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Usbek to his cousin Gemchid, dervish of the brilliant monastery of Tauris

What do you think of Christians, sublime dervish ? Do you think that on judgment day they will be like the Turkish infidels, who will serve as asses to the Jews and be led by them in full trot into hell ? I know of course that they will not go to the sojourn of the prophets, and that the great Ali did not come for them. But since they did not have the good fortune to find mosques in their country, do you believe they will be condemned to eternal punishments, and that God will punish them for failing to practice a religion he has not had revealed to them ? I can tell you this, that I have often examined these Christians ; I have questioned them to see whether they had some knowledge of the great Ali who was the handsomest of all men : I have found that they had never heard of him.

They are not like those infidels whom our holy prophets had run through with swords because they refused to believe in the miracles of heaven [1] : they are more like those unfortunates who lived in the darkness of idolatry before the divine light came to illuminate the face of our great Prophet.

Moreover, if one examines their religion closely, one will find in it something like a germ of our doctrines. I have often admired the secrets of Providence, which seems to have intended thereby to prepare the way for general conversion. I have heard of a book by one of their doctors, called *Triumphant Polygamy*, [2] in which it is proven that Christians are commanded to practice polygamy. Their baptism is the image of our ritual ablutions, and Christians err only in the efficaciousness they attribute to that initial ablution, which they think ought to suffice for all the others. Their priests and monks pray, as we do, seven times a day ; they hope to go to a paradise where they will enjoy a thousand delights by means of the resurrection of the body ; they have designated fasts as we do, mortifications by which they hope to influence divine mercy ; they revere good angels, and are wary of the bad ones ; they have a holy credulity for the miracles which God performs through the ministry of his servants ; they recognize as we do the inadequacy of their desserts, and the need they have of an intercessor with God. [3] I see Muhammadanism everywhere, though I nowhere see Muhammed. Whatever we do, the truth escapes, and always pierces the darkness that surrounds it. A day will come when the Eternal One will see none but true believers on the earth [4] : time which consumes everything will destroy errors as well ; all men will marvel to find themselves under the same standard ; everything, even the Law, will be consumed. The divine prototypes will be taken from the earth and borne into the celestial archives.

Paris this 20th day of the moon of Zilhagé 1713

[1] Chardin cites the eleven miracles of Muhammed that are incorporated in the Muslim calendar (VII, 444-448).

[2] Johann Leyser, *Polygamia triumphatrix, id est Discursus politicus de polygamia, auctore Theophilo Aletheo* (Londini Scanorum 1682). Apparently Montesquieu did not own this book, but it was mentioned very critically by Bayle (DHC, "Lyserus" and note A of "Lamech" ; see also *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* for April 1685).

[3] For Christians, this expression evokes Christ ; the Muslim equivalent would be Muhammed the "messenger" or "apostle sent from God" (Chardin, VII, preface).

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[4] Chardin mentions the theory of a thirteenth imam, who is to take the place of the "twelfth and last imam or successor of Muhammed," who had disappeared in the year 296 of the Hegira.