Fifth of Jaquelot’s Faults: He Sought a Compromise That Nobody Needed

Maximus: Let's move on to another consideration, which is that nobody needed the peace treaty that Jaquelot wanted to draw up between faith and reason, for he declares that his goal was to demonstrate “that it is not necessary to renounce reason in order to accept religion.”¹ Now, everybody already knew that those who admit the Trinity and other mysteries of the Gospel do not renounce reason at all, but on the contrary base their position on philosophical maxims that have the highest degree of evidence and certitude. Their foundation is that God can neither deceive nor be deceived, and that consequently He must always be believed at his word; and then they employ their reason to discern the true meaning of Scripture. If humbler minds cannot examine by the rules of grammar and dialectic the various meanings that can be given to the texts of the word of God, they assume that their Doctors have conducted that examination with all necessary precision.

Themistius: You make me think of something that Jaquelot said after having cited several writers who spoke of the use that ought to be made of reason in theological matters:² “If I crossed the Rubicon,” he adds, “then I crossed it in good company and without any intention of making war with religion.”³ I can assure him that aside from several ridiculous fanatics,⁴ every Christian, whether wise or ignorant, will cross the Rubicon with him, and Bayle will join the party first of all.

The Roman Catholics have a particular interest in humbling reason, since their doctrine of the Eucharist overturns several very evident philosophical

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¹ Jaquelot, ETB, 287.
² These citations are useless, since it is rather clear that all our non-Rationalist theologians recognize a wide range of uses of reason in religion. The Rationalists should have been content with this: see RQP II, cxxx (OD II, 767).
³ Jaquelot, ETB, 173.
⁴ The faction of Daniel Hoffman that wanted to prohibit the use of philosophy soon died out: see the article “Hoffman” in Bayle’s Dictionary. A certain Verdenhagen, who was infatuated with the visions of Jaques Boehm, was ridiculed for denouncing the use of philosophical reason. See his Psychologia vera, printed in Amsterdam in 1632.
principles. Nonetheless they will board Jaquelot’s boat with no hesitation. Innumerable women among them are well-enough instructed in their religion to be able to say that far from renouncing reason when they believe in transubstantiation, they make the best use of reason of all, and that it is reason that orders them to prefer over some of its most evident axioms the voice of God manifested in Scripture. If we object that it is without reason that they believe that they follow the voice of God, they will respond that there is nothing more in conformity with reason than to suppose that the promises that Jesus Christ made to His Church mean that he would never permit that it should decide in favour of lies in matters of faith. What more reasonable thing could we do, these women will say, than to accept the decisions of the Church as true, these decisions that were preceded by an examination in which reason, tradition, study, and science played such a great part? Is there anything more contrary to reason than to suppose that God did not establish on the earth a tribunal that would judge our controversies infallibly? We follow reason, therefore, when we believe in the real presence. If we pressed further, we would get into the details of the dispute, and these women could be silenced; but it would still be true that they did not claim to believe their Eucharistic mysteries without reason or against reason.

*Maximus:* A famous Protestant theologian said that if the majority of the members of the Roman Church “took some care to inspect and examine in their consciences the reasons for which they so firmly retain their belief in Transubstantiation, they would frankly confess that the principal reason is the prejudice that has preoccupied their minds since childhood, namely that to be a good Christian on this point and others, it is necessary to entirely renounce our intelligence.”

There is an ambiguity in this that only too often finds its way into discourses of this nature. The whole is slipped in for one of its parts. It is certain that innumerable theologians have said that to be a good Christian it is necessary to submit several maxims of reason to the authority of God, but they have never said that it is even necessary to abandon this maxim of reason—*God is more credible than men*—or that it is necessary to renounce our intelligence so completely that we would not preserve even this part that makes us judge that there is nothing more reasonable than to follow the voice of God in preference to several philosophical maxims.

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5 Amyraut, *De l’élévation de la foi* [On the Elevation of Faith], 12–13.