

Leibniz to André Morell (10/20 December 1696)

[A I 13, p397]

To Mr André Morell at Arnstat

Hanover, 10 December 1696

Sir

You will by no means inconvenience me by making me hold on to letters for Mr Abbé Nicaise, or for any other friend you have in Paris or elsewhere in France, and I would always take care to hold on to them as well as their responses...

I read with pleasure how you lectured our good Abbé by teaching him the true theology, which theologians often hardly know. I have thought more about these things and for a longer time than you perhaps think. I read with pleasure and with respect the invaluable fragments of the Acts of the martyrs of the early Church. These *Acta sanctorum Felicitatis and Perpetuae*, which the late Mr Holstein first published, and which some even believed were written by Tertullien, charmed me when I saw them the first time.¹ As did also the book by Martyr Hippolite,² which the late Mr Gudius first uncovered. As for the lives of the saints, I find that the late Mr Arnaud D'Andilly, brother of the Doctor, made a good choice of them. And as for St. Teresa, you are right to esteem her [A I 13, p398] works. One day I found in them this fine thought: that the soul ought to conceive things as if there were only God and itself in the world. This thought gives rise to an idea which is significant even in philosophy, and I have made good use of it in one of my hypotheses.³ I even found solid thoughts in St Catherine of Genes (she is different from the one of Siene). I forgive these people the credulities which are noticeable in their works, and I content myself with finding excellent things there, on the whole. Thus I am naturally led to attach myself in things to what must be praised in them, without paying too much attention to what can be criticized in them, especially when the praiseworthy parts prevail. I read books not to censure them but to profit from them, which means that I find some good everywhere, though not equally.

I don't know whether you saw what the late Mr Pelisson had printed of the correspondence I had with him.⁴ I showed him through the testimony of serious authors of the Roman church this secret, known to few people, that according to the principles of this Church and its better theologians, one can be saved through the sincere love of God above all things, whatever communion one belongs to.⁵ And I was surprised that he had no qualms about printing that in Paris. For able persons have recognized that what he says against it does not weaken the impressions that my letter can give. It is not that his eloquence does not weaken everything that can come from me, when it is only about that, but the force of reasons always prevails over eloquence, however great it may be, provided that these reasons are clearly explained.

I don't know if you have seen the books of the Jesuit Father Spee, who was an excellent man. The first person I heard praise this father was John Philipp, elector of Mainz, who recommended him to me to the point of giving me a copy of his book on

¹ L. Holstein, *Passio sanctorum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (Rome, 1663).

² Hippolytus.

³ See 'Discourse on Metaphysics' §32; 'New System'.

⁴ Paul Pelisson-Fontanier, *De la tolerance des religions, Lettres de M. de Leibniz et Réponses de M. Pellisson* (Paris, 1692).

⁵ A I 6, no. 59 & no. 60.

the Christian virtues, *Güldenes Tugend-Buch*,⁶ in which I admired everything, except for the German verses, [A I 13, p399] the true taste for which is still unknown in the Roman church. But the thoughts are so fine and profound and, at the same time, so well crafted to touch even the vulgar and dark souls in the world, that I was charmed by them. He especially recognized and recommended this great secret of the effect of the true love of God. He even proposes a nice method for praising God at all moments, the solidity of which he even proves like the mathematicians. I pointed it out to Abbé Molanus, who found it so beautiful that it he applied it to a fountain he has in his Abbey. And he taught it to Roman Catholic Abbés, colleagues (in part) who had come to see him, being of the same order. If you cannot find the book where you are, I will find it for you. This great man is also the author of the book which has caused quite a stir without it being known where it came from; for one must look after oneself, to speak properly. It is *Cautio criminalis circa processus contra sagas*.⁷ I know from the mouth of this same elector that this father is the author. The book was translated into several languages. It was praised and refuted. Mr Becker talks about it a lot in his *Enchanted World*.⁸ But no one knew to whom it should be attributed. The elector mentioned to me that this good father had admitted to him that he had accompanied to the fire a very great number of so-called criminals in his capacity of confessor; that he had thoroughly quizzed them to discover the truth, but that he could not say he had found anyone who gave him grounds to think had truly been a sorcerer. The elector was still a canon in Würzburg when this father said these things to him; but he was touched by them so much that as soon as became bishop he put a stop to these proceedings, which had been only too common in Franconia.⁹ I know that the late Miss de Bourignon and even Mr Poiret are of another view, and believe that the world is teeming with sorcerers. But they should be forgiven for that in favour of the other excellent thing they say.

I have perhaps meditated with as much application as Mr Poiret himself on what the true inner theology is. And I have even tried to respond to it through the effects. In my opinion, the touchstone of true illumination is a great ardour for contributing as much as possible to the glory of God and the general good. And I find so few people who take this to heart that it surprises me. I have made suggestions of this nature thousands of times. But I usually found that people who wanted to appear the most [A I 13, p400] pious were paralyzed when it really comes to doing good, instead being content to vent themselves with fine words as if God can be won over by ceremonies. I find also that few men have a true idea of the good. I only deign to call a person 'good' who really makes men more perfect, and the grandeur of God better known. I also find that those who are of a sectarian or schismatic humour, that is, who put distance between themselves and those who are full of good intention but do not act rightly in their opinion, could have neither charity nor illumination in its true purity. It seems to me that the late Mr Labadie, the late Miss de Bourignon, and William Penn, with his brethren, had that fault of being sectarian or condemnatory. Among those people who have extraordinary views I have found hardly anyone who agrees with me about this great principle of charity besides Mr Helmont, in whom have I noticed a true ardour for the good, although aside from that we often have very different opinions about particular matters. You tell me, Sir, of some people in Holland of an eminent sanctity; you will do me therefore a very great favour if you will inform me

⁶ Friedrich von Spee, *Güldenes Tugend-Buch* [Golden Book of Virtues] (Cologne, 1646).

⁷ Friedrich von Spee, *Cautio criminalis* [Prudence in criminal cases](Rinteln, 1631).

⁸ Balthasar Bekker, *De Betoverde Wereld* [The Enchanted World] (Amsterdam, 1691-1693).

⁹ A region of Southern Germany.

of your discoveries about them. For there is nothing I value more than the acquaintance of such persons. I am not fortunate enough to know Mr Poiret. But I have seen certain things of his that have satisfied me very much. However it is true that there are others which have not satisfied me, especially what he wrote against the *Acts of Leipzig* and the excellent Mr de Seckendorf. But his zeal should be forgiven. If his intention is truly good, I will like and respect him very much. And it is among other things for the marks of good intention you give that I am with so much respect,
Sir –

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