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Usbek to the same

Up until now we have spoken of the Muslim countries, and sought the reason why they were less populous than those states that were subjected to domination by the Romans ; let us now examine what has produced this effect among the Christians.

Divorce was allowed in the pagan religion, and it was forbidden to Christians. This change, which at first appeared to be of so little consequence, gradually had terrible outcomes, and such that they can hardly be believed.

Not only was all the satisfaction of marriage taken away, but also harm was done to its purpose ; by trying to tighten its bonds, they loosened them, and instead of uniting hearts, as they pretended, they separated them forever.

In such a free act, and where the heart must have such a large share, they introduced constraint, necessity, and even the fatality of destiny. They discounted the displeasures, the whims, and the unsociability of the humors ; they tried to fixate the heart, in other words what is most variable and inconstant in nature ; they attached irretrievably and without hope people weighted down by each other, and almost always badly matched ; and they acted like those tyrants who had live men bound to dead bodies. [1]

Nothing contributed more to the mutual attachment than the faculty of divorce : a husband and a wife were encouraged to bear domestic burdens patiently, knowing that it was in their power to end them ; and they often kept this power in hand their whole lives without invoking it, because of the sole consideration that they were free to do so.

It is not the same with Christians, made by their present burdens to despair of the future. Of the drawbacks of marriage they see only the duration, and so to speak their eternity : whence the disenchantments, the discords, the contempt, and it is so much lost for posterity. Scarcely are they three years into marriage before they neglect its essentials ; they spend thirty chilly years together ; internal separations come into existence that are as strong and perhaps more pernicious than if they were public ; each lives and remains autonomous : and all this to the prejudice of future generations. Soon a man disenchanted by an everlasting wife will turn to women of pleasure, a shameful trade, and so harmful to society, which without fulfilling the object of marriage represents at best only its pleasures.

If of two persons thus bound there is one who is not suited to the design of nature and the propagation of the species either by temperament or by age, they both bury the other with themselves, making the other as useless as one is oneself.

Therefore we should not be surprised if among Christians we see so many marriages supply such a small number of citizens. Divorce is abolished ; ill-assorted marriages are never patched up ; women no longer pass successively, as they did among the Romans, into the hands of several husbands, who in the process made the most they could of it.

I dare to say that if, in a republic like Lacedaemon, where the citizens were constantly constrained by singular and subtle laws, and in which there was but one family, which was the republic, it had been established that husbands should change wives every year, a countless people would have been born of it. [2]

Letter 112

It is rather difficult to understand quite what led Christians to abolish divorce. Marriage in all the nations on earth is a contract subject to all the conventions, and only those that could have weakened its purpose ought to have been banished. [3] But Christians do not at all look at marriage from this perspective, so they have great difficulty saying what it is. They do not make it consist in the pleasure of the senses ; on the contrary, as I have already said, they seem to want to banish that from marriage as much as they can ; but it is an image, a figure, and something mysterious which I do not understand. [4]

Paris this 19th day of the moon of Chahban 1718

[1] An example of the tyranny of Mezentius, which justifies the revolt of his subjects in Virgil's *Aeneid*, (VIII, v. 485-491).

[2] The faltering of Sparta, reduced to a few dozen citizens at the time of Alexander's conquest, is well known. War losses and especially a rigorous policy forbidding any restocking of the body of citizens were the principal causes.

[3] *The Spirit of Law* will in part draw the consequences : if marriage is a contract, it is not religion that should determine its statutes (XXVI, 9).

[4] An allusion to Church's "mystic body of Christ" and to Biblical comparisons between marriage and the relation of Jesus to the Church.