

FROM CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS TO ENLIGHTENED DEISM: THE CASE OF JACQUES ABBADIE (1656-1727)

Jacques Abbadie's reputation in eighteenth-century France is typical of the fate of all Christian apologists in that Enlightened age: he is at once admired, imitated, ridiculed, and dismissed.¹ To those who share his views, such as the Abbé Houtteville, Abbadie's *Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne* (1684) is both 'éclatant' and 'excellent', 'un modèle à quiconque travaillera dans les mêmes vuës'.² Writers who did follow his lead are legion, and it is not an overstatement to say that Jacques Abbadie is the father of Christian apologetics in the eighteenth century.³ It is perhaps because of his influence that Voltaire read the *Traité de la vérité*, refuted it on occasion, and ridiculed its author as one who 'défend quelquefois la vérité avec les armes du mensonge' and who 'est mort en démente à Dublin'.⁴ It is Diderot, however, in his *Pensées philosophiques*, who points out the weakness of Abbadie's apologetic and all those it inspired. To associate philosophical and theological proof, as Abbadie does, may be, according to his admirers, to answer the objections of atheists and deists alike (Houtteville, *La Religion chrétienne*, 1. ccix) but to Diderot, as I shall show, it serves only to prove the superiority of natural over revealed religion.⁵ In other words, the *Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne* is an exercise in futility: it serves only to prove what it seeks to refute.

In the twentieth century, while critics do not necessarily share Diderot's bias, they tend, broadly speaking, to be in sympathy with his view of Abbadie. Typical of its time, the *Traité de la vérité* is informed by the notion of a progressive revelation. Nature and grace collaborate, then, to prove the existence of God, the superiority of natural religion over atheism and superstition, the validity of Judaism, and finally,

¹ *Pensées philosophiques*, §lix, in *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, ed. by J. Assézat; see, for example, Diderot: 'J'ai lu quelques Abbadie, Huet, et les autres. Je connais suffisamment les preuves de ma religion, et je conviens qu'elles sont grandes: mais le seraientelles cent fois davantage, le christianisme ne me serait point encore démontré' (1st edn, 20 vols 1875-77 (Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1966), 1. 153).

² A. C. F. Houtteville, *La Religion chrétienne prouvée par les faits*, 3 vols (1st edn 1722) (Paris: Dupuis, 1740), 1. ccix, ccxi.

³ J. Ehrard, *L'Idée de nature en France dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (1st edn 1963) (Genève: Slatkine; Paris: Champion, 1981), p. 423, n. 7, p. 426, n. 1, and R. Pomeau, *La Religion de Voltaire* (1st edn 1969) (Paris: Nizet, 1974), pp. 51-52. On apologetics in eighteenth-century France, see A. Monod, *De Pascal à Chateaubriand: les défenseurs français du christianisme de 1670 à 1802* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970); R. Palmer, *Catholics and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1939); W. Everdell, *Christian Apologetics in France, 1790-1790* (New York: Mellen Press, 1987); S. Albertan-Coppola, 'L'apologetique catholique en France à l'âge des Lumières', *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 205 (1988), 151-80. To my knowledge no detailed study exists of Abbadie's influence on eighteenth-century religious thought. The history of the editions and reprints of his work provides an insight into the extent of his popularity. To date I have traced twenty-three in French (the last eighteenth-century edition in 1771), two in English (the second in 1810), four in German (the last in 1777-78), one in Dutch (1751), and one in Italian (I have yet to see a copy of this edition). The German editions in the earlier part of the century are particularly interesting, since Abbadie's text has been heavily annotated. For Abbadie's biography, see R. Whelan, 'The Dean of Killaloe', *Lias*, 14 (1987), 101-17.

⁴ Voltaire, *Défense de M. le duc de Beinsbrucke*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by L. Moland, 52 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1877-85), xxxiii, 550. See also Voltaire's letter to E. N. Damilaville, 19 novembre 1765 (D12989) and to A. Morellet, 22 janvier 1768 (D14695), *Correspondence and Related Documents*, ed. by T. Besterman, in *The Complete Works of Voltaire* (85-135), 51 vols (Genève and Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-77), 113/xxxix, 400, and 117/xxxliii, 62, and R. Pomeau, *La Religion de Voltaire*, p. 181.

⁵ See Diderot, *Pensées philosophiques*, §lxii, in *Œuvres complètes*, 1. 155, and Ehrard, *L'Idée de nature*, p. 450, and below, notes 35-37. This is not to argue that Diderot believes in the validity of natural religion. He seems in this passage merely to turn one of the standard apologetic arguments against itself.

as the culmination of the whole process, the supremacy of Christianity. While critics are mindful that the exposition of natural religion is not to be confused with deism, those who have read the *Traité* are agreed, to quote Pomeau, that 'le déisme était en germe dans l'apologie d'Abbadie'.⁶ In other words, although Abbadie and other rationalist apologists of his generation are not themselves deists, their work contains elements of what will later become Enlightened deism. Traditionally, the cause of this so-called 'pre-Enlightenment' thought is sought in the great philosophical systems of the seventeenth century, notably those of Spinoza and Malebranche.⁷ Cartesianism alone, however, cannot explain the drift towards 'reasonable Christianity' which characterizes this period.⁸ Not only is the diffusion of Cartesianism extremely complex,⁹ but thinkers such as Abbadie also pride themselves on their eclecticism, an eclecticism further complicated in his case by a Protestant education. It is this which makes Abbadie something of a test case for the history of ideas. The religion of the early Enlightenment did not evolve in a linear manner, it is rather the result of a complex web of intellectual forces which eighteenth-century thinkers 'ordered, sifted, developed, and clarified' (Cassirer, p. vi). A study of some of Abbadie's proofs of Christianity within their socio-historical context will, I believe, lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the origins of the Enlightenment. By restoring some of the complexity, we shall gain access to the 'deeper strata' (Cassirer, p. viii), indeed, to the theological origins of Enlightened deism.

If, for the sake of argument, we take deism to mean belief in a god or first cause, known by natural revelation, venerated by natural religion, and obeyed by natural law,¹⁰ then there is much in the *Traité de la vérité* to confirm the view of Abbadie as a precursor of the Enlightenment. In the first part of the apologetic, the challenge of atheism leads him to stress the natural knowledge of a supreme being available to all mankind. He neglects none of the standard arguments for the existence of God, since his assumption that knowledge is both acquired and innate¹¹ allows him to use both scholastic and Cartesian proofs of the divinity.¹² Although the argument from

⁶ Pomeau, *La Religion de Voltaire*, p. 160. This position is also held by B. Toranne, *L'Idée de nature en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978), pp. 265-66, but rejected by C. J. Betts, *Early Deism in France: From the So-Called 'deistes' of Lyon (1564) to Voltaire's 'Lettres philosophiques' (1754)* (The Hague, Boston, MA, and Lancaster: Nijhoff, 1984), pp. 6, 83-85. As will become clear below, I disagree with Betts's analysis of the significance of Abbadie's treatise.

⁷ For example, G. Lanson, *Origines et premières manifestations de l'esprit philosophique dans la littérature française de 1675 à 1748* (1st edn 1907-10) (New York: Franklin, 1973); E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. by F. C. A. Pettergrove (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 22, and passim; Betts, *Early Deism*, pp. 41, 77-78; and Tocanne, *L'Idée de nature*, pp. 271-73, and passim.

⁸ See Ehrhard, who studies the general drift from the 'Dieu d'Abraham' to the 'Dieu des philosophes' in the religious thought of the day (*L'Idée de nature*, pp. 402 and pp. 399-407).

⁹ M. Heyd, *Between Orthodox and the Enlightenment: Jean-Robert Chouart and the Introduction of Cartesian Science in the Academy of Geneva* (The Hague, Boston, MA, London, and Jerusalem: Nijhoff, 1982), provides a classic study of the eclectic adoption of Cartesian scientific positions.

¹⁰ Of course, this is merely a working definition, deliberately chosen to avoid the pitfalls inseparable from a more complex treatment of the subject. For more subtle definitions, see Betts, *Early Deism*, pp. 3-18; A. O. Lovejoy, 'The Parallel of Deism and Classicism', *Modern Philology*, 20 (1931-32), 281-99; S. L. Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists* (1st edn 1930) (Oxford: Marston Press, 1963); A. R. Winnett, 'Were the Deists "Deists"?', *Church Quarterly Review*, 161 (1960), 70-77.

¹¹ Jacques Abbadie, *Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne* (henceforth *Traité*), 2 vols, 3rd edn (Rotterdam: Leers, 1689), I, i, 14, pp. 107-08. All references are to this edition and are to volume, part, chapter, and page.

¹² For some of Abbadie's contemporaries, these two kinds of proof were mutually exclusive; see A. C. Kors, "'A First Being, of Whom We have no Proof': The Preamble of Atheism in Early Modern France", in *Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany*, ed. by A. C. Kors and P. J. Korshin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), pp. 17-68.

general consent was already partly discredited by travel literature (Kors, pp. 19, 21), Abbadie appeals to 'le sentiment que les hommes ont communément de l'existence de Dieu' as an example of 'quelque proportion naturelle qui est entre cette premiere verité & nôtre entendement'.¹³ This notion of an innate knowledge of God is complemented in the *Traité de la vérité* by the standard arguments: that is to say, *a posteriori* proofs derived from our sense knowledge of the world. Abbadie argues from the sequence of cause and effect in the world to the existence of a first cause (for example, *Traité*, t. i. 4, p. 28; t. i. 5, p. 35; t. ii. 2, p. 138), from the fact of motion to a prime mover (*Traité*, t. i. 5, pp. 30–35), and from the order and symmetry of the world, the adaptation of means to ends, to the existence of a 'Sagesse qui preside à la conduite de l'Univers' (*Traité*, t. i. 4, pp. 20–25; the quotation is from page 25). These, to Abbadie's mind, compelling arguments from cosmology, design, and teleology constitute a natural proof 'exposée à la veüe de toute sorte de personnes' (*Traité*, t. i. 4, p. 25; see also, t. i. 4, pp. 20, 22, 29), which the apologist completes, for the sake of his more philosophical readers, with a version of the ontological argument. Abbadie reasons from the idea of a perfect being to its real and necessary existence, since 'un estre qui est infiny, & qui a toutes les perfections, doit avoir celle d'exister necessairement & par luy-même' (*Traité*, t. i. 6, p. 45; see also, t. i. 6, pp. 40–41, 58). A similar type of argument allows him to establish the immateriality and immortality of the soul (*Traité*, t. i. 6, pp. 56–64). Thus whether he uses Thomist (or *a posteriori*) arguments, or Cartesian (or *a priori*) arguments, Abbadie demonstrates a uniform confidence in human reason, that 'lumiere naturelle qui ne nous trompe point' (*Traité*, t. i. 2, p. 6; for a definition of 'lumiere naturelle', see *Traité*, t. ii. 8, p. 181), and in its ability to achieve certain knowledge of the divinity. This rational knowledge of God constitutes, to his mind, a 'Revelation naturelle' (*Traité*, t. iv. 14, p. 544; t. ii. 1, p. 4 for two of the many references), available to all mankind. By conflating the proofs of the existence of God with natural revelation, Abbadie realizes the moral purpose of his apologetic: he relegates the atheist to the level of the brute beast, who has not reason enough to see God. But it is a costly victory, since his argument also succeeds in establishing the validity of a revelation made to mankind, not by supernatural manifestations but by the independent working of human reason.¹⁴

The autonomy of human reason is also central to Abbadie's demonstration of the necessary connexion between natural revelation and natural religion and

¹³ *Traité*, t. i. 2, pp. 9, 11. Abbadie is quite adamant that this kind of knowledge of God does not come from education. Consequently, when confronted with accounts of atheistic peoples, he dismisses them not as uneducated in Western values but as less than human. The passage is worth quoting because it is a typical example of the attitude which was later to yield the 'missionary colonialism' of the nineteenth century: 'Car pour l'exemple de quelques Sauvages, qui ne [...] ignorent [Dieu] que parce que la raison ne se déploie point en eux, il ne sauroit tirer à conséquence. Ceux qui n'exercent point leur raison sont semblables à ceux qu'on en ont point. Il faut les mettre au rang des enfans, qui vivent sans reflexion, & qui ne paroissent capables que des actions animales. Et comme l'on ne doit point conclurre, qu'il n'est pas naturel à des gens raisonnables de chercher les moyens de se garantir des injures de l'air, parce qu'il y a des Sauvages qui ne s'en mettent point en peine; on ne doit pas inferer aussi de l'abaissement de leur esprit stupide & abruty, qui ne tire aucune conséquence de ce qu'il voit, qu'il n'est naturel à l'homme de connoître la sagesse d'un Dieu qui agit dans l'Univers' (*Traité*, t. i. 2, p. 11).

¹⁴ See, for example, the following passage in *Traité*: 'C'est Dieu [...] qui est le principe de la connoissance que nous avons de son existence, parce que d'un côté il a gravé les caracteres de sa sagesse dans cet Univers, & que de l'autre il a seulement formé nôtre esprit, qu'il ne peut s'empêcher de connoître l'existence de son Createur à ces caracteres' (t. ii. 6, pp. 160–61). See also t. ii. 4, pp. 152–53; t. ii. 5, p. 155; t. ii. 6, p. 166.

morality.¹⁵ In the *Traité de la vérité*, the religious and moral instincts are innate and universal: they are a rational response to the initiative taken by the divinity, who is revealed in the natural world (*Traité*, t. i. 11, pp. 88, 90; t. ii. 8, pp. 180–81; t. iii. 18, p. 360). The religious response, according to Abbadie, is expressed in four ways: praise, thanksgiving, trust, and prayer. These four religious duties are 'un devoir naturel & indispensable' whereby man acknowledges the 'Sagesse souveraine', whose beneficent government of the universe and providential supervision of human life place mankind under an obligation to worship (*Traité*, t. ii. 4, pp. 152–54; t. ii. 5, pp. 155–57). This general attitude of dependence on the supreme being, which Abbadie sees as the essence of natural religion, is incomplete, in his view, without a further expression of human gratitude: namely, the moral life (*Traité*, t. ii. 5, p. 157). While in the *Traité de la vérité* he attributes a natural sociability to mankind,¹⁶ he argues that this 'mutuelle bienveillance' is not sufficient to stem 'les effets de la cupidité', which make people act out of self-interest. Thus, human weakness is fortified by a 'loy naturelle': that is to say, by 'certaines maximes d'équité & de justice, dont nous connoissons la vérité naturellement'. He continues by outlining some of the rules of this natural morality: 'que nous devons faire pour les autres ce que nous voudrions que les autres fissent pour nous: qu'il faut rendre à chacun ce qui luy appartient: qu'on ne doit faire tort à personne' (*Traité*, t. i. 11, pp. 88, 90; t. ii. 8, pp. 180–85; the quotation is from page 90). These simple and universal moral principles are made more effective by the conscience, a natural faculty in man, which causes him to fear the consequences of a possible transgression of natural law (*Traité*, t. ii. 6, p. 161; see also t. i. 11, p. 90). At this point, it is difficult to appreciate the part played by Abbadie's understanding of natural religion and morality in an apologetic for the Christian religion. His insistence on the natural instinct to worship and obey the supreme being seems to make mankind self-sufficient: what use are supernatural revelation and grace if unaided nature can meet the religious and moral requirements of the divinity?

In fact, Abbadie argues for a two-phase development in the religious history of mankind: natural revelation belongs to the first and supernatural intervention to what he sees as the second phase. There is a necessary link between the two, given that the state of nature, as he describes it, has an ambiguous status. Repeatedly, in the *Traité de la vérité*, Abbadie refers to the futility of natural religion which, despite his sometime eulogy, he presents as unable to check the abuse men make of it, as a result of their moral corruption (*Traité*, t. ii. 7, pp. 167–77; t. ii. 10, p. 203; t. iii. 1, pp. 206–07; t. iii. 3, p. 218; t. iv. 1, p. 424). Moreover, although rational knowledge of God is universal, disparity of belief and the abominations of paganism arose, according to Abbadie, because people allowed their senses and imagination to dominate their reason (*Traité*, t. ii. 7, pp. 167–77; t. ii. 10, p. 203; t. iii. 1, pp. 206–07; t. iii. 3, p. 218; t. iv. 1, p. 424). Similarly, although natural law is known and shared

¹⁵ In presenting natural revelation, religion, and morality as separate if interconnected phenomena, I am making Abbadie's thought seem clearer than it actually is. Sometimes he separates the three phenomena (see *Traité*, t. ii. 6, pp. 160–61; t. ii. 6, p. 166; t. ii. 8, p. 180), but he more often conflates either natural revelation and religion (see *Traité*, t. ii. 4, pp. 152–54; t. ii. 5, p. 159), or natural religion and natural law (see *Traité*, t. i. 11, pp. 88, 90).

¹⁶ In *Traité*, t. i. 11, p. 88, Abbadie expressly rejects Hobbes's argument of social origins in favour of 'des causes d'union & d'intelligence' 'au dedans de nous'. However, in his later *Défense de la nation britannique* (London: La Veuve Mallet, 1692), he is inclined to give a Hobbesian account of the state of nature (see R. Whelan, 'The Political Theory of Jacques Abbadie', *Leis*, 14 (1987), 143–56 (p. 148)).

by all, its effect is undermined because reason itself 'se laissoit corrompre par l'interêt, & prononçoit toujours en faveur des passions' (*Traité*, I. ii. 7, pp. 174-75; the quotation is from page 174). Predictably, Abbadie attributes this 'corruption qui avoit altéré la nature' to 'le péché originel' (*Traité*, II. iv. 11, p. 483; I. ii. 8, p. 183). Original sin, then, is, for Abbadie, a derogation in the authority of reason which governed the religious and moral life of mankind in the state of nature. Consequently, it is the Fall which creates the need for supernatural intervention in the form of the Judaic-Christian revelation. But this 'seconde Revelation' (*Traité*, I. iii. 5, p. 239), does not replace natural religion; it is added to its precepts, in order to fortify mankind against his own corruption. So, although, for Abbadie, the perfect state of nature seems to exist only prior to the Fall, a lesser version continues afterwards, although it is impaired by original sin. In fact, the examples of Plato and Socrates prove that man's fallen reason still provides him with 'une idée véritable, quoy qu'imparfaite, de la Divinité', and the ability to '[s]'attacher] à la pratique de la vertu, parce que [...] elle est agreable à cette Souveraine Essence'.¹⁷ Consequently, not only is Judaism presented as a 'retablissement' of natural religion but 'la Religion de Jesus-Christ est celuy de la droiture, de la justice, & de la Religion naturelle dans la pureté & la simplicité qui luy est propre, & qui est rétablie par la charité' (*Traité*, II. ii. 14, p. 139). While elsewhere in the *Traité de la vérité*, Christ is presented as the mediator who saves mankind from sin (*Traité*, II. ii. 7, pp. 74-78, where Jesus is contrasted with the Sages of Antiquity, and II. iii. 1, p. 183, where he is portrayed as the suffering Saviour), here he is presented as the restorer of that rational revelation, religion and morality, which were the property of mankind in the state of nature (*Traité*, II. iv. 11, pp. 483-85). It is this intellectualist view of religion, based on a notion of the continuity between the state of nature and the dispensation of grace, which eighteenth-century thinkers were not slow to exploit.

Abbadie's assimilation of nature and grace suggests, however, a complex network of influences which have more to do with philosophical and theological developments in seventeenth-century France than with eighteenth-century free thought. First, while in 1684 he claims that 'je ne suis [pas] partisan [...] de Descartes' (*Traité*, I. i. 5, p. 30, although the statement is made in the context of Cartesian science) meaning that he is not a committed disciple, ten years later he will freely admit 'je consens de passer pour Cartésien'.¹⁸ The *Traité de la vérité* represents, then, the early stages of his Cartesianism, where the influence of Descartes and more specifically Malebranche¹⁹ is present but by no means dominates Abbadie's thought. The use of the ontological argument speaks for itself, but the traces of Cartesian cosmology and epistemology are equally telling. Thus, he shares Malebranche's insistence on the order of the universe, his finalism: that is to say, the view

¹⁷ *Traité*, I. ii. 2, pp. 139-40; I. iii. 3, p. 219; I. ii. 3, p. 151. Other passages in the *Traité* express a less favourable attitude to the Ancient pagans and seem to be inspired by a more Augustinian reading of the past (for example, *Traité*, I. iii. 1, p. 206; II. iii. 7, p. 292; II. iv. 2, p. 359), yet another instance of Abbadie's eclecticism.

¹⁸ The statement occurs in Abbadie's letter to a friend on 20 January 1694, printed in Archimbaud, *Notions recueillies de pièces fugitives d'histoire, de littérature*, 4 vols (Paris: Lamesle, 1717), III, 63. Although Abbadie presents himself as a Cartesian here, he also retains his independence: 'Je consens de passer pour Cartésien [...] mais je ne crois point qu'on me voye souffrir le martyre pour Descartes personnellement. Je m'en sers quand il me semble qu'il a raison; mais sans opiniâtreté, sans entêtement.'

¹⁹ Although Abbadie does not quote Malebranche, the similarity between some of their arguments seems to suggest that Abbadie had read, or at least consulted, the *De la recherche de la vérité* (1674-75), the *Traité de la nature et de la grâce* (1680), and perhaps the *Méditations chrétiennes* (1683) before he wrote his *Traité*.

that the glory of God is the ultimate purpose of the creation²⁰ and his explanation of the problem of evil by reference to 'les loix generales de la Nature' (*Traité*, i. i. 4, pp. 25–28; see Tocanne, *L'Idée de nature*, pp. 80–96). Moreover, while Abbadie's epistemology is heterogeneous, his conception of original sin as an epistemological disorder, which allows the imagination, the senses, and the passions to dominate the intellect, is a reworking of certain key ideas in Cartesianism.²¹ Malebranche also has an idea of natural morality, which is part of his vision of all things in God, a notion that the Fall corrupts but does not fundamentally destroy the natural order, and a rational view of the Word as 'la Raison universelle', who, as Christ, is the occasional cause of God's grace to mankind,²² all of which recur, to a greater or lesser extent, in Abbadie's treatise. In the final analysis, however, the particular borrowings are less important than the general approach which he shares with Malebranche: both thinkers rationalize theology and tend to reduce Christianity to a reasonable and natural religion (Tocanne, *L'Idée de nature*, p. 265). This characteristic is not, of course, exclusive to Malebranche. Given, then, that Abbadie also has recourse to *a posteriori* proofs, whose validity is vigorously contested by his fellow Cartesians (Kors, "'A First Being'", *passim*), we must look elsewhere in order to grasp the full implications of his position.

The *Traité de la vérité*, as Abbadie himself indicates on occasion, is inspired largely, although not exclusively, by a long tradition of French Protestant apologetic.²³ In fact, it has been said that he merely repeats the Huguenot Du Plessis-Mornay's *Vérité de la religion chrétienne*, an extremely influential apologetic published in 1581 (Laplanche, *L'Évidence*, p. 7). If we take Mornay's treatise as typical of the influence of Abbadie's reading on his own apologetic, it seems that he has been influenced by Mornay's arguments in support of the possibility of natural knowledge of the divinity. Mornay is a thinker marked by neo-Platonism and consequently by the notion of the *prisca theologia*, the idea that 'there were partial pre-Christian revelations other than that given to the Jews'.²⁴ He asserts not only that natural reason can know the existence of God but that this natural knowledge is available to all mankind. Moreover, the purpose of his treatise is to prove that all the main doctrines of the Judaeo-Christian revelation were known in a veiled way to what he calls 'la sagesse humaine'.²⁵ Abbadie's references to Plato and Socrates's knowledge of God

²⁰ For Malebranche, see Tocanne, *L'Idée de nature*, p. 75; *Traité*, i. i. 12, pp. 96–98. None the less Abbadie, like Malebranche, also advances a limited anthropocentric finalism (*Traité*, i. i. 4, pp. 24–25), a notion which is totally alien to Descartes's thought. On this, see W. von Leyden, *Seventeenth-Century Metaphysics* (London: Duckworth, 1968), p. 12.

²¹ See Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme*, and Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité*, for Cartesian epistemology, and A. Levi, *French Moralists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), for a treatment of the wider context of seventeenth-century epistemology.

²² Malebranche, *Traité de la nature*, i. i, n. xliv, xlvi (Paris: Vrin, 1976), p. 12, 105, 107. See also W. H. Trapnell, *The Treatment of Christian Doctrine by Philosophers of Natural Light from Descartes to Berkeley*, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 252 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1988), pp. 65–71, 207–09.

²³ On seventeenth-century Protestant apologetics, see F. Laplanche, *L'Évidence du Dieu chrétien: religion, culture et société dans l'apologétique protestante de la France classique (1576–1670)* (Strasbourg: Association des publications de la Faculté de théologie protestante de Strasbourg, 1983). Abbadie was also influenced by Pascal; on this see A. McKenna, *De Pascal à Voltaire: le rôle des "Pensées" de Pascal dans l'histoire des idées entre 1670 et 1734*, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 276, 277 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1990).

²⁴ D. P. Walker, 'The *prisca theologia* in France', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 17 (1954), 204–59 (p. 210, and *passim*).

²⁵ Philippe Du Plessis-Mornay, *De la vérité de la religion chrétienne contre les Athées, Epicuriens, Payens, Juifs, Mahomédists, & autres Infidèles*, 2nd edn (Anvers, 1582), pp. 13–14, 160; see also Walker, 'The *prisca theologia*', p. 211. On Du Plessis-Mornay, see R. Patry, *Philippe Duplessis-Mornay: Un huguenot homme d'État 1549–1623* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1933).

place him quite definitely within this more liberal theological tradition which allows for the possibility of partial revelations to the Gentiles. There is, however, a world of difference between his dilute version and Mornay's tightly reasoned approach. Not only are all the neo-Platonic overtones missing from Abbadie's treatise, he also shows little of Mornay's caution when affirming the possibility of natural knowledge of God. As a Calvinist, Mornay is clear that natural theology and religion are futile for salvation, are capable of saying only what God is not, and are too often misled by imagination into idolatry (DuPlessis-Mornay, *De la vérité*, pp. 483–86 and Walker, 'The *prisca theologia*', pp. 211–12). While Abbadie also professes to hold a Calvinist theology of grace, and can also be negative about post-lapsarian natural religion, his confidence in the admittedly limited power of reason after the Fall, together with his idea of '[la] proportion [de la Religion Chrétienne] avec la Religion naturelle' (*Traité*, II, iv, 11, p. 483), take him closer to naturalism than to Mornay's neo-Platonic Calvinism. So, while Abbadie's reading, whether of Mornay (or, for example, Pascal), helps to account for some of the ideas and something of the flavour of his treatise, it does not provide an overall framework which could give coherence to the eclecticism of his thought.

To learn how an individual comes by his often contradictory ideas, as is the case of Abbadie in the *Traité de la vérité*, the historian of ideas must consider the history of his education.²⁶ Like many a young Protestant of his day, Abbadie's *peregrinatio academica* took him to three of the major Protestant Academies: Montauban and Saumur in the 1670s, and finally Sedan in 1680, where he took his doctorate (Whelan, 'The Dean of Killaloe', p. 210). All third-level Protestant education in seventeenth-century France was dominated by Aristotelianism, an intellectual tradition once associated with Christianity which encourages the harmonious interaction between reason and faith visible in Abbadie and in the Protestant apologetic tradition. Not only that, Abbadie's insistence on the order and finalism of nature, on the validity of natural law, and his use of Thomist or *a posteriori* proofs of the existence of God are all an integral part of the scholastic tradition (Laplanche, *L'Évidence du Dieu chrétien*, pp. 113–17, and *passim*, and Kors, "'A First Being'" *passim*). We can be sure that he was exposed to that tradition not only because the teaching style at Montauban, where he studied theology from 1673–1675, was scholastic in orientation²⁷ but also because one of his professors, Théophile Arbussy, was an eclectic Thomist-cum-Augustinian in theology,²⁸ as Abbadie was later to be. A manuscript source also reveals that during his time at Montauban he studied the thought of Suárez,²⁹ the Jesuit scholastic, whose

²⁶ F. Baumer, 'Intellectual History and its Problems', *Journal of Modern History*, 21 (1949), 191–203 (p. 201), quoted by Heyd, *Between Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment*, p. 1.

²⁷ See M. Nicolas, *Histoire de l'ancienne Académie protestante de Montauban (1598–1659) et de Puylaurens (1660–1685)* (1st edn 1885) (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1971); J.-P. Pittion, 'Les Académies réformées de l'Édit de Nantes à la Révocation', in *La Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes et le protestantisme français en 1685. Actes du colloque de Paris (15–19 octobre 1985)*, ed. by R. Zuber and L. Theis (Paris: Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français, 1986), pp. 187–205 (p. 194).

²⁸ There is some uncertainty as to whether Abbadie studied philosophy or theology at Montauban-Puylaurens (see Whelan, 'The Dean of Killaloe', p. 102, and n. 7, p. 114). However, given that Arbussy joined the staff of the Academy in 1673–74 and gave his inaugural address in 1674, Abbadie could not have been unaware of his ideas. Furthermore, the theological tradition at Montauban was eclectic before Arbussy came to teach there. See Nicolas, *Histoire de l'ancienne Académie de Montauban*, pp. 65–75, 217–19.

²⁹ It was Jean La Placette, Abbadie's pastor and teacher in Nav, his home town, who introduced him to Suárez; see Michel David to Louis Tronchin, 2 avril 1701 de Killenny, *Archives Tronchin*, 48, f° 134^v. Bibliothèque publique et Universitaire de Genève. I am grateful to M. Olivier Fatjo for drawing my attention to this letter.

more optimistic view of the effects of the Fall leads him to argue, as does Abbadie, that post-lapsarian man can both know and love God naturally and know and obey natural law.³⁰ Although the views of Suárez and the scholastic approach to theology was inimical to the teaching style at Saumur³¹ and in fact Abbadie proclaims his independence from Salmurian theology, it would seem that he did integrate some of what he learned there with the intellectual baggage he had already acquired. His assimilation of the two systems was facilitated by their shared intellectualist approach to religious belief. The Saumur school is famous for its insistence on the role of the intellect in conversion, a view which, by reinforcing his Thomism, may well be partly responsible for Abbadie's idea of Christianity as a restoration of 'la raison dans ses droits' (*Traité*, II. iv. 3, p. 367). More importantly, however, Salmurian covenant theology substitutes for the traditional Calvinist notion of two covenants (one of works (before the Fall) and the other of grace (after the Fall)) a concept of three covenants, of nature, law, and grace. As later in Abbadie's thought, Amyraut, one of Saumur's leading thinkers, associates direct knowledge of God and natural law with the state of nature, and views the three covenants as a progressive revelation, as 'three steps in God's revelatory process, each step representing an advance upon the preceding one'.³² The importance of reason, the high view of natural knowledge and morality, and the notion of a progressive revelation: these and other ideas make up the intellectual framework which Abbadie acquired through his education. As a framework it is eclectic and plastic enough to accommodate some of the ideas of Malebranche or Pascal, to name but two who influenced him, but once deprived of its socio-historical context, as it already is in the *Traité de la vérité*, it is also naturalistic and rationalistic enough to make the apologetic a seedbed of deism.

What, then, can we learn from this exercise in contextualization? Restoring 'early modern minds to the fullness of their learned world' (the phrase is Kors, "'A First Being'", p. 18) allows us to make a distinction crucial to the history of intellectual influence: namely, the distinction between intent and impact. Had he been asked to justify his exposition of natural religion, Abbadie would undoubtedly have pointed to his mentors and the great Christian writers from whom he draws his inspiration. His ideas may have heterodox implications, but they are part of a well-established religious tradition and are presented, together with other arguments, in defence of Christianity. In fact, it is these other arguments which show the first signs of strain and of the discrepancy between his intention and his influence. Proof of the Judaeo-Christian revelation, in Christian but especially in Reformed apologetics of this period, is inseparable from proof of the reliability of Scripture. Abbadie is particularly anxious, in this respect, to answer the objections of Hobbes and Spinoza. Either ill-equipped or reluctant, despite his education at Saumur,³³ to

³⁰ See Tocanne, *L'Idée de nature*, pp. 251-52. Suárez is also one of the key thinkers in the development of the concept of natural law; see Francisco Suárez, *Selections from Three Works*, ed. and trans. by J. B. Scott, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press; London: Milford, 1944), II, 252-272.

³¹ See B. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969) and Pittion, 'Les Académies réformées', *passim*.

³² Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, p. 145; F. Laplanche, *L'Écriture, le sacré et l'histoire. Erudits et politiques protestants devant la Bible en France au XVII^e siècle* (Amsterdam and Maarssen: APA-Holland University Press, 1986), pp. 387-88.

³³ Saumur is famous for its Biblical criticism; see Laplanche, *L'Écriture, le sacré et l'histoire*, *passim*.

match their biblical criticism, he contents himself with the standard moral arguments for the truth of Scripture: for example, that neither the whole Jewish nation nor the early apostles and disciples could conspire in a lie. Even the Abbé Houtteville (who admired the *Traité de la vérité*) sees Abbadie's neglect of 'la Critique' as a fatal flaw in his argument, indicating that not only was his apologetic already out of date by 1722 but his philosophical proofs were alone held to be valid in the debate with unbelievers.³⁴ We have Diderot to thank for pointing up the inherent weakness of these same proofs in his treatise *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle*. There, universal consent becomes a proof not of Christianity but of the superiority of natural religion, for all men agree as to its precepts.³⁵ Furthermore, Abbadie's view of Christianity as a restoration of natural religion and law is for Diderot a proof that Revelation has nothing to add to nature (Diderot, *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle*, §iii, in *Œuvres complètes*, I, 262). Finally, Abbadie's contention that natural religion and morality are inadequate, given the power of the imagination and the passions since the Fall, is reversed by Diderot against Christianity: the 'absurdities' of the Christian mysteries become one more example of the kind of 'extravagance' which mankind persist in adding to the perfect 'voix de la nature', which alone leads mankind in the path of true religion and virtue (Diderot, *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle*, §v, in *Œuvres complètes*, I, 263-64). In a word, if God has revealed himself directly, what need has man of supernatural revelation or institutionalized religion?³⁶ In his *Traité de la vérité*, Jacques Abbadie has succeeded in proving for future generations the superiority of theism and of rational religion; from there it is but a step to the deism of the Enlightenment.³⁷

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³⁴ In the 1722 edition of his work, Houtteville praises Abbadie's treatise, referring to 'le cours universel dont il jouit encore' and 'sa manière de composer [qui] est encore sur le vrai ton, intéressante, pure, animée' (p. clxxxviii). While he is more reserved about the third volume of the *Traité* (*Traité de la divinité de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*), which Abbadie added to the other two in 1689, Houtteville is quite sure, at this time, that Abbadie's work is in tune with the attitudes and style of early eighteenth-century thinkers. By 1740, however, in the second edition of *La Religion chrétienne prouvée par les faits*, he argues that Abbadie's neglect of biblical criticism has let the side down: 'Il est essentiel de ne pas négliger [la Critique] dans une dispute de l'espèce de celle que nous avons avec les ennemis de la foy Chrétienne; car tous ne l'attaquent pas avec les mêmes armes.' In other words, Abbadie's moral arguments for the truth of the Bible are dismissed as incapable of answering the 'Incrédule', although Houtteville continues to praise his abilities in the area 'de la seule réflexion & du raisonnement' (pp. ccx, ccxi).

³⁵ Diderot, *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle*, §ix, in *Œuvres complètes*, I, 265; the author is referring to the whole apologetic tradition but, given Abbadie's influence, it seems appropriate to apply Diderot's arguments to the *Traité*.

³⁶ Abbadie does, however, argue for the necessity of public worship of God: 'C'est d'ailleurs un devoir naturel & indispensable à l'égard de l'homme, de glorifier celui qui luy a fait tant de bien. [...] Mais si chacun de nous est obligé de s'acquiescer en son particulier de ces devoirs, il n'est pas moins certain que nous sommes dans l'obligation de les pratiquer en public' (*Traité*, I, ii, 4, pp. 152-53).

³⁷ This paper was delivered at the 31st Annual Conference of the Society for French Studies, 30 March-1 April 1990.