

Leibniz to Isaac Jacquelot (6 October 1706)

[Gr p64]

Sir,

As your letter gave me hope that I would soon have the honour of seeing you here, I believed I could better respond with the spoken word, but as this hope has now faded I take up the pen in order to fulfil my obligation to you. When you have fully considered, Sir, that material mass is always a being by aggregation, which is consequently a result of several other beings, you will find that to come to the true sources or principles, you will have to admit unities or simple substances everywhere, and that thus what I say about this is not a simple hypothesis, and still less than a multiplication of beings without necessity.

I am delighted to learn that you have replied to Mr Bayle,¹ and have no doubt that you did so as you did before, that is to say by avoiding what could offend. For this is an individual of such great merit, and who can render so many services to letters and even, if he wants to apply himself, to religion, that it is right to handle him with tact; that is why I am quite angry about the great quarrel that he has had with Mr Le Clerc, another excellent man, and one very capable of giving us his insights. Both should concentrate their efforts on instructing us on a number of things and on advancing towards each other from their respective sides without offending each other and without muddling [Gr p65] personal disputes with the discussion of things. It would also be hoped that clever men would want to lend their mind and knowledge to edifying truths rather than to paradoxes and error, whether in the form of objections or otherwise.

For myself, far from being angry that a clever and well intentioned man makes specious objections against the truth, I take pleasure in seeing and examining them, since these sorts of objections always serve to clarify the matter and to throw a new light on it; but I wish that they were put in Latin books, or ones that are only read by people advanced in learning, just like the Scholastics, especially when these are about truths of which it is important that the public be persuaded.

Nevertheless I find that Mr Bayle makes objections stronger than they are, as if he likes the idea that there are invincible objections that can be opposed to the truth. The *Reply to the Questions from a Provincial*, and the response that has just been made on his behalf to Mr Le Clerc in explaining the précis of the doctrine of the former, appears to me to admit of some difficulty when he says there, on page 18, 'that the way of bringing man's moral and physical evil into harmony with the attributes of an infinitely perfect unique principle of all things, is beyond all philosophical insights, so that the objections of the Manicheans leave difficulties that human reason cannot resolve.' For if the way of bringing evil into harmony with the perfection of God means giving the detail of the reasons which led him to permit evils, then this way could be inexplicable, because it perhaps depends on the universal harmony which envelops infinity. And nevertheless the objections that are made against the permission of evil can and must be susceptible to a good solution, for it is not necessary that the one who responds to an objection demonstrate his thesis *a priori* and thoroughly explain everything obscure and difficult that it contains, but yet it is necessary that people who are clever and capable of application can find a way to

¹ Isaac Jacquelot, *Examen de la théologie de M. Bayle* [Examination of Mr Bayle's theology], (Amsterdam, 1706).

respond to objections; otherwise there would be no more obscurity in this respect, because it would be *clear* that the thesis is false, and it would be wrong to hold for certain what is refuted by an objection to which one could not respond properly. For what is a demonstration other than an invincible argument, that is, an argument whose form is good, and whose matter consists in propositions that are either evident or [Gr p66] proved by similar arguments until one comes to evident propositions alone? Thus to say that what reason or revelation teaches us could be subject to invincible objections, would be to want there to be demonstrations of the for and against, because reason teaches us by an invincible objection that what it refutes is false.

I believe that most of those who have spoken at length on the use of reason in theology, such as Vedelius, Musaeus and others, will ultimately agree with what I have just said. It is true that the person who is completely persuaded of a truth is not at all obliged to examine all the objections that can be made against it, and even that it would be unfair to most of the people if some were to want to force them to do that. It is also true that one must not move away from the letter of the text when the contrary reasons are only likely. But everyone remains agreed that reason and revelation could not teach an absurdity.

.....

If someone is of another opinion, and claims that the truth can admit of difficulties which consist in invincible objections, he loses the means of knowing the truth, or rather he [Gr p67] recognizes two contradictory truths. I am therefore of the opinion that one can and must reply to the objections of the libertines, the atheists, the infidels and the heretics, and I entirely agree with what the last Lateran Council recommends to Christian philosophers, in wanting them to apply themselves to address the poor reasons of the Averroists and of those other Peripatitians who in those times maintained that the immortality of the soul was true according to faith, and false in philosophy.² And I strongly commend your plan to take up the defence of faith against the objections that are drawn from modern philosophy.

© Lloyd Strickland 2005

With thanks to Geert de Wilde

² The doctrine of twofold truth was condemned in session 8 (held 19 December 1513) of the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517).