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Usbek to the same

The prohibition of divorce is not the sole cause of the depopulation of Christian countries ; the great number of eunuchs they have among them is not a less considerable cause.

I am speaking of the priests and derviches of both sexes who consecrate themselves to everlasting continence. It is among the Christians the epitome of virtue, which I do not understand about them, not knowing what a virtue is from which nothing results.

I find that their doctors manifestly contradict themselves when they say that marriage is holy, and that celibacy, which is the opposite, is even more holy. Not to mention that when it comes to precepts and fundamental dogmas, the good is always the best.

The number of these people professing celibacy is prodigious. Fathers used to condemn their children to celibacy from the cradle ; today they consecrate themselves to celibacy as early as the age of fourteen, [1] which comes to about the same thing.

This community of continence has obliterated more men than plagues and the bloodiest wars have ever done. In every religious house you see an eternal family where no one is born, and which is maintained at the expense of all the others. [2] These houses are always open like so many chasms where future generations bury themselves.

This policy is very different from that of the Romans, who established penal laws against those who rejected the laws of marriage and wanted to enjoy a liberty so contrary to the public welfare.

I am speaking to you now only of Catholic countries. In the Protestant religion everyone is entitled to beget children : it suffers neither priests nor derviches ; and if in the establishment of that religion, which brought everything back to the earliest times, its founders had not been constantly accused of intemperance, there can be little doubt that after making the practice of marriage universal, they would also have lightened its yoke, and finally removed any barrier that on this point separates the Nazarene [3] and Muhammad.

But however that may be, it is certain that religion gives the Protestants an infinite advantage over the Catholics.

I dare to say that in the present state of Europe, it is not possible for the Catholic religion to subsist five hundred years.

Before the decline in Spanish power, the Catholics were much stronger than the Protestants ; the latter gradually achieved equilibrium, and today the balance is beginning to swing in their favor. This superiority will increase by the day ; the Protestants will become richer and more powerful, and the Catholics weaker.

The Protestant countries should be and really are more populous than the Catholic ones ; whence it follows, first, that

tributes there are more considerable, because they increase in proportion to those who pay them.

Secondly, that the lands there are better cultivated. Finally, that trade flourishes more there, because there are more people who have a fortune to make, and that with more needs, they have more resources to fill them. When there is only a sufficient number of people to cultivate the land, trade necessarily perishes ; and when there is only a sufficient number to maintain trade, the cultivation of the land necessarily fails. In other words, both must fall at the same time, because one can never be intent on one without it being at the expense of the other.

In the Catholic countries, not only is the cultivation of the land abandoned, but even industry is pernicious. It consists only in learning five or six words of a dead language [4] ; once a man has that provision in his possession, he need no longer worry about his fortune : he finds in the cloister a tranquil life which in secular life would have cost him sweat and effort.

Nor is that all : the derviches hold in their hands almost all the wealth of the state. It is a society of greedy men who always take and never give back. They endlessly amass revenues to acquire capital. So much wealth becomes, so to speak, paralysed : no more circulation, no more trade, no more arts, no more manufacturing.

There is no Protestant prince who does not raise ten times much in taxes on his peoples than the Pope does on his subjects ; yet the latter are wretched, whereas the former live in plenty ; trade revives everything in one case, and monasticism spreads death everywhere in the other.

Paris this 26th day of the moon of Chahban 1718

[1] The age set since the Council of Trent was in fact sixteen.

[2] To the argument of the sterility priests, monks, and nuns, is added an economic one, often repeated later : that celibates are parasites, consumers who produce nothing.

[3] Jesus.

[4] Probably a suggestion that *Hoc est corpus meum* ('This is my body') sufficed for saying mass.