

## **PART 1**

### ***Trends***





# From Religion in the Singular to Religions in the Plural: 1700, a Faultline in the Conceptual History of Religion

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## Abstract

Guy Stroumsa has identified a paradigm shift that led to the modern pluralistic notion of religion. This chapter shows how, in the Dutch Republic, this shift emerged out of a general and long-lasting conversation on tolerance and diversity conducted by philosophers and theologians. Although well before 1700 the orthodox had also accepted the existing practices of tolerance, Reformed authors of all stripes regarded it as an—in-avoidable and deplorable—evil, because they all held that true religion should be based on correct theology. Consequently they recognized only one true religion: that is, their own. Over the course of the seventeenth century the knowledge of God necessary for true religion radically changed character. Instead of an extensive and logically coherent edifice of scholastic theology, the dictates of one's conscience became the rule of faith. For radical thinkers the Bible became irrelevant, at least to the possession of divine knowledge. However, even these radical philosophers remained within the traditional paradigm in which there was one true religion among many forms of idolatry. Only after 1700 did the new religious paradigm develop in two traditions. The tolerance debate caused some influential scholars of natural law and philosophers to underline the individual character of all religions. Other scholars focused on the universal character of religion arising from human nature, which made the differences among existing religions insignificant.

## 1 The Negative Connotation of Tolerance and Religious Diversity before 1700

As is well known, religious diversity was seen as a problem in early modern Europe. Once the realization dawned that the Reformation had resulted in a permanent religious schism within the populations of countries and cities, society aimed first at practical solutions. After 1700, however, we see the general

acceptation of toleration not as a stopgap but as a Christian ideal, which in a short span of time gained almost general acceptance. The first two sections of this chapter will substantiate this observation.

In the late autumn of 1653 two Arminian students of theology travelled from Amsterdam to Utrecht to take some courses in the theological faculty and in particular, to hear its luminary, Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), the last living member of the 1618 national Synod of Dordt.<sup>1</sup> They also attended the Reformed confirmation classes of Jodocus van Lodenstein (1620–77), a pupil of Voetius, who became one of the leading figures of the ‘further Reformation.’ Philippus van Limborch (1633–1712), one of these students, wrote to his father about these visits. According to the later Arminian professor, both mainstays of the public Church received the young Arminians well. When, on leaving his house, they asked Van Lodenstein if their conversation had annoyed him, he said it hadn’t and even called the students ‘beloved’ and ‘agreeable.’<sup>2</sup> During an academic disputation in April 1654 Voetius’s colleague Hoornbeek gave Van Limborch the opportunity to attack Reformed doctrine, which he did by expounding on the 1629 Arminian *Apologia pro confessione*.<sup>3</sup> In this little story of Van Limborch’s study year at Utrecht university we observe that even during the apogee of the confessional state, leading members of the Dutch public Church entertained an open and liberal attitude towards ‘heretics’: people whose loss of faith was, according to conventional doctrine, a deadly sin.

The toleration practiced in the Dutch Republic seems not to be exceptional. Some historians have argued that de facto toleration was rather common in seventeenth-century Europe. In the introduction to their landmark volume *Difference and Dissent* Cary Nederman and Chris Laursen even state that “a considerable body of historical scholarship has established the sheer diversity of tolerant practices as well as theories throughout Europe before the late seventeenth century.”<sup>4</sup> They argue that this was nothing new at that time. As is well known, already in the Middle Ages Saint Thomas Aquinas had produced theological arguments for the toleration, in practice, of infidels and Jews. Only heretics and apostates he excluded from any toleration at all.<sup>5</sup> Hence,

1 P. J. Barnouw, *Philippus van Limborch* (The Hague, 1963), pp. 11–2 and Otto J. de Jong, ‘Voetius en de tolerantie,’ in: *De onbekende Voetius*, ed. J. van Oort et al., (Kampen, 1989), pp. 109–16.

2 Abraham des Amorie van der Hoeven, *De Joanne Clerico et Philippo a Limborch* (Amsterdam, 1843), p. 130: “Gij zijt mij lief en aengenaem.”

3 Des Amorie van der Hoeven, *De Joanne Clerico et Philippo a Limborch* (see above, n. 2), pp. 132–3.

4 Cary J. Nederman and John C. Laursen, ‘Introduction,’ in: *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Cary J. Nederman and John C. Laursen (Lanham, Md., 1996), pp. 1–16, there 5.

5 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2.2.10.11: “Dicendum quod humanum regimen derivatur a divino regimine, et ipsum debet imitari. Deus autem, quamvis sit omnipotens et

Nederman and Laursen censure “the virtual consensus in the English-speaking world that the first true theoretical defence of tolerance was proposed by John Locke,” and that the publication of his *Epistola de Tolerantia* marked a fault line in the de facto history of tolerance.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the connotations of tolerance in Locke and his predecessors show a marked continuity. It should be noted that the main connotation of ‘tolerance’ in Locke’s letter is negative: the magistrate tolerates certain people with a particular religious belief if he refrains from using physical force against them, i.e., an action against the outward goods and bodies of those dissenters.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, persuasion in the classical rhetorical tradition is also a kind of force.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Locke’s position is substantially a Protestant one, banning atheists from society and denying Roman Catholics the right to exercise their religion freely. Laursen calls Spinoza’s position a more “thoroughly modern one,” as it is more universal.<sup>9</sup> He underlines the descriptive nature of Spinoza’s argument and, indeed, the actual practice in the Dutch Republic was far more tolerant than what Locke theoretically asked for in his *Epistola*. However, even Spinoza saw tolerance in a negative light, because it tends to lead to conflict and the destruction of peace, concord, and unity of mind (*unio animorum*) in the city.<sup>10</sup> To avoid these evils, which endangered society, the patricians should be of the same religion: “great conventicles”—of people who are not members of the public Church—“are to be forbidden” and the churches of “sects” should be small.<sup>11</sup>

Voetius, contrary to his reputation as an intolerant Calvinist hardliner—an adversary maliciously called him the “Pope of Utrecht”<sup>12</sup>—fully accepted the existing practices of tolerance in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe.

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summe bonus, permittit tamen aliqua mala fieri in universo, quae prohibere posset ... Sic ergo in regimine humano illi qui praesunt, recte aliqua mala tolerant etc.” Cf. K. Schreiner, ‘Toleranz,’ in: Otto Brunner et al., eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972–97), 6: 457–8.

6 Nederman and Laursen, ‘Introduction,’ p. 2.

7 William Walker, ‘Force, Metaphor, and Persuasion in Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration*,’ in: *Difference and Dissent*, ed. Nederman and Laursen (see above, n. 4), pp. 205–29, there 205–10; cf. Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007).

8 Walker, ‘Force, Metaphor, and Persuasion’ (see above, n. 4), pp. 210–29.

9 John C. Laursen, ‘Spinoza on Toleration: Arming the State and Reining in the Magistrate,’ in: *Difference and Dissent*, Nederman and Laursen, ed. (see above, n. 4), p. 195.

10 Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus*, in: *Opera Posthuma* (s.l., 1677), pp. 265–354. (Hereafter cited as Spinoza, *TP*), 3.7 and 3.10. It should be noted that the word ‘tolerance’ is almost absent from Spinoza’s works. See J. I. Israel, ‘Tolerantia,’ in: *The Bloomsbury Companion to Spinoza* (hereafter cited as BC) (London, 2010), pp. 328–9.

11 Spinoza, *TP* (see above, n. 10), 8.46.

12 A. C. Duker, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 4 vols., (Leiden, 1915), 3: 74–7. He refers to Pierre du Moulin’s anonymous *Papa Ultrajectinus, seu, Mysterium iniquitatis reductum à clarissimo*

The United Provinces tolerated Roman Catholicism and Arminianism by not applying its “perpetual edicts against the free exercise of these false religions.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Voetius saw in this kind of *libertas religiosa* the cornerstone of “the Dutch confederation.”<sup>14</sup> He favorably contrasted it to the Roman-Spanish Inquisition, which subjected human conscience, which “recognized only God as its Lord,” to a human power.<sup>15</sup> This kind of religious freedom implied a full liberty of conscience and the toleration of every form of religion that a person privately practiced with his family and his servants.<sup>16</sup> Therefore: “our religion does not and does not want to suppress the liberty of conscience by slavery or tyranny.”<sup>17</sup> According to the Utrecht divine, the magistrate grants the right of religious freedom in this specific form to every citizen, but it has to be balanced with the duty to protect true religion.<sup>18</sup> Voetius acknowledged the *ius reformandi*, that is the right to choose the public religion and to determine the freedom or repression of other religious groups, which had been accorded to sovereign powers under the Union of Utrecht and under the peace treaties of Augsburg and Westphalia. Like Spinoza, however, he—not surprisingly—did not consider toleration to be a social or religious ideal.

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viro Gisberto Voetio in opere *Politiae ecclesiasticae* (London, 1668). See Douglas Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration* (Cambridge, 1938), p. 224.

- 13 Gisbertus Voetius, *Politica ecclesiastica*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam, 1663–74), 2: 385.
- 14 Voetius, *Politica ecclesiastica* (see above, n. 13), 2: 354–7. Religious freedom as the freedom of the church is dealt with in the first chapter of this treatise. Voetius distinguishes among seven grades of this freedom. The sixth is the freedom of the Dutch Republic, where the “state (*politia*) as principle and as rule (*in thesi et in genere*) grants a just and complete liberty and adopts the cause of religion and the church,” although politicians in fact limit this religious freedom.
- 15 Voetius, *Politica ecclesiastica* (see above, n. 13), 2: 401: “Huic coactioni conscientiae (quae tyrannidis in conscientias eique subservientis inquisitionis Romano-Hispanicae quod ad formam et modum agendi, non vero quod ad objectum, aemula dici potest), opponitur libertas conscientiae, in qua nulla potestas humana, sed sola divina imperium habet.”
- 16 Voetius, *Politica ecclesiastica* (see above, n. 13), 2: 380: “Est talis libertas conscientiae in foederato Belgio omnibus subditis et incolis concessa et perpetua praxi jam recepta.”
- 17 Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectae disputationes theologicae* (Utrecht, 1648–69), 2: 540: “libertatem conscientiarum nostra religio servitute aut tyrannide non premit et non premi vult.” Moreover, it does not subject the conscience to human writings and ecclesiastical tenets. Here and elsewhere Voetius identifies the liberty of conscience with the “libertas prophetandi.”
- 18 Voetius, *Politica ecclesiastica* (see above, n. 13), 2:387: “By divine order every magistrate is in conscience obliged to promote true religion, the church and its members.” According to Voetius and his contemporaries the freedom of conscience is by no means identical with the freedom of religion, as J. A. B. Jongeneel underlined in his ‘Voetius’ zendingstheologie, de eerste comprehensieve protestantse zendingstheologie,’ in: *De onbekende Voetius*, ed. Van Oort (see above, n. 1), pp. 118–9.

Notwithstanding the general practice of a certain tolerance in the confessional states of Europe at the end of the seventeenth century, the main connotation of the concept remained substantially negative. It was considered to be the persistence of a religious and social evil and, if possible, measures had to be taken to avoid its nasty consequences. In this respect, the differences among Voetius, Spinoza, and Locke in their assessments of the concept of tolerance are relatively small, certainly if compared with High Enlightenment ideas. In the conceptual history of tolerance—but not in its practices—we find a far-reaching change after Spinoza, that is: after 1700. This paradigm shift made ‘tolerance’ a virtue.

## 2 The Positive Connotation of Tolerance after 1700

In the *Lettres écrites de la montagne*, Rousseau observed that “the Protestant religion—being a free religion—is tolerant on principle. It is basically tolerant and as far as possible, because its only tenet is not tolerating intolerance.”<sup>19</sup> In his *Maximen und Reflexionen* Goethe rejects the word *Toleranz* by maintaining that “toleration should, strictly speaking, be only a passing mood; it ought to lead to acknowledgment and appreciation. To tolerate a person is to affront him.” Moreover, true religion implies that every Christian acknowledges that others think and express themselves “after their own fashion.”<sup>20</sup> Another example is the Halle luminary Johannes Salomo Semler, who created the slogan “Religion ist Privatsache.”<sup>21</sup> In 1776, more than a century after Lodewijk Meijer had written *Philosophia Sacrae Scripturae Interpres* (1666), Semler prepared Meijer’s work for publication. In his preface he rhetorically asks the reader why Christians persecuted and even burned so many heretical books, a practice so

19 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ‘Lettres écrites de la montagne,’ in: id., *Collection complète des oeuvres*, 33 vols. (Geneva, 1782–89), 6: 283: “La Religion Protestante est tolérante par principe, elle est tolérante essentiellement; elle l’est autant qu’il est possible de l’être, puisque le seul dogme qu’elle ne tolère pas, est celui de l’intolérance.” This barrier separates the Reformation from Roman Catholicism, Rousseau continues, and in a footnote he adds that “De toutes les Sectes du Christianisme la Luthérienne me paroît la plus incon-séquente.” It is intolerant but does not know the reason for it. Quoted by Gerhard Besier, ‘Toleranz,’ in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (see above, n. 5), 6, p. 501.

20 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflexions* (New York, 1906), 7: 356 and 522. Cf. Besier, ‘Toleranz’ (see above, n. 5), p. 505.

21 Gottfried Hornig, *Johann Salomo Semler: Studien zu Leben und Werk des Hallenser Aufklärungstheologen* (Tübingen, 1996), p. 180.

obviously at odds with the tolerance that is essential to Christianity.<sup>22</sup> In Kant's political philosophy Semler's idea of a private religion is transformed into the first principle of an ideal civil society, namely the idea that every citizen may seek his ultimate *Glückseligkeit* in his own way without interference from the state because a rational state is 'patriotic' and not 'paternal.'<sup>23</sup> Hence, the magistrate should no longer conceive of himself as a father and should stop treating its citizens like minors unable to think for themselves.

In all these texts we meet with a radically different conception of tolerance than before: now toleration has an utterly positive connotation, since it is basic to 'real religion' and 'enlightened society.' Without tolerance true religion is impossible; true religion necessarily implies tolerance and an enlightened society presupposes both virtues in its citizens. The three interlinked concepts formed a new 'political-theological' language, in which 'religion' is defined in terms of 'tolerance' and the other way round. Both are essential to a free society of civilized citizens. Discursive innovation, however, did not automatically transform social practice. In the Netherlands, for example, the end of the confessional state marked by the *Staatsregeling voor het Bataafsche Volk*,<sup>24</sup> its constitution, certainly did not imply the sudden end of discrimination against Jewish and Roman Catholic citizens in the new Batavian Republic (1795–1806), the Kingdom of Holland (1806–10), or even the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–30).

We find a clear and significant example of the changed concept of religion adopted in the High Enlightenment period in the works of the towering figure of the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who continued the reflections of Semler and Herder on this topic.<sup>25</sup> In his *On Religion* he observed that religion is essentially "contemplative" and therefore "neither a metaphysics, nor a morality." Since the early nineteenth century Schleiermacher's new concept of religion has been considered an "epochal innovation."<sup>26</sup> Schleiermacher adopted neither the approach which

22 Lodewijk Meijer, *Philosophia Sacrae Scripturae Interpres*, ed. J. S. Semler, (Halle, 1776) (hereafter cited as Meijer, *PSS1*), p. v. Further references to the first edition: 'Eleutheropoli' [=Amsterdam] 1666.

23 Immanuel Kant, 'Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis,' in: id., *Gesammelte Schriften: Akademie Ausgabe*, 33 vols. (Berlin, 1900–55), 8: 290.

24 *Staatsregeling voor het Bataafsche volk*, (The Hague, 1798), articles 19–22, pp. 4–5. Article 20, for example, reads: "Geene burgerlijke voordeelen, of nadeelen, zijn aan de belijdenis van eenig Kerkelijk Leerstelsel gehegt."

25 Falk Wagner, *Was ist Religion? Studien zu ihrem Begriff und Thema in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Gütersloh, 1986), p. 59.

26 Wagner, *Was ist Religion?* (see above, n. 25), pp. 59–60. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, (London, 1893), p. 36: "The contemplation of



based religion in a science of God, nor the Spinozan-Kantian view, which focused on morality. Instead he defined religion to be the “sense and taste for the Infinite,” implying that it is specifically an intuition and a feeling. “Religion is a direct relationship with the infinite”; “belief in God, is not necessarily a part of religion”; “one can conceive of a religion without God.”<sup>27</sup> According to this definition religion is not basically a form of specific knowledge but rather a sentiment that links humanity with the infinite whole of nature. We are unable therefore, to conceive of religion via a universal concept; it is necessarily a diverse phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> According to Schleiermacher, true religion always manifests itself in the existing religions of the world. He opposes general and abstract theological doctrines with religion, which is based on a personal sentiment and not on conformity with a particular creed.

This—High—Enlightenment discourse on tolerance and religion is in sharp contrast with political-religious languages of the seventeenth century. Although Voetius and his contemporary theologians and philosophers had in principle accepted existing religious policies and were well prepared to endure the diverse forms of religious life outside the Church backed by the state, they had all presumed the existence of only one true religion, concretely embodied in their own Church, which was necessary to maintain social order and peace. Such a religion was acquired by being taught its basic doctrine. The Reformed Church, for example, was a genuine religion because it was formally based on the Three Formularies of Unity approved by the Synod of Dordt and materially consisted of a body of propositions inferred from these creedal statements. The anecdote with which this chapter began may illustrate this. During their visits with Reformed leaders in Utrecht the Arminian students engaged in fierce debate in an effort to establish the truth of their doctrine. Both sides assumed the concept, dominant during the seventeenth century, of a religion that, like the results of a mathematical calculation, was the only true one, implying that all other religions were false.<sup>29</sup>

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the pious is the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things, in and through the Infinite.... Religion is to seek this and to find it in all that loves and moves.” “Morality always shows itself as self-manipulating, as self-controlling, piety appears and a surrender,” *ibid.*, p. 37.

27 Schleiermacher, *On Religion* (see above, n. 26), p. 39.

28 Wagner, *Was ist Religion?* (see above, n. 25), p. 68.

29 In *Politica ecclesiastica* (see above, n. 13), 2: 355 Voetius, no doubt sardonically, stated that in the period 1616–8 the Arminian regime of Utrecht granted only the most inferior form of religious liberty, the freedom of conscience, and denied its dissenters the *genuini reformati*, the freedom to exercise their religion, either in public or in private, within the city or outside its walls. This observation by the lifelong Utrecht controversialist should warn us against choosing without much ado a speaker of seventeenth-century political language as a predecessor of the modern discourse.

In the early modern period, according to Guy Stroumsa, a growing interest in other religions gave rise to a “new science” of religion. Due to the awareness of religion in the New World, traditional classifications were transformed. He calls this transformation a “paradigm shift” in the title of the first chapter of his book *New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason*. It implied the notion of “a basic plurality of religions” and a conceptualization that overcame “the limits of Christianity” and, I would like to add, the limits of one’s own confession.<sup>30</sup> Stroumsa hardly specifies the moment of this shift: I suggest ‘faultline 1700’ as a plausible turning point in a basically gradual development.

Since specific philosophical speculation about religion started only at the end of the Age of Enlightenment—the *Spätaufklärung*—with the rise of the philosophy of religion, one must consult indirect sources such as manuals, inaugural addresses, and dictionaries to assess the paradigm of religion that had prevailed in earlier periods. For the seventeenth century, reflections on religion by leading scholars in the Dutch Republic such as Voetius, Van Limborch, and Spinoza will be dealt with in the next section. They represent the whole spectrum of ideological positions extending from orthodoxy on the one hand to philosophical radicalism on the other. These authors may be used to reconstruct this paradigm, because, as Jonathan Israel underlined, seventeenth-century scholars acted and wrote as members of their institution, church, or legal body, not as independently thinking individuals.<sup>31</sup> The focus on the Dutch Republic is also justified by its being a trendsetter in its social and political structure and its openness to religious diversity due to commerce. In some of the original core provinces—Holland, Utrecht, and the western part of Friesland—several confessions coexisted side by side, although in a hierarchical order, and unlike its counterparts in the rest of Europe the government refrained from imposing a single confession on the entire population.<sup>32</sup> It seems plausible to assume that the paradigm shift from religion in the singular to religion in the plural revealed itself there first. Moreover, in the United Provinces curiosity about other religions was stimulated by all kinds of travelogues and journals telling of real and imagined voyages into non-European territories.<sup>33</sup>

30 Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), pp. 37–8.

31 Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man (1657–1752)* (Oxford, 2006), p. 24.

32 Peter van Rooden, *Religieuze Regimes: Over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland, 1570–1990* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 21–3.

33 Michiel van Groesen, *The Representation of the Overseas World in the De Bry Collection of Voyages (1590–1634)* (Leiden, 2008); P. J. Buijnsters, *Imaginaire reisverhalen in Nederland in de 18e eeuw* (Groningen, 1969). The phrase ‘voyage imaginaire’ seems to have been created in 1745; according to Buijnsters, this genre served as an instrument to spread ideas of tolerance and reasonable religion. It flourished from 1709 onwards and suddenly disappeared

This culminated in the famous 1723 *Ceremonies and Customes of the Several Nations*, published in English, French, and Dutch.<sup>34</sup>

### 3 The 'Humanist' Paradigm of Religion: Religion in the Singular before 1700

In the entry 'Religion' in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, the Roman Catholic theologian Ernst Feil resumes the thinking of the first volume of his conceptual history *Religio*. The word 'religion' in antiquity denoted the careful enactment of our obligations towards God. Christianity added the notion that such worship required a science of God, which implied that the only true religion is Christianity, because it is based upon direct divine revelation. Second, the consequence of this focus on true knowledge of the Deity was that 'religion,' with respect to other creeds and rituals such as those of Judaism, Islam, and paganism, is in principle never used. The followers of these creeds were called 'secta' and the whole of their rituals, practices, and rules 'lex.' All non-Christian religions were considered to be forms of superstition.<sup>35</sup> However, the author of the part of this section on 'religion' in the early modern period underlines "the transformation in meaning" brought about by humanism. A distinction was created between 'religion' in a broad sense, applying to all religions, and in a particular sense, referring to the one and only true religion. This attempt to differentiate between religion in a broad and in a proper sense, which enabled commentators to carry on the basics of the Christian paradigm, is a distinct feature of the humanist paradigm.<sup>36</sup> In the following section I will show that during the whole seventeenth century this paradigm still controlled

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after the 1795 Batavian revolution, when the genre apparently lost social relevance. Ibid., p. 18.

34 Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), pp. 38–9: "Such books [travel books] provided the essential textual and visual sources for *Religious Ceremonies of the World*."

35 Ernst Feil, 'Religion: Vom Beginn der Neuzeit bis zur Frühaufklärung, §5 B,' in: Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 13 vols., (Darmstadt, 1971–2007), 8: 646. The four volumes of his *Religio* (Göttingen: 1986–2007) have the following subtitles: *Band 1: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs vom Frühchristentum bis zur Reformation*; *Band 2: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs zwischen Reformation und Rationalismus (ca. 1540–1620)*; *Band 3: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs im 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert*, and *Band 4: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert*.

36 S. Lorenz, 'Religion: Vom Beginn der Neuzeit bis zur Frühaufklärung,' Ritter and Gründer, eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (see above, n. 35), 8: 645.

the minds of all scholars, by dealing with representatives of Reformed orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and philosophical radicalism.

#### 4 Reformed Orthodoxy: Voetius

In his voluminous works on theology and ecclesiastical politics Voetius rarely uses the word 'religion.' Yet several meanings can be distinguished in his writings. In a broad sense the word refers to all religions, for example in his discussions of Islam or Roman Catholicism or his observation that the frequent change of religion causes atheism.<sup>37</sup> In a more proper sense he opposes the unique 'true religion' to other, false religions, which, in fact are not real religions at all because they cannot bring salvation. For the truth of religion proof can be given, and rational argument easily exposes the falsity of other presumed religions.<sup>38</sup> The object of religion is God; knowledge of him will lead to true acts of worship. Voetius opposes true religion to irreligion and unbelief on the one hand, and to superstition and magic on the other. All these forms of false religion are based on an incorrect knowledge of God and the false cult that thus ensues.<sup>39</sup>

Voetius basically reproduces Calvin's ideas here. The French reformer had underlined the objective and cognitive nature of religion, with its foundation in the knowledge of God, and had observed that true religion should conform to "the perpetual will of God, who is always identical with himself and therefore God is not a spectre or phantasm, which may change according to the fancy of every individual." By imagining ourselves a God, we revolt against the

37 'De atheismo,' in: Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectae disputationes theologicae* (see above, n. 17), 1: 128: "crebra religionis mutatio et transitus de secta in sectam." According to Voetius the phenomenon that atheism is caused by frequent religious changes is to be observed with Mennonites, spiritualists, and in particular "those who defect from Christianity to Mohammedanism, or Judaism" and "qui in vera religione apud nos educati" like dogs returning to their vomit. Feil, *Religio* (see above, n. 35), 3: 46–57, unfortunately deals only with Hoornbeek, Voetius's junior colleague, as a representative of Reformed orthodoxy and not with Voetius himself.

38 Voetius, *Politica ecclesiastica* (see above, n. 13), 4: 335: "per rationes refutandi falsam religionem et theologiam." Voetius here quotes Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles* 1. 9.

39 Voetius, *Selectae disputationes theologicae* (see above, n. 17), 4: 778: "an actus religionis recte distinguatur in interiorem et exteriorem; ad illum referantur orationes mentales et meditationes; ad istum vero sacrificia, primitiae, decimae, laudes Dei seu cantus spirituales? Aff."

true God.<sup>40</sup> So “we may decide with Lactantius, that there is no legitimate religion unconnected with truth.”<sup>41</sup> However, according to Calvin, religion consists not only of barren speculation but also knowledge, which implies the worship of God.<sup>42</sup> There is only one pure and genuine religion, which is different from all forms of superstition, and it consists in *eusebeia*, that is, right worship, as the Greeks already surmised. There should be “a certain rule, because otherwise He would be worshipped wrongly.”<sup>43</sup> Although Calvin accepts the idea that religion is theoretically universal—“since experience testifies that God sowed the seed of religion in all men”—in historical reality there is only one real religion, since outside the true Church religion did “not ripen” and had degenerated into superstition.<sup>44</sup>

In its strictest sense Voetius identifies religion with the Reformation and its church. This real religion is different from other forms of Christianity such as ‘popery,’ Lutheranism, and the sects established after the Reformation. This religion is constituted primarily by a particular doctrine laid down in a confession and a catechism, secondarily by a particular social order (*politia*), and in a tertiary sense by well-described rites and ceremonies (*cultus*).<sup>45</sup> In Voetius’s

40 Jean Calvin, *Institutio religionis Christianae*, (Geneva, 1602) 1.4.3, p. 5: “Sed non animadvertunt, veram religionem ad Dei nutum ceu ad perpetuam regulam debere confirmari.” Imagining God, mankind established mendacious cults. If we do not know God, we are unable to serve him. However, Calvin assumes that speculative knowledge of God is insufficient. “En quid sit pura germanaque religio, nempe fides cum serio timore Dei coniuncta, ut timor et voluntariam reverentiam in se contineat et secum trahat legitimum cultum, qualis in Lege praescribitur” (Pure and genuine religion is faith combined with serious fear of God, in order that such fear implies a willing reverence of God and leads to the legitimate cult prescribed in the divine law), *ibid.* 1.2.2, p. 4.

41 Calvin, *Institutio* (see above, n. 40), 4.3, pp. 5–6: “Superest ergo ut cum Lactantio constituamus, nullam esse legitimam religionem nisi cum veritate coniunctam.”

42 Calvin, *Institutio* (see above, n. 40), 1.12.1, p. 29: “Diximus autem Dei notitiam non esse positam in frigida speculatione, sed secum trahere cultum eius.”

43 Calvin, *Institutio* (see above, n. 40), 1.12.1, p. 30: “semper caeci ipsi [the Greeks] in tenebris palpando senserunt tenendam certam regulam, ne praepostere colatur Deus.” See Feil, *Religio* (see above, n. 35), 1: 258–63.

44 Calvin, *Institutio* (see above, n. 40), 1.4.1, p. 5: “omnibus inditum esse divinitus religionis semen experientia testatur ... alii evanescent in suis superstitionibus ... omnes tamen degenerant a vera eius notitia.”

45 Voetius, ‘De praepiudiciis verae religionis,’ in: *Selectae disputationes theologicae* (see above, n. 17), 2: 542: “religionem et veram ecclesiam appellamus tum protestanticam tum reformatam stricte ita dictam.... Hujus ecclesiae et religionis considera 1. formam et statum. 2. ortum et progressum. 1. Status religionis atque ecclesiae nostrae circumscribitur formulis et adjunctis quibusdam. Formulae describunt vel doctrinam catechesibus et confessionibus expresssam, vel politiam et ritus.” The disputation was held 3 September 1642.

view the cognitive element of religion clearly prevails over its moral and social aspects.

Although there is only one true religion, Voetius does not deny the obvious facts of history in this regard: namely, the diversity of the churches and the development of Christianity. He observes that a historical phenomenon may be in agreement with 'our' true religion or oppose it. Apparently, other reform movements in the Middle Ages, such as the Waldenses and the Hussites, preceded the true church of the Reformation. They had clearly continued the church of the Fathers and had shared the fundamentals of its creed. According to Voetius the identity of the Reformed churches in various countries appears empirically due to their common doctrine and enemies.<sup>46</sup> However, true churches may differ in cult and organisation (*politia*). In sum, it is obvious that according to Voetius there is only one religion, the others are pseudo-religions, and this genuine religion—*religio nostra*—is identical with the Reformed Church. Its truth stems from the truth of its constituting knowledge of God.

## 5 Reformed Heterodoxy: Vossius

The orthodox theologian Voetius stands in a long tradition of identifying one's own form of Christianity with the only true religion, but so do 'heterodox' scholars such as the humanist scholar Gerardus Vossius (1577–1649) and Van Limborch as well. Apparently, both thought within the 'humanist paradigm' of religion. This conceptual framework is adopted in Vossius's encyclopaedic work on religion, the *De Theologia gentili* (1642), according to a modern biographer his "greatest work."<sup>47</sup> In this study Vossius, who due to his sympathy with the Arminian cause was dismissed after the Synod of Dordt as principal of the Staten College, a training institute for Reformed ministers at Leiden University, and who in 1632 became professor of history at the new Illustrious School of Amsterdam, collected all the mythological material known to him and attempted to provide a 'history' of religion. According to the Dutch scholar, 'true religion' is constituted both by the true knowledge of the true God and the

46 Voetius, *Selectae disputationes theologicae* (see above, n. 17), 2: 542–3: "Adjuncta religionis ... sunt partim antecedentia, partim concomitantia, vel opposita. Illa sunt praeludia sive prae ambula reformationis ... Ista sint convenientia cum ecclesiae antiquae in fundamentalibus: unde resultat ipsius antiquitas, catholicismus, successio. Unitas, concordia ... Amplitudo ... Propagatio et plantatio ... Zelus et oppositio valida adversus omnes haereses ... Testimonium adversariorum ... Zelus in urgenda doctrina et praxi bonorum operum ... Convenientia cum politiis et magistratibus."

47 N. G. J. Wickenden, *G. J. Vossius and the Humanist Concept of History* (Assen, 1993), p. 30.

correct worship of the true God which such knowledge produces.<sup>48</sup> It maintains the golden mean between irreligion and superstition or idolatry. For this notion Vossius refers to the Bible, Plutarch, and some of the Fathers. However, although pagan religion and idolatry are false, their object may well be correct: the true God. In that case pagan religion errs only in the act of knowing and worshipping.<sup>49</sup> The causes of idolatry are natural ones, and this explains why even false religion may have a divine origin, since God reveals himself not only in Scripture but also in nature and history. Therefore, the conviction that there is only one true religion did not prevent the study of religion's 'defective' forms.<sup>50</sup>

## 6 Van Limborch

Van Limborch adopts the same framework. In his famous 1687 *De veritate religionis Christianae amica collatio cum erudito Judaeo* (Friendly conversation about Christian religion with a learned Jew) the Arminian professor Van Limborch systematically avoids using the words 'Jewish' or 'Muslim' in combination with 'religion.' He refers to these 'false' religions by the traditional designation of *secta*.<sup>51</sup> Like Voetius, he acknowledges that true religion is based upon true doctrine. In his main work, his outline of Christian doctrine *Theologia Christiana* (1686), Van Limborch defines religion as the object of theology, the true science of God. He describes religion as the "right way or method of both knowing and serving the true God, in the firm hope of obtaining a reward from Him. It therefore comprehends the duties of love, fear, faith, hope and obedience."<sup>52</sup> The difference between religion and theology, however, is

48 Gerard Johannes Vossius, *De theologia gentili et physiologia christiana, sive ad veterum gesta ac rerum naturam reductae*, (Amsterdam, 1641), 1.3, p. 16: "adumbravimus ea, ad quae lumine naturae potuit pervenire, tum in cognitione Dei, tum in cultu ejus, in quibus duobus religio consistit." Referring to Titus 1,2 he specifies his definition of religion by observing that "this acknowledgement of his truth," is of a practical nature, being "after piety and leading to the hope of eternal life."

49 Vossius, *De theologia gentili* (see above, n. 48), 1.3, p. 21: "Hujusmodi tamen idololatria, ubi non objecto, sed solo in actu peccatur non proprie sed, ut dixi tralatitiae idololatria vocatur."

50 Wickenden, *G.J. Vossius* (see above, n. 47), pp. 28–9.

51 Philippus van Limborch, *De veritate religionis christianae amica collatio cum erudito Judaeo* (Gouda, 1687), pp. 28–9. See Feil, *Religio* (see above, n. 35), 3: 62–3.

52 Philippus van Limborch, *Theologia christiana ad praxin pietatis ac promotionem pacis christianae unice directa* (Amsterdam, 1686), 1.1, p. 2: "Religio quam Theologiae objectum diximus, est recta verum Deum cognoscendi et colendi ratio, sub certa spe remunerationis ab ipso obtinendae, complectiturque in se amorem, timorem, fidem, spem ac obedientiam."

small, because the foundation of religion is the knowledge of God's existence. An inquiry into the nature of divine worship would be pointless if God does not exist. Although this knowledge of God may well be acquired by natural means—here Van Limborch refers to the usual philosophical arguments for God's existence—the only norm or rule of religion is Scripture. The knowledge of God acquired by natural means is very weak and is full of errors. It obviously lacks clearness and distinctness.<sup>53</sup> Like Voetius, Van Limborch sees the main parts of religion to be correct knowledge and the true worship of God following from this true knowledge. The polity as the third part of 'our religion' is not mentioned, but the proper structure of the Church is dealt with in the seventh and last book of *Theologia Christiana*. Unlike Voetius in his main theological work Van Limborch does not deal with any other religion, be it Roman Catholicism, Judaism, or Islam. However, Van Limborch, obviously, adhered to the traditional conceptualization of religion and focused on the knowledge of the Divine in defining religion.

## 7 Radical Cartesians on Religion

Unlike Voetius and Van Limborch, most radical Cartesians did not represent a church or a religious group. A boundless rationalism seems peculiar to their reflections on religion, and they tended to deny the need for any revelation. Notwithstanding these particularities, philosophical radicals remained within the humanist paradigm of religion.

The 'moderate' Cartesian philosopher Johannes De Raey, for example, saw a direct parallel between the hermeneutical rationalism of Meijer's *Philosophiae Sacrae Scripturae Interpres* and the theological rationalism of the Franeker professor of philosophy and theology Herman Alexander Röell, who, being a professor, spoke on behalf of his university and his church.<sup>54</sup> In his inaugural address *De religione rationali*, delivered on 17 June 1686, Röell defined reason as "the most supreme gift of God," by which the mind is conscious of itself and all other things. Moreover, reason is also the faculty of reasoning, which orders ideas representing the various things in a series of *modi cogitandi*, which "infers the unknown from the more known, the obscure from the more clear and

53 Van Limborch, *Theologia christiana* (see above, n. 51), 1.2, p. 6: "Scientia Dei, quam ex natura haurimus, admodum debilis est, multisque erroribus obruta, ut patet in Ethnicis, docetque tantum in genere esse Deum ... non autem distincte."

54 Johannes de Raey, 'Epistola ad virum celeberrimum theologum in sua de litibus Franequeranis dissertatione,' in: id., *Cogitata de interpretatione, quibus de natura humani sermonis et illius rectus usus tum in communi vita et disciplinis ad usum vitae spectantibus, tum in philosophia ... vindicantur* (Amsterdam, 1692), pp. 661–8.



conclusions from their premises.”<sup>55</sup> The geometrical order governing all ideas rests upon common notions, which make us discern universal truth in the sciences and in morality. God has impressed these innate common notions on the human mind, and together they contain “all science, all wisdom and all seeds of virtue.” Without them no knowledge is possible.<sup>56</sup>

In *Dissertatio de religione rationali* Röell applied his Cartesian epistemology to our knowledge of God and consequently to religion. He defines true religion as consisting of an actual redemptive knowledge of God, which implies a true worship of God.<sup>57</sup> Hence, his Franeker colleague and main adversary Ulricus Huber angrily wrote that Röell had merged philosophy and theology, and had made reason “the unique principle of Christian truth” and the necessary precondition for interpreting “the divine word.”<sup>58</sup>

Twenty years before Röell, Meijer had developed a comparable theological rationalism. After four hermeneutical chapters in the *Interpres*, Meijer defined philosophy in chapter 5. He observed that philosophy is certain and true knowledge, which reason “discovers in the most certain Light of Truth.”<sup>59</sup> In my translation the nouns in “the Light of Truth” are given capitals; this Light is clearly divine. According to Meijer the source of all knowledge is God, which is to say, in scholastic terms, that God is its principal cause. He continues by observing that the human intellect is the secondary, remote, or instrumental cause of philosophical knowledge. Although the Amsterdam man of letters speaks the language of scholasticism here, he gives it a Cartesian twist. According to Meijer, human reason is capable of acquiring full knowledge of the essences of things and all the properties they necessarily imply if it carefully proceeds from the simplest and best-known truths to the more complicated and less obvious ones in accordance with the true method to guide the intellect. The power of reason to know the essences or natures of things, both in physics and metaphysics, the “choir of the mathematical disciplines” clearly shows.<sup>60</sup> A few years before, Meijer had already propagated the notion that

55 Herman Alexander Röell, *Dissertatio de religione rationali*, 4th ed., (Franeker, 1700), § 13, p. 14.

56 Röell, *Dissertatio de religione rationali*, § 26, p. 23.

57 Röell, *Dissertatio de religione rationali*, § 5, p. 6: “sola salutaris esse religio potest, quae vera, ea vera in qua est gloriae et virtutum divinarum agnitio, amor, celebratio. Talem deum agnoscere, amare, laudare ac colere ... vera proculdubio religio est.” Hence there is a “cultus Dei verus et rationalis.”

58 Ulricus Huber, *De Concursu rationis et Sacrae Scripturae Liber* (Franeker, 1686), pp. xx5r and ††4r. The immediate occasion for writing this pamphlet, which started an acrimonious controversy, were disputations in the fall of 1686 defended by two pupils of Röell.

59 Meijer, *PSSI* (see above, n. 22), p. 40.

60 Meijer, *PSSI* (see above, n. 22), p. 42: “secundum veram intellectum dirigendi methodum procedat.”

mathematics is the example that philosophy—and ‘theology’—should follow in order to become a science.<sup>61</sup> In the appendix of *Ethics* I Spinoza shared this idea, stating about teleology that “such a doctrine might well have sufficed to conceal the truth from the human race for all eternity, if mathematics had not furnished another standard of verity in considering solely the essence and properties of figures without regard to their final causes.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Meijer hints at the notion that true method consists in observing the logical hierarchy governing essences. Apparently, the idea was taken from the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, where in section 38, for example, Spinoza says that the logical order of two ideas is identical with the order of the “formal essences of those ideas.”<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, man knows that he knows, for every clear and distinct perception causes in us the consciousness of it. Hence God is not only the cause of all knowledge in an objective but in a subjective sense. God causes all our convictions, including faith, via clear and distinct perceptions and, therefore, via our intellect.<sup>64</sup> Meijer concludes that both as knowledge and as an instrument to lead humanity to faith, revealed or supernatural theology is superfluous.<sup>65</sup>

Of these notions, *conscientia*, in its double meaning of conscience and consciousness, became the most prominent idea in second-generation Cartesian epistemology. Lambertus van Velthuisen, for example, called it a gift of God, because of its indispensable moral and epistemological functions. It leads virtuous men to “tranquillity of mind” and constancy in the face of fate.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, consciousness is a precondition of knowledge. All knowledge requires that someone who knows, the Utrecht scholar observed, knows that he knows. In a philosophical disputation in 1689 Andreas Diosi, a Hungarian pupil of Röell, even directly linked consciousness to God, observing that true knowledge is possible because it is, in a literal sense, knowing with the help

61 Meijer, *PSSI* (see above, n. 22), pp. \*2r–\*3r.

62 Benedictus de Spinoza, *Opera posthuma* (see above, n. 10), p. 35: “quae sane unica fuisset causa, ut veritas humanum genus in aeternum lateret, nisi Mathesis, quae non circa fines; sed tantum circa figurarum essentias, et proprietates versatur, aliam veritatis normam hominibus ostendisset.”

63 Spinoza, *Opera posthuma* (see above, n. 10), p. 368.

64 Meijer, *PSSI* (see above, n. 22), p. 43: “quoniam est nulla clara et distincta perceptio, quae non intime sui conscientiam in nobis gignere possit, et cum omnis clarae et distinctae perceptionis Deus causa sit, etiam hujus intimae conscientiae causa erit, cumque haec conscientia rem perceptam veram esse nobis indubie persuadeat, ... non immerito ... Dei seu Spiritus Sancti ... testimonium ... appellari poterit.”

65 Meijer, *PSSI* (see above, n. 22), pp. 43–4.

66 Lambertus van Velthuisen, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols (Rotterdam, 1680), 1, p. \*2: “conscientiam quem immediate a Deo immortalis accipimus.”

of God: *con-scientia*.<sup>67</sup> This notion reinforces the Cartesian identification of philosophy with ‘the science of God’ and consequently with religion, because this knowledge necessarily entails moral consequences and creates ultimate human bliss. However, although Cartesianism transformed theology, it did not affect the concept of religion. Based on reason, religion more than ever remained a unique body of truths which guided mankind to real happiness, whereas other faiths had been relegated to the sphere of error and superstition.

## 8 Spinoza on Religion

Like Voetius, Spinoza used the term ‘religion’ in a manifold sense. However, the philosopher’s ideas on religion are more disparate. It is hard to reconcile his ideal of a ‘scientific’ religion based upon reason, as developed in the *Ethics*, with the religion leading “the ignorant to salvation” (Matheron)—that is, which had to guide the lives of the rest of the population. In the *Ethics* he uses the word in a strict sense and it is defined along traditional lines, focusing on the true knowledge of God. In *Ethics* IV, proposition 37 Spinoza observes: “whatever we desire and do, whereof we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, that is insofar we know God.”<sup>68</sup> According to this definition, divine knowledge has direct moral implications—obviously the Latin *quatenus* has a causal meaning here—and results in certain desires and actions. Religion therefore is put on a level with true life and piety and is part of *fortitudo*, the force of the knowing mind, which takes passive affects and makes them active. This philosophical religion is without ceremonies and without a church, but it implies a political community, because the ‘true life’ of the religious man is a social life, as is obvious from the appendix of *Ethics* 4. Like Meijer, Spinoza thought that ‘philosophers’ acquire this form of religion wholly by natural means, that is to say without revelation.<sup>69</sup>

67 Andreas Diosi, *Disputatio philosophica de conscientia* (Franeker, 1689), p. 5. Cf. Jacob van Sluis, *Herman Alexander Röell* (Leeuwarden, 1988), pp. 148–50.

68 Spinoza, *Opera posthuma* (see above, n. 10), p. 192; “quicquid cupimus et agimus, cujus causa sumus quatenus Dei habemus ideam sive quatenus Deum cognoscimus, ad religionem refero.” Cf. Alexander Samely, *Spinozas Theorie der Religion* (Würzburg, 1993), p. 59 and Paul C. Juffermans, “Religio,” in: BC (see above, n. 10), pp. 301–2. He there summarizes chapter 6 of his *Drie perspectieven op religie in het denken van Spinoza* (Budel, 2003).

69 For Röell, however, revelation is necessary due to man’s innate ignorance and impiety, *Dissertatio de religione rationali* (see above, n. 55), § 161, pp. 179–80. Without the “Batavian tube” of Scripture the pagans are hardly able to be aware of “rational religion and true piety and virtue” (§ 150, p. 164). Of this deplorable fact the modern atheism of Spinoza and his followers gives evidence, as do the “West Indians” inhabiting “New France” and

In the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* 'religion' is used in a broader sense. It is still a unique phenomenon and refers to a 'universal or catholic' religion. Such a religion is within the reach of all men. In the preface of this work Spinoza states one of his objectives: "In order that I might know from Scripture whether the human heart and understanding were naturally corrupt, I proceeded to inquire whether the universal Catholic system of religion, or the Divine law propounded by the prophets and apostles to the whole human race, was different from the religion which the light of nature teaches?"<sup>70</sup> To answer this question Spinoza undertook a scrupulous investigation of the Bible.<sup>71</sup> In chapter 14 he presents as the outcome of his hermeneutical research a *credo minimum*, which consists of some "fundamentals of faith," or "fundamentals and dogmas of Scripture," as Spinoza called it.<sup>72</sup> Other authors such as Locke, Voetius, and Van Velthuisen use the more current term 'article of faith,' which is defined in the lexicon of Micraelius as "a peculiar tenet of doctrine contained in the Word of God, which is put before the Christians to believe in order to acquire salvation."<sup>73</sup> Theologians used these notions in a different sense in the seventeenth century, but both conceptions defined religion in terms of divine knowledge, elaborated in a set of propositions, which is essential to our ability to lead a moral life. According to Bordoli, Spinoza apparently combined the Protestant belief in the self-sufficiency of the Bible with the 'irenical' tendency to reduce the number of articles to a bare minimum, which "cannot give rise to controversy among good men."<sup>74</sup> Spinoza enumerates seven basic dogmas—Locke and Van Velthuisen give only one. Five of these are of a theo-

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the peoples near the Ganges who are without any grasp of God's existence and His real worship. Moreover, the Chinese, the Malabari, and the Peruvians, for example, worship the sun and the moon. Elsewhere there is the cult of animals (§ 152, p. 170). Reason proves the divinity of Scripture and so, indirectly, the rationality of the mysteries of faith, which are in themselves above reason. See Van Sluis, *Herman Alexander Röell* (see above, n. 67), pp. 56–8.

70 [Benedictus de Spinoza], *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (Amsterdam, 1670) (hereafter cited as Spinoza, *TTP*): p. [\*5v]: "Porro, ut scirem, num ex Scriptura concludi posset, humanum intellectum naturâ corruptum esse, inquirere volui, num Religio catholica, sive lex divina per Prophetas & Apostolos universo humano generi revelata alia fuerit, quam illa, quam etiam lumen naturale docet?" I corrected the Wallis version, available online, which curiously translated *Religio catholica* as "Roman Catholic religion."

71 See for example Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion and Politics. The Theologico-Political Treatise* (Oxford, 2012), chapters 6–8.

72 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 14, pp. 163–4.

73 Johannes Micraelius, 'Articulus fidei,' in: *Lexicon philosophicum terminorum philosophis usitatorum* (Stettin, 1662), p. 177.

74 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 14: p. 163: "hinc sequitur, ad fidem catholicam, sive universalem nulla dogmata pertinere, de quibus inter honestos potest dari controversia," see Roberto Bordoli, 'Fundamenta fidei,' in: BC (see above, n. 10).

retical nature. The universal religion requires the acceptance of the notions of God's existence, unity, omnipresence, omnipotence, and His preparedness to forgive the sins of all those who repent. Spinoza, therefore, maintains that true religion is founded on knowledge and superstition on ignorance.<sup>75</sup>

However, to make religion really 'universal' Spinoza transforms—and reduces—the role of religious knowledge and identifies religion with morality. Here he anticipates the new eighteenth-century paradigm of religion. At the end of chapter 18 Spinoza resumes his argument: "To avoid such evils in a state, there is no safer way than to make piety and religion to consist in acts only—that is, in the practice of justice and charity, leaving everyone's judgment in other respects free." In chapter 14 Spinoza makes the truth of religious knowledge dependent on the right actions it gives rise to. He writes: "Faith consists in knowledge of God, without which obedience to him would be impossible, and which the mere fact of obedience to Him implies," and "Faith is not salutary in itself, but only in respect to the obedience it implies." Apparently, religion consists of a simple moral practice, which is to live in justice and charity. This implies among other things the defence of the law, relief for the poor, and prohibitions on killing other people and coveting another's property.<sup>76</sup> Along with Hobbes in his definition of religion, Spinoza returns here, behind the Christian paradigm, back to Cicero's ritualistic notion, and in the *Tractatus* the adverbial form of 'religion'—*religiose* or even *religiosissime*—is frequently used to denote the way that different kinds of persons complied with a specific ritual, law, or ceremony, for example circumcision.<sup>77</sup>

What is more: religion is universal due to its simplicity, as is the 'natural' religion of the eighteenth century. That is why every person not blinded by prejudices and passions and able to interpret the divine word freely will easily understand the universal religion. To know God in a proper way does not require philosophical speculation or other forms of science.

The ritualistic connotation leads to the third meaning of religion. In this even wider sense religion is a historically established national institution prevailing in a specific society. Men in the state of nature, Spinoza maintains,

75 Spinoza, *Opera Posthuma* (see above, n. 10), ep. 21 (dated 1 December 1675), pp. 449–50: "Hoc tantum hic addo me inter religionem et superstitionem hanc praecipuam agnoscere differentiam, quod haec ignorantiam, illa autem sapientiam pro fundamento habeat" (in modern editions Letter 73).

76 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 12, p. 151: "Videlicet justitiam defendere, inopi auxilio esse, neminem occidere, nihil alterius concupiscere &c."

77 Thomas Hobbes, *De homine*, c. 14, in: id., *Opera philosophica qui Latine scripsit omnia* (London 1839), p. 119: "hominum, qui Deum sincere honorant, cultus externus." See Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 3, pp. 49, 62, 65, 66, 67, c. 8, 124, c. 9, 141, c. 12, 163, and c. 16, 217.

live without religion in this sense,<sup>78</sup> and Spinoza observed that a lawgiver creates a particular religion in order to form a specific society. For example, it was Moses who, due to his power and by divine order, introduced the Hebrew religion.<sup>79</sup> Unlike the apostles, the prophets preached religion as basically a law for a nation.<sup>80</sup> It is an instrument of power, demonstrated for example when the Spanish king forced the Jews to adopt the religion of his kingdom.<sup>81</sup> Here Spinoza identifies religion with a political law, which requires obedience to God and to the authorities who deem themselves qualified to interpret his word. Religion acquires the force of law by decree of the sovereign; before revelation, Spinoza observes, there is no divine law that a man has to obey.<sup>82</sup> Social reasons, according to the *Political Treatise*, account for why all patricians must share the same religion.<sup>83</sup>

This third notion of religion seems hard to reconcile with the previous conceptions, which, as Spinoza observed, are “inscribed in all human hearts.”<sup>84</sup> In annotation 34 Spinoza stated that the third notion of a particular religion belongs to the first kind of knowledge, because the concept of a God who gives laws is an imaginative fiction that requires the notion of the will of princes who give laws. Reason, however, conceives of the divine nature as it is, without

78 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 16, p. 184: “Et ideo status naturalis cum statu religionis minime confundendus, sed absque religione & lege ... concipiendus.” For this section see Ernst Feil, ‘Benedictus de Spinoza’ in: *Religio* (see above, n. 35), 3, pp. 418–23.

79 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 5, p. 61: “Hac igitur de causâ Moses virtute, & jussu divino religionem in Rempublicam introduxit, ut populus non tam ex metu, quam devotione suum officium faceret.”

80 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 12, p. 149: “videlicet quia ante adventum Christi Prophetæ religionem prædicare solebant, tanquam legem Patriæ, & ex vi pacti tempore Mosis initi; post adventum autem Christi eandem tanquam legem catholicam, & ex sola vi passionis Christi omnibus prædicaverunt Apostoli.” Hence, unlike Judaism, the New Testament religion is universal.

81 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 3, p. 42: “Rex Hispaniæ olim Judæos coegit Regni religionem admittere.”

82 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 19, pp. 214–5: “Religionem vim juris accipere ex solo eorum decreto, qui jus imperandi habent; & Deum nullum singulare regnum in homines habere, nisi per eos, qui imperium tenent, & præterea quod Religionis cultus, & pietatis exercitium Reipublicæ paci, & utilitati accommodari, & consequenter a solis summis potestatibus determinari debet quæque adeo ejus etiam interpretes debent esse.” This power Spinoza some lines earlier identified with the traditional Reformed “hoc jus, circa sacra summis potestatibus competere.”

83 Spinoza, *TP* (see above, n. 70), 8.46, p. 339. It is, however, inconsistent with his argument that Spinoza calls this religion of the *regents* the most simple and universal (*catholica*).

84 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 12, p. 144: “Nam tam ipsa ratio, quam Prophetarum & Apostolorum sententiæ apertè clamant Dei æternum verbum & pactum, veramque religionem hominum cordibus, hoc est, humanæ menti divinitus inscriptam esse.”

will or intellect.<sup>85</sup> Led by reason we can love God, but we cannot obey his will. Spinoza reconciles the religion of reason with the religion established within a political society by making a clear-cut distinction between inward and external worship. External worship belongs to the third form of religion and is created by the imagination. It includes ceremonies and rites, which are in no way relevant to our real happiness and have a social function only. The worship practiced in inward religion is defined as “the means by which the mind is inwardly led to do homage to God in singleness of heart.”<sup>86</sup> This inward religion is simple and consists of “truth of character,” not specific actions.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the distinction between inner and outward religion enables Spinoza to dissociate his view from the tenets of Roman Catholicism, which, as Spinoza observed, makes “the pope the interpreter of the divine law”: even if, in his view, the prince is the interpreter of the divine law as well, he may arrogate this authority only with respect to outward religion. In inward religion every man is “of his own right” and is fully entitled to believe whatever his reason tells him to.<sup>88</sup>

Although Spinoza loosened the relation between real religion and a particular confession in this manner, and severed the link between theology and faith, his objective approach towards religion and his focus on the knowledge of God in his main definition of religion kept him within the humanist paradigm. On the broader level of universal religion, he singled out a true religion and called

85 Christophorus Theophilus de Murr, *Benedicti de Spinoza Annotationes ad Tractatum theologico-politicum* (The Hague, 1802), pp. 41–2: “Amor enim Dei non obedientia sed virtus est, quae homini, qui Deum recte novit necessario inest. At obedientia voluntatem imperantis non rei necessitatem respicit et veritatem.... nequaquam nisi ex revelatione scire possumus, an Deus aliquo honore coli velit ab hominibus tamquam princeps.... Ex rationis ductu igitur Deum quidem amare, sed non obedire ei possumus.”

86 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 19, p. 218: “cultum religionis externum, & omne pietatis exercitium reipublicae paci, & conservationi debere accommodari, si recte Deo obtemperare velimus,” and p. 215, “non autem de ipsa pietate, & Dei interno cultu, sive mediis, quibus mens interne disponitur ad Deum integritate animi colendum; internus enim Dei cultus, & ipsa pietas uniuscujusque juris est (ut in fine Cap. VII. ostendimus), quod in alium transferri non potest.” See Juffermans, *Drie perspectieven op religie* (see above, n. 86), pp. 418–23.

87 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 7, pp. 102–3: “At Religionis longe alia est ratio. Nam quandoquidem ipsa non tam in actionibus externis, quam in animi simplicitate & veracitate consistit, nullius juris neque autoritatis publicae est. Animi enim simplicitas & veracitas non imperio legum, neque autoritate publica hominibus infunditur ... Cum igitur summum jus liberè sentiendi, etiam de Religione, penes unumquemque sit.” Cf. Spinoza, *TP* (see above, n. 70), 2.22. Here Spinoza refers to the dictates of reason which religion is about, and he underlines the fact that it is a human way of speaking to say that we obey God’s will.

88 Spinoza, *TTP* (see above, n. 70), c. 7, p. 103: “Longè igitur abest, ut ex autoritate Pontificis Hebraeorum ad leges Patriae interpretandum posset concludi Romani Pontificis auctoritas ad interpretandam religionem.”

other kinds of faith 'superstition,' which is necessarily self-destructive. To guarantee social peace, 'catholic' religion should be a phenomenon in the singular.

## 9 The Eighteenth-Century Paradigm of Religion

In the Age of Reason there emerged a "new paradigm for the studying of religious phenomena," as Stroumsa has recently called it.<sup>89</sup> Unlike Thomas Kuhn, he underlined the fact that "intellectual revolutions are not born from a big bang." However, the new 'Enlightenment' paradigm was already taken for granted in general mainstream reference works with entries on religion, such as Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* of the 1730s and 1740s and Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. These entries gave voice to new attitudes towards religion and, more importantly, made the general public familiar with this new view. At the beginning of the century these ideas were developed in widely current academic texts, such as Noodt's rectoral address and Barbeyrac's manuals of natural law.<sup>90</sup> The drastic change in our thinking about religion came about along two lines of argument.

89 Stroumsa, *A New Science* (see above, n. 30), pp. 4–5.

90 In Picart's *Ceremonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* of the 1720s and 1730s, religion is also conceived as a common human feature. This momentous study had a wide circulation, but it gives too little conceptual analysis of religion to be useful to my purpose. However, see Hunt, Jacob, and Mijndhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe* (see above, n. 34), pp. 292–4 and 11–6. Yet the book calls the non-monotheistic religions by their traditional negative name 'idolatry.' In the frontispiece Protestantism figures as 'true religion,' as opposed to superstitious Roman Catholicism. Although according to the authors of *The Book that Changed Europe*, p. 13 the frontispiece "underestimates the actual importance of idolatrous people," seemingly the distinction between a unique true religion and all kinds of superstition did not completely lose its force. In the opening dissertation on religious worship it is conventionally observed that the greatest part of mankind worships God with external signs. So, the more confused the ideas of God are, the more absurd and extravagant these rites. "Ignorance has carried devotion even to barbarism." Here the example of human sacrifices is given. In the opening dissertation of volume VIII, 'On the conformity of the ceremonies of the greatest part of Christianity with those of the Greeks and Romans,' we read on page 7: "je prétens que les protestants n'ont pas retranché sans raison de leur [i.e., of the Greeks and Romans] culte religieux ces ceremonies, quelles qu'elles soient comme vaines et inutiles." The Protestants are satisfied to worship God only in the spirit and in truth, "in conformity with true Christianity," while the greatest part of Christianity practices superstitious ceremonies. Hence, according to the *Coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, if anywhere, it is only in liberal Protestantism, due its spiritual nature, that we find the true knowledge of God, which leads to pious worship.



One observes around 1700 a growing disbelief in, or a diminishing need for, a 'science of God' as the foundation of religion. More and more scholars were no longer attempting to establish basic truths about God. The interest in the objective creed was increasingly replaced by a subjective and individual inner 'cult.' The toleration debate of the end of the seventeenth century seems to have given rise to this tendency, an observation that will be substantiated here by dealing with the trendsetting examples of Bayle and Noodt. It is also the prevailing notion of religion in Zedler's encyclopaedia. There had also been the growing naturalization of religion, which made it part of humanity's—moral—nature. It transformed the ceremonies of tradition into moral practice. This development will be dealt with in the last three sections before the conclusion. Both tendencies made religion a plural concept, which may equally refer to any religion. The distinction, cultivated in the humanist paradigm, between religion in a broad sense and in a strict sense fades away.

## 10 The Growing Neglect of Religion's Doctrine: Bayle

In 1706 the Leiden legal scholar Gerard Noodt (1647–1725) developed a principled Latin defence of tolerance on the basis of a 'subjective' concept of religion: a conception of religion which, by focusing on the attitude of the believer, specifies neither the object of religious knowledge nor its doctrine. In this respect he was influenced by Pierre Bayle (1647–1706). The famous 'Rotterdam philosopher,' Feil observed, started to use religion freely in a neutral sense, referring to any confession whatsoever. Besides Christian forms of religion, such as Socinianism, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism, we find in his works abundant mention of Chinese, Persian, Jewish, and Japanese religions.<sup>91</sup> What is more, in his argument the term 'sect' has lost its negative connotation and is merely used as an equivalent for religion.<sup>92</sup> In his main treatise on toleration, he defined 'religion' as follows: "hence the nature of religion is a certain persuasion of our soul with respect to God which produces in the will the love, respect, and fear that the supreme Being merits." The subjective element is underlined by the phrase "persuasion of our soul."<sup>93</sup> In this definition Bayle

91 An example of this alignment of religions: in Pierre Bayle, *Janua coelorum reserata*, 3,5, in: id., *Oeuvres diverses*, 2 vols, (The Hague, 1737), 2: 876: "Atqui ex probatis hucusque in Religione Pontificia, Sociniana, Judaïca, & Mohametica salus obtineri potest."

92 Feil, *Religio* (see above, n. 35), 3: 451–2.

93 Pierre Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de l'évangile selon St. Luc: "Contrains-les d'entrer,"* in: id., *Oeuvres diverses*, 2: 371b: "La nature de la Religion est d'être une certaine persuasion de l'ame par rapport à Dieu, laquelle produise dans la volonté

focused on the inner side of religion—a disposition of the mind—which is not necessarily linked with its outward manifestations in corresponding acts. Contrary to our acts, an inner conviction cannot be produced by force, but only by argument. Force only produces false religion, Bayle argues in summary of his ideas.<sup>94</sup>

Fully in line with this notion of the basic interiority of religion is Bayle's observation that religion is localized in the laity and not in a clergy. In the *Commentaire philosophique* he ironically writes that were the magistrate, out of fear of the dominant church and in order to please the clergy, not to tolerate 'the sects,' the prince should simply exhort the clergy to lead a life in accordance with the precepts of Jesus Christ. This appeal would meet the laity's wishes for a purer religion and would destroy the power of the opponents of tolerance.<sup>95</sup>

Making conscience the '*pierre de touche*' of religious truth reinforces the subjective conception of religion. Every individual's conscience is the ultimate judge deciding whether an action is good or bad. A religious person necessarily assumes that the rule used to assess such an act lies only in God. However, the individual's conscience provides the only access to this law. Considering this idea to be obvious, Bayle calls it one of the clearest notions of metaphysics.<sup>96</sup> So a man acting against his conscience acts wrongly whatever he does.<sup>97</sup> Yet conscience is a highly defective means to assess moral truth. Therefore, we

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l'amour, le respect: et la crainte que mérite cet Etre suprême & dans les membres du corps les signes convenables à cette persuasion, et à cette disposition de la volonté; desorte que si les signes externes sont sans un état intérieur de l'ame qui y réponde ou avec un état intérieur de l'ame qui leur soit contraire, ils font des actes d'hypocrisie et de mauvaise foi ou d'infidélité." A few lines before Bayle had more traditionally defined the essence of religion as consisting of the human mind's judgments of God and the emotions of respect, fear and love they create. It is hence possible that religion can exist without any external acts of worship—ceremonies—but this is rarely the case. In Locke we find a similar subjective definition of 'true and saving religion': "Religio consistit in interna animi fide," John Locke, *Epistola de tolerantia* (London, 1765), p. 5 (original 1689).

94 Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique* (see above, n. 93), 2, ch. 6, p. 419a: "un Prince ... se mettroit au-dessus de ce peril, car il n'auroit qu'à faire publier dans tous ses etats, qu'il ne toléreroit plus les sectes, dès que tout le clergé de la religion dominante meneroit une vie conforme aux conseils et aux préceptes de Jésus-Christ ... Cette condition plairoit sans doute aux laïques."

95 Feil, *Religio*, (see above, n. 35), 3: 451–2.

96 Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique* (see above, n. 93), 2, ch. 8, p. 422b: "D'où je conclus que c'est la même chose de dire: *ma conscience juge qu'une telle action est bonne ou mauvaise et ma conscience juge qu'une telle action plaît ou déplaît à Dieu.*" See H. Bost, *Pierre Bayle et la religion* (Paris, 1994), p. 59.

97 Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique* (see above, n. 93), 2, ch. 8, p. 423a: "Ainsi c'est une proposition évidente que tout homme qui fait une chose que sa conscience lui dicte être mauvaise ... fait un péché."

have to make our personal choices in religious affairs, if we do not want to be a sceptic in religion our entire lives.<sup>98</sup> Since in religious matters no objective truth is available, it is obvious that, given the world's actual religious diversity most people will act in ways urged on by conscience, which is 'objectively' in error. In religion, subjective truth prevails. According to Bayle, religion is necessarily a plural phenomenon.

## 11 Van Noodt

In 1706, at the end of his second term as *rector magnificus* of the university of Leiden, the renowned Dutch legal scholar Gerard Noodt (1647–1725) delivered an address on the freedom of religion which instantly caught the attention of all Europe. Many editions of the Latin text appeared both in the Protestant North and the Roman Catholic South. Dutch, French, English, and German versions circulated widely.<sup>99</sup> Van den Bergh, Noodt's intellectual biographer, underlines the controversial nature of the address, which did not plead for the traditional indulgence but rather for an absolute freedom of religion, unhindered by any interference by the government.<sup>100</sup> Van den Bergh did not only argue for the traditional 'Batavian freedom' of conscience, granted by the Union of Utrecht in 1579. He intended to advocate religious tolerance in "that great Republic" of mankind, which has "no other limits than the ocean and the course of the sun."<sup>101</sup> Van den Bergh underlines the influence of Bayle's ideas.<sup>102</sup>

Of the distinguishing features of religion Noodt dealt with in his address, nearly all tend to underline the subjectivity of religion. He starts by observing that religion is universal, given to all. "Religion, to my understanding, Gentlemen, is a Gift of God, which God has given to every one in particular."<sup>103</sup> However, religion is of a personal nature, being "a holy commerce between God and man."<sup>104</sup> Like Bayle, Noodt infers that the individual has to decide on

98 Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique* (see above, n. 93), 2, ch. 8, p. 427b: "mais après tout dans la religion on ne peut se faire toute sa vie le sceptique et le pyrrhonien; il faut se fixer à quelque chose et agir selon ce à quoi l'on se détermine."

99 G. C. J. J. van den Bergh, *The Life and Work of Gerard Noodt (1647–1725): Dutch Legal Scholarship between Humanism and Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1988), p. 224.

100 Van den Bergh, *Life and Work* (see above, n. 100), p. 226.

101 Gerard Noodt, *The Power of the Sovereign and the Right of the Liberty of Conscience, in two discourses*, trans. John Savage (London, 1708), p. 92.

102 Van den Bergh, *Life and Work*, p. 226 (and those of Spinoza, p. 227). A link with Arminianism was partly due to his family history (*ibid.*, pp. 229–31).

103 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 92.

104 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 108.

the truth in religion wholly by himself.<sup>105</sup> Noodt argues for the personal nature of religion on the base of natural law. He writes: "What can be more just and equitable than to leave every one full liberty to do what he thinks best in his own affairs."<sup>106</sup> Man, like every animal, is created with the inclination to seek his own advantage. Due to this inclination every person freely chooses not only a profession but also a religion, in order to procure a certain infinite good. In elaborating this natural law argument Noodt infers that God gave every individual a soul and reason and thus implanted morality.<sup>107</sup> The object of every religion is "the sovereign good, true felicity and eternal happiness," which is arrived at by uniting ourselves to our God. Such a union is produced not by words or other external acts but "by the Spirit only, that is by holy thoughts and a pure will."<sup>108</sup> This implies a third characteristic of all religions: all possess a spiritual nature and all are of equal value. Every religion rightly claims to be of a natural or even divine origin, because our ideas of the Divine are not in our power.<sup>109</sup> However, there are in the world an infinite number of religions—Noodt uses the traditional word 'sects'—into which mankind is divided: Christian, Jewish, Turkish, Pagan, etc. The disputes among them aiming to establish the truth of any of these are endless and pointless if we hope to arrive at any agreement, because religion as such is without a universal doctrine and, due to its diversity, its general content cannot be fixed universally.<sup>110</sup> Only within a church or religious society can rules be established and a creed formulated.<sup>111</sup> Yet a man may—and should—withdraw his subscription the moment he considers this confession to be irreconcilable with his own sense of religion.<sup>112</sup> The dispute between churches and religions neither reason nor the law of nature can settle.

105 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 108.

106 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 93.

107 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 94 and p. 103: "I have always found that Nature has not brought forth a few priviledg'd persons, to whose judgment all the rest of world are to submit blindly in the search after truth, but that she has given a share of reason to all men."

108 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 95.

109 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), pp. 98–9. Hence "no mortal man of what rank, quality or condition soever, is master of his own conscience" and thus of his religion. It depends entirely on "the sovereign and eternal Being."

110 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 102: "Thou hast not, O God, thought it proper to give such a degree of evidence to religion, as may lead us all to one faith, as we all have one arithmetic. Thy will be done."

111 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 109.

112 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 108: "Tis not less a Man's privilege to quit a religion, than to profess it at first. Indeed, that person shews himself to be manifestly unworthy of being reckon'd a member of the spiritual society between God and man, who does not adore ... his Divine majesty with his heart.... He who chooses a religion,

This remark leads to the fourth characteristic of religion, its basic plurality. According to Noodt the way to eternal felicity is obscure, slippery, and difficult. God ordained the obscurity of religious truth and the absence of any fixed doctrine. For, if He had wished to do otherwise, it would have been quite easy for Him to give all humans one and the same religious conviction. In science everyone knows the same truths, for example that three and two are five, and its truths are beyond controversy.<sup>113</sup> In religion, however, God did not think it proper to give humanity such a degree of evidence, and its absence inevitably resulted in a plurality of religions. Therefore, the existence of a great number of religions is due to the divine will; no religion can prove its 'scientific' truth. Due to this 'theological' justification of religious diversity, the difference with radical Cartesian thought is obvious.

## 12 Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon*

Between 1731 and 1754, in 68 volumes totalling 62,571 pages and 300,000 entries, there appeared the most voluminous encyclopaedia ever published in Europe. This "big and complete" *Universal-Lexicon of all sciences and arts*, as the first words of its title read, is called after its publisher 'Zedler,' but unlike his predecessors he did not contribute any entries to his work. Although the huge encyclopaedia is a monument of baroque learning, it is not a scholarly work but a so-called *Konversations-lexikon*. It was published by Johann Heinrich Zedler (1706–1751) to commercialize "exclusive knowledge of experts of former ages" and to transform it into the common knowledge of the educated public.<sup>114</sup> Intended for educated readers, it was written in the vernacular and alphabetically ordered,<sup>115</sup> lacking any "*innere Systematik*."<sup>116</sup> That is to say: the growing need for 'orientation' and 'consumption of knowledge' could not be met by strenuous efforts to organize all knowledge in a systematic way. Apparently

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with a design to procure himself a certain good, may reserve a right to himself to examine whether what it teaches be exactly confirmable to the Truth."

- 113 Noodt, *Power of the Sovereign* (see above, n. 101), p. 102. According to Van den Bergh this argument is familiar in the natural law tradition and originated in Grotius's *De jure belli ac pacis* 1.1.10.5.
- 114 Kai Lohsträter and Flemming Schock, 'Einleitung,' in: id., *Die gesammelte Welt: Studien zu Zedlers Universal-Lexicon* (Wiesbaden, 2013), p. 3.
- 115 Elger Blühm, 'Johann Heinrich Zedler und sein Lexikon,' *Jahrbuch der Schlesischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Breslau* 7 (1962), 189–90 (my translation).
- 116 U. J. Schneider quoted in Frank Weiske's report 'Die gesammelte Welt: Wissensformen und Wissenswandel in Zedlers *Universal-Lexicon*' of the Wolffenbüttel conference 18–19 November 2010, available on the Web journal H-Soz-Kult, 05.03.2011.

the publisher cared only about the 'simple usefulness' and 'traceability' of the information.<sup>117</sup>

The article 'Religion,' like the other anonymously written entries, starts by reproducing the traditional etymology of the word by Lactantius, and continues by observing that religion is basically the just worship of God, which requires a proper understanding of him.<sup>118</sup> This implies the distinction between false and true religion which is used to classify all religions: the pagans serve God although they know him falsely and imperfectly; the Jews know God, partly accepting revelation in half of its fullness; the Christians possess a perfect and complete revelation; and the Muslims serve God starting from a fiction and an imagined revelation.<sup>119</sup>

However, the author does not supply any notions that might be used to identify true religion and, what is more, in the remaining ninety per cent of the article the distinction between false and true religion is not mentioned.<sup>120</sup> The author merely describes facts about the beliefs, images, and ceremonies of the world's different religions. More than once he refers to Picart's classic

117 Lohsträter and Schock, 'Einleitung' (see above, n. 114), p. 4.

118 Johann Heinrich Zedler (ed.), *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste, welche bishero durch menschlichen Verstand und Witz erfunden und verbessert worden. Darinnen so wohl die Geographisch-Politische Beschreibung des Erd-Kreyses, ... Wie nicht weniger die völlige Vorstellung aller in den Kirchen-Geschichten berühmten Alt-Väter ..., Endlich auch ein vollkommener Inbegriff der allergelehrtesten Männer ... enthalten ist*, 68 vols, (Halle, 1742). Ibid. 31: 443: "In besonderm Verstande versteht man dadurch den Dienst und die Verehrung des wahren Gottes; weil man aber Gott nicht gebührend verehren kan, wenn man ihn nicht vorher gehöriger massen erkannt, so braucht man auch dasselbige in weitem Verstande und begreift man darunter so wohl die wahre Erkenntniss Gottes, als auch die Verehrung des wahren Gottes." Since 'religion' is also applied to the worship of false gods, Zedler concludes that there is a distinction between false and true religions. True religion is provided with true knowledge of God, false religions with inadequate knowledge of the Divine power.

119 Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon* (see above, n. 118), 31: 443: "die Heyden Gott dienen aus einer falschen und sehr unvollkommenen Erkenntniss ... die Juden Gott nach seinem geoffenbahrten Willen zu dienen vermeynen, aber nur ein Theil desselben annehmen wollen; die Christen ihren Gottesdienst nach der ganzen und vollkommenen Offenbarung des göttlichen Willens richten, die Mahometaner einer fälschlich angegebenen Offenbarung folgen." Although in this entry this traditional framework of the four religions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Paganism—hardly played a part, in other entries, according to T. Winnerling, it led to a serious misconception of other religions and the inability to erode the "absolute priority" of Christianity. 'Zur Buddhismus-Wahrnehmung im *Universal-Lexicon*,' in: Lohsträter and Schock (eds.), *Die gesammelte Welt* (see above, n. 114), p. 156.

120 Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon* (see above, n. 118), 31: 443–4, give a theoretical introduction and pp. 444–52 give a factual description of all religions, whether false or true.

*Céramonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, which, unlike Vossius's seventeenth-century work, has no longer 'idolatry' but 'religion' in the title.<sup>121</sup> He starts with Africa, and via America and Asia he reaches Europe, which is dominated by four churches. However, on a global scale Christianity forms a minority. So demography does not establish its truth either.<sup>122</sup> Europe, moreover, is religiously diverse. Although the Inquisition attempted to enforce religious conformity in some territories such as Spain and France, it did not succeed. In these countries substantial religious minorities still live in secret: Jews, Muslims, and Protestants, notwithstanding the official religious uniformity.<sup>123</sup>

After dealing with religious diversity in other regions, the author focuses on the German lands. The Treaty of Westphalia regulates the coexistence of three tolerated religions—Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed. According to the entry's author, this treaty prevented religious compulsion. He observed that even if adherence to a certain religion is required for a specific state office, the conscience remains free, because in that case only conformity to the ceremonies of external religion is needed. The author's advice to the reader is to avoid blameable hypocrisy, or even self-repudiation, by steering the middle course between offending one's own conscience and taking unnecessary risks.<sup>124</sup> Finally, the Zedler entry observed that in the Ottoman Empire religious

121 Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon* (see above, n. 118), 31: 450: "dem berühmten Kupfferstecher, Bern. Picart." However, the existing literature merely consists of travel journals. Scholars have to consider the doctrine of 'religions of foreigners' in a logical order and it is necessary to rely upon its sources, the writer in Zedler observed.

122 Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon* (see above, n. 118), 31: 449. It is observed in the book that the world's population was calculated to be 19/30 Pagan, 6/30 Islamic, and only 5/30 Christian.

123 Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon* (see above, n. 118), 31: 448: "In Spanien giebt es lauter Catholische, weil die Inquisition daselbst gar scharf ist, gleichwie auch in Portugall. Sie leiden aniesso weder Maurer noch Jüden. Wobey iedoch wohl zu merken dass nichts destoweniger die Anzahl der heimlichen Juden in diesen Landen noch immer sehr gross ist."

124 Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon* (see above, n. 118), 31: 451: "nicht allein nach Massgebung des Westphälischen Friedesschlusses, sondern auch anderer Reichs-Grundgesetze, aller Zwang und Bedrängniss wegen der Religion, als eine unzulässige Gewalt über die Gewissen verboten.... Es ist zwar vornehmlich in Sachsen der Religions-Eid eingeführet, krafft dessen alle, die in öffentliche Bedienungen treten, verbunden werden bey ihrer Religion zu beharren, oder auf widrigen Fall sich ihrer Bedienung zu begeben. Weil aber dadurch dem Gewissen seine Freyheit gelassen, und bloss eine äusserliches Bedinge, welches um besserer Ordnung und Erhaltung des gemeinen Ruhestandes willen eingeführt, erfordert wird, so ist solches vor einen Religions-Zwang nicht anzusehen.... Die nach der Wahrheit urtheilen halten dafür, dass wohl ein Mittelweg zu finden, da man ohne Anstoss des Gewissens und ohne Furcht für Zuziehung unnöthiger Gefahr fortkommen könne."

conformity is not enforced. The Turks leave all religions in peace and they admit freedom not only of conscience but also of religious exercise. Apparently, they no longer adopt Muhammad's principle of spreading religion by the sword. It is the reverse in Christianity, where the first Christians abhorred the use of force and considered its use to convert people to be the distinguishing mark of a false religion. Later on Christianity deviated from this principle. Although the Zedler writer never forgets himself and only describes the different ideas in a neutral manner, the reference to Noodt may suggest that he agrees with the first Christians and takes the renunciation of violence to be the main constituting element of true religion, which may be observed from the outside.<sup>125</sup> From the argument in the last section on Germany's religious diversity we may also infer that like Noodt, the Zedler writer situated religion in the human heart, which made individual conscience and not philosophical discourse or Biblical hermeneutics the ultimate subjective judge. In this manner the search for the truth of religion was transformed into a question of its veracity.

### 13 Religion in Natural Law: Pufendorf and Barbeyrac

In the early modern confessional state, positive law imposed a particular religion and a public church on a specific society. However, according to High Enlightenment legal scholarship, nature itself also put humanity under the obligation to have faith and religion. This development of natural law transformed religion into a man-made phenomenon, which was to be conceived as common to all. Apparently, with *De Officio hominis et civis* (1673) Samuel Pufendorf inaugurated this tradition by not dealing with religion as based upon revelation or 'sacred scriptures,' as Hobbes, for example, still did.<sup>126</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century Thomas Reid wrote that Pufendorf had been the first to introduce the Christian duties into natural jurisprudence.<sup>127</sup> This handy treatise on the duties of man and the citizen by the German jurist was a great success. In the first hundred years after its publication it was reissued sixty-three times, and in due course was translated into English (1682), German (1691), French (1693), Russian (1624), Danish (1742), Dutch (1761), and Italian

125 Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon*, 31: 452: "Die ersten Christen sind einer ganz andern Meynung gewesen, so dass sie under die Kennzeichen einer falschen Lehre gezählet, wenn sie zu ihr Ausbreitung Gewalt gebrauchet. In den folgenden Zeiten ist man von diesem Grunde abgewichen."

126 Thomas Hobbes, *Elementa philosophica de Cive* (Amsterdam, 1647), part 3.

127 Thomas Reid, *Practical Ethics, being Lectures and Papers on Natural Religion, Self-Government, Natural Jurisprudence, and the Law of Nations*, ed. Knud Haakonsson (Princeton, 1990), p. 305, note 1.



(1761). Through all these versions this little treatise, like Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon*, reached an audience far beyond the small circle of academic scholarship and managed to attract bourgeois readers.<sup>128</sup>

Pufendorf's argument started by defining 'duty' in terms of human 'actions'.<sup>129</sup> By making 'action' a key concept in this definition, 'duty' is related to the ontological distinction between '*entia moralia*' and '*entia physica*.' For an action is not any motion whatsoever, but rather it proceeds from two human faculties: the intellect and the will.<sup>130</sup> By these powers man does not only know things, but as the result of his actions also makes them conform to a certain rule. The things in nature, which are 'beings-in-conformity-with-a-rule,' are studied in moral science. This implies that Pufendorf acknowledges an ontological foundation of natural law.<sup>131</sup> The rule or norm of human action is called 'law' and is a "decree by which a superior obliges one that is subject to him to accommodate his actions to the directions prescrib'd therein."<sup>132</sup> Such a moral law requires the knowledge both of the lawgiver and of the law itself. For no man obeys a rule if he does not know whom he has to obey and what act he has to perform.

Laws may be distinguished according to the legislator—God or man—and according to their necessity and universality. Natural laws are necessary and universal, whereas positive laws are contingent and particular to a state. The natural law, created by God, is congruent with the social and rational nature of every human individual. Hence, all peaceful societies have to apply them. God is the lawgiver of these natural laws, and they are known by the "light of reason."<sup>133</sup> However, although reason is able to know these laws, we need God's intervention once more to make these laws obliging—because of the weakness of our intellectual faculties after the Fall and the variety of human individuals. Reason alone cannot do the job.<sup>134</sup> Natural law prescribes all kinds of obligations, which are distinguished according to their object: God, other people,

128 Samuel Pufendorf, *De officio hominis et civis juxta legem naturalem libri duo*, in id., *Gesammelte Werke* 2, ed. Gerald Hartung, (Berlin, 1997), p. ix.

129 Pufendorf, *De officio* (see above, n. 128), 1.1.1: "Officium nobis heic vocatur actio hominis pro ratione obligationis ad praescriptum legum recte attemperata." English in: *The Whole of Duty of Man according to the Law of Nature, made English* by A. Tooke, London, 1735, p. 1: "Duty is that action of a man, which is regularly order'd according to some prescrib'd Law."

130 Pufendorf, *De officio* (see above, n. 128), 1.1.2 and Simone Zurbuchen, *Naturrecht und natürliche Religion: Zur Geschichte des Toleranzproblem von Samuel Pufendorf bis Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Würzburg, 1990), p. 11.

131 Zurbuchen, *Naturrecht und natürliche Religion* (see above, n. 130), p. 21.

132 Pufendorf, *De officio* (see above, n. 128), 1.2.2.

133 Pufendorf, *De officio* (see above, n. 128), 1.2.16.

134 Zurbuchen, *Naturrecht und natürliche Religion* (see above, n. 130), p. 23.

and ourselves.<sup>135</sup> The obligations towards God include our duty to know his existence and his main attributes. Here Pufendorf infers a credo consisting of four basic tenets: the belief in God's existence; in his act of Creation; in God's regime over the world and mankind, and God's utter perfection. These tenets imply an inner and an external worship of God. Pufendorf implicitly accepts the existence of a public church, because we have to worship God in the midst of others publicly. Otherwise we may give the impression that we are ashamed of doing so. Our example may testify to our devotion and incite others to do the same.<sup>136</sup> Pufendorf's argument is an example of how religion became involved in natural law. Barbeyrac's versions of Pufendorf's manuals show how this development changed the idea of religion.

#### 14 Barbeyrac

'Natural religion,' apparently, tends to neutralize the humanist distinction between false religions in the plural, unfortunately practiced by the majority of mankind, and true religion in the singular. However, Pufendorf's natural religion remained a defective religion, because it is restricted to this life here on earth. According to Leibniz, only a religion based upon revelation will guide human action to eternal bliss and bring salvation. This transcendental religion is real religion.<sup>137</sup> It was the Groningen professor Jean Barbeyrac (1674–1744)<sup>138</sup> who, according to Hartung, effaced the distinction between religion included in natural law and supernatural religion.<sup>139</sup> To transform natural religion into a real religion, Barbeyrac added to his French version of *De officio* a densely annotated letter of Leibniz, in which the latter had criticized Pufendorf for confining natural law to this life<sup>140</sup> and to our external actions in the physical world.<sup>141</sup> Barbeyrac simply denied that natural law is confined to this world;

135 Pufendorf, *De officio* (see above, n. 128), 1.3.13.

136 Pufendorf, *De officio* (see above, n. 128), 1.4.2–5 and 6–7.

137 Zurbuchen, *Naturrecht und natürliche Religion* (see above, n. 130), pp. 38–46.

138 Philippe Meylan, *Jean Barbeyrac, 1674–1744, et les débuts de l'enseignement du droit dans l'ancienne Académie de Lausanne* (Lausanne, 1937).

139 Hartung in Pufendorf, *De officio* (see above, n. 128), p. 243 note 6 and 7: "Barbeyrac relativiert diese strikte Trennung von irdischer und jenseitiger Rechssphäre."

140 [Leibniz], 'Jugement d'un anonyme sur l'originel de cet abregé,' in Samuel Pufendorf, *Les devoirs de l'homme et du citoyen, tels qu'ils lui sont prescrits par la Loi Naturelle* (Amsterdam, 1746), pp. 214–9. Cf. the summary in Hans Welzel, *Die Naturrechtslehre Samuel Pufendorfs: Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1958), pp. 5–6.

141 [Leibniz], 'Jugement d'un anonyme' (see above, n. 140), pp. 225–7.

all considerations about a future life should be “excluded from natural law.”<sup>142</sup> He welcomed Leibniz’s critique of Pufendorf’s attempt to distinguish between natural law and theology by arguing that human actions in the outside world are dealt with in natural law and the “Divine Tribunal.” Hence theology deals with our interior acts.<sup>143</sup> Unlike Bayle and Noodt, Barbeyrac maintained that conscience is indeed able to assess with certainty our inner volitions, which cause our actions. Although we have to rely on visible actions in the outside world to assess the causes of another person’s actions, we are able to penetrate into the inner realm of the causes of our own actions. Hence, a natural science of morality is possible and moral theology is part of natural jurisprudence. Apparently Barbeyrac’s thought is still a bit ambiguous on this issue. It was the Wolffian notion of ‘human perfection’ that led to the full integration of natural religion into natural law. F. A. van der Marck, Barbeyrac’s successor at Groningen University, for example, wrote that external natural law, which derives from the social nature of humanity, makes the individual a perfect citizen, but, supplemented by a higher inner natural law, it transforms the human individual into a moral being and leads to an ultimate spiritual perfection. This makes religion obligatory by natural law, and even mission, in the sense of teaching natural religion to the ‘pagans,’ he considers to be an obligation of natural law.<sup>144</sup> In this argument, mission has been transformed from the traditional preaching of the Christian gospel to all people into the teaching of morality to humankind.

It might well be that Barbeyrac’s ambiguity with respect to the relation between theology and natural law in part accounted for the success of his commentaries. His fame rests chiefly on the annotated translations into French of Latin works on natural law, making these works available not merely to the world of the scholars but also to the reading public outside academia without Latin, that is, “*le grand monde*,” as Leibniz called it.<sup>145</sup> The 1706 translation of Samuel Pufendorf’s treatise *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* is preceded by an elaborated preface in which he introduces a comprehensive “science of morality”

142 [Leibniz], ‘Jugement d’un anonyme’ (see above, n. 140), pp. 213–4: “on ne doit pas exclure du droit naturel toute considération d’un vie à venir.”

143 [Leibniz], ‘Jugement d’un anonyme’ (see above, n. 140), p. 224: “C’est de cette application aux actions dont on ne peut pénétrer le principe que par quelque effet ou quelque signe extérieur, c’est des choses dont le tribunal humain peut connoître que notre Auteur veut parler.”

144 See Henri A. Krop, ‘The Law of Nature is a Lamp unto Your Feet: Frederik Adolf van der Marck (1719–1800) on the Book of Nature and Revelation,’ in: *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, ed. Klaas van Berkel and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leuven, 2006), pp. 99–102.

145 Sieglinde C. Othmer, *Berlin und die Verbreitung des Naturrechts in Europa* (Berlin, 1970), pp. 97–124.

and outlines its “progress from the Earliest Times Down to the Publication of This Work,” as the title in the contemporary English version states. Barbeyrac underlines the general significance of natural law, its formation of the basis for a new “*science des mœurs*” accessible to “*le magistrat, l’homme de guerre, le négociant, l’artisan*,” that is, “men without letters” as Barbeyrac called them. The book with this new science is only out of reach of “the farmer and the journeyman,” who are completely illiterate. However, although the term “natural law” is, like the legendary “Southern Lands,” unknown to them, even “persons without education” will profit by reading a book on “moral science” with the same attention as “they do their daily business.”<sup>146</sup>

According to the preface, the “science of morality” deals with all rules God prescribes to everyone in order to make them happy by reaching their destined end.<sup>147</sup> This science makes humankind familiar with all its duties and, in the tradition of natural law, the laws of nature are presented as instruments used by God ordering everything in the universe to that end. If the end of human life is happiness, then the love of God, which grants ultimate bliss, is extremely beneficial to mankind. This implies that religion is universal. In the contemporary *Théodicée* Leibniz formulated this idea as follows: since the love of God is the main principle taught by all religions in a more or less perfect way, their creeds and forms of worship all “foreshadow truth.”<sup>148</sup> They prepare humanity for the divine law by accustoming people to virtue and making them abhor vice. This was the goal of Moses, other good legislators, wise founders of religions, and Jesus Christ, who “established the most pure and most enlightened religion.” However, according to Leibniz, the natural religion of the pagans is full of superstition and an “absurd” belief in miracles. It had to be perfected in Hebrew religion and in Christian doctrine. Jesus Christ transformed natural religion into a law and gave it the authority of a public dogma. He did what the philosophers had attempted in vain and “the religion of the sages became the

146 Jean Barbeyrac, ‘Préface,’ in: Samuel Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens, ou Systeme general des principes les plus importants de la morale, de la jurisprudence, et de la politique. Traduit du latin ... Avec des notes du traducteur, où il supplée, explique ... les pensées de l’auteur*, (Amsterdam, 1706), 1: lxxxv and Othmer, *Berlin und die Verbreitung des Naturrechts* (see above, n. 145), pp. 124–9.

147 Barbeyrac, ‘Préface,’ in: Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens* (see above, n. 146), p. 1: “En effet, on ne sauroit raisonnablement douter, que chacun n’ait besoin pour se rendre heureux, de régler sa conduite d’une certaine manière et que Dieu comme Auteur et Père du genre humain ne prescrive à tous les hommes sans exception des devoirs qui tendent à leur procurer la félicité après laquelle ils soupirent.”

148 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal* (Amsterdam, 1734), p. v: “Les cérémonies ressemblent aux actions vertueuses et les formulaires sont comme des ombres de la vérité.”

religion of the people." Muhammad only retained the "tenets of natural theology" and spread them to Asia and Africa.<sup>149</sup> In this manner Leibniz retained the notion of the uniqueness of Christianity. Barbeyrac adopts a comparable historical framework. His outline of the "science of morality" starts with the "Chaldeans and the Chinese" and continues with the ancient Greek philosophers and the Church Fathers. Common moral and religious notions had been developed all over the world almost from the beginning of humankind.

Moreover, reversing Noodt's position, Barbeyrac distinguishes between the hermetic speculative sciences, which are basically uncertain and controversial, and the *science des mœurs*, the principles of which all will find easy to understand and are hence prescribed to all members of the human race. Barbeyrac makes his point by referring to Confucius, the Stoics, Cicero, and Montaigne.<sup>150</sup> Morality, which Barbeyrac calls the "daughter of religion," is simple and certain.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, becoming moral and religious requires no "metaphysical speculation, leafing through voluminous books"; it is not necessary "to learn several languages, to penetrate the mysteries of an antiquity for a long time past—in one word: to be a scholar." A religious man needs no other master than his own heart.<sup>152</sup> Barbeyrac argues for this moral equality by invoking God's goodness and the ensuing veracity in the tradition of natural law, which prevents the development of an outrageous scepticism with respect to religion and morality.<sup>153</sup>

Finally, Barbeyrac underlines the fact that religion is not the exclusive concern of theological experts. On the contrary: "all ministers of public churches, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pagan, or Jewish tend to neglect moral science." Based upon the human conscience, which discerns the basic principles of morality, moral science and religion presuppose tolerance and freedom.

149 Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée* (see above, n. 148), p. viii.

150 Barbeyrac, 'Préface,' in: Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens* (see above, n. 146), pp. i–ii: "Les Stoiciens ... soutenoient que leur philosophie n'étoit pas au dessus de la portée des femmes et des esclaves, et que comme la vertu est ouvert à tous les hommes sans distinction, il n'y a non plus aucune condition privilégiée en ce qui regarde la connaissance des règles et des principes tant des devoirs communs" And p. iv: "Les mœurs et les propos des paysans (dit Montaigne) je les trouve communement plus ordonnez selon les principes de la vraie philosophie, que ne sont ceux de nos philosophes."

151 Barbeyrac, 'Préface,' in: Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens* (see above, n. 146), p. xix: "elle [morality] marche d'un pas égal avec elle [religion] et la perfection de celle-ci est la mesure de la perfection de celle-là."

152 Barbeyrac, 'Préface,' in: Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens* (see above, n. 146), p. ii.

153 Barbeyrac, 'Préface,' in: Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens* (see above, n. 146), p. xii. This history deals with morality in the Christian and non-Christian worlds. See Petter Korkman, *Barbeyrac and Natural Law*, (Helsinki, 2001), pp. 22–32.

Therefore, although the Reformation returned to the pure religion of Christ, leading theologians such as Calvin and Beza spoiled their achievements by re-introducing intolerance and persecution.<sup>154</sup> That is why religion took refuge with the layman, the expert of natural law, who finally restored the ancient *science des mœurs* and natural religion.<sup>155</sup> Those natural law scholars are the real Reformers, and their work allowed religion to regain its original conformity with the divine law.

## 15 Religion in the *Encyclopédie*

The *Encyclopédie* contains an elaborate article on religion, though it merely focuses on natural religion. Revealed religion is dealt with in separate entries on particular religions such as Christianity, Islam, paganism, and Judaism. Louis de Jaucourt (1704–80), a Paris-born nobleman of Protestant descent, wrote the entry. He had studied sciences, theology, and medicine at Geneva and Leiden.<sup>156</sup> Back in France, he befriended Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet. From the second volume onwards he collaborated with Diderot and contributed to the enterprise no fewer than 17,395 articles.<sup>157</sup>

In accordance with Christian tradition, Jaucourt observed that religion consists of ‘knowledge’ and the worship we owe God. Religion, therefore, presupposes the existence of a God, who maintains relationships with his creatures and requires to be worshipped by them. This deity might be known either by revelation or by natural means. If we know the deity by natural means, natural religion develops, which is defined as “the worship reason, left alone and using only its own lights, understands it owes to the Supreme Being, Creator, and

154 Barbeyrac, ‘Préface,’ in: Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens* (see above, n. 146), p. xxx: “Les lumières de la réformation rétablirent considérablement parmi les protestants la pureté de la doctrine et la pratique. Mais les réformateurs eux-mêmes et les successeurs, ont-ils toujours bien suivi l’esprit du christianisme et la réformation?” Barbeyrac asks rhetorically. The answer is clear: “Le dogme affreux de l’intolérance ou de la persécution pour cause de religion, n’a-t-il pas été soutenu par deux traités exprès, l’un de Calvin, l’autre de Bèze?”

155 Barbeyrac, ‘Préface,’ in: Pufendorf, *Le droit de la nature et des gens* (see above, n. 146), p. xxxii: “Les docteurs destinés à enseigner la religion se divisent sur des questions fort inutiles.” Hence it was a layman who had a “système de cette science. Ce ne sont pas les ecclésiastiques ou des théologiens de profession c’est illustre Grotius dont la mémoire sera toujours en bénédiction pour ce sujet chez tout les amateurs sincères de la Vérité.”

156 Philipp Blom, *Enlightening the World: Encyclopédie, the Book that Changed the Course of History* (New York, 2005), pp. 102–12 and Jean Haechler, *L’Encyclopédie de Diderot et de ... Jaucourt: Essai biographique sur le chevalier Louis de Jaucourt* (Paris, 1995), pp. 75–83.

157 Madeleine F. Morris, *Le chevalier de Jaucourt: Un ami de la terre (1704–1780)* (Geneva, 1979), p. 2.

Sustainer of all things in the sensible world.”<sup>158</sup> “Natural religion,” Jaucourt continues, is also called ‘morality’ because it includes the duties of man towards his fellow man and himself, because God created all men.

Jaucourt observed that deists pretend that natural religion is sufficient to enlighten us about the nature of God and to order our morality in conformity with his laws, but he—ironically?—points out their inconsistency. If God did everything in accordance with his necessary laws, they should accept the fact that there is truth in revealed religion. Apparently, according to His providence, God uses revelation to enlighten man. Otherwise he would be doing something pointless.<sup>159</sup> So revelation is a natural phenomenon as well.

The article in the *Encyclopédie* that follows the entry on religion is on natural religion. This phenomenon is defined by the three main duties it produces: to love God, to be grateful to him, and to pay him tribute. Natural religion is based upon a threefold sentiment: admiration of God’s infinite greatness, gratitude for his blessings, and an acknowledgement of his sovereignty. Natural religion is primarily inner worship; cults are wholly dependent upon historical and social circumstances.<sup>160</sup> However, Jaucourt refutes the argument of radical philosophers that cults, being human fictions, are reprehensible.<sup>161</sup> Given the existence of God, religious sentiments are a natural consequence of that fact, and outward religions are natural as well. They are the necessary result of religious sentiment. Moreover, religion is a social phenomenon: if piety is a moral virtue, it is also a social virtue. Nothing contributes more to the dominance of virtuous behaviour in a society than the example people continuously give to one another. Just as Pufendorf had argued, worship in a public church, although in itself pointless, has a moral and social value. Moreover, man is not a purely rational being but is always subject to devastating passions. To liberate ourselves from their dominance, we have to edify one another and to help our fellow humans direct their minds to the spiritual.<sup>162</sup> Here the traditional social

158 Louis de Jaucourt, ‘Religion,’ in: *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par un société des gens et des lettres. Mis en order et publié par Mr. \*\*\**, 28 vols., (Neufchâtel, 1765), 14: 78: “le culte que la raison, laissée à elle-même, et à ses propres lumières, apprend qu’il faut rendre à l’Être suprême, auteur et conservateur de tous les êtres qui composent le monde sensible, comme de l’aimer, de l’adorer, de ne point abuser de ses créatures, &c.”

159 Jaucourt, ‘Religion’ in *Encyclopédie*, 14: 78.

160 Jaucourt, ‘Religion’ in *Encyclopédie*, 14: 81–2.

161 Jaucourt, ‘Religion’ in *Encyclopédie*, 14: 80.

162 Jaucourt, ‘Religion’ in *Encyclopédie*, 14: 82: “Si la piété est une vertu, il est utile qu’elle regne dans tous les cœurs: or il n’est rien qui contribue plus efficacement au regne de la vertu, que l’exemple. Les leçons y feroient beaucoup moins; c’est donc un bien pour chacun de nous, d’avoir sous les yeux des modèles attrayans de piété. Or, ces modèles ne peuvent être tracés, que par des actes extérieurs de *religion*.”

dimension of true religion is transformed into the concept of a community of civilized citizens.

Finally, Jaucourt mentions the historical fact that all peoples have always had some external religion, or at least religious ceremonies. Here an outline of a history of religion is given which, as in Barbeyrac's preface, culminates in Christianity, presented as the most perfect form of religion.<sup>163</sup> It does what all religions do, that is: it links man to his god, makes him observe his laws, and creates sentiments of submission and dependency. Arguing within the tradition of natural law, Jaucourt observed that the Christian religion leads to our perfection in particular and makes us happy in this life and the next. Even if this positive observation about Christianity is ironic, the *Encyclopédie* had to deal with religion within the new High Enlightenment paradigm in order to be accepted by the general reading public. It presented religion as a universal human phenomenon, which is produced by nature to transform man into a moral being and make humankind deserve ultimate happiness.

## 16 Conclusion

The first years of the eighteenth century witnessed a dramatic change in attitudes towards religion. Until the end of seventeenth century all leading commentators had been convinced that a public religion was intellectually and socially necessary. This established religion was conceived as the true one; other believers, which was to say the adherents of superstitions, were to be endured if possible. Such a feeling was shared by the orthodox and the heterodox alike, as the first section tries to substantiate.

Around 1700 scholars increasingly lost their belief that reason could enable them to establish 'true' religion. In the Dutch Republic the general fear of religious diversity gradually diminished as well. After 1700 religious uniformity was no longer seen as an unambiguous ideal which individuals and society

<sup>163</sup> Jaucourt, 'Religion' in *Encyclopédie*, 14: 83–8. On p. 88: "J'ajoute seulement que la religion est le lien qui attache l'homme à Dieu, et à l'observation de ses lois, par les sentimens de respect, de soumission et de crainte qu'excitent dans notre esprit les perfections de l'Etre suprême, et la dépendance où nous sommes de lui, comme de notre créateur tout sage et tout bon. La religion chrétienne a en particulier pour objet la félicité d'une autre vie, et fait notre bonheur dans celle-ci. Elle donne à la vertu les plus douces espérances, au vice impénitent de justes allarmes, et au vrai repentir les plus puissantes consolations; mais elle tâche sur-tout d'inspirer aux hommes de l'amour, de la douceur, et de la pitié pour les hommes." Haechler considers Jaucourt's argument highly ironic here. He observed that Jaucourt "contests Christianity by omission," that is, by passing over the divine affection towards its creatures (p. 425).



should aspire to. Tolerance, therefore, was transformed from a social and religious evil, as all religious parties in the seventeenth century considered it to be, into a virtue indispensable for true religion and a civilized society. Gradually, the concept of tolerance also came to encompass the recognition that all religions might be 'true' if they stimulated the moral perfection of the individual and the civilization of society. This recognition applied to citizens belonging to dissenting churches, but less so to members of the Roman Catholic Church, and was most outspoken with regard to the public religions of empires outside Christendom. Chinese religion as well as Islam were each perceived to be the core of a civilized system of values and virtues standing on an equal footing with Christianity. The man-made social value of religion came to replace God-given doctrinal knowledge as the objective and universal measure of religious truth. Religions that lacked a clear association with a territorial political power, however, retained the odium of being 'primitive' and 'barbarous.' 'Civilized' religions emphasized moral and political usefulness over 'superstitious' ceremonies, 'irrational' hopes and fears, and idle speculation. Religious virtue became equated with secular, national virtues rather than with spirituality, hostile to the world. The resulting religious cultures are often characterized as 'Protestant,' but are more aptly called 'Enlightened.'

In the second part of this chapter causes of this paradigm shift were discerned and outlined: the tolerance debate, which led Bayle and Noodt to underline the subjective nature of religion and its private character, and the development of natural law theory, which made religion an overall phenomenon that was an integrated part of human culture. The main encyclopaedias of the Enlightenment bear witness to the sudden popularity among the reading public of this new vision. Whereas Bayle's pleas for a layman-centered religion and a full subjugation of the clergy under the authority of the state, limiting its office to educating the people in the way of a virtuous life, were still controversial, by the time of Diderot and D'Alembert in the High Enlightenment such notions were being propagated in vernacular texts aimed at a wide audience.

The paradigm shift from religion conceived to be basically singular to a sense of religions in the plural, which took place in the years around 1700, might remind the historian of religion that any search for an ahistorical 'essence' of religion is pointless.