

*[This article, from the papers of Gordon H. Clark, was found at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary, Clark Library. It appears to be Clark's translation of part of the writings of Nicholas Malebranche, a French Philosopher, whom Clark admired specifically for his theory of Divine Illumination.]*

The Search for Truth by Malebranche

The Preface

The spirit of man is by its nature placed between its creator and bodily creatures ... But as the great elevation by which it is above all material things does not prevent it from being united to them, ... so the infinite distance between the sovereign Being and the human spirit does not prevent it from being immediately united to him and in a most intimate manner. This latter union elevates it above all things; by that union it receives its life, its light, and all its felicity ... On the contrary the union of the spirit with the body abases man infinitely; and it is now the principle cause of all our errors and all our miseries.

I am not surprised that ordinary people or pagan philosophers only consider the soul in its relation to and union with the body, without recognizing the relation and union it has with God; but I am surprised that Christian philosophers, who ought to prefer the spirit of God above the spirit of man, Moses above Aristotle, Augustine above some miserable commentator of a pagan philosopher, are more interested in the soul as the form of the body than as made in the image and for the image of God ... to whom alone it is immediately united. ... The relation of the soul to its body could have never existed, but its relation to God is so essential that it is impossible to conceive that God could have created a soul without that relationship.

It is more the nature of our spirit to be united to God than to be united to a body. ... Since the will of God regulates the nature of every thing, it is more the nature of the soul to be united to God by a knowledge of the truth and by the love of good, than to be united to a body, because it is certain ... that God made our spirits in order to know him and to love him rather than to impose a form on the body.

...

The sin of the first man so weakened the union of our spirit with God, that the union is not felt except by those whose heart is purified and whose spirit is enlightened; for that union appears imaginary to those who blindly follow the judgments of sense and the urging of passion.

On the contrary it [the first sin] has so strengthened the union of our soul with our body that it seems to us that these two parts of ourselves are no more than a single substratum; or rather it has so subjected us to our sense and our emotions that we are brought to believe that our body is the principal one of the two parts of which we are composed. ...

The soul, although united very strictly to the body, does not cease being united to God; and at the very time when it is receiving from its body those feelings lively and confused which its passions inspire in it, it is [also] receiving from the eternal truth, which presides over its spirit, the knowledge of its duty and its shortcomings. When its body deceives it, God undeceives it. ... and when it praises it and applauds it, God bitterly approaches it internally and condemns it by a law more pure and more holy than those of the flesh which it had been following.

... a man who judges everything by his sense, who always follows the movement of his passions, who perceives only what he senses ... is in the most miserable place of spirit that he could be in; in that state he is infinitely distant from the true and the good. But when a man judges things only

by the pure ideas of the spirit, and carefully avoids the confused noise of the creatures, and when retiring in to himself to hear his sovereign maker, with his senses and passions silent, it is impossible for him to fall into error.

... but when the spirit turns from God and goes outside [himself] when he interrogates only his body in seeking the truth, when he listens only to his senses, his imagination, and his passions, it is impossible for him to escape deception. ...

The body fills the spirit with such a great number of sensations that it becomes incapable of knowing the least hidden of truths. The sight of the body dazzles and dissipates that of the spirit, and it is difficult to perceive clearly any truth with the eyes of the soul during the time one uses the eyes of the body to know it. This shows that it is only by the attention of the spirit that any truth is discovered and any knowledge is gained; because indeed the attention of the spirit is nothing other than its return and conversion to God, who is our only Teacher, and who alone can instruct us in every truth ... as St. Augustine says.