Several Remarks on Origenism

Themistius: Let us a pause a while over the question of Origenism. Every sensible person would appreciate why Bayle did not refute the opinions of Origen concerning the future state of the damned. Nevertheless, Le Clerc seems to have taken offence to this since he says, “I challenged him to do this several times.” He adds that “the majority of the Manichean arguments” related by Bayle “assume” the eternity of hell, and consequently “they are ridiculous because they beg the question.” How pitiful is that! Christians both Eastern and Western, the Romans, Calvinists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians of Great Britain, Arminians, etc., all assert that the punishments of hell will be eternal. Therefore, when a Manichean objects that their systems attribute conduct to God that conflicts with common notions, and when he proves this particularly by the doctrine concerning the state of the damned, does he base his objections on opinions doubted by his adversaries? Does he not base himself on what they formally teach? Is this begging the question? Is it not a ridiculous blunder to claim that he does so? Notice that Bayle, in his dispute with Le Clerc’s Origenist, never bases anything on the hypothesis of the eternity of hell.

Maximus: Le Clerc strikes me as so weak in matters of argumentation that I am completely astonished. If he had held himself to the simple title of Grammarian I would not have been as surprised by his bad logic as I was after learning that for a long time now, aside from teaching the Hebrew language, he has taught philosophy in the Arminian college, and has even published his philosophy course several times.

Themistius: Perhaps he would reason better if his passion were less fiery. What is he thinking when he continually supposes that once we hold that the eternity of hell “is completely incompatible with the idea we have of justice,” we cannot reply to an Origenist who would conclude “invincibly, that the punishments are therefore not eternal because God is just”? He should examine a little the pages from Nicole’s work, then he would see that nearly all Christians are strongly

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1 See *RBL*, section VIII *(OD III, 1006).*
2 Le Clerc, *BC X*, 412.
3 Le Clerc, *BC X*, 412–413.
4 See above, *Dialogues*, Part 1, chapter 7, 172.
persuaded that the eternal punishments of the wicked are just, even if they appear unjust according to our ordinary human ways of judging justice and mercy. That is how we would reply to the Origenist; and if he were obstinate in claiming that our ideas are the rule of God’s virtues, we would soon reduce him to absurdity.

_Maximus_: If Le Clerc did himself justice, he would praise Origenism less. He would not say that if Origenism “were true, it would save religion from the attacks of Bayle.”\(^5\) He would remember that by granting the Origenists everything Le Clerc gave them, Bayle did not fail to show that their system conflicted with common notions. Up to now, Le Clerc has not been able to parry these great blows.

_Themistius_: He denies that he renders the goodness and holiness of God problematic.\(^6\) But does he not declare that he knows not whether the punishments of the damned will be eternal, and does he not advance conjectures opposed to the common opinion of theologians concerning the eternity of these punishments?\(^7\) That is a fact he cannot deny. We know, moreover, that he establishes as an incontestable doctrine that if the conduct of God were not in conformity with the common notions we have of goodness, holiness, and justice, then God would be neither good, nor holy, nor just. Furthermore, we know that he agrees that the ordinary systems concerning the state of the damned attribute conduct to God that is in no way conformable to our common notions. He undertook to defend only Origenism against the objections of the Manicheans, and he abandoned the rest of Christianity. We must consider it certain that if he believed that the ordinary doctrine of hell agreed with common notions, then he would not have rejected it; for why would he separate himself from the whole body of Christianity? Why, when explaining the passages from Scripture concerning the state of the damned, would he abandon the literal sense that appears at once very clear, if he was not strongly persuaded that the eternal punishments are not in conformity with common notions, and consequently, remove from God all goodness, holiness, and justice? Therefore, I argue as follows:

According to Le Clerc, God would be unjust if His conduct did not conform to the notions we have of justice.

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5 Le Clerc, _BC X_, 413.
6 Le Clerc, _BC X_, 414.
7 See _RBL_, section _VI_ (_OD III_, 1001).