

SHORT AND FAMILIAR
ANSWERS
TO THE
MOST COMMON OBJECTIONS
USED
AGAINST RELIGION

FROM THE FRENCH OF

L'ABBÉ DE SÉGUR

FORMERLY CHAPLAIN OF THE MILITARY PRISON OF PARIS

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Some pages have been removed here from this preview..

Objection 1

**WHAT HAVE I TO DO WITH RELIGION? I HAVE
NONE, AND THAT DOES NOT PREVENT MY
ENJOYING EXCELLENT HEALTH.¹**

Accordingly, I do not offer religion to you as a means of growing in height, or enjoying good health.

But, honestly, are we then in this world only for that; and have we no higher destiny than our oxen, our dogs, and our cats? All nations, in all times and places, have been convinced of the contrary, and it appears strange that you should be right, against the whole world.

It is about our higher destiny that religion is concerned. Nothing can touch us more closely; nothing can better deserve the attention of a reasonable man.

In fact, according as religion is found true or false, everything changes in the practical direction of our life, in our ideas, in our most intimate and most important sentiments.

Now, not only *is it possible* that religion is true, but there are many strong arguments in its favour, in the immense blessings of civilization which it has spread upon the earth, and in the respect which has been paid to it by so many men of every nation, eminent for their virtues and their genius, such as Bossuet, Fénelon, Saint Louis, Bayard, the great Conde, Napoleon, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Francis de Sales, Columbus, Sir

¹ The author begins with the objection of the lowest kind of mere animal man.

Thomas More, Daniel O'Connell, Charles Carroll, and a host of others, whose names are familiar to our countrymen.



Let me, then, discuss the cause of religion with you.

Believe me, you reject it only because you do not know it. As you represent it to yourself, I can easily understand that it is distasteful to you. But do you represent religion to yourself as it really is? This is the whole question. Alas! what prejudices, what strange errors exist with regard to it!

It will not be difficult for me, my dear reader, in these simple conversations, to show you that these prejudices are unjust; that religion is not what its enemies say it is; that not only is it not absurd, but that it is supremely reasonable, beautiful, and harmonious, and that it rests upon the most solid proofs.

I am going to show you that it is made for you and that you are made for it.

If, like me, you saw it, every day—this holy religion—drying the tears of the poor, changing the most hardened hearts, arresting the progress of evil, repairing injuries, softening hatred and dislikes, infusing everywhere resignation, truth, peace, hope and joy into people's souls, you would soon alter your language, and I should have no need to press this subject upon you.

But, unfortunately, this *practical* and *experimental* proof of religion requires rather to be felt than heard of. It is experience, and not words, that makes us understand its invincible power.

You may not have reached that period of life when you will need the helps and consolations of religion; but that time will come for you as it has come for others. Witness the poor soldiers suffering

and dying on the field of battle. Witness their appreciation of the helps of religion afforded to them by the Sisters of Charity whom even Protestants have called “Angels of the battlefield.” Witness the helps of religion to humanity in the various asylums for infants and orphans, the sick, the aged and the poor. Go to the bedside of the sick and dying; go to the deathbeds of those who have faith in God and in religion, and witness their peace and content of mind, and you will realize the meaning of the words: “Without me, you can do nothing.”² and also of these other words: “I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.”³

Nor does religion unfit a man for the duties of this life. On the contrary, it tends to restrain his passions, and affords him courage and strength to discharge his various duties toward God and his fellow men; it makes him a law-abiding citizen, a lover of right and justice, who does not shrink from any sacrifice, even that of his own life, at the call of duty.

² John 15:5

³ Phil. 4:13

Objection 2

THERE IS NO GOD.

Are you quite sure of that? Who then has made the heavens and the earth, the sun, the stars, man, the world?

Did all these things create themselves? What would you say if someone were to show you a house, and tell you that it made itself? What would you say even if he pretended that it was possible? That he was laughing at you, would you not? or that he was mad; and you would be quite right.

If a house cannot make itself, how much less the wonderful creatures which fill the universe, beginning with our own bodies, which are the most perfect of all!

There is no God!

Who told you so? Some thoughtless fellow, no doubt, who had not seen God, and thence concluded that he did not exist. Is there nothing real but that which we can see, hear, touch, or feel? Does not your thought, that is to say, your soul that thinks, exist? It exists so really, and you know it so evidently, that no reasoning in the world could convince you to the contrary. Yet, have you ever seen, or heard, or touched your thought? See, then, how absurd it is to say: There is no God, because I do not see Him.

God is a *pure spirit*, that is, a being which cannot be brought under the material senses of our body, and which is perceived only by the faculties of the soul. Our soul is also a *pure spirit*: God has made it in his own image.

Some years ago, when irreligion seemed fashionable, a gentleman of talent was taking supper at the same table with some pretended philosophers who sneered at religion and denied the existence of God. The stranger kept silent. The clock was just striking when his opinion was asked. The stranger pointed to the clock, and said: "Gentlemen, do you hear the sound of that beautiful clock?" "Yes," they replied. "Well," said the stranger, "the various parts that compose that clock fell together of their own accord and produced that wonderful piece of mechanism." "Why, that's absurd," said the would-be infidels. "And not only that," continued the stranger, "but the big town clock which regulates this one, also fell into a happy combination and made itself." "Still more absurd," replied the infidels, growing somewhat impatient; "we did not expect the amusement of being entertained this evening by an inmate of some lunatic asylum." "But that's not all," said the stranger; "there is a bigger clock than any of these; it is a town clock for all towns; one, in fact, which regulates all other timekeepers; they call it the clock of the universe. Its great dial, the sun, appearing regularly morning after morning, awakens, quickens into activity, and regulates the whole world. And yet some lunatics in our asylum claim that this great clock of the universe made itself." The infidels then became quite friendly with the stranger, who explained to them that, just as it is unreasonable and absurd to believe that a clock could exist and keep time without a clockmaker, so it is equally absurd and unthinkable that the earth, moon and stars could exist and move with such clocklike precision around the sun without the work of a Maker's hand. The infidels, seeing at once the force of the argument, admitted that they had never before stopped to consider the matter in that common sense light.

The belief of our nation on this point is emblazoned in the dome of the National Library at Washington, in these words of the

Holy Ghost: “The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.”¹

Saint Paul thus points out the existence of God: “The invisible things of Him (His existence, etc.) *are clearly seen from the creation of the world*, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also and divinity; so that they (unbelievers) are inexcusable.”²

Another anecdote is related of the reply of a lady to a celebrated unbeliever of the Voltairian school. He had endeavoured ineffectually to convert her to his atheism. Mortified by her resistance, “I could not have believed,” said he, “that in a reunion of people of talent I should be the only one not to believe in God.”

“But you are not alone,” replied the mistress of the house; “my horses, my spaniel, and my cat also have that honour; only those poor beasts have the wit not to boast of it.”

Father Kircher and a Young Infidel

Father Athanasius Kircher, who lived in the seventeenth century, is recognized as one of the greatest scientists of his day. He was in turn a professor of philosophy, oriental languages, mathematics and Egyptology. He was a voluminous writer on mathematics and physical sciences, and his famous work *Mundus Subterraneus* was a real cyclopedia, comprising all the geological knowledge of the day. At Rome he collected an enormous museum of scientific instruments, natural objects, models and antiquities, and he himself constructed many wonderful instruments. Father Kircher was the possessor of a magnificent globe representing our planetary system. By means of a secret spring the whole

¹ Psa. 18:2

² Rom. 1:20

could be set in motion, reproducing in miniature the movement of the earth and the other planets around the sun.

A young friend of the great scientist called one day just as the priest was about to attend a dying woman. Kindly the priest invited the young man to his study, there to await his return. Quite naturally the young man's attention was soon drawn to the splendid globe, and as he was passing his hand over the instrument he accidentally touched the secret spring, starting the whole mechanism in motion. Lost in admiration of this wonderful imitation of the universe, the priest found him on his return. The first question the young man, who by the way was an avowed infidel, asked was: "Father, who is the genius that has made this wonderful instrument?" "Why," answered the priest, "nobody made it, it made itself." "Father," said the young man, "you are but trifling with me; it is against reason; it is an utter impossibility that this splendid and wonderful miniature of our universe should have made itself or be the work of chance." "What," answered the priest, "you admit that a genius was necessary to make this poor, insignificant miniature of the vast universe, and yet affirm that the great universe of which a single blade of living grass contains more wonders than this paltry globe, had no maker?" For a moment the young man reflected, then dropping on his knees he uttered his first profession of faith: "My God, I believe."

In plain English, do you know what that boasting phrase: "There is no God," means? Here is a faithful translation of it: "I am a bad man, who am very much afraid that there is someone above who will punish me."

Objection 3

**WHEN ONE DIES, THERE IS AN END OF
EVERYTHING.**

Yes, if you are speaking of cats, dogs, asses, canary-birds, etc. But you are very modest if you reckon yourself in the number.

1st. You are human, my friend, and not a beast. It is strange that it should be necessary to tell you so. You have a soul capable of reflecting, of doing good or evil, and that soul is immortal; the beasts have none.

That which makes a *human* is the *soul*; that is to say, that which thinks within us, that which causes us to recognize truth, and to love good. This is what distinguishes us from beasts. This is why it is so great an insult to say to anyone: "You are a beast, you are an animal," etc. It is to refuse to him his highest glory, that of being *human*.

To say then: "When I die there will be an end of me," is to say: "I am a beast, a mere brute, an animal! And what an animal! I am not of so much value as my dog, for he runs faster, sleeps better, sees farther, has a more delicate sense of smell, etc., etc.; or as my cat, who sees in the dark, who has no trouble about her apparel, etc. In a word, I am a very inferior beast, the least gifted of animals."

If you like that, say it; believe it, if you can; but allow us to be a little more proud than you, and to proclaim loudly, that we are men. 'Tis the least you can do.



2nd. What would the world come to if your assertion were true? It would become a regular den of infamy—good and evil, virtue and vice, would be nothing but idle words, or rather odious falsehoods!

Why, indeed, if, on one hand, I have nothing to fear in a future life, and if, on the other, I manage sufficiently well to have nothing to fear in this present one, why should I not steal, or murder, when it would serve my interest? Why should I not give myself up to all the excesses of licentiousness? Why curb my passions? I have nothing to fear; my conscience is a lying voice, upon which I will impose silence. One thing only is worth my attention; that is, to avoid the police and the officers of justice. *Good*, for me, as well as for every other sensible man, will be to elude them successfully; *evil*, to fall into their clutches.

“What language!” you say; “a man must be mad to use it seriously.”

Very true. And yet, if there is an end of everything for us on the day of our death, I defy you to gainsay this odious, this absurd language.

If there be no future state, I defy you to show me in what Saint Vincent de Paul and the great army of Sisters of Charity are more worthy of our esteem than Tracy the outlaw, with his band of highway robbers.

Judge of the tree by its fruits, as we are taught by our own common sense, and by the Gospel. By horrible consequences, judge of the principle; and dare to repeat again, “When we die there is an end to us!” We shall know henceforth what that means!



3rd. While it is contrary to common sense, materialism is also contrary to the general and invincible sentiment of the whole human family. Always and everywhere men have believed in a future state. Always and everywhere the innocent who have been unjustly persecuted, the good man who has been unfortunate, have looked forward to another life for the justice and happiness which were denied to them in this world; always and everywhere men have believed in a God who will be the avenger of unpunished crime!

In fine, always and everywhere men have prayed for the dead, have hoped to find those whom they loved beyond the tomb and in a better world.

“Why do you weep?” said the dying Bernardin de Saint Pierre to his wife and children. “That which you lose in me will live always. . . It is but a momentary separation; do not make it so painful. . . *I feel that I am quitting only this earth, and not life.*”

Such is the voice of conscience; such is the voice, the sweet, the consoling voice of truth.

Such also is the solemn language of Christianity. It shows us the present life as a season of temporary trial, which God will crown with eternal happiness. It excites us to merit this happiness by self-sacrifice, and by the faithful performance of our duty. When his last hour approaches, the Christian yields up his soul to God with confidence, and to a pure, holy, and peaceable life, succeeds an eternity of joy!



Far from us, then, far from our enlightened country, be this wretched materialism, which would snatch from us such sublime hopes! Far from us those errors which degrade the heart, which destroy all that is good, all that is dear and worthy of respect in this world!

Far from us be the doctrine which leaves to the suffering and weeping poor, to the innocent who are oppressed, nothing but despair for their inheritance!

The human conscience rejects such a doctrine with scorn!

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