Whether Le Clerc Had Recourse to the Same Refuge as Bayle; An Addition to What He Said Concerning the Trinity

Themistius: What do you make of his response to the charge that in sacrificing the feeble lights of reason at the foot of the throne of God’s majesty he retreated to the same refuge as Bayle?¹

Maximus: I would say he responds like a great liar, for he claims it is a question “not of the conduct of God, but of the meaning of the words of Jesus Christ.”² What? Do not the words of Jesus Christ concerning the state of the damned make up precisely and formally a part of God’s conduct? Le Clerc most certainly imagines that all his readers are an insignificant and ignorant bunch that believes everything he says. If he were persuaded that several readers would actually consult the writings of both parties, then his boldness in disguising the truth would be lessened.

There is another lie that can be seen on the same page,³ and that he repeats at every opportunity, but we have already refuted it. Moreover, it would be useless to examine the accusation on the page that follows, namely that it is to mock God and man, and to be a fanatic, to say that we submit reason to the Faith. Bayle is not the only target of this attack; so too is everyone most worthy of veneration among the greatest lights of the primitive Church and of the Church of every century up to and including our own. It is unbearably audacious for such a small man to treat nearly the whole body of Christianity in this way.

Themistius: It seems to me that you have been too easy on his response to the objection that he retreated to the same refuge as Bayle. You have not reflected at all on his observation that “reason dictates to us that it is better to say that we do not understand the meaning of the words of Jesus Christ than

---

¹ See RBL, section IV, (OD 111, 994–995).
² Le Clerc, BC X, 403.
³ He says that Bayle claims that the eternity of punishments “is absolutely contrary to the justice and to the goodness of God” (Le Clerc, BC X, 403). This is pure calumny, since Bayle says only that we cannot demonstrate to the Manicheans that it is conformable to common notions.
to attribute to them a meaning contrary to reason, which is never opposed to Revelation." This is what prevents him from interpreting literally those passages of the Gospel that represent the torments of the damned as eternal. He fears attributing to the words of the Son of God a meaning that is contrary to reason and consequently false, and so at worst he would rather say he does not understand them.

But why was he not as circumspect when it came to the passages concerning original sin, which in appearance have much less clarity than those concerning the eternity of hell? He flatly denies original sin, and suspends his judgment on the eternity of hell. Where could this disparity come from? Could it come from the fact that the rejection of the eternity of hell would not be tolerated in the United Provinces in the way we tolerate the rejection of original sin? He knows it better than I, but he does not consider it sufficient to endanger his reputation to play the Pyrrhonian on this other article.

I ask him again: why is he not as circumspect when faced with the passages of Scripture concerning the Trinity, the hypostatic union, the redemption of humankind by the death of Jesus Christ? He affirms these three mysteries, yet he knows the Polish Brethren oppose them with common notions. He should say, if he wishes to reason consistently, that from a fear of attributing to Scripture a meaning opposed to reason, he prefers to admit that he does not understand the passages by which the orthodox give proof of these three articles of their confession of faith.

Maximus: You have just placed him in the crossfire of the orthodox and the Socinians. This was a good remark; I was wrong to have omitted it.

Themistius: He was challenged “to dare to say that he did not abandon [common notions] when he recognized in God three really distinct, coessential, and consubstantial persons.” He responded coldly “that there is no reason in that case to abandon common notions,” whether we understand along with the Fathers that the three divine persons are “three equal substances of the same essence in species, or whether we take the word ‘person’ as we take it today in the whole of Christianity, and with reason.”

---

4 Le Clerc, *BC X*, 403.
5 He believed that Bayle meant "coeternal", but this is to be ignorant of the fact that theologians ordinarily join together these two synonyms, *coessential* and *consubstantial*.
6 *RBL*, section IV (*OD II*, 995).