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How Radical Was the Enlightenment? What Do We Mean by Radical?

Diametros nr 40, 99-114

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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HOW RADICAL WAS THE ENLIGHTENMENT? WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RADICAL?

– Margaret C. Jacob –

Abstract. The Radical Enlightenment has been much discussed and its original meaning somewhat distorted. In 1981 my concept of the storm that unleashed a new, transnational intellectual movement possessed a strong contextual and political element that I believed, and still believe, to be critically important. Idealist accounts of enlightened ideas that divorce them from politics leave out the lived quality of the new radicalism born in reaction to monarchical and clerical absolutism. Taking the religious impulse seriously and working to defang it of bellicosity would require years of labor. First all the world's religions had to be surveyed, see Picart's seven folio volumes; and Rousseau's Savoyard vicar had to both preach and live religion simply as true virtue; and finally Jefferson editing the Bible so as to get the irrational parts simply removed, thus making people more fit to grant a complete religious toleration. Throughout the century all these approaches to revealed religion may be legitimately described as radical. Each produced a different recommendation for its replacement. As I have now come to see, the pantheism I identified in 1981 would lead in many directions, among them lay the search to understand all human religiosity and to articulate a universal natural religion.

Keywords: Atheism, materialism, absolutism, French Protestant refugees, Dutch cities, religious toleration, Bernard Picart, Jonathan Israel, English freethinkers, Papal condemnation, Rousseau, pantheism, Jefferson.

In 1981 I argued that the period of the early Enlightenment, bound roughly from the 1680s to the 1720s, produced within the republic of letters a set of ideas, attitudes, and texts that were by any standard as radical as those we associate with the High Enlightenment. In my 1981 account three quite diverse national settings mixed to create, as it were, a perfect storm. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 thousands of exiled French Protestants fled to the Dutch Republic and England – to name only the largest concentrations – and they carried with them experiences of persecution vivid and shocking to the modern imagination. The French authorities detained children deemed ripe for conversion; the laity was actually forbidden to emigrate thus forcing families to separate as escape routes were found for some and not others. Elderly Protestants were thrown in prison; the clergy was expelled sometimes with two days notice or that was how long it

took a leading and endangered Protestant clergyman, Jean Claude, to leave France. In his words the French authorities

[...] strung up their victims, men and women, by their hair or by their feet, to the rafters in the roof, or the hooks in the chimney, and then set fire to bundles of moldy hay heaped up beneath them... They flung them into huge fires which they lit for the purpose, and left them there till they were half-roasted. They fastened ropes underneath their arms and lowered them into wells, pulling them up and down till they promised to change their religion.

True in every detail, or not, accounts like Claude's were widely believed by Protestants on both sides of the Channel. When Claude (d.1687) arrived in the Dutch Republic he was awarded a pension by the stadholder, William of Orange.¹

The emotional logic of these events, combined with a newly found freedom, made for an experience that was inherently radicalizing. This could take the form of the extreme orthodoxy and millenarianism found among older exiles like Pierre Jurieu, or the radical scepticism of his enemy Pierre Bayle, or among the younger generation, a few highly literate seekers took another look at religion in general and concluded that something was inherently wrong with the existing exemplars. Still others turned toward politics, embraced the Republic that gave them refuge, but not uncritically, as can be seen in the reformist stance taken by Jean Rousset de Missy in the Dutch revolution of 1747–1748. In the imaginary republic of letters, if conditions were right, an intellectually radical posture toward both religion and politics was entirely possible. Combine French persecution with exile in the urban book capital of Europe, the Dutch Republic, add to the mix an armed international alliance between the republic and England against France, and refugees or Anglo-Dutch sympathizers could be expected to hold strong opinions. What is perhaps less obvious is that some would turn to freethinking.²

I believed in the 1970s when I was researching the material that became *The Radical Enlightenment* (1981), and I still believe, that the conditions created by the turn toward absolutism in the 1680s in both England and France set up an unprecedented set of circumstances that would only be replicated, in a lesser way in the 1740s, and again more dramatically in the 1780s. In other words in early modern Europe political instability caused by actions coming from the center, i.e.

¹ See: J. Claude, *An account of the Persecutions and Oppressions of the Protestants in France* (London 1686), pp. 19–21 as quoted in Marshall [2006] pp. 63–64.

² See for a description of the Huguenot community as occupied with maintaining their unity as a group of scholars: Goldgar [1995]. On the integration of the Huguenots in Dutch society, see also Berkvens-Stevelinck [1985] pp. 13–49; Bots, Posthumus Meyjes and Wieringa [1985].

governments and elites, set up conditions where authority would be challenged, if only from the safety of anonymity.

The reappearance of religious persecution in the 1680s created one such instability that in the context of English history harkened back to the civil wars of the 1640s and 50s. The notion of there being a dialectic between the magisterial and the radical came from my reading of George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962) where the conflict between Luther, Calvin and the Church unleashed “lesser folk” who took the Reformation in unprecedented directions. The idea of applying this dialectical approach to the Enlightenment crystallized in conversations with J.G.A. Pocock. My reading of Christopher Hill also made clear that the civil wars had produced a revolution within the revolution, a radicalism that was both religious and political. Its heirs of the next generation replicated the dialectic, with the radicals believing that 1688–1689 had not gone far enough. As deists like William Stephens who adopts a tone of objective reporter, explained that “the late happy Revolution (which came on too soon, and was cut off too short) though it was not so highly beneficial to us, as was expected, yet was of very great importance.” For all its importance, the Revolution had failed to establish a republic. In such an understanding, Locke would be the magistrate and Toland his radical nemesis.³

It is important to remember that when I wrote originally various philosophers of the seventeenth century were seen in a light different from that of today. Outside of French historiography, Spinoza had largely dropped out of the intellectual history of the Enlightenment; Locke was seen as infinitely more important than Hobbes, and the two dozen or so major *philosophes* occupied center stage in any history of the period. Very little had been written in the twentieth century on Toland or Collins, and no one had heard of the “Knights of Jubilation,” as our coterie called themselves. In addition the Dutch Republic had fallen out of most histories of the period. There had been pioneering work done on clandestine literature by Ira Wade in particular, but we were fifteen years away from the work of Miguel Benítez. Not least the concept of ideology was just beginning to be applied to terms like Newtonian, Cartesian, and Spinozean. Finally the foot soldiers of the movement, the publishers, booksellers, and journalists were only just coming into their own. In less than thirty years we have performed radical surgery on the received understanding of the Enlightenment.⁴

³ Stephens [1696] p. 10; and see De Krey [1992] pp. 198–217.

⁴ The 1981 argument appears in Jacob [1981/2006]. And see Wade [1938] and Benítez [1996].

Would I apply the adjective “radical” to it as a whole? From one perspective the secularization of Western thought that emerged out of the eighteenth century was a major break with the past and became defining of Western thought thereafter. No other metaphysical system with which I am familiar in my limited way has raised formal atheism to be the often unspoken norm when seeking explanations of natural or social phenomena. Since the Enlightenment, no scientist or historian would invoke God as the explanation for how or why something unfolds – and expect to still be taken seriously.⁵ To imagine, on the other hand, that in the eighteenth-century, only atheists, materialists and believers in democracy make up the ranks of the truly enlightened is a form of essentialism with which I would not want to be associated. In the heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers there were many mansions, and Moses Mendelssohn belongs to the Enlightenment just as surely as does the Baron d’Holbach. Making everything and everybody into a radical has the effect of rendering the category largely meaningless. Cutting a wedge between so-called moderates and radicals turns back the historiography into a pre-Cassirer condition.

The Unique Role of the Dutch Republic

Before its decline in the 1730s and beyond, the Republic offered an unprecedented set of advantages to immigrants and refugees. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries more than 1.5 million people flocked to its Western seaboard towns, and only a third of them came from the Dutch countryside. More than a million emigrated from foreign lands. The influx produced social, cultural, linguistic, and especially religious diversity of a sort never before seen in Europe. Although many immigrants arrived from Calvinist territories, the majority were Lutherans and Catholics, and many Jews and members of other persecuted sects also made their way. Religious diversity combined with the urban division of labor in complex ways. Men dependent upon one another in commerce might have vastly different religious identities or nationalities. Such divided loyalties made the imposition of uniform standards of behavior nearly impossible. Dutch cities consequently fostered an atmosphere conducive to change, innovation and flexibility. They held out a standing invitation to the questioning of conventional social mores, just the kind of orientation that would appeal to men such as those found in the circle of young Protestant refugees I identified in 1981 as being

⁵ Lilla [2007], chapter two. See also on the subject of religion as an object of study, Bremmer [2008] pp. 432-437.

responsible for some of the most outrageous texts new to the age. Then, as now, I would identify their heretical stance toward clerical authority and orthodox Christianity as radical, born out of profound anger at the treatment accorded Protestants now forced out of their homeland, but also freed from constraints in the setting offered by the Dutch cities.

Men like the engraver Bernard Picart and the journalist and book factor, Prosper Marchand, had been led out of Catholicism toward Protestantism precisely by the writings of Jean Claude, among other Protestant polemicists. Their intellectual and religious journey only started there. In 1710 when they arrived in The Hague they may have self-identified as Protestants, but within two years Picart's prospective father-in-law angrily reported to close family friends that Picart was a man of *geen religie*, (no religion), and the following year Marchand wrote angrily in a private letter that he espoused no particular form of Protestant faith. Their odyssey took them in the end to natural religion, pure and simple. It also attracted to the Republic other beleaguered French heretics such as the Marquis d'Argens.⁶

The emotional setting of exile found Picart, Marchand and their circle relocated into Dutch cities where by 1700 about half the books published in Europe were printed. They were accompanied by well over 100000 French Protestants who altered the linguistic and cultural landscapes of numerous Dutch cities, especially Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Within two years after 1685 and the arrival of the first wave of immigrants, a secret Anglo-Dutch plot, conceived against the attempt to re-impose Catholicism in England, led in 1688-1689 to a successful revolution. It affirmed newly found freedoms and a new system of governance that were seen distinctively as Protestant and English. It also exposed a political radicalism visible among London Whigs in the 1680s and 1690s. In 1981 my concept of the storm that unleashed a new, transnational intellectual movement possessed a strong contextual and political element that I believed, and still believe, to be critically important. Idealist accounts of the Enlightenment that

⁶Most of the information about Picart's in-laws, the Vincent family, is derived from father Vincent's correspondence with the Antwerp publishing house Plantin-Moretus (Archive Officina Plantiniana, Antwerp, no. 639-642). For a description of these letters, see Sabbe [1924]. As on many occasions before, it was the publisher, Balthasar Moretus, who helped the Vincents to flee France, with support from his publisher friend F. Leonard and the Antwerp engraver Cornelis Martinus Vermeulen, who worked in Paris and with whom Vincent traded in private letters, see Antwerp, Archive Officina Plantiniana, no. 641, 817. The Dutch text of the letter speaks of Picart as having "geen religie." Picart could have gotten in contact with Vincent through engraver Cornelis Martinus Vermeulen, with whom Picart worked in 1697 on a portrait of Willem III for *L'Histoire de l'Angleterre* by De Larrey, 'dont il a fait aussi la moitié du *Titre* achevé depuis par le même C. Vermeulen'. Picart [1734]. See also Häseker and McKenna [1999]. See also Gasper [2014].

divorce it from politics leave out the lived quality of the new radicalism born in reaction to monarchical and clerical absolutism.

Where We are Now

In addressing the questions posed by my title, let me first describe where the scholarship on this period has now gone - and my own thinking somewhat altered - since 1981. In 2001 my thesis - even my title - was expanded upon and applied to many other national arenas, to German and Spanish developments to name but one welcome addition to the scholarly discussion. In 1981 I had focused on the Dutch-French-English nexus, and saw a select cast of major seventeenth-century thinkers as influencing the arguments put forward by French refugees and English Whigs for religious freedom, republican government, freedom of the press, habeas corpus and against monarchical absolutism as practiced by French king and clergy. These arguments appeared in the journals, books and clandestine manuscripts originating in both London and Amsterdam. The origin of these new polemics owed much to a particular reading of Hobbes, to Locke, to a heretical reading of Newtonian science (Toland's distinctive contribution), and of course to Bruno, Spinoza, as well as the English republican thinkers of the 1650s. In 2001 Jonathan Israel reduced all of those influences into an *Ideengeschichte* centered on the intellectual legacy of Spinoza and he excluded any significant English or French component. Since then the exclusion has deepened and also acquired a polemical edge.

If I think that Israel's simplification of the way intellectual influence and human agency work - an idealist rendering that also effaces the political - will not stand up under scrutiny, so too I think aspects of my own youthful thinking are in need of a reformulation. In 1981, heady from the discovery of new evidence about the origin of the most radical text of the first half of the century - if not of the age - *Le Traité des trois imposteurs*, I dwelt upon the negative rebuff it offered to the three great monotheistic religions, the assault upon their veracity and the character of their founders, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, now labelled as the three great impostors. The text gleefully proclaimed Nature as God and also relied upon Hobbesian arguments about fear as the origin of the religious impulse. Its political edge took the form of labeling the impostors as subverting true republics. It was yet another nail in the coffin of what Mark Lilla calls Christian political theology. Since 1981 a specific coterie made up largely of French Protestant refugees in The Hague and Amsterdam - comprising Prosper Marchand, the political agent Jean Rousset de Missy, the publishers Charles Levier, Fritsch and Böhm, the engraver Bernard Picart, the English freethinkers John Toland

and Anthony Collins, and the minor Dutch diplomat, Jan Vroesen – has been identified as the locus for the transcribing, altering and disseminating of the *Traité*. They initially called the text *La vie et l'esprit de Spinoza*, and in 1719 Levier put out a now very rare edition of it which the Dutch authorities promptly suppressed. Only two or three copies of that 1719 publication now exist; one at UCLA's Young Research Library.⁷

The thinking of this group on the nature of religion was in fact, as I now see, far more subtle and profound than the dismissal of it offered in *La vie et l'esprit*. In the hands of this group religion moved from being a doctrinal and devotional matter to becoming an object to be studied scientifically. After 2006 and a year spent addressing Bernard Picart's and Jean Frédéric Bernard's massive seven folio volume, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of all the Peoples of the World* which first appeared in 1723 and concluded only in 1743, my thinking and the book that Lynn Hunt, Wijnand Mijnhardt and myself subsequently published, came to see this coterie as capable of offering a far richer account of religion than what can be found in the *Traité*. In the period around the arrival of Marchand and Picart, in 1710 in The Hague, virtually no one in Europe believed in full religious toleration. Preparing people to accept such a posture toward others required that the nature of religion be entirely rethought. *Religious Ceremonies and Customs* fundamentally challenged the religious assumptions of its readers by giving them first-hand accounts, comparative essays, and ethnographic perspectives on the various religions found around the world. In fact, the book helped invent the discipline of anthropology. Readers were expected to draw their own conclusions from this material, with some guidance along the way, especially from the explosive introductory essay. Readers were also being invited to distance themselves from their own beliefs and customs and to think about religious practices more generally. This distance marked a crucial first step toward a complete toleration. The French first edition was immediately translated (although moderated) into Dutch, then English and German, and reprinted, plagiarized, and pirated in multiple editions and languages as recently as the 1980s.⁸

⁷ For an account of the text see Jacob [1981/2006]; Berti [1994] (with the original French text and a substantial critical presentation); Charles-Daubert [1999]; Berti, Charles-Daubert and Popkin [1996]. For a portion of the text see Jacob [2001] pp. 94–113.

⁸ And for my subsequent thinking see Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt [2010]. Bernard published two supplementary volumes to *Cérémonies et coutumes*. The first (published in 1743) is titled volume 7, part II. After a preface severely criticizing the two Catholic clerics who published a pirated and expurgated edition of *Cérémonies et coutumes* in 1741, Bernard then printed some of the additional material they had included in their edition, presumably in order to counter their efforts

The compensation received by Bernard Picart, the engraver, and Jean F. Bernard, the publisher and main author, came only from sales of about 3000 copies, nevertheless a remarkably good press run for the period. Shortly after the first two volumes appeared Bernard Picart deposited 1500 pounds in the Bank of England. His name adhered to the largest and most influential publishing project we can associate with his circle, or indeed any enlightened coterie before Diderot's *Encyclopedie*, and the Picart volumes made their way onto the Index of Forbidden Books in 1738.

When the Catholic Church put the work on the Index, it opined in particular: "This Preface breathes the spirit of heresy, not only because of its dogma *concerning spiritual religion*...but also concerning the Vicar of Christ [the pope], holy intercession, sacrifice, and many other things."⁹ Rome was not alone in finding the general preface problematic; the English translation published between 1733 and 1739 simply dropped it without mention. What had Bernard said? "If all men could agree to only regard God as a very simple Being, sovereignly perfect in his Essence, his virtues, and his immense capacity," then they could suppress all intercessors and "go directly to God." They would then be able to eliminate sacrifices, incense, festivals, confraternities, penances, and monasteries, and the people who did these things would be seen as either deliberately trying to mislead others or as mentally unstable [*malades d'esprit*]. Everyone would then look only to themselves for ways of satisfying the Divinity and they would believe that love of virtue and pure morals were the only things truly agreeable to God. The private proceedings of the Holy Office accused it of attempting to spread a "spiritual religion."

The idea of comparing the religions of the world is hardly surprising today, much less shocking, even if we do it too little or with too little willingness to suspend our own beliefs. In the early eighteenth century, however, most Western writings about religion either laid out the true doctrine (that of the author) or focused on debunking the competitors: Catholics and Protestants wrote against each other, the various Protestant sects justified their separate understandings of religious truth, and Christians wrote against Islam and Judaism, the other

to better him. The second supplement (published earlier in 1741) contains various additional "dissertations" on civil ceremonies that he had originally intended to consider in *Cérémonies et coutumes*, but in fact, the volume seems an ill-considered attempt to capitalize on the success of the original work. It includes titillating essays on the feast of fools, the use of satire, the masquerades of Carnival, and the similarity between the practices of the Jews and ancient bacchanalias. There are no engravings by Picart in these two volumes, the title pages notwithstanding.

⁹ Rome, Archive of the Congregation of The Doctrines of the Faith, Vatican City, MS ACDF Index, Diari 16 (1734-1746), f. 100 verso.

monotheistic religions. The customs of the rest of the world's religions were lumped together as pagan idolatry and often brutally depicted. Interest in them was pursued, when it was at all, mainly as a way of facilitating Christian missionary efforts. The hefty five volume *Atlas geographus*, for example, printed in London between 1711 and 1717, repeated the common European view of the origins of Buddhism in China: "A 2d Sect sprung up about 32 Years after Christ's Death, and introduced the Worship of an Idol called *Foe* [Buddha]. This filled the Empire with Idolatry, Atheism, Superstition and Fables." Non-Western religions were generally depicted in just this way as idolatrous, atheistic, superstitious and composed of legends and myths.

Fashioning *Religious Ceremonies and Customs*, Bernard Picart and Jean Frédéric Bernard, aimed at something very different. They still used the terms *idolatry*, *superstition*, and *atheism* in describing Chinese religions, for instance, but these now functioned as smokescreens to hide their true intent. Readers familiar with the previous literature would expect to see those terms. In the section on China, Bernard cleverly set up parallels with the more familiar paganism of Greece and Rome and even with Christianity itself. "Who would not believe, when reading the account of such a beautiful moral system and such an excellent practice of its duties, that *Confucius* was Christian and that he had been instructed in the teaching of J.[esus] C.[hrist]?" Although Bernard claimed only to provide descriptions mixed in with an occasional reflection, "without taking sides either for or against those who have analyzed *Chinese Ceremonies*," he had one main purpose, present in the Chinese section as in all others: to get at the "natural religion" that lay hidden beneath the corruptions introduced by organized religions of all sorts. So, in the next sentence on Confucius, he urged the reader, "Take notice in particular of *this integrity, a gift from Heaven, and from which mankind has been deprived* [the emphasis is his]... No prophet of the Jews spoke more clearly [than Confucius] about the corruption of the natural religion and about the necessity of re-establishing it. Do we not have good reason to be surprised that China had the privilege of a kind of revelation, when according to vulgar opinion idolatry covered all the face of the earth, except for the little state of the Jews?" The "vulgar" view of idolatry kept people from seeing the universal truths of natural religion. Imagining that the subtlety of this radical vision of religion should be reduced to atheism is as much a misreading as is the view that when Spinoza spoke about God, it was simply a code word for his atheism.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Ceremonies and Customs*, IV: pp. 198, 212, 199. The debate on Confucianism was intense in this period. Most original in Bernard's account is his emphasis on Confucius's contribution to developing a natural religion. See the discussion of conflicting views in Israel [2006] pp. 640-666.

The sophisticated nature of the vision of Picart and Bernard required considerable erudition. Between them (and they both lived on the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam), they owned over 4000 books. The extremely rare posthumous catalogues of their books have now been located and they display vast quantities of travel literature, the works of every major 17th century thinker, especially Hobbes, Locke, Newton, Spinoza, Descartes and even Bruno (d.1600), extensive texts by liberal Protestants, many Bibles, etc. In short they were immensely and widely read and no single intellectual influence works to pigeonhole their thinking. Picart's library was especially strong in works by, about and against Hobbes, a remarkable six rare works by Bruno; Bernard had Toland and, of course, Spinoza. Both had Descartes and Newton.¹¹

Although any of the world's religions might serve to show how priests had corrupted natural religion, Catholicism would be Bernard and Picart's primary target. Their reasons for this hostility were profoundly personal. Bernard was the son of a French Calvinist pastor who had been forced to flee to Amsterdam after 1685. Picart, the son of a famous Parisian engraver, had embraced Calvinism a decade or more *after* it became illegal in France. In the company of his life-long friend, Prosper Marchand, Picart too made his way northward, first to The Hague, and then to Amsterdam, where he met Bernard some time after late 1709. As French Protestant refugees, the two men could draw on support from a vibrant community of like-minded exiles who shared their fury against the repressive policies of Louis XIV and their growing interest in "freethinking," that is, a critical open-mindedness about religion that began with criticism of Catholicism and could then progress in more radical directions.

Without saying it explicitly, the frontispiece and opening paragraphs of the very first volume of *Religious Ceremonies and Customs* draw attention to the defects of Catholicism. The frontispiece, engraved in 1727 but clearly intended at the head of the first volume, carried an innocent title, "Vignette of the Principal Religions of the World." At first glance, the religions are represented with remarkable even-handedness. Although monotheism overshadowed the pagan religions, Islam appears in the very front and in a surprisingly favorable light. The viewer has to read the caption to get the full import of what is intended. The female figure in white holding the Bible stands for Christianity, but next to her a Catholic monk is trying to shut the book. The female figure representing

¹¹ *Catalogue du Fonds de Libraire de Feu Jean Frederic Bernard and Catalogus Librorum tam Latinorum quam Gallicorum/Catalogue de livres rassemblez par feu M.Bernard Picart celebre dessinateur.*

Roman Catholicism looms over all the others in the frame, and she holds an olive branch which “she seems to present to all other religions that wish to return to the bosom of the church.” But she tramples on both the rabbi representing Judaism and the figure symbolizing the Roman Empire. The Roman is holding up the globe with the insignia of imperial authority, which the dark figure of Superstition is taking from his hand and transferring to the Pope. The modest female on the left who points to the Bible embraces the tree (of the true religion) whose useless branches she has cut away. She is surrounded by all the leading figures of the Protestant Reformation.

The magisterial Reformers are the ones who initiated the process so important to Bernard and Picart; these radicals took it further, aiming at a universal and natural religion that looks forward to the credo of the Savoyard Vicar. In anticipating the thought of Rousseau and Jefferson on religion, the early radicals availed themselves of many sources, but they also understand a reality that present-day historians ignore at their peril. Religion maps ubiquitously through human history, and that insight on the part of Bernard, Picart and their circle required that it be understood, rationalized, and rendered tolerant.¹²

Taking the religious impulse seriously and working to defang it of bellicosity would require years of labor to survey it in seven folio volumes; or to require the Savoyard vicar to both preach and live it as true virtue; or to find Jefferson editing the Bible so as to get the irrational parts simply removed, thus making people more fit to grant a complete religious toleration.¹³ Throughout the

¹² The vignette is bound as the frontispiece to vol. 1 in the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, set. It appears in the same place in the set owned by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. See <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b23005558/f1.item>.

¹³ Leiden, Marchand Mss 28 Fol. 144-146, “manuscrites de la main de Marchand concernant la religion (not dated).” “C’est neant-moins là toute la Religion de Jesus-Christ, quoi qu’en puissent dire tous les Theologiens du Monde, de quelque Société qu’ils puissent être; et cette seule Regle, toute simple quelle est, peut suffire pour se debarasser tout d’un coup de toutes les Imaginations creuses, et de toutes les Speculations chimeriques, dont ils ont accablé la Religion chretiennes: Speculations beaucoup plus embarrassantes, que bien fondées, et beaucoup moins difficiles à imaginer, que faciles à resoudre.

On sait de science certaine qu’ils crierioient extraordinairement contre ce Raisonnement, s’il venoient à leur connoissance; que, quelques desunis qu’il soient entre eux, ils se reuniroient tous contre lui, pour le traiter d’heretique, d’Impie, de Blasphematoire, de digne du feu, &c. Mais, sans s’arreter aux Injures, et aux Persecutions, dont une funeste et déplorable experience n’a que trop appris à tout le monde qu’il sçavent incomparablement mieux se servir que de bonnes Raisons; on se contenteroit de leur faire cette petite Question?

Lorsque Jesus-Christ vint au Monde pur nous enseigner le chemin du salut, les Instructions qu’il donna, tant à ses Disciples, qu’à ceux qui suivirent son parti, et embrasserent sa Doctrine, suffisoient-elles pour les sauver; En un mot, la Nouvelle Religion, qu’il venoit instituer, avoiet-elle ce Degré de Perfection necessaire pour les conduire surement, et infailliblement, au Salut, pourvu qu’ils l’obsrvassent exactement et religieusement?

Je ne pense pas qu'on puisse le nier; car, Jesus Christ, en qualité de Messie, d'Envoié, de Fils de Dieu, afin de ne chicanner point sur les Termes, estoit rempli de l'Esprit de Dieu en une telle abondance, que St. Paul n'a point fait de Difficulté de dire de lui, que Dieu habitoit corporellement en lui. Avec une Prérrogative si éclatante et si rélévée, et aiant pourvoir d'enseigner, d'expliquer, de retrancher, d'ajouter; en un mot, de former un nouveau plan de Religion, capable de remedier aux desordres qu'il venoit reformer; il ne l'a certainement point fait à demi, et ne l'a point laissé imparfait. Car, il n'auroit pas été de la sagesse et de la Dignité de l'Esprit de Dieu, dont il estoit extraordinairement rempli, de donner une Regle imparfaite à ceux qu'il venoit instruire et corriger.

Or, si cette Regle estoit parfaite dès son commencement, comme sortant des mains de Dieu même, qui ne scauroit rien faire d'imparfait et de defectueux; et si dès lors celle a pû certainement et indubitablement conduire au Salut ceux à qui Jesus-Christ lui-même l'a donnée ; pourquoi seroit-elle imparfaite aujourdhi [sic] pour moi, et pourquoi ne me conduiroit-elle pas présentement au Salut, aussi certainement, et aussi indubitablement, qu'elle y a conduit autrefois les premiers Disciples du Jesus-Christ? Si elle étoit parfaite dès son commencement, pourquoi veut-on m'obliger à recevoir aujourd'hui toutes les Additions, et toutes les Innovations, qu'on y a faites? Les premiers Chretiens, je dis les premiers du tems des Apotres, et du tems de Jesus-Christ lui-même, avoient-ils besoin, pour se sauver, de tout ce Fatras de Jargon Théologique, dans lequel la Religion se trouve ensevelie? Estoiient-ils obliger, pour opérer efficacement leur Salut, de s'embarrasser la Fête d'une quantité prodigieuse de Termes facheux, et accablans: Termes si obscurs, et si inintelligibles, que ceux même qui y sont le plus attachés, ne les entendent pas eux-mêmes, et disputant sur leur signification depuis si longtems, et d'une manière si dure et si scandaleuse? Estoiient-ils obliger, pour gagner le Ciel, de sçavoir ce que c'est que Prédetermination et Réprobation Eternelles, Prédetermination Gratuite, Décrets absolus et éternels, Prédetermination Physique, Grace efficace, Grace suffisante, Grace universelle, Prévision de Mérite, science moienne, Libre-Arbitre; et quantité d'autres semblables, dont on en a embarassé la Question qui roule sur la matiere dont se peut opérer le Salut? Estoiient-ils obliger, pour mériter la Gloire éternelle, d'approfondir les Mysteres de l'Essence Divine, et de l'obscurcir par les Termes barbares de Personne, d'Hypostase, de Génération éternelle, de consubstantialité, d'Amousios, de Trinité, et de mille et mille autres enfin, que sunt verba et voces, praeterea que nihil? Tous ces Termes, & toutes les Doctrines, que vous renfermer dessous, étoient-elles nécessaires du tems des Apotres? Je ne pense pas qu'on ose l'avancer. Et cela estant, qu'en ai-je à faire aujourd'hui? Ne faut-il pas s'aveugler soi même à plaisir, pour ne pas voir que ce ne sont que des fruits de l'Ecole des philosophes platoniciens, qui, étant entrés les premiers dans l'Eglise chrétienne, y ont apporté le Jargon de leur Académie, et y ont en même tems préparé l'entrée à la Messe, à l'Invocation des saints, au culte des images, des statues, & des reliques, à la Présence reele, à la Transubstantiation, et en fin à cette Fourmilere de Dogmes monstrueux et abominables, qui font aujourd'hui regarder avec tant de justice & de fondement, l'Eglise romaine comme le centre de l'Idolatrie, et comme la plus impure et la plus corrompuë de toutes les Sociétez religieuses?» [Underlining in the original.]

«Au commencement, il n'en estoit point ainsi. Jesus-Christ qui supposoit la connoissance d'un Dieu dans l'Esprit de ceux qu'il estoit venu instruire, ne leur demandoit autre chose que de la reconnoitre pour la Messie, c'est-à-dire pour l'Envoié, le Fils de Dieu; et cette confession faite, sans s'informer autrement de ce qu'ils entendoient par là, il leur donnoit le Bateme, comme à des gens qu'il trouvoit suffisamment instruits pour etre introduits dans le Roiaume de Dieu, et pour etre faits membres de son Eglise. Les Apôtres n'ont rien fait de plus. Ils s'en sont tenus-là tout simplement. Dès que les Juifs ou les Gentils, avoient reconnu Jesus pour le Messie, le Fils de Dieu, et promis d'embrasser sa Doctrine; sans exiger d'eux aucune Explication particuliere de leur Foi, ils les admettoient, sur le champ, dans la compagnie des vrais Fideles, et ils estoient regardés comme tels par tous ceux qui composoient l'Eglise Chrétienne...

Un tel homme venant à mourir, et aiant d'ailleurs rempli les Devoirs du Christianisme tels qu'ils nous sont prescrits par Jesus Christ lui-même, ne mourroit-il pas en etat de Grace et de salut? On ne le niera pas, je pense. Et, si cela lui a suffi pour lors, pourquoi ne me suffira-t-il point aujourd'hui, à moi, qui m'en tiens à la Regle certaine, donnée par Jésus-Christ lui-même, de l'aveu de tous les

century all these approaches to revealed religion may be legitimately described as radical and herculean although each produced a different recommendation for its replacement. No single project occupied enlightened thinkers more thoroughly than the search for rational religiosity. Only a very few of them embraced atheism or materialism.

The preface to Picart, volume 1 does not name specific religions, but it makes two crucial points about what will follow: first, that lying beneath the extraordinary variety of religious practices to be found in the world are certain common principles built upon widely shared mental and spiritual foundations; and second, that the “strangely bizarre” quality that can be seen in many religious ceremonies results from false ideas about the Divinity. “If all men could agree to regard God only as a very simple Being, supremely perfect in his Essence, his virtues, and his immense capacity,” then the elaborate hierarchies of intercessors with God (in other words, the Pope, bishops, priests, and saints of Roman Catholicism) soon would be suppressed and sacrifices, incense, festivals, confraternities, and the austerities practiced in monasteries and convents would be seen for what they are: ways of misleading the less sophisticated. Believers would look only inside themselves for ways of “satisfying the Divinity.” At this point, the preface sounds very Protestant, refusing to grant the need for intercession between the believer and God. Volume six published by Bernard after Picart’s death in 1733 lays out the claim that this divinity may be co-eternal with nature, or not, as the believer might wish.

When addressing the category of monotheism, Bernard’s text is quite slippery on the subject of the one, true God. He never fails to capitalize the “Gods” when discussing those peoples who have a belief in more than one of them. At times the text slips effortlessly between God and Gods, implying their interchangeability, and then at others the text asserts that many of the peoples who appear to believe in multiple deities in fact have one, a single being, in mind. Suffice it here to say, God and the Gods remain remote throughout the text. They are feared, prayed to, offered sacrifices - even human ones - but never does the book suggest that any of these invocations have been proven to work effectively. But God or Gods do appear to have a long history, and central to the book’s argument, they are universal to humanity.

Théologiens du Monde et du mien, à moi, qui ne veux absolument en admettre aucune autre, puisque, de leur propre confession, elle étoit parfaite dès le tems que Jesus-Christ nous l’a donnée? Je m’y tiens donc uniquement attaché; & xxxxtous les Je m’y tiens donc uniquement attaché; & xxxxx tous les Raisonnemens Théologiques, ou Philosophiques, qu’on pouraoit me faire, xxxx ne m’en détacheroient certainement point.»

What lies at the root of the natural religion infusing this text, and I would suggest the circle that produced it, can be most clearly documented in the private writings on religion left by Picart's intimate friend, Marchand. He saw the vast corruption of the religion of Christ as the handiwork of the theologians and their jargon, and he further believed that elaborate ceremonies were an accretion, a move away from the true natural religion which Jesus had understood and which belonged as the centerpiece of belief. While Picart leaves none of his private thoughts about religion, in 1713, early in the years of their exile, Marchand explained his position in the draft of a letter to an unnamed Catholic correspondent. In the letter, he angrily refuses to return in a "blind" or "absurd" fashion to the fold of a church that arrogates its authority "so haughtily and unjustly." He explains that a book by Jean Claude (published in 1683) in defence of Protestantism against Jansenist attacks was one of those that "contributed the most to disabusing me of the opinions of Rome." Marchand does not rest there. He insists that everything required for sound doctrine can be found in the New Testament and among the primitive Christians. In a particularly provocative aside, he calls to his defence the work of the Catholic cleric Nicolas Malebranche, whose book *Search for Truth* of 1674 tried to reconcile Cartesianism and Catholicism. Malebranche's efforts produced furious reactions from Bossuet and the Jansenist Arnauld, both sworn enemies of the Protestants as well. It hardly seems accidental that the title of Malebranche's book was the one chosen by Picart, and explicated below it by Marchand, for his controversial 1707 engraving in praise of Descartes.

Near the end of the letter Marchand drops a bombshell: "since I am not Lutheran, Calvinist, Arminian, Socinian, Anabaptist, or Quaker," anything charged against these Reformers and their various sects fails to concern him in the least. Writing privately from the relative safety of the Dutch Republic, Marchand can say that he belongs to no particular religion. Since anyone reasonable, he insists, will conclude that the Roman Church has fallen into "the most gross and contemptible idolatry," it is time to return to the New Testament and circumvent "all the superstitions and criminal innovations" introduced in the last 1700 years. It was views such as these that no doubt horrified Picart's future father-in-law in 1712. What kind of religion was it that required no organized church and no official doctrine? Yet Marchand appears to believe firmly in Jesus, whom he calls "the Son of God." It is not clear that he believes in the Trinity, but it is never mentioned. He wants to return to a "pure and simple doctrine" based on Scripture and avoid the "infinity of bizarre cults and ceremonies" introduced by Roman Catholicism. In the same year, 1713, Marchand wrote a preface to a new collection of the chief Protestant works refuting transubstantiation that was published by

Fritsch and Böhm in Rotterdam. Taking pride of place among them were works by Claude. Did this concern with refuting the central doctrines of Catholicism lead Marchand – and Picart and Bernard, along with countless others – toward what the age came to call “natural religion” and which some viewed as tantamount to deism, even atheism?

When Picart and Marchand arrived in the Dutch Republic they were clearly committed to a Protestant identity of some sort, but their intellectual and religious journey was just beginning. By the end, as *Ceremonies and Religious Customs* reveals, they had read widely and could reference a vast travel literature, as well as works by Toland, Hobbes and Spinoza – all readily available in the Republic. Having been detached from the mystique of Catholicism, they began an odyssey that would be repeated by many others. Forging an enlightened religiosity required far more thought and reading than the rote repetition of materialist arguments. The power of the Enlightenment from this early coterie to thinkers like Rousseau and Jefferson lay in understanding the force of organized religion, and then searching for a set of beliefs which deists, and perhaps even atheists of the age, could understand if not accept. As I have now come to see, the pantheism I identified in 1981 would lead in many directions, among them lay the search to understand all human religiosity and to articulate a universal natural religion. Therein ultimately lies the radical message of the Enlightenment.

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