punishments. He, who never imagined a single cruelty, how could human stupidity spread the idea that He invented eternal torments? Rather than spreading such calumnies, it would be better not to believe in God. He remains, however, placid in His infinite goodness and unalterable in His perfection. The Truth reveals itself spontaneously to well-disposed minds.

To a certain extent, Terminus accesses the desires of humans.

In all equity, each deceased person will be given the fate that he or she thought was right for others to suffer. More precisely, immediately after death, each person will suffer the worst of the fates that his or her beliefs have destined for some of his or her co-religionists. In particular, Christians will go to hell, Buddhists will be reborn into an inferior being and atheists will be deprived of resurrection. The intensity of the punishment will be individually regulated, in proportion to each person's faith, and each deceased person will only suffer such torments as he believed Terminus was capable of.

Thus, Terminus does not punish, but lets everyone punish themselves freely, in the way he thought.

As for social relations, they are, for the AT, regulated by the respect of human rights.

### Meditation practice AT

AT meditation is an individual activity. There is no demand to join a community, which shows that AT is not a sect. The activities of the AT movement are totally non-profit making: no collection, no church tax, no fundraising. The complete detachment, total purity and perfect integrity of the movement are clear evidence of the superiority of AT over traditional religions.

The tuning of the mind to the will of Terminus brings peace and frees the AT from eternal suffering. AT meditation consists of two levels of elevation:

1. Drive out of oneself any intention to inflict suffering on others, including one's worst enemies.
2. Eradicate from one's conscience any accusation that Terminus wants to persecute poor sinners. Since the aim is to purify the image of Terminus, referring to a traditional religion is not a valid excuse.

It should be noted that the consequences in the afterlife are the same for AT and atheists. On the other hand, the followers of traditional religions condemn themselves to eternal suffering, unless they convert to the AT doctrine, or become atheists.

# Philosophical tales

## From the stick as a gift to the meaning of life

### The Straight Sticks clan

This story took place in ancient times when man was a hunter-gatherer.

The Straight Sticks clan, favoured by a favourable forest environment, had acquired great know-how in the art of making perfectly straight sticks, both solid and slightly flexible, of all sizes. Together with his neighbours, he bartered these sticks for hunting, fishing and gathering products.

### The Sacred Sticks clan

Following a barter, the Sacred Sticks clan received a stock of straight sticks. The sorcerer gathered the clan and, pointing to a straight stick that he described as sacred, made a speech:

*As our gods have communicated to me and as I have taught you, straight sticks are sacred sticks, that is to say divine objects, on which we will be able to lean during our journey in the afterlife. I am going to distribute a sacred stick to each one. You will have to keep it preciously because when you die, we will bury it beside you. It will serve you eternally.*

### The Pragmatic clan

Following a barter, the Pragmatic clan also received a stock of straight sticks. The chief gathered the clan together, and declared:

*Unlike our neighbours of the Sacred Sticks clan, the straight sticks have no special meaning for us, no destination prescribed by our gods. I am going to distribute a straight stick to each one who will be able to freely dispose of it.*

Only a small part of the clan was hostile and closed:

*Straight sticks are useless. You see a lot of them in the forest, where they are just a support for the leaves.*

For all the others, the use of straight sticks was very diverse: digging sticks for harvesting roots, sticks for harvesting nuts, spears for hunting and fishing, arrows, sticks to pierce a piece of meat to be roasted, supports for hut roofs, etc.

Some people, including the sorcerer, even use them as sacred sticks.

### The meaning of life

Life is a gift that we have all received. For some, its meaning and use, prescribed by the gods, obey the specific directives of the religious clan to which one belongs. For others, life does not have a unique and revealed meaning, and everyone is called to give it meaning. For my part, it is a question of living one's life as fully as possible, fulfilling oneself on all levels: physical, emotional, intellectual and social.

Some believers remind me of children who hate open construction games and only accept to build constructions with an assembly plan attached. It is a pity, because it is impoverishing.

He who complains about the absurdity of existence only reveals his inner emptiness and presents himself as easy prey to religious recruiters who will be happy to show him how to regulate his existence.

## **The search for happiness**

### **Year 1**

[*The disciple*] My parents made me a Catholic and I am trying on this path that will lead me to salvation.

[*The wise man*] Are you happy here now?

[*The disciple*] No, the hope of future happiness does not make me happy here now.

[*The wise man*] Do you feel fulfilled in your search?

[*The disciple*] In Christianity, man is born guilty, and throughout his life he remains guilty of not doing enough to save his soul; thus, happiness is not of this world. Well, I don't want to give up happiness.

[*The wise man*] There is not just one path to happiness, the same for everyone, because everyone must find his or her own way. If one day I stretched out my finger to show you a path, it is neither the finger nor the path that must be observed, but the procedure for determining your path.

[*The disciple*] I understand, I have to look for a better way.

### **Year 2**

[*The disciple*] He who is content to follow the tendencies of his environment renounces being himself. His personal consciousness is reduced to a reflection of his social environment. I want to question my deepest self in order to become morally independent and to have free rein to develop my own thinking. I have given up religious practices, and I am looking for a personal approach to religion.

[*The wise man*] Are you happy here now?

[*The disciple*] No, I am insecure in my faith, and I question my hope.

[*The wise man*] Do you feel fulfilled in your search?

[*The disciple*] No, I feel guilty that I don't always act perfectly.

[*The wise man*] And so what?

[*The disciple*] I understand, I have to look for a better way.

### Year 3

[*The disciple*] I have been filled with the wisdom of the New Age, and I feel connected to the whole universe.

[*The wise man*] Are you happy here now?

[*The disciple*] No, but the Age of Aquarius will come and overwhelm me with happiness.

[*The wise man*] Do you feel fulfilled in your search?

[*The disciple*] No, everyday life doesn't satisfy me.

[*The wise man*] And so what?

[*The disciple*] I understand, I have to look for a better way.

### Year 4

[*The disciple*] Faith consists in desiring things whose existence is unverifiable and improbable, such as eternal life and the perfect happiness of paradise, and then declaring, against all plausibility, that all this is assured. I have emancipated myself from the beliefs that have been instilled in me, and I have distanced myself from religions. From now on, I am an agnostic.

[*The wise man*] Are you happy here now?

[*The disciple*] No, because hope has become a mere possibility.

[*The wise man*] Do you feel fulfilled in your search?

[*The disciple*] No, because guilt remains as a possibility, therefore as a permanent feeling.

[*The wise man*] And so what?

[*The disciple*] I understand, I have to look for a better way.

### Year 5

[*The disciple*] I stopped hoping for the Paradise obtained artificially by self-suggestion. To tend towards serenity, one must free oneself from the fear of death. Religions were blackmailing me about what would happen after death, so I freed myself from religious beliefs. **The de-dramatisation of existence is a measure of mental hygiene.** You have to pay more attention to life than to myths. In order to remove obstacles to happiness, one must fight fears that relate to imaginary or unproven things such as the fear of hell. I have become an atheist. I have thus freed myself from the fear of the Last Judgement (or of reincarnation into an inferior being) and I have stopped trembling.

[*The wise man*] Are you happy here now?

[*The disciple*] No, but I feel much better. After the relief, I have reached a permanent state of lightness. The frustrations come from a lack of adaptation to the world as it is, and I have to accept what is inevitable. Unrealistic expectations are a source of disappointment. On the other hand, we have to focus on what depends on us. When I am unhappy with my life, it is

usually possible to correct the course of my life, but only if I have the courage to make the necessary effort. If you don't do everything you think is desirable, you do what you can do, but it would be better to better define what you really want, and to stick to it with perseverance in the long run. In order to go far, you have to move in the same direction for a long time.

[*The wise man*] Do you feel fulfilled in your search?

[*The disciple*] Yes, because I have understood that we must seek happiness here now. Life is an opportunity that we must seize every moment: to love, to learn, to understand, to build, ... I want to apply myself to love life in its finiteness and to think that being ephemeral is a quality. It is a real spiritual work to open one's heart to appreciate the present moment in a constantly renewed way.

[*The wise man*] And so what?

[*The disciple*] In order to progress without wandering, I want to feel in harmony with my deepest aspirations, free of fantasies and utopias, but without harming the need to build a life project, and move forward sustainably in the same direction, without losing sight of my relationship with others. It is better to remain constructive because, when you make a retrospective judgment on your life, there is generally more to regret among what you have not done than among what you have done.

I have made a lot of progress in my spiritual path and I have found a path that suits me.

## **Healing** (Outline of the tale)

### **Characters**

The following characters appear in this tale:

#### *The musician*

Our musician is an artist in every sense of the word, even the less glamorous ones. He has composed melodies that have accompanied the most famous films, composed songs for famous singers. He leads a chaotic life, remarries every year, spends some episodes of his life in drugs, others in detoxification. He is invited to star-studded television shows. He is interviewed by the press, both on his musical work and on his latest conquest or relapse. He does not wallow in his relative unhappiness and seeks a way out that constantly eludes him.

#### *The Philosopher*

Whoever appears here is immensely cultivated and very productive. Being somewhat depressed and occasionally tempted to commit suicide, he has written moving pages about the nonsense of existence, which has brought his fame beyond the oceans. When he writes that man is irretrievably mired in the misfortune of his fate, he feels a great inner joy of being so brilliantly lucid, of being able to describe it and being recognised for it.

### *The believer*

Following the death of a loved one, our believer decided to dedicate his life to God. He realised that what he had previously regarded as petty misconduct turned out to be in fact sins, some of which are deadly. To make amends, he was now going to devote himself as a lay auxiliary to the parish. He felt his work as a balm that soothed his feelings of guilt. Life is not more beautiful, but less painful.

### *An ordinary person*

Our character, man or woman, has a modest profession, a family life which, without being brilliant, is rather happy. In philosophical or religious matters, he doesn't break his head and doesn't think too much about it. He does not ask for the moon when he foresees disappointment. A little lightness is an antidote to the heaviness of negative feelings. He lives from day to day, taking pleasure in the moment, but without sacrificing the future, keeping his head on his shoulders, as they say in his milieu. One must try to live as fully as possible, with the means at one's disposal. Life is beautiful as long as it is not ruined by the anxiety of an uncertain future. But happiness is something else.

### **Tale**

A succession of major scientific discoveries and dazzling medical advances were made, capable of overcoming all mental illnesses. Following a thorough examination, a precise diagnosis can be made. A treatment, perfectly adapted to each case, can be prescribed. The result is a complete and definitive cure.

The *musician* and the *ordinary person* were declared sane.

As a result of the treatment, the personality of the *philosopher* changed. The pleasure of life returned. He became a writer. In his novels, he portrays desperate characters with a realism that makes for the greatest literary successes. What he dramatises in his work, he de-dramatises in his life. His pessimism has subsided. His novels now end with an opening to hope for a better future.

As for the *believer*, after a long psychological care, he found peace by becoming an *ordinary person*.

### **Moral**

Especially when it comes to the meaning of life, madness is often the subject of misdiagnosis. One must weed one's inner garden to remove the sickly anxiety. It is religious indifference that heals the believer.

## Humanity on show

### A philosophical tale

One day, a long time ago, God was daydreaming. “*My God, I'm bored!*”, he said to himself. Why was that? When everything is perfect, when everything runs smoothly and without surprises, nothing interesting or captivating happens. Only boredom remains.

*“I've got an idea how to get out of this”, he says to himself. “I'm going to create a humanity, but I don't want it to be perfect - how horrible! -. I want an ambivalent humanity, capable of both the best and the worst. I'm going to make it full of contrasts, with love, generosity and joy, but also hatred, cruelty and suffering. I'm going to put it in a stimulating context, with fertile land and natural resources, but also disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis and disease. In short, imperfection is necessary for the expression of my omnipotence.”*

And so it was done. Since then, humanity has been evolving on what is, as far as we know, the greatest stage of entertainment, under the watchful eye of the divine spectator.

In the highly improbable event that such a God does exist, let's at least hope he's having a good time!

At the end of the show - for us, at our death - the believer, full of hope, will hold out his hat to receive the reward for his work as an actor.

The wise man remembers that actors were hired by force and carry out their activity under duress.

If we are to believe in the existence of God, we must not be afraid of contradictions. Let's keep our critical minds alert and not take our dreams for realities.



## Epilogue

The truth cannot be established, but the error can be ruled out, which makes it possible to identify the field of research. In order to respond to my need for coherence, I pursued the goal of chasing away contradictions, which led me to reject religious fictions fuelled by the writings fallen from the sky. One must return to the school of common sense and rest both feet on the ground. The exercise of free thought, in particular the opposition to all dogma, requires acceptance of a great diversity of ways of looking at existence. More fundamentally, I aspire to religious indifference. Unfortunately, because of the weight of religion in my environment, this ideal is out of reach. I support in solidarity all attitudes that encourage resistance to religious indoctrination.

Instead of whining that we live in a society without values and putting our hopes in another world, let's give meaning to the world we live in. Let us reserve our commitment to what is universal, away from the circles of believers. **We want to be characterised by values that are more open and more general in scope than the cult of credulity in a communitarian setting.**

Let us return to the foundations of our Western culture: humanism inherited from the Enlightenment, with human rights, democracy, secularism, the search for the common good and the primacy of reason over faith. Infinity exists in what we can build, create or love.

Let us base school education, not on the authority of the Church, but on the development of reason, critical thinking, independence of mind and intellectual autonomy, within a secular framework.