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RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY AND HISTORICAL METHODOLOGY
IN PIERRE BAYLE'S *CRITIQUE GÉNÉRALE*

by

Jeffrey Bruce Robin

Thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
M.A. degree in History.

Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa

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UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

ABSTRACT

RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY AND HISTORICAL METHODOLOGY

IN PIERRE BAYLE'S *CRITIQUE GÉNÉRALE*

Jeffrey Bruce Robin
University of Ottawa, 1994

Supervisor:
Prof. Jean-Claude Dubé

Famous for his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) is best known as the sceptical father of Enlightenment thought. Although considered to be an atheist since the time of Voltaire, his biography reveals the likelihood of his having had a Christian outlook, at least until the last years of his life. Since about 1960 scholars have shown his Calvinist ideology to exist in his writings, particularly those predating the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. An early, lessor known work, the *Critique générale de l'Histoire du calvinisme* reflects his Calvinist outlook. Composed to refute the *Histoire du calvinisme* written by the Jesuit Louis Maimbourg (1610-1686), who denounced the Protestant Reformation and justified the coercive measures of Louis XIV against the Huguenots, it contains the one of the first Protestant expositions of the Reformation as an historical phenomenon. More importantly, it contains the first mention and elucidation of historical pyrrhonism, an historiographic concept that Bayle derived from his readings of the

Libertines, especially François de La Mothe le Vayer (1588-1672). Bayle's historical pyrrhonism is considered to be the foundation of modern historical criticism. Armed with historical pyrrhonism and an exacting dialectic, Bayle refuted Maimbourg so successfully that the name Maimbourg became synonymous with bad history, in the process helping to define the essential qualities of the historian for the eighteenth century.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: BAYLE'S LIFE AND WORK	7
1.1: The sources for Bayle's biography	7
1.2: Bayle's early years (1647-1670)	12
1.3: Bayle's years of exile (1670-1706)	22
1.4: Bayle and the Republic of Letters	32
CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE <i>CRITIQUE GÉNÉRALE</i>	43
2.1: "Une foi, une loi, un roi"	44
2.2: History serving Church and State	58
2.3: Maimbourg and the <i>Histoire du calvinisme</i>	69
CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF THE <i>CRITIQUE GÉNÉRALE</i>	76
3.1: Style of the <i>Critique générale</i>	76
3.2: Sources of the <i>Critique générale</i>	81
3.3: Structure of the <i>Critique générale</i>	87
CHAPTER 4: BAYLE'S REFUTATION OF MAIMBOURG	93
4.1: Bayle's dialectic	94
4.2: Historical pyrrhonism	106
4.3: Bayle and the Reformation	115
CHAPTER 5: BAYLE AND THE HISTORIAN	121
CONCLUSION	130
BIBLIOGRAPHY	132

INTRODUCTION

In 1935 the great Flemish scholar Paul Hazard (1878-1944) coined a phrase so apt that it has remained to this day the best appellation of the period spanning the years from 1680 to 1715. He called it *la crise de la conscience européenne*.¹ During this period Europeans were only beginning to come to grips with the existence of the very ancient cultures of Asia and the discovery of a New World. Newton was then explaining the physics of a very large and empty universe, whereas Descartes and Spinoza had already thoroughly shaken the traditional philosophical and religious conceptions.

At this juncture an extremely heated debate between the Catholics and the Protestants of Europe erupted over the historical role of the Reformation. The controversy between these two groups was as old as the Reformation itself. For over one hundred and fifty years they had argued over Scripture and tradition, focusing their debate on theological concerns such as papal infallibility, the cult of the saints, and the precise nature of the sacraments.

¹From the title of his book, *La Crise de la conscience européenne* (Paris, 1935). I have used the English translation, *The European Mind, 1680-1715*, trans. by J. Lewis May (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin University Books, 1972).

They took their arguments so seriously that nations went to war, and subjects were forced at sword-point to renounce their religion or accept the consequences.

This controversy incorporated an historical aspect when, in 1671, Pierre Nicole (1625-1695), the collaborator of the famous Jansenist leader Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694), published a book entitled *Préjuges légitimes contre les Calvinistes*. In this book Nicole used historical arguments to show that the Reformation was a serious and damaging schism, and not a legitimate and genuine reform of Christianity. Over the course of the following twenty-five years, virtually every Protestant and Catholic leader entered into this debate. Never resolved, it continues even today.

Pierre Bayle joined the controversy in 1682 with his book, the *Critique générale de l'Histoire du calvinisme de M. Maimbourg*.² He wrote this book within the short space of two weeks as a rebuttal to the *Histoire du calvinisme*, a book which was published in early 1682 by the extremely popular Jesuit historian, Louis Maimbourg. Although the *Critique générale* established Bayle as a Protestant champion and as a worthy member of the Republic of Letters, it has received remarkably little attention from modern scholars. Moreover, the *Critique générale* displayed much of the

²I shall henceforth use the shortened version of the title, *Critique générale*.

philosophical, historical, and critical methodologies and concepts for which he became so famous in his other works, most notably the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*.

To understand the *Critique générale*, its conception of the Reformation, and its role in the development of modern historical methodology, a number of different factors must be considered. First, the historical figure of Bayle himself must be confronted, all the more so because from well before his death controversy about his religious beliefs hung over his works. Was he an atheist or a Christian? The interpretation of his religious beliefs necessarily impacts on the interpretation of his writings. Accordingly, Chapter One deals with the biography and literary production of Bayle. It begins with an examination of the sources available for constructing his biography. The biography proper is divided into two sections: Bayle's early years and education; then his years of exile when he produced his many books. The last section considers Bayle's literary production itself. He was a very prolific author, so not all his writings can be listed, let alone explored, but in order to gain a better idea about him and his work, a selection of his major publications are discussed.

Secondly, just as the *Critique générale* cannot be considered in isolation from its author and his work, it cannot be considered without regard to its historical setting. This historical setting is the subject of Chapter

Two. The first section provides an overview of the political and religious situation in France in the years preceding the publication of the *Critique générale*. Although the early 1680s were relatively quiet years in that no major war occurred, very momentous events transpired domestically in both France and England, events to which Bayle's *Critique générale* had direct links. In 1685 the Catholic James II came to the throne of England, an event which had been expected for some years and which began a chain of events leading to the Glorious Revolution of 1688; and Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes (1598), the "perpetual" royal edict promulgated by Louis XIV's grandfather, Henri IV, to regulate the religious situation in France. Although the *Critique générale* preceded these events, it was nevertheless part and parcel of the events leading up to them.

The second section of Chapter Two outlines the state of historical writing and research in France of the late seventeenth century. As will be shown, history and the historical sciences underwent critical and fundamental changes which set the stage for the controversy surrounding the Reformation and which helped to shape the modern discipline. It is against this background that the works of Bayle and Maimbourg should be viewed. The final section of Chapter Two deals specifically with Maimbourg and the *Histoire du calvinisme*. It contains a synopsis of his life

and writings, an examination of his historical methods, and an exposition of what he wrote that so infuriated the Protestants.

Thirdly, the *Critique générale* must itself be analysed in order to put it into the context of the debate. This is the subject of Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Three deals with the mechanical and technical aspects of Bayle's *Critique générale*. The first section examines the unusual style of Bayle's work, and relates it to the literary framework of Louis XIV's France. The second section contains an exposition of Bayle's sources and his techniques using them. Bayle's sources are identified in context to the subject matter of the second section of Chapter Two. The final section of Chapter Three examines the structure of the *Critique générale*, showing the novel way in which Bayle approached his work and the goals he pursued.

Chapter Four presents an examination of the methodology that Bayle used to refute Maimbourg. The first section deals with Bayle's famous dialectic and provides examples of how Bayle turned Maimbourg's historical arguments on their heads. The second section presents the concept of historical pyrrhonism, a concept that Bayle derived from the *libertins* of mid-seventeenth-century France. It was especially this concept that gave originality to Bayle's work. In the third section Bayle's

arguments concerning the Reformation are presented, as well as the conclusions he arrived at from his reading of the history of the Reformation.

Finally, having examined Bayle's life, the context in which he wrote the *Critique générale*, and the *Critique générale* itself, one can take a step back from the debate surrounding the Reformation in order to see what Bayle had to say about the way he felt that the historian should approach his work. This is the subject of Chapter Five, and it is in direct relation to what Bayle had to say about Maimbourg, though some material is drawn from some of Bayle's other works.

CHAPTER ONE

BAYLE'S LIFE AND WORK

Although it is often very difficult to determine the real beliefs of a controversial historical figure such as Pierre Bayle, primary sources from which one can determine a great deal about his life are not lacking. The first section of this chapter outlines the sources available to construct his biography. The second and third sections summarise his life, which is divided into two periods: Bayle's early years and education and his years of exile. In these biographical sections the important themes are his socio-economic background, his education, his career, and of course his religious beliefs. In the fourth and final section of this chapter is a sampling of Bayle's immense literary production, a sampling which helps one get an idea of the whole of his work.

1.1 The sources for Bayle's biography

Although Bayle wrote no memoirs, we have much of Bayle's correspondence, a little over 1640 extant letters,

about one half of which he sent and one half he received.¹ Curiously enough, however, no complete edition of his correspondence has been published. This oddity has occurred for a number of reasons, but it has its roots in a feud which broke out in 1709 over the ownership and control of Bayle's papers between Bayle's first biographer, Pierre Desmaizeaux (1673-1745), Bayle's former publisher, and a rival biographer, Prosper Marchand (1675-1756).² In the end two separate, somewhat different, but incomplete editions were published.³ Today much of Bayle's correspondence remains scattered in various European archives, some of which has been published by Emile Gigas in 1890 and by the *Romanic Review* in issues dated 1931-1936.⁴

Bayle's correspondence began while he was studying at Toulouse in 1669, and it continued until his death in Rotterdam in December 1706. He generally wrote to members of his immediate family until the death of his younger

¹See Elisabeth Labrousse, *Inventaire critique de la correspondance de Pierre Bayle* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1961).

²*Ibid.*, pp. 13-20.

³Marchand edited the *Lettres choisies de M. Bayle avec des remarques*, 3 vols., (Rotterdam: Fritsch et Böhm, 1714); Desmaizeaux edited the *Lettres de M. Bayle, publiées sur les originaux, avec des remarques par M. Des Maizeaux*, 3 vols., (Amsterdam: La Compagnie des Libraries de La Haye, 1729), thereafter incorporated into the *Oeuvres diverses*.

⁴Emile Gigas, *Choix de la correspondance inédite de Pierre Bayle, 1670-1706, publié d'après les originaux conservés à la Bibliothèque royale de Copenhague* (Copenhagen, 1890).

brother in 1684 and the deaths of his older brother and father in 1685. In maturity he had contacts spanning Europe and including intellectuals such as Gotfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716), aristocrats such as Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), as well as a host of literary figures and high officials in both church and state.

We have as well another primary source, a personal chronicle entitled the *Calendarium Carlananum*, after the name of Bayle's home town of Carla. Found among the papers left by Bayle to his heir, this autobiographical document sheds much light on his life.⁵ In it he chronicles year by year his movements, his work, and the major events of his life. Entries for the years of his youth are very short and succinct, whereas those of his maturity are much more substantial and informative. Although it has not been dated precisely, Bayle must have written it at Rotterdam towards the end of his life. He left no clue as to why he wrote it, nor as to why it abruptly and mysteriously ends off at the year 1687, just as he entered into the religious and political controversies that would form the basis of his reputation as a proponent of religious tolerance; but it seems clear that Bayle intended it for posterity.

⁵Desmaizeaux thought the *Calendarium Carlananum* important enough to be appended as a "pièce justificative" to his *Vie de M. Bayle*. See below, p. 5.

There are as well a large number of public documents relating to Bayle in various archives. Parish and municipal registers from Bayle's home town give the names and dates of baptisms, marriages, deaths, land ownership, inheritances, population, and religious denomination. Municipal records from Geneva and Rotterdam contain information about Bayle's employment there, as do records from the University of Franeker, which offered Bayle a teaching position in 1684.⁶ Even a number of "arrêts du conseil" and royal edicts also serve to fill in certain gaps in his life. May of these documents have been identified and used by Bayle's modern biographer, Elisabeth Labrousse.

As for secondary sources, Bayle's two chief biographers are Pierre Desmaizeaux and Elisabeth Labrousse. Bayle's younger contemporary, Desmaizeaux took a proprietary attitude towards Bayle's literary works and personal papers.⁷ Before anyone else, he undertook to write Bayle's biography. In 1708 he published with an English translation of Bayle's *Pensées diverses sur la comète* an anonymous work

⁶See below, p. 29.

⁷Desmaizeaux earned his living by writing biographies of the great men of his time and owed his entry into English literary circles to Bayle's recommendation. Like Bayle, Desmaizeaux was the son of a Protestant minister and a Huguenot refugee. He too had studied for the ministry and had worked as a tutor, first at Bern and then at Geneva. He met Bayle at Rotterdam in April 1699 and thereafter corresponded with him regularly. Desmaizeaux occasionally served as Bayle's literary agent in London. See J. H. Broome, "Bayle's Biographer: Pierre Des Maizeaux," in *French Studies* (Vol. IX, No. 1, Jan. 1955), pp. 5-8.

composed in English entitled *The Life of Mr. Bayle, in a Letter to a Peer of Great Britain*.⁸ Sketchy and incomplete, this short work was written before Bayle's correspondence and personal papers were collected and before Desmaizeaux had access to the *Calendarium Carlananum*. Two entire decades passed before he wrote the much more complete *Vie de M. Bayle* that appeared in the 1730 edition of Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*.

The modern and definitive biography of Pierre Bayle has come from the pen of Elisabeth Labrousse. According to her, Desmaizeaux's biography of Bayle is "un curriculum vitae précis et bien informé," but it is too academic in tone and too prone to eulogy.⁹ Unlike Desmaizeaux, Labrousse has taken great care to keep Bayle in the social context of each of the milieux in which he lived. In her view, Desmaizeaux, by adhering to the mores of the eighteenth century, ignored many interesting questions, such as how Bayle paid for his education and whether from time to time he wrote "pour avoir du pain." She has used many of the same primary sources as had Desmaizeaux, but she has had

⁸This peer was Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury. Influential in English political and literary circles, he encouraged Desmaizeaux to gather information on Bayle's life for publication. He had twice been to Holland on account of political turmoil in England and he had personally known Bayle. Of course, for his part Desmaizeaux hoped to gain a powerful patron.

⁹Elisabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle. Tome 1. Du pays de Foix à la cité d'Erasmus* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), p. 3.

as well access to parts of Bayle's correspondence that were not available to him, particularly that of Bayle's youth. She has also located and used a number of public documents to confirm certain events and to fill in various gaps. In the final analysis, Labrousse has had the advantage of having reasonably complete sources.

1.2 Bayle's early years (1647-1670)

Pierre Bayle was born November 18, 1647, at Carla, a town in the county of Foix, located in the extreme southwest of France. Foix was one of the poorest and most isolated regions of the kingdom. Bayle later described it as "quelque membre paralytique du monde qui ne participe aucunement au commerce et à la société des autres."¹⁰ Very little cash circulated and most of the inhabitants eked their existence from the land or from pastoral activities.

Carla was a town of about fifteen hundred inhabitants whose character was more urban than rural. It was an active commercial centre, but it depended almost completely on the city of Montauban, Languedoc's principal Huguenot city, despite the fact that Catholic Toulouse, the capital of Languedoc, was much closer.

¹⁰Letter to Pierre's elder brother Jacob, dated July 31, 1673, and cited by Labrousse, *op. cit.*, pp. 32f.

Foix was Calvinist country, with a long and proud history stretching back at least to the time of the Albigensians. Its strategic location on the rugged Spanish border had helped it earn a reputation as a key bastion of the Huguenots during the religious wars of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. During Bayle's youth some two-thirds of Carla's inhabitants belonged to the Reformed Church.¹¹

Pierre's family was originally from Montauban. Pierre's paternal grandfather, Isaac Bayle, was probably the son of a man named Baille, the "troisième consul de Montauban," who had been heavily involved in the civil wars against the Catholic League.¹² Staunchly Calvinist, Isaac was a merchant who dealt in cloth. His wife, Isabeau de Bardon, was the daughter of Jean de Bardon, a leading bourgeois in Montauban, a member of the Consistory, and the "commis au paiement des Eglises" for the provincial synod of Upper Languedoc-Upper Guyenne.

Issac and Isabeau had two children: David (d. 1674) who became a lawyer; and Jean (1609-1685), Pierre's father. Jean became a minister. He had studied theology at the

¹¹Labrousse, *op. cit.*, p. 9, n. 32. Carla fell within the diocese of Rieux, though in practical day to day terms was dependant upon the Bishop of Pamiers, whose seat lay a few miles to the east of Carla. It is interesting to note that in the 1670s the bishop was the Jansenist François de Caulet (d. 1680), who vehemently opposed Louis XIV's position on the "régale."

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 4.

Protestant academy of Montauban and had been a schoolmate of Jean Claude (1619-1687), the famous Protestant minister and controversialist. In 1637 he was admitted to the rank of minister and assigned to Carla, where he remained until his death in 1685. In 1643 he married Jeanne de Brugière (d.1675), a member of the Ducasse family, a noble family of the area. The couple had three children: the eldest, Jacob (1644-1685), who, like his father, entered the ministry; Pierre, (1647-1706); and the youngest, Joseph (1656-1684), who also pursued a career in the ministry.

Jean Bayle had little personal wealth. According to Labrousse, he had certain "interests" in Montauban, perhaps in the cloth trade. but he never profited from them. By virtue of his wife's dowry he possessed a few small landholdings near Carla that provided directly for most of the family's basic needs: wood for fuel; wool and hemp for spinning and weaving; wine; and foodstuffs, including bags of rye and wheat for barter with the local baker. Jean's only cash income seems to have been his share of the annual salary of five hundred francs paid by the consistory to the two ministers of Carla; but on more than one occasion he felt compelled to complain to the provincial synod of irregular and incomplete payment of salary.¹³

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 16, n. 63. From 1670, this second minister at Carla was Jacob Bayle.

Despite its modest economic circumstances, the family enjoyed a very privileged position within the community. It had two servants: a valet for Jean's needs and a serving girl who worked under Jeanne's direction. Jean Bayle was the leader of the Reformed Church in Carla. He and his family were expected to set an example within the community as a good, God-fearing family, an expectation that the local consistory and provincial synod enforced themselves.¹⁴

As Desmaizeaux first pointed out, Pierre was a self-taught prodigy. He received little formal education before the age of eighteen, but did attend the "petite école" in Carla, which was a one-room, one-teacher school of primary instruction operated by the Consistory.¹⁵ At the "petite école" Pierre learned to read and write in French, basic arithmetic, and, of course, catechism. Pierre's study of Latin and Greek took place at home under his father's supervision, with Latin starting at the age of ten and Greek at the age of twelve. The home environment lacked none of the encouragements as well as the means for providing the basics.

¹⁴Emile G. Léonard, *Histoire générale du protestantisme. Tome II. L'établissement (1564-1700)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961.), pp. 317ff.

¹⁵The Crown restricted these "petites écoles" in many ways. For example, although funded by the local consistory, they were after 1671 allowed no more than one instructor. See Elisabeth Labrousse, *La révocation de l'Edit de Nantes* ([Paris]: Editions Payot, 1990), p. 129.

As a youth Pierre spent a great deal of time reading and studying. His father had a small library. Although its entire contents are not known, it included a variety of books including a Bible; a number of Humanist classics such as Plutarch's *Vies parallèles*, translated by Jacques Amyot (1513-1593); Montaigne's *Essais*; and other works of interest, such as the *Antiquitez de Castres* by Borel.¹⁶ Aside from his father's library and any other reading material his father managed to purchase or borrow, Pierre also systematically sought out and exhausted any and all reading materials in the area of Carla. He borrowed books belonging to his family's neighbours and relatives, particularly from his father's colleagues. He frequented the booksellers who passed through Carla, Protestant ones from Montauban and Catholic ones from Toulouse. Occasionally he went to Toulouse, to "La Poterie," the street where booksellers conducted their business, even though his lack of money meant that he could only leaf through the books.¹⁷

Pierre began his college studies only at the age of eighteen, some six to eight years later than was normal for the time.¹⁸ His father simply could not afford the cost of

¹⁶Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 and 55.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 15 and 33.

¹⁸L. W. B. Brockliss, *French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.), pp. 54ff.

educating two sons at the same time. The cost of Jacob's education alone kept his purse empty. In 1662 room and board cost one hundred-twenty francs per annum, and then came the other expenses, such as clothing, candles and paper.¹⁹ As a result Pierre only joined his older brother Jacob at the Protestant academy at Puylaurens in February 1666, halfway through the academic year.²⁰

On account of Pierre's age and his studies at home, he seems to have received advanced standing, finishing his humanities by year's end, thus completing his secondary education. He was now proficient in Latin and Greek. He had also studied rhetoric and some arithmetic, and was ready to proceed to his philosophy, a two-year programme that prepared one for entry into the professional faculties of medicine, law, and theology.²¹ But the financial burden

¹⁹Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, op. cit., p. 16, n. 63.

²⁰In the 1660s the only Protestant academy in Languedoc was at Puylaurens. In 1659 Louis XIV had ordered that the Protestant academy at Montauban be reduced in size and transferred to Puylaurens. In 1617 the academy at Montpellier had been transferred to Nîmes, which was itself closed in 1664. In 1668 between one hundred and one hundred and twenty students attended the academy at Puylaurens. See Simone Guenée, *Les universités françaises*, (Paris: Picard, 1982.), and Marie-Madeleine Compère, *Les collèges français*, (Paris: INRP-CNRS, 1984).

²¹According to L. W. B. Brockliss, the "educational establishment saw no value in the study of the past as a separate subject," in *French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 152.

proved too great, and Pierre did not return to Puylaurens in the autumn for his final academic year.²²

Pierre returned to study at Puylaurens only after Jacob had finished his studies for the ministry and had been assigned to a parish. Pierre arrived there at the beginning of November 1668, but the following February he turned up at the Jesuit college in Toulouse, much to the surprise of his family in Carla. Attending a Catholic institution was quite irregular for the son of a Protestant minister, especially one who intended himself to enter the ministry, though Desmaizeaux claimed that "Il n'y avait là rien d'extraordinaire. Les réformés envoyaient souvent leurs enfants étudier chez les Jésuits, quoique cela eût été défendu par les synodes."²³

Pierre was already in his early twenties when he left Puylaurens. He knew that the Jesuit college at Toulouse was much larger and far superior to the Protestant Academy at Puylaurens. He knew also that he could register free of charge as an external student, which meant living off campus.²⁴ But he was taking a desperate gamble, for although he paid no tuition, he soon found himself living in

²²According to Desmaizeau, Pierre missed the school year on account of illness, but Labrousse has proven that the lack of money was the cause. See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25ff.

²³*Vie de M. Bayle*, p. 2.

²⁴Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63, n. 52.

a rooming house whose tenants included a Jesuit priest. In short, his need for free tuition necessitated his living under the same roof as a Catholic priest who was there to work diligently for the conversion of needy Huguenot students.

Exactly one month after his arrival in Toulouse, Pierre abjured and became a Roman Catholic. In the short term he did not suffer financial worries, for although he could expect no further financial support from home, he had arrived in Toulouse with the money his father had given him to pay for his year at Puylaurens. Moreover, immediately upon his conversion, officials for the bishop of Rieux, Antoine François Bertier (d. 1705), began to pay him a pension and to make promises of modest benefice for him after his graduation.²⁵

Aside from perfecting his Latin, which was still the language of instruction at colleges and universities, he continued his philosophy programme. His programme at Toulouse was composed of courses in physics, metaphysics, logic, and ethics. Like the universities of the time, the Jesuits taught traditional scholastic philosophy. Yet through his physics instructor, Pierre Rome, he came into contact with the non-scholastic works of the French

²⁵It is interesting to note that at the time of Bayle's arrival in Toulouse, the rector of the Jesuit college was Jean Ferrier (1614-1674), a seasoned Jesuit polemicist against Jansenism and Calvinism, who shortly thereafter became confessor to Louis XIV.

philosophers Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) and René Descartes (1596-1650).²⁶ Within eighteen months, six months shorter than normal, he completed his courses and successfully defended his theses.

On the other hand Pierre had cut himself off from his family and had begun to question his religious conversion. Immediately after graduation in July 1670, Pierre secretly abjured Catholicism in the presence of his elder brother and a number of other ministers from the county of Foix. However, the family's joy was bitter-sweet. For Pierre's return to the Reformed Church meant that he now had to flee France, because according to French law he was now a relapsed heretic and thus subject to incarceration and banishment. To this end his father found enough money to send him to Geneva, where he would be safe from the French authorities and could continue his studies for the ministry.

Later in life Bayle attributed his conversion to youthful impulsiveness and to his readings of various works of religious controversy.²⁷ His first contact with these works probably occurred at Puylaurens, though during the five months in 1668 he had spent with his father's colleague Laurent Rivals (d. 1679) at Saverdun, a town situated about

²⁶Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96 and note.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 64ff. In particular, Bayle had been convinced by Catholic arguments regarding transsubstantiation and the legitimacy of the Papal authority.

half way between Foix and Toulouse, Rivals may have also given him access to such works.

Among these Catholic works of controversy, it seems that it was Cardinal Richelieu's *Traité qui contient la méthode la plus facile et la plus assurée pour convertir ceux qui se sont separez de l'Eglise* (Paris, 1651) that had most influenced Pierre.²⁸ Written in a sober, non-insulting fashion, this tract was convincing. Its arguments rested on the principles of unity and submission to proper authority. It avoided dogma and concentrated on proving the legitimacy of the Catholic church. Once Richelieu had showed this legitimacy, it was a small step for him to convince the Protestant reader that the early reformers had rebelled against legitimate and divinely constituted authority, thus making schismatics of themselves and their posterity. Although Bayle initially believed Richelieu's argument, he later came to believe it specious.

²⁸One of Bayle's professors at Puylaurens, André Martel (1618-1698) published a reply to Richelieu's work at the time he was studying there. Perhaps he also came into contact with the famous *Controverses* of St. François de Sales (1567-1622), though there is no direct evidence for this. Bayle did display an intimate knowledge of the famous Savoyard missionary, because in the *Critique générale* he used the example of St. François' desire to donate his cadaver to medical students in order to criticise superstitions surrounding burial.

1.3 Bayle's years of exile (1670-1706)

Bayle came to Geneva as a refugee "proposant," or theology student. Under the direction of François Turretini (1623-1687) and Louis Tronchin (1629-1705), he studied the Bible, Church history, dogma, and casuistry.²⁹ Tronchin had Cartesian leanings, if for no other reason than their usefulness as a weapon against the Roman Catholic dogma of trans-substantiation. Tronchin impressed Bayle, particularly in his method of criticism. Bayle wrote to his father that Tronchin was "dégagé de toutes les opinions populaires et des sentiments généraux qui n'ont point d'autre fondement que parce qu'ils ont été crûs par ceux qui nous ont précédés."³⁰

Bayle also kept himself busy with extracurricular activities. For instance, every Thursday he attended religious services given in Italian "pour apprendre cette

²⁹L. W. B. Brockliss, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-235.

³⁰Unpublished letter to his father, Sept. 21, 1671, quoted in Walter Rex, "Pierre Bayle, Louis Tronchin, et la querelle des Donatistes: étude d'un document inédit du XVII^e siècle," in *Bulletin de l'Histoire du protestantisme français* (July-Sept. 1959), p. 103. See also Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle, op. cit.*, pp. 102-103. According to Desmaizeaux, it was from Jean Chouet (1642-1731), Tronchin's nephew, and the first of the Academy's professors openly to teach the new and radical Cartesian philosophy, that Bayle was first exposed to Cartesian philosophy.

langue-là."³¹ In order to prepare himself better for the work of a tutor, he taught himself genealogy, geography, and history. He frequented the courses of a Mr. Sartory, professor of history and Greek. Through Sartory, Bayle was also initiated to biblical exegesis. Bayle took instruction in Hebrew from Pierre de la Fontaine (d. 1676), although many of the students at the academy paid a tutor for additional instruction in Hebrew.³² He often attended weekly seminars conducted by the senior students of the academy in which a paper on an historical topic was presented and discussed. The topics included the empires of the Babylonians and Persians, and the role of modern heresies in the formation of reformed Christianity. Bayle himself wrote a paper intended for one of these seminars on the subject of ancient Greek philosophy.³³

In contrast to his studies at Toulouse, at Geneva Bayle could only register as an auditor because he had to find the means to support himself. To assist him in his

³¹Letter to his father, Sept. 21, 1671, cited in Jean Delvolvé, *Religion, critique et philosophie positive chez Pierre Bayle*, [1906], (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970.), p. 12.

³²Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, op. cit., p. 101.

³³Letter to Minutoli, Jan. 31, 1673, in *Oeuvres diverses*, (The Hague: 1731), vol. 4., pp. 535-539. At the centre of these seminars was a curious figure, Jean-Baptiste Rocolles (1630-1696), a Benedictine monk and "historiographe" to Louis XIV, who abjured Catholicism and arrived in Geneva towards the end of 1672. He was the author of *Introduction générale à l'histoire* (Paris, 1662).

search, he had arrived armed with letters of introduction to the religious and academic authorities of Geneva. Having completed philosophy he was qualified to work as a "régent" at the Academy of Geneva or as a "précepteur" for the children of a noble or wealthy Genevan family. One of the theology professors at the Academy, François Turretini, recommended him for a vacant position for the college's "deuxième," that is, the second year of study in the humanities programme; but the Consistory delayed filling the vacancy until February 1671.

While awaiting the decision Bayle found employment that November through the recommendation of another theology professor, Louis Tronchin. He began to work as a tutor to the children of a relative of one of Tronchin's colleagues, a relative who happened to sit in the "Petit Conseil" that governed Geneva. Bayle received no salary but had free room and board and thus could continue his studies. He held this position until May 1672, when he entered into the service of Frederick, Count de Dohna (1621-1688).³⁴ Bayle now tutored the Count's three sons who lived at the family's chateau at Coppet, some fifteen kilometres northeast of Geneva, a location which interfered with his ability to attend

³⁴An old aristocratic family, the Dohna had already given three generations of military valour and political governorship to a number of Protestant German princes. Among his many charges, Frederick was governor of the principality of Orange. Living in the Count's household helped to give Bayle great insight into government and politics.

classes. He remained in the Count's service until the end of May 1674.

Bayle never finished his theology programme. In late 1675 he obtained a post as a professor of philosophy at the Protestant academy of Sedan.³⁵ Bayle owed his appointment to the intervention of Jacques Basnage (1653-1722), a former roommate at Geneva, and Pierre Jurieu (1637-1713), who was then professor of theology and Hebrew at the Academy.³⁶ Basnage told Bayle of the opening, and then recommended him to Jurieu. Both Basnage and Jurieu knew about his past conversion to Catholicism and his status as a relapsed "heretic," but they kept this information hidden. Bayle lived in constant fear of having his relapsed status discovered, and so he went by the surname "Bêlé." He asked his family to use that name in their correspondence to him and not to tell anyone in his home town of his appointment.³⁷

³⁵A European crossroads, Sedan was situated on the Meuse about two hundred kilometres northeast of Paris. It had been an Imperial enclave within France that the French Crown acquired in 1642 on condition of guaranteeing its "liberties" and Protestant religion. See G. N. Clark, *The Seventeenth Century*, 2nd. ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 141-142.

³⁶Basnage was one of Bayle's schoolmates at Geneva and was then one of Jurieu's students. He was from a wealthy Rouenais family, and would later be a leader of the moderate French exiles in Rotterdam. Jurieu became the leader of the radical exiles.

³⁷Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

For six years Bayle held an honourable place in society teaching philosophy at Sedan. During this time he became close to the Jurieu family. In fact, according to Labrousse, Bayle was at that time like an adopted son to the childless Jurieu and his family.³⁸ They even made plans to get Bayle married, largely to help him financially through the acquisition of a dowry; but these plans came to naught, with Bayle apparently preferring the solitary life of the scholar.

During his years at Geneva and at Sedan, Bayle read a number of very important books of the time.³⁹ There was the *Recherche de la verité* (1674) written by a disciple of Descartes, the French Oratorian, Nicolas de Malebranche (1638-1715); the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678) written by the French Oratorian Richard Simon (1638-1712); and the infamous *Tractatus theologico-politico-historicus* (1670) written by the Dutch Jew Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), an individual considered by everyone of the day, including Bayle, to be an atheist, and who was ostracised even by the Jewish community for his writings.

In July 1681 Louis XIV ordered the academy at Sedan closed permanently, but Bayle was not out of work for long.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 143.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 159.

One of his former students came to his aid.⁴⁰ This student was Johannes van Zoelen (1658-1689), the son of an important Rotterdam lawyer. On Bayle's behalf he lobbied his uncle Adrien van Paets (1635-1685), the powerful Rotterdam city councillor who was then the Dutch ambassador to England. The city council established the "Ecole Illustre" and invited Bayle and Jurieu to take positions there.⁴¹

These positions were essentially sinecures designed to rescue two worthy French refugees. The Ecole Illustre was not a large school and did not confer degrees. Most of the students were either the impoverished sons of French refugees or the sons of indigenous families who were too young to be sent to university at Leyden or Utrecht.⁴² Jurieu taught theology, while Bayle taught philosophy and history, an unusual combination for the time.

Holland was much different from either France or Geneva. Throughout the seventeenth century it was the hub

⁴⁰H. C. Hazewinkel, "Pierre Bayle à Rotterdam," in *Pierre Bayle, le philosophe de Rotterdam: études et documents* (Paris: Librairie Vrin, 1959.), pp. 20-22. See also Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle, op. cit.*, pp. 165-166 and p. 172, n. 14.

⁴¹At first Bayle received a salary of three hundred florins per year, which was later increased to five hundred. Yet his room and board cost him four hundred florins per year. See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle, op. cit.* pp. 175-176. Ecoles Illustres were founded in a number of Dutch cities. They provided education similar to that of universities, but they did not confer degrees. See J. L. Price, *Culture and Society in the Dutch Republic during the Seventeenth Century* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1974), p. 83.

⁴²Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle, op. cit.*, p. 178.

of European and overseas trade. A republican state, it provided a safe haven to religious and political refugees from throughout Europe, especially France and England. Bayle met there a number of important English refugees including John Locke and Lord Ashley Cooper. At Rotterdam Bayle was able to stop using his pseudonym, though he chose to remain anonymous in his publications in order to protect his family in France. However, Bayle did not have to learn to speak Dutch because of the sizable Walloon community in Rotterdam.

Holland was the largest printing and publishing centre in Europe during the seventeenth century, and it was the most important country for the publication of academic, scientific, and technical works.⁴³ The most important publishing centres were Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. At Rotterdam Bayle met the publisher Reinier Leers, a friend of van Paets and a member of the Walloon church. Through Leers, Bayle had access to an important publishing house, and in 1682 it was Leers who published Bayle's first book, the *Pensées diverses sur la comète*. Leers also employed Bayle to solicit and edit manuscripts

⁴³J. L. Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172. During the period 1675-1700, some two hundred seventy-three printers and publishers were in business in Amsterdam alone. See K. H. D. Haley, *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 123.

for publication.⁴⁴ In this way Bayle augmented his income and built his personal library.⁴⁵

Bayle made Rotterdam his home for the remainder of his life. He was unable to return to France so long as he remained Calvinist, which he in fact remained, despite the claims to the contrary made by his literary enemies and historians of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.⁴⁶ Preferring to remain with his fellow French exiles in Rotterdam, Bayle rejected in 1684 an offer of an academic position at the University of Franeker.⁴⁷ In fact, Bayle's only ambition seems to have been to study and to write. In a letter to his younger brother Jacob dated May 29, 1681, he wrote:

⁴⁴Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, op. cit., p. 182.

⁴⁵Bayle's estate had the considerable sum of ten thousand florins, a sum that could only have accumulated through his publications and his work with Leers. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

⁴⁶Throughout his years at Rotterdam Bayle continued to be a member of the French Reformed Church, and, his health permitting, communicated four times a year, despite the fact that he could have left the Church without civil reprisals. Moreover, he kept the support of a number of influential pastors, most notably Jacques Basnage. See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, op. cit., especially pp. 269f, n. 124.

⁴⁷See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, op. cit. pp. 188f, and Elisabeth Labrousse, "Documents relatifs à l'offre d'une chaire de philosophie à Bayle à l'Université de Franeker au printemps de 1684," in *Pierre Bayle, le philosophe de Rotterdam : études et documents* (Paris: Librairie Vrin, 1959) pp. 219-237.

Une des choses qui me plairoit ... ce seroit la charge de Bibliothécaire, ou de quelque Bibliothèque publique, ou de la Bibliothèque de quelque Grand; car vous avez le temps d'étudier et, sans être riche, dont je ne me soucie pas, vous avez des livres à suffisance.⁴⁸

Although Bayle never became a librarian, he managed nevertheless to fulfil his desire to study and publish.

During his years in Rotterdam Bayle came into contact, either personally or in correspondence, with many of the great figures of the time. Through his friendship with the wealthy merchant Benjamin Furly (1636-1714), who had lived in Rotterdam since 1677, Bayle met a number of important Englishmen who had taken refuge in Holland because of James II's accession to the English throne in 1685, such as Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), later Bishop of Salisbury and author of *A History of His Own Times*; and John Locke (1632-1704), the famous English philosopher and proponent of religious toleration.

On a personal level the years 1684 and 1685 mark severe tragedy in Bayle's life. He had already lost his mother to tuberculosis in April 1675 when, in May 1684, his younger brother Joseph took ill and died. Then, in March 1685, his father died. Immediately following the death of his father, Bayle's older brother Jacob was imprisoned because he was a Protestant minister and because he was the

⁴⁸Cited by Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle, op. cit.*, p. 34f, n. 33.

brother of the author of the *Critique générale*; and on November 12, 1685, Jacob died in prison.⁴⁹

The conjuncture of these deaths and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in October 1685 led Bayle to write a number of pamphlets on religious persecution that put him squarely in the middle of the political and religious controversy surrounding the Revocation Crisis. First was a small pamphlet entitled *Ce que c'est que la France toute catholique sous le règne de Louis-le-Grand* which appeared in March 1686. This pamphlet was quickly followed by the *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de J.-C.: Contrains-les d'entrer: où l'on prouve par plusieurs raisons démonstratives qu'il n'y a rien de plus abominable que de faire des conversions par la contrainte, et où l'on réfute tous les sophismes des convertisseurs à contrainte, et l'apologie que Saint Augustin a faite des persécutions*. Despite the fact that these two pamphlets were published anonymously, Bayle was quickly identified as being the author; and they established him as the leader of the moderate French exiles in Holland.

These publications also led to the beginning of a bitter feud between him and Pierre Jurieu, who was then the leader of the radical group of exiles wanting a holy war

⁴⁹According to one of Bayle's correspondents, François Janiçon (1634-1705), a Parisian lawyer, by arresting Jacob the authorities had chastised the author of the *Critique générale*. See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, op. cit., p. 199.

against Louis XIV. This feud lasted until the deaths of both parties, with Jurieu unceasingly accusing Bayle of atheism and of being a traitor to the Protestant cause. In October 1693 Jurieu convinced the Rotterdam Consistory of the Walloon Church to intervene with the municipal authorities to have Bayle fired from the Ecole Illustre and to have him prohibited from teaching.

For the remaining thirteen years of his life, Bayle devoted himself to his writing. Although he no longer drew a salary from the Ecole Illustre, he received an income from his books and from his work for Reinier Leers. However, his health had never been good, and he suffered increasingly from migraine headaches and tuberculosis, which eventually killed him. He continued to be a member of the Walloon Church of Rotterdam and, when he died with pen in hand in December 1706, he was buried in that church. He had already become famous because of his publications, but he would soon be referred to as a father of the Enlightenment because of the popularity of his writings with such figures as Voltaire.

1.4 Bayle and the Republic of Letters

In an age when academic journals did not exist, scientific and literary information travelled slowly. Yet the intellectuals of the Scientific Revolution did not work

in isolation, but depended upon an extensive epistolary exchange. The Republic of Letters was composed of these intellectuals, and it existed to advance knowledge through international cooperation regardless of the religious affiliation of its members.⁵⁰ The idea of a Republic of Letters was not new, for in the early sixteenth century Erasmus had spoken of a "Respublica literaria et christiana." However, in the seventeenth century, religious unity simply did not exist, and the educated classes had to transcend religious divisions in order to carry on their scientific and literary dialogue.

Bayle was one of the most prolific and exciting authors in the Republic of Letters. The period of his activity in it coincided almost exactly with his years of exile in Rotterdam. This conjuncture is not surprising, for in France he had no hope of ever obtaining the "Privelège du Roi," that is, the licence required by an author to have a manuscript published. However, except for a brief period of illness in early 1687, Bayle wrote and published unceasingly in Holland throughout this period of his life. A complete listing of his publications would run several pages, so only his most popular and influential works will be dealt with here.

⁵⁰See Paul Dibon, "Les échanges épistolaires dans l'Europe savante du XVIIe siècle," in *Revue de synthèse* Sér. 3 (97), 1976, pp. 31-50.

Bayle arrived in Rotterdam in the fall of 1681 carrying a draft manuscript of what became a classic in French literature, the *Pensées diverses sur la comète*. Bayle got the idea to write this book from the passing of a large comet through the night sky in December 1680. It had caused great fear and wild speculations of impending doom, because the populace interpreted it as a sign of God's displeasure. From this event Bayle found the opportunity to publish an attack against superstition and, where possible, against the Roman Catholic Church, an institution that Bayle felt to be the principal cause of superstition.

Bayle entitled his manuscript *Lettre à M. L'A.D.C., docteur de Sorbonne; où il est prouvé, par plusieurs raisons tirées de la philosophie et de la théologie, que les comètes ne sont point le présage d'aucun malheur; avec plusieurs réflexions morales et politiques, et plusieurs observations historiques, et la réfutation de quelques erreurs populaires*. Published anonymously in Rotterdam by Reinier Leers in March 1682, Bayle's book found a receptive market, and in July 1684 a second edition appeared entitled *Pensées diverses sur la comète*.⁵¹

The book bore many characteristics that came to typify Bayle. It was essentially a collection of letters called "sections" in the text, and it was written with a

⁵¹Bayle published the *Addition aux Pensées diverses* in 1694, with a second edition in 1699, followed by the *Continuation des Pensées diverses* in 1704.

balance of formality and familiarity. In it Bayle examined three basic concepts.⁵² First, he gave a critique of the "préjugé;" secondly, he criticised the miracle, though he recognised the moral utility to society of a few "essential" miracles; and thirdly, he exploded the traditional, philosophic premise of the mutual exclusivity of religion and morality by showing the possibility of a moral, but atheistic society. Throughout the *Pensées diverses* Bayle attempted to maintain an unbiased point of view, one based on a rational criticism whose sole aim was the pursuit of truth, though he often digresses to compare the practices of Roman Catholics with those of pagans.

Shortly after the publication of the *Pensées diverses*, Bayle wrote the *Critique générale de l'histoire du calvinisme*.⁵³ The *Critique générale* was unlike the *Pensées diverses* in that Bayle now stepped into the realm of polemic and controversy. On the one hand he recognised the potential for success for a Protestant author to write a rebuttal to the well-received *Histoire du calvinisme* written by the Catholic Louis Maimbourg.⁵⁴ In the preface to the second edition of his *Critique générale* he stated that his

⁵²What follows has been taken from Jean Delvolvé, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁵³In 1685 Bayle published the *Nouvelles lettres de l'auteur de la Critique générale de l'Histoire du calvinisme*.

⁵⁴On Maimbourg and his *Histoire du calvinisme*, see the following chapter.

book contained "pensées fort propres à réussir, dans les conjonctures où nous sommes."⁵⁵ On the other hand he went to great lengths to hide its authorship from his colleagues and friends to protect his family from possible reprisals from the French authorities.⁵⁶ He even sought out a different publisher, finding Abraham Wolfgang in Amsterdam. Yet he retained his anonymity for only a brief period, and although he won accolades from the Protestant community, it caused him difficulties with his mentor, Jurieu, who felt slighted by Bayle's secrecy.

For his next publication Bayle entered into another completely different literary genre. Acutely conscious of the lack of availability of scientific and literary news, he had for a number of years wanted to publish a journal to circulate such news.⁵⁷ The genre of the literary and scientific journal was still rather new in the mid-1680s.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Pierre Bayle, *Critique générale de l'Histoire du calvinisme*, in *Oeuvres diverses*, vol. II, p. 2.

⁵⁶The *Critique générale* attained the notoriety of being burnt in public. Thereafter none of Bayle's writings were permitted legal entry into France.

⁵⁷Delvolvé, *op. cit.*, p. 67; and Labrousse, "Couliesses du Journal de Bayle," in *Pierre Bayle, le philosophe de Rotterdam : études et documents* (Paris: Librairie Vrin, 1959), p. 100.

⁵⁸The seventeenth century witnessed the birth and development of journalism. See G. N. Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 300ff. Among the titles he cites are: *Strassburger Zeitung* (1609), the first printed periodical; and the *Gazette de France* (1631). Bayle often criticised the "gazette" for bias and as a source of error for the historian. See Chapter Four.

Since 1665 there appeared the *Journal des savants* (Paris), which targeted the educated and, since 1672, the *Mercure galant* for literature and news of high society and the French court. But it was Bayle's *Nouvelles de la République des lettres* which was the first to become "un périodique de recension de haute tenue."⁵⁹ It was also unique because it was the first French language periodical to be published outside of France. In it Bayle reviewed books whose subjects included history, philosophy, science, and, to a limited degree, literature.

Published on a monthly basis, the *Nouvelles de la République des lettres* was very similar in format to Bayle's previous works: bibliographic in nature, each issue contained several review articles which in form resembled letters; and each article affected a neutral position, in that neither Catholic nor Protestant works were openly favoured. In the preface to the first issue which appeared in March 1684, Bayle wrote of his new publication:

Il ne s'agit point ici de religion; il s'agit de science; on doit donc mettre bas tous les termes qui divisent les hommes en différentes factions, et considérer seulement le point dans lequel ils se réunissent, qui est la qualité d'homme illustre dans la République des lettres. En ce sens là tous les savants se doivent

⁵⁹Jean Mesnard, *Précis de littérature française du siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990.), pp. 328-329.

regarder comme frères et d'aussi bonne maison les uns que les autres.⁶⁰

The *Nouvelles de la République des lettres* marks a significant turning point in Bayle's life. It entrenched Bayle as a major author of the time because of its success and because of the network of correspondents that Bayle made in the Republic of Letters. Bayle's success and stature gave him the opportunity to take the position of leader of the moderate party of the French religious refugees in Holland and England.

Bayle's best known book is without question the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. Bayle got the idea to write his dictionary from his reading of contemporary dictionaries. In particular, Bayle based his dictionary on Louis Moréri's *Grand dictionnaire historique ou, le Mélange curieux de l'histoire sainte et profane* (Lyon, 1674). Bayle conceived his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* as an answer to the errors found in Moréri's work and other contemporary dictionaries, whose subjects included biography, mythology, history, and philosophy.⁶¹ It has also been suggested that Bayle intended his dictionary to serve as a sort of substitute library for the individual

⁶⁰*Nouvelles de la République des lettres*, March 1684, in *Oeuvres diverses*, vol. 1., p. 2.

⁶¹The model for historical dictionaries was the *Dictionarium historicum, geographicum, poeticum* (1553) of Charles Estienne. Aside from Moréri's dictionary, Bayle also relied on the *Lexicon historicum* (1679) of J. J. Hoffmann. See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, op. cit., p. 236.

unable to afford many books or lacking ready access to a library.⁶² The reader of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* quickly gets the impression that Bayle has read every work published on any given topic. It is structured into the articles proper, with their footnotes at the bottom of the pages where Bayle made his criticisms and gave his proofs, and the precise citations to his sources in the margins of the pages.

Bayle's dictionary first appeared as the *Projet et fragments d'un dictionnaire critique* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1692), but he greatly enlarged it and reissued it as the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* in two folio volumes in October 1696. Bayle's dictionary was the only work that carried his name. It sold very well and was praised by some of the greatest minds of the time including Leibnitz, who called it "le plus beau des dictionnaires."⁶³

A second edition of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* appeared in print in May 1698 in three folio volumes. It contained more articles and a number of clarifications, especially regarding the article "David" because a number of ministers, Jurieu in particular, had found that Bayle had treated a biblical figure with a much too secular tone. Despite the controversy and scandal that

⁶²See Ruth Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition: A Study of the Historical Theory and Practice of Pierre Bayle* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1989), p. 185.

⁶³Cited by Labrousse, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* caused among both Catholic and Protestant theologians and clerics, Bayle continued to work on the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* until his death, bequeathing his corrections and additions to his publisher Leers, who incorporated them into the third Dutch edition (1720), which now had to include a fourth volume.

The last work Bayle wrote was entitled *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial*. Like the *Critique générale*, the *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* is little read today. It is a multi-volume work, whose first volume appeared in 1704, the second and third volumes in 1705, and the fourth and final volume in 1706. In the "Avertissement" to his last work, Bayle stated that it resembled "un peu aux écrits qui parurent en si grand nombre dans le XVIIe siècle sous le titre de 'Divers leçons.'" ⁶⁴ Like most of his other publications, the *Réponses aux questions d'un provincial* had no real structure, but was simply a collection of Bayle's personal reflections, philosophical and theological discussions, and historical information. Above all, it was an opportunity for Bayle to defend himself and his ideas in the Republic of Letters, and, like the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, it represents his thoughts in maturity.

⁶⁴*Réponse aux questions d'un provincial*, "Avertissement" in *Oeuvres diverses*, vol. III, p. 501.

In conclusion, Pierre Bayle was one of the most prolific and provocative authors of the late seventeenth century, despite the fact that he began his literary career late in life. Like many other great scholars of the time, Bayle brought to his writings a wealth of erudition and much hard work, but they possess a flavour unlike that of his contemporaries because of his insatiable curiosity and his unrelenting criticism. Bayle also brought to his writings a system of beliefs that appear to have remained a constant in his life, a system of beliefs instilled in him during his youth in the southwest of France. With the exception of his eighteen months at Toulouse, Bayle always lived in a Protestant environment. At any time during his exile he could simply have abjured Calvinism, returned to France, and received preferment from the government of Louis XIV. Additionally, he could have avoided the feud with Jurieu and the other orthodox Protestant ministers of the Refuge had he been willing to support their belief that religious conformity was to be enforced at the expense of the individual's conscience.

In life and in death Bayle has been called many things, including misanthrope and atheist. Yet if he led the life of a recluse in his final years, he did so because of ill health; and if he distrusted human nature, he did so on account of great personal tragedy and his knowledge that those who caused the sufferings of his family and fellow

religionists did so on the basis of ignorance, false premises, and self-interest. As for the charge of atheism, such was the battle-cry of the age in the heated literary exchanges. To the observer of the late twentieth century, it seems clear that throughout Bayle's career he never ceased to attack error, nor ever compromised his ideal of truth.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE *CRITIQUE GENERALE*

Two unconnected but very important historical factors furnish the setting to Bayle's *Critique générale*. The first consists of the events leading up to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in October 1685, whereas the second involves the substantial advances made in historical methodology during the late Renaissance. Indeed, these two factors are critical to understand all of Bayle's writings, not just the *Critique générale*.

Chapter Two examines the historical setting to Bayle's *Critique générale*. Section one provides an overview of the religious situation in France from the beginning of Louis XIV's personal reign in 1661 until the Revocation of late 1685 because at the root of the debate between Maimbourg and Bayle lay the ideal expressed in the sixteenth-century French saying "Une foi, une loi, un roi."¹

Section two presents a synopsis of historical philosophy and methodology of Renaissance France, with an emphasis on the fifty year period preceding the Revocation.

¹Although attributed to the French humanist Guillaume Postel (1510-1581), this saying was used as early as 1500, thus predating the Reformation. See Elisabeth Labrousse, *La révocation de l'Edit de Nantes* ([Paris]: Editions Payot, 1990), p. 59, n. 14.

A veritable explosion of historical writing took place during this period, and the ways in which historians practised their craft expanded and were refined, despite the spread of the essentially ahistorical philosophy put forth by René Descartes and his followers. The growing importance of history and historical writing to the public played a fundamental role in the controversy in which Bayle and Maimbourg took part.

To conclude this chapter, section three considers Louis Maimbourg and his book, the *Histoire du calvinisme*. Maimbourg was an unusual figure, one who has been mistreated by posterity, particularly on account of Bayle's criticism. An examination of his life and historical work, in the context of the Revocation and of the historian's craft, completes the setting in which Bayle wrote the *Critique générale*.

2.1 "Une foi, une loi, un roi"

In 1682, the year that Maimbourg and Bayle entered into debate, France was a Catholic kingdom at the height of the Counter-Reformation.² However, beneath the surface lay

²Some may be shocked at this use of Counter-Reformation. Whereas it aptly describes the Catholic Reformation of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in southern Europe, it seems to exclude the subsequent Catholic Reformation in France under Louis XIII and Louis XIV. Indeed, in my opinion the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes achieved the Counter-Reformation in France,

serious divisions. The French could not fairly claim to have a single faith, even though ninety-five per cent of the population was Catholic.³ The Catholics themselves were at odds over various issues, the most serious of which dealt with the leadership of the Catholic church in France. Well before the Reformation French kings and Italian popes, often by means of a general council, fought over the investiture of senior clerics, whether a pope could depose a king, and who held the ultimate authority on spiritual affairs. On the one hand there were the "dévôts" or "ultramontanes" who supported papal supremacy over the monarch and church councils in all spiritual and some temporal matters, including the deposition of a monarch. On the other hand there were the "Gallicans," who supported the idea of the French Catholic Church in which the king held all temporal authority, his bishops in council held the spiritual authority, and the Pope acted largely as a figurehead.⁴

The rivalry of these two groups often caused bitter feuding at court and among the clergy, creating difficulties for the Crown both at home and abroad. For instance, from

albeit many years after its completion elsewhere in Europe.

³In 1685 there were about one million Protestants in France out of a total population of about twenty million. See Pierre Goubert, *Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 160.

⁴See Roland Mousnier, *Histoire générale des civilisations. Tome IV. Les XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* 5e éd. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), pp. 283-285.

the beginning of the Protestant Reformation the "dévôts" had pressured the Crown to eradicate the Protestants within France and to pursue a foreign policy in which France would side with the Catholic powers, while the "Gallicans" supported the French monarchy's policy of siding with Protestant powers to counter the threat of Habsburg encirclement of France. In fact, the Gallicans usually acted as a powerful support to the absolutist claims of the French monarchy. Throughout the 1680s France remained on the brink of schism from Rome because of Louis XIV's quarrel with Pope Innocent XI (1676-1689) over the "régale", that is, the investiture of bishops and the revenue associated with it. Louis XIV had his Gallican clergy issue its Four Gallican Articles in March 1682, just as Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme* was published.

Another bitter but spiritual battle was under way between two other groups, the Jesuits and the Jansenists. The Jesuits were a missionary religious order that was founded in the sixteenth century and was the militant arm of the papacy in Europe and overseas. The Jansenists took their name from Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), a Dutch Catholic theologian at the University of Louvain. In his posthumously published book *Augustinus* (1640), Jansen outlined a strict predestinarian position, one which compared favourably with the Calvinist position and clashed bitterly with the Jesuit position based on free-will.

Jansenism spread throughout Europe, but it was strongest in France. Many famous literary and religious figures of the seventeenth century were Jansenists, including, for instance, Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694) and Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). The debate between the Jesuits and the Jansenists dominated the religious life in France during the last half of the seventeenth century, and it gave Protestant polemicists much ammunition.

In comparison to the difficulties Louis XIV faced in 1682 because of the struggles within the Catholic church, the Protestant minority gave him little cause for concern. They no longer had the military strength that they had possessed in the sixteenth century and more and more of Huguenot nobles were converting to Catholicism. Yet their presence presented a highly unusual situation in France where, through most of the seventeenth century, two official religions coexisted. This anomaly rankled the Catholic clergy to no end and it was generally perceived among the Catholics to tarnish the reputation of Louis XIV.

Such a religious situation where two religions were officially recognised within one state had few parallels in Europe of medieval or early modern times.⁵ It ran counter to the traditional, medieval conception of monarchy. Kings swore in their coronation oaths to uphold and defend the

⁵Even in tolerant Holland, only the Reformed Church held official status.

Catholic religion by exterminating heresy and heretics. Thus when the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century had challenged the traditional religious authorities, they had also challenged the political ones. Indeed, the success of the Protestant Reformation had shattered the principle of unity for Latin Christendom, and it had reestablished it in a decentralised fashion according to the principle of "cuius regio, eius religio."⁶ This type of settlement respected the traditional belief that political and religious authority were of divine origin. Indeed, throughout early modern times religious toleration remained as foreign a concept to the people of the time as their notion of religious unity and kingship seem to us.

The closest France came to realising the saying "Une foi, une loi, un roi" took place during the rule of a strong and active king. However, from the time of the unexpected death of Henri II in 1559 until 1661, when Louis XIV personally took the reins of government, the French kingdom had in fact suffered serious difficulties because of repeated minority governments, a disastrous war of succession, and a devastating dynastic war against the

⁶In the aftermath of the Schmalkaldic wars in Germany (1531-1547) the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was forced by the Peace of Augsburg (1555) to accept the principle "cuius regio, eius religio," whereby each of the German princes determined the religion of his dominion. However, this peace only recognised the Lutheran and Catholic churches. It was only after the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) with the Peace of Westfalia (1648) that the Calvinist church was also recognised.

Habsburgs. During the minorities of François II and Charles IX the Regency, led by the Queen Mother Catherine de Medici, waged non-stop battles with numerous powerful factions. First there were the Princes of the Blood, that is, the king's closest male relatives who felt that right of birth gave them a right to rule during a minority. Then there were the great feudal nobles, all of whom felt menaced by a strong royal government. The "Parlements" wanted to make the regency submit to the rule of law, while the French clergy lobbied for civil persecution of religious minorities and dissenters. Indeed, religion complicated the difficulties for the Crown because a number of the Princes of the Blood and the nobles were Protestant. The divisiveness, the intrigue, the warfare, and the massacres climaxed when, in 1589, the last Valois king, the childless Henri III, was assassinated.

In France the royal succession was governed according to the ancient Salic law, which was based on male primogeniture. In this way Henri III's legitimate successor was Henri de Navarre (1553-1610). Yet a unique problem arose in that Henri was Protestant, unlike the generations of his Catholic predecessors. Catholic forces, both French and foreign, took up arms to prevent a Protestant succession. Ultimately the combination of Henri's military skill and his conversion to Catholicism in 1593, which was

subsequently sanctioned by the Pope in 1595, ensured his victory.

Reminders of this dynastic crisis haunted France through much of the seventeenth century. In 1610 Henri IV was assassinated, which forced the kingdom into yet another minority (1610-1617). Louis XIII himself did not have a son until late in his reign, hence the Dauphin's nickname "Louis-Dieudonné." Thus when Louis XIII died in 1643, his son Louis XIV was only five years old. Just as during the minorities of the second half of the sixteenth century, these periods of regency government left royal authority particularly vulnerable. However, largely because of the efforts of the Crown's chief ministers for the period 1624-1661 Cardinals Richelieu (1585-1642) and Mazarin (1602-1661), the power and authority of the Crown was expanded and centralised at the expense of the feudal nobility and local officials.

In Louis XIV the French had a strong, active king, who brooked no interference in his authority or in his justice and who had earned through his conquests the title "Louis-le-Grand." To this king the saying "Une foi, une loi, un roi" had particular relevance because he meant to realise it. In its individual elements it presented the three traditional tenets on which the French kingdom stood, whereas as a whole it embodied that intertwining of politics and religion, as inextricable in late seventeenth century

as in medieval times. It revealed what he, his ministers, and his Catholic clergy strove for in the French kingdom by means of unity, order, and respect for authority in both the religious and political spheres.

When Louis XIV began his personal rule in 1661, he inherited a royal government whose authority was felt throughout the kingdom. He built upon this base during the 1670s and 1680s by directing his minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683), to reorganise the kingdom's finances by reforming and unifying the multitude of taxes and tariffs throughout France and to codify the myriad of laws and legal practices then in existence, such as the codification of civil (1667) and criminal (1669) procedure, and the national codes for the forests (1669), commerce (1673), and the marine (1680).

The French monarchy of the seventeenth century became the model for absolutism, which itself was based on the divine right of kings. The divine right of kings dated back to the early Middle Ages, and it was justified by Scripture.⁷ Absolutism and divine right were defended by the great French prelate Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) in his *Politique tirée de l'Ecriture* (1679), which he wrote for the instruction of the Dauphin. Bossuet repeatedly stressed the need for unity, order, and respect for

⁷See St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, XIII, i-vii, by which rulers received directly from God their legitimate authority to govern.

authority, all of which flowed out from the sacred nature of monarchy as symbolised at the monarch's coronation by the anointing of holy oil and the swearing of the oath to uphold the Catholic religion.⁸ Indeed, Bossuet often referred to the king as "Louis-Dieudonné." Thus rebellion against the king was tantamount to rebellion against God. Conversely, rebellion against legitimate religious authority was considered rebellion against the properly constituted political authority. Indeed, religion had proved to be as critical to the monarchy as blood line at the time of the Bourbon succession in 1589.

After the war of succession Henri IV imposed an uneasy religious settlement on France which satisfied neither the Catholics nor the Protestants. This settlement was enshrined in the Edict of Nantes (April, 1598). The French clergy felt especially threatened by the continued existence of the French Protestants, and throughout the seventeenth century they never ceased to pressure the Bourbon kings to revoke it. However, the Bourbon monarchs never seemed to have sufficient power or time to accomplish such a task. During the first thirty years of France under the Edict of Nantes, the Huguenots retained their "places de

⁸See Jean Touchard, *Histoire des idées politiques. 1. Des origines au XVIII siècle*, 7e éd., (Paris: PUF, 1983), pp. 344ff. It is interesting to note that the superstition regarding the king's touch was still practised by many seventeenth century monarchs including Charles II of England.

sûreté" and their powerful noble leaders. With Louis XIII and Richelieu constantly preoccupied with the Habsburgs, and thus sensitive to maintaining alliances with the Protestant princes of Germany and the Protestant king of England, little could be done to satisfy the demands of the French clergy. Indeed, when Louis XIII and Richelieu crushed the Protestant rebellions of the 1620s, Louis XIII felt compelled to renew the Edict of Nantes through the Peace of Alès (1629), which, although removing the "places de sûreté," restored religious toleration for the Huguenots. The Huguenots now had to depend for their continued existence solely on the good graces of the king and seemed left to die of attrition.⁹

During the upheavals of the Frondes beginning in 1648 and continuing well into the 1650s, the Huguenots remained loyal to the underage Louis XIV and his chief minister Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661), and so won a further respite. But after Louis XIV began his personal rule following the death of Mazarin, the position of the Huguenots became more precarious by the day. Louis XIV's foreign affairs slowed the process, but when peace descended on Europe following the Treaty of Nijmegen (1679) Louis XIV had free hands to deal with his Protestant subjects. Yet despite the Bourbon success to enforce their authority and

⁹Norman Ravitch, *The Catholic Church and the French Nation, 1589-1989* (London: Routledge, 1990.), p. 24.

to centralise their power, no Bourbon king realised religious peace.

The Crown used a progressive and systematic strategy of both liberal and repressive means to force the Huguenots to abjure Calvinism and accept Catholicism. In 1670 Louis XIV wrote in his memoirs:

Quant à ce grand nombre de mes sujets de la religion prétendue réformée, qui était un mal il me sembla ... que ceux qui voulaient employer des remèdes extrêmes et violents, ne connaissaient pas la nature de ce mal ... qu'il faut laisser passer et s'éteindre insensiblement je crus ... que le meilleur moyen pour réduire peu à peu les huguenots de mon royaume était de ne les point presser du tout par aucune rigueur nouvelle contre eux, de faire observer ce qu'ils avaient obtenu sous les règnes précédents, mais aussi de ne leur accorder rien de plus, et d'en renfermer même l'exécution dans les plus étroites bornes que la justice et la bienséance le pouvaient permettre.¹⁰

There were two periods of intense legal/judicial activity about repressing the Huguenots, first during the 1660s and secondly during the 1680s. Judicial orders struck at both the individual and the institutions. The Crown struck the Protestant organisation first. During the late 1650s Mazarin moved to limit the holding of Huguenot colloquiums and provincial synods, and in 1663 Louis XIV forbade official communications between Protestant churches of different provinces. At the end of 1659 Mazarin allowed them to hold a national synod, but also informed them that

¹⁰Cited in Labrousse, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

it would be their last one, an act which contravened the Edict of Nantes.¹¹

In April 1661, one month after the death of Cardinal Mazarin, Louis XIV set up the "Commissions mi-parties" to investigate complaints regarding the execution of the Edit of Nantes in each province of the kingdom. Each and every Protestant church had to prove with documentary and archival proof its right to worship and to have a church, within the most restrictive interpretation possible of the Edict of Nantes. Initially few Protestant churches were demolished, but numerous and lengthy legal actions ensued which led to the ultimate destruction of a large number of Protestant parishes during the late 1670s and early 1680s.¹²

A succession of royal proclamations in the 1660s reduced the number and quality of Protestant schools. The "petits écoles" were decreased in number and restricted to one teacher. Many Protestant colleges were forced to share their institutions with the Jesuits, and a number of them like those at Pont-de-Veyle and at Nîmes closed outright. In the 1680s Louis XIV accelerated the number of closures, the most spectacular one being Sedan. The guilds and professions were closed to the Protestants, simply by making it mandatory for all candidates to swear an oath which

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 111-115. In 1680 about one half of the Protestant churches which had stood in 1598 were forbidden. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

included the clause "religion catholique apostolique et romaine."¹³

From early in the seventeenth century the Crown and the Catholic clergy had encouraged individuals to convert, particularly among the nobility and the professionals, the pastors especially. Nobles were enticed by promises of honours and preferment from the Crown, whereas those of lesser rank were eligible for pensions from the Catholic clergy who, from 1615, set aside thirty thousand "livres" per year for this purpose.¹⁴ In 1677 Louis XIV picked up on this idea and created the infamous "Caisse des économats" to provide pensions to newly converted individuals of all ranks. Other economic inducements were also used to garner conversions, such as tax exemptions and moratoriums on the payment of interest on debts incurred by Protestants who converted.

The most effective measures proved to be those that were most cruel and repressive, those that deprived the Huguenots of their livelihood on account of their religion, and those that prevented them from exercising their religion. The Crown interfered with the administering of the sacraments. An Arrêt of 1665, reissued in 1680, stipulated that a judicial official attend the deathbed of a

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

Protestant to attempt a last minute, deathbed conversion.¹⁵ From 1680 Protestant women were no longer permitted to practise midwifery, which meant that Protestant babies were at risk of Catholic baptism if they showed signs of ill health.

The single most effective means to force conversions came from the billeting of troops. A normal practice of the seventeenth century, troops were most often billeted with inhabitants who had incurred the royal displeasure, often through revolt. As a means of conversion, this billeting came to be called the "dragonnades" and it was very effective. Beginning in August 1681 in the province of Poitou, within a few short weeks some thirty thousand conversions were made there alone.¹⁶ Such a high rate of conversion encouraged the Crown to continue this policy, and by mid-1685, Louis XIV felt there to be no more need for the Edict of Nantes.

The Revocation and the events leading up to it caused a mass exodus of Huguenots, perhaps 200,000 out of a total population of 1,000,000.¹⁷ Although this exodus caused much harm to the French economy, it caused even more trouble for Louis XIV and his subjects in the foreign intrigues and wars that it precipitated.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁷Goubert, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

2.2 History serving Church and State

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century, history as a branch of knowledge was both theological and teleological in nature. For well over a thousand years the Catholic Church and its clergy had dominated historical writing, categorising it as either "sacred" or "profane," according to the division made by Eusebius (265-340) in the *Ecclesiastical History* and by St. Augustine (354-430) in the *City of God* and in the *Confessions*.¹⁸

Sacred history embodied human history as contained in the Bible, though ecclesiastical history was also considered to be a part of it. History moved according to God's providence, revolving around the interaction of good and evil, and it provided the ultimate explanation for events in the corporeal world. In fact, human history began in the year 4004 B.C., according to such influential histories as Sleidan's *De quatuor summis imperiis* (1556) and Bishop Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681).¹⁹

¹⁸The chronological term "anno domini," which Bayle used himself in his autobiographical *Calendarium Carlananum*, dates from the early Middle Ages.

¹⁹Johann Philippi (1506-1566), usually referred to as Sleidan or Sleidanus after the town of Schleiden where he was born, was a renowned diplomat whose histories were considered reliable. See below, Chapter Three.

On the other hand, profane or secular history encompassed human events, especially those of a political and military nature. Its sources were to be found in old manuscripts, annals, chronicles, memoirs, and political narratives--most of which were written in Latin until well into the seventeenth century--as well as in archaeological artifacts such as coins and monuments. While at no time purporting itself to be knowledge in a teleological sense, this type of history proved itself useful to maintain order in the corporeal world by providing the means to uphold political and religious authority and to resolve legal disputes through the use of written records.

Sacred history began to come under heavy criticism in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, not simply from secular historians, but also from biblical exegetes, foremost of whom was the French Oratorian Richard Simon (1638-1712). Often referred to as the "father of biblical criticism," Simon shocked and outraged his contemporaries by applying historical and philological criticism to the Bible, that is, by seemingly treating the Bible as just another secular text. He dared to point out in his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (Paris, 1678; Rotterdam, 1680) that Moses could not have actually written all of the Pentateuch, a proposition that led to the first edition of his book being placed on the papal Index of forbidden books,

the copies of the Paris edition being burnt, and to him being dismissed from the Oratorian Order.²⁰

Simon was also a prolific author of ecclesiastical history, the most popular type of history at that time. In fact, most of the Catholic religious congregations were deeply involved rather competitively in the writing of the history of their orders and their patron saints. The two most famous of these orders were the Bollandists, a small group of Jesuits based in Antwerp, and the Maurists, a French Benedictine Congregation of St. Maur.

The Bollandists took their name from Jean Bolland (1596-1665), who led his fellow monks in their enormous project of justifying the Catholic cult of the saints. Working their way through the calendar of the saints, they sought out, collected, and critically analysed any and all documents concerning the lives of the saints in order to publish revised biographies that could withstand the criticism of the Protestants and the humanist scholars alike. These biographies were collectively entitled the

²⁰Bayle, too, came to grief because of his critical treatment of the Old Testament figure David in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. See above, Chapter 1. It is important to note that while many critical editions of the Bible were produced during the Renaissance, all of them were critical in the sense of verifying the authenticity of the original sources and of the faithfulness of the translations. With the possible exceptions of such individuals as Galileo, it was not until Simon and Bayle that reason was applied to the Bible to ask whether some element or elements of its content could be taken as being physically impossible.

Acta sanctorum [Bollandiana], and they were published without interruption from 1643 until 1794.

One of the Bollandists, Daniel von Papenbroeck (1628-1714), initiated a controversy that had monumental consequences for the historical and archival sciences.²¹ In a preface entitled "Sur le discernment du vrai et du faux dans les vieux parchemins" in the volume of the *Acta sanctorum* published in 1675, von Papenbroeck raised serious questions about the authenticity of the Merovingian and Carolingian parchments held at the Abbaye de Saint-Denis and elsewhere. To the modern historiographer, on the one hand, von Papenbroeck took a first step toward the scientific authentication of primary source material. On the other hand, to those who believed in the authenticity of these documents, the Maurists in particular, he had fired the opening salvo of a serious controversy.

The Maurist Congregation was founded in 1621, and it was an integral part of the Counter-Reformation in France. Like the Jesuits, the Maurists were dedicated to preaching and education, but they also had a special interest in historical and ecclesiastical scholarship. Like the Bollandists, they produced a number of multi-volume histories of their order and hagiographies of their saints--

²¹See, for instance, Blandine Barret-Kriegel, *Les historiens et la monarchie. I. Jean Mabillon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), pp. 58-59; and Charles-Olivier Carbonell, *L'Historiographie* 2e éd. corr. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), pp. 74-75.

for example, the *Acta SS. Ordinis S. Benedicti* (1668-1701). They collected documents and wrote histories on the Catholic Church, the French monarchy, French literature, and other subjects.

The Maurist Order produced many scholars, most famous of whom was Jean Mabillon (1632-1707). It was Mabillon who took up von Papenbroeck's challenge regarding the authenticity of the Merovingian and Carolingian parchments held at the Abbaye de Saint-Denis. He knew well the specific documents that von Papenbroeck had claimed to be forgeries, and he set out in a methodical fashion to show precisely how one could authenticate documents through textual criticism in his monumental book, *De re diplomatica* (1681). Indeed, Marc Bloch, the founder of the "Annales" school, wrote in his *Apologie pour l'histoire* that 1681 was "une grande date de l'histoire de l'esprit humain" precisely because of the publication of Mabillon's *De re diplomatica*.²²

A theological interpretation of history continued to reign supreme in the seventeenth century, despite the excellent examples of secular history produced in the Renaissance by such authors as Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)--*History of Florence* (1525)--and Francesco

²²Cited by Carbonell, *op. cit.*, p. 71. It should be noted that Bloch could not help but admire the systematic, communal manner in which these Orders approached history, a manner quite similar to what he advocated for historians.

Guicciardini (1483-1540)--*History of Italy* (1561). Although the Renaissance humanists had made great strides in historical methodology because of rigorous philological techniques and the rediscovery of the ancient historians such as Tacitus (55-120), they had dared not cross swords with established religious authority. In the same way that no one dared to criticise the content of the Bible, they all too often naively accepted the "truth" of a document or source once its impurities and glosses had been purged by solid philological techniques.²³ Nevertheless, the more thorough of the humanist historians produced works that were based on documentary evidence, though many continued to rely on oral tradition and, often enough, their own imaginations.²⁴

A handful of humanist scholars produced works that were critical in that they did not blindly accept traditional explanations. For example, François Hotman (1524-1590), a Huguenot jurist and polemicist, showed quite effectively in his *Francogallia* (1573) that the French monarchy could not have possibly had Trojan origins, despite the very popular myth to the contrary. A few others even pursued remarkably modern expositions of a scientific

²³Fueter, *op. cit.*, pp. 284ff.

²⁴ For a marvellous story regarding the fancies of the Jesuit historian Antoine de Varillas (1624-1696), see Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680-1715* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin University Books, 1973), pp. 46-54.

methodology for history, most notably Jean Bodin (1530-1596) and Lancelot de La Popelinère (1531-1608).²⁵ In the *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566) Bodin defined history as a social science in which it is the acts of humanity that are of interest and that these acts are determined by physical circumstances such as geography and human motivations. In the *Histoire des histoires* (1599), which also included the *Idée de l'histoire accomplie* and the *Dessein de l'histoire nouvelle des françois*, La Popelinière went even further by outlining an all-encompassing "perfect" history based on the principle that historical knowledge was relative and reflected the culture which elaborated them. Unfortunately, neither Bodin nor La Popelinière had any immediate successors in the seventeenth century.

The French monarchy understood the value of history, both for the purpose of collecting historical documents for informational and evidential value, and for the purpose of producing official histories or propaganda. This understanding was reflected in many ways, not least of which was its substantial financial support of scholars. The usefulness of historical documents was established early in the Renaissance. Perhaps the most famous example was the one provided by Lorenzo della Valle (1407-1457), who, using

²⁵The following is taken from Carbonell, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61, and George Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History: Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 155-171.

humanist philological techniques in his *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* (1440), proved the Donation of Constantine to be a forgery.²⁶ This use of history greatly embarrassed the Papacy because its political authority over the Papal States was based on the supposed "donation" made in the fourth century to the Papacy by the first Christian emperor, Constantine.

In the same manner and with an eye to territorial expansion, Louis XIV and his ministers employed what must have been a small army of legal bureaucrats to scour archives for documents in order to facilitate the Crown's policy of *réunions* of erstwhile Imperial lands. Of course, too, Louis XIV's "commissions mi-parties" examining the "disputes" over the legality of the existence of most, if not all, of the Huguenot churches in France had to rely on historical documents.²⁷

The French monarchy provided substantial financial support to its official historiographers since the fifteenth century.²⁸ At the beginning simple chroniclers, these scholars performed an increasing number of functions for the

²⁶See, for example, Fueter, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

²⁷See above, p. 55. One may ask at what point legal research became historical research. Finding and defining such a point is possibly no easier today than three hundred years ago. During the Renaissance, however, scholarly methodology was very much less delineated than today.

²⁸See François Fossier, "A propos du titre d'Historiographe sous l'Ancien Régime," in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 32 (1987), pp. 361-417.

Crown, particularly by the seventeenth century. Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin gave an ever increasing level of support to scholars, but according to Orest Ranum, it was Colbert who had the particularly important role in expanding the Crown's patronage activities:

Never before [Colbert] had there been such extensive bureaucratic organization of scholarly and literary activities; it would be refined and extended in subsequent regimes down to our own day.²⁹

Colbert sought systematically to enhance the king's reputation through the use of the arts and history, and he greatly accelerated the gathering of information and advice pertaining to civil administration, the economy, and culture.

Among those who collected, collated, and catalogued historical documents--in much the same way as the Bollandists and Maurists, and thus performed an invaluable service for modern historians--a few individuals stand out. André Duchesne (1584-1640), whom Michaud called the "père de l'histoire de France" in the *Biographie universelle*, and his son François (1616-1693) wrote several national histories and conducted numerous genealogical researches for some of the greatest noble families, including the Châtillon and the Montmorency. Above all, they collected vast quantities of

²⁹Orest Ranum, *Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 169-170.

manuscripts, documents, and histories whose catalogue--though never completed--was published as the *Historiae Francorum scriptores* (1636-1649), a work that so greatly impressed Leibnitz that he undertook a similar project in Germany.³⁰

One of the most widely read historians of seventeenth-century France was the "libertin" François-Eudes Mézeray (1610-1683), "historiographe de France."³¹ The son of a surgeon, he studied at the University of Caen, then at the Collège Saint-Barbe in Paris. His three volume *Histoire de France depuis Faramond jusqu'à maintenant* (1643-1651), with its easily read text and its great emphasis on visual appeal--for example, the handsome prints of the kings, the queens, the coins, and the seals from early Capetian times--proved to be so successful that he was admitted to the Académie française in 1649. Although the first volume of his *Histoire de France* exhibited some tendency toward credulity regarding the origins of the French nation and contained a number of old-fashioned dialogues between historical characters, subsequent volumes showed a more critical stance and a reliance on primary sources.³² Fueter thought well of Mézeray, calling him "le premier historien

³⁰See Fueter, *op. cit.*, pp. 392f.

³¹On the "libertins," see Chapter Four.

³²Réné Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Genève: Slatkine, 1983) pp. 280-283.

français national qui possède un jugement politique indépendant," and placing him among the "politiques" and the Gallicans.³³ However, his independent spirit led to trouble with the Crown because of his criticism of the *gabelle* in his *Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France* (1668). He was subsequently removed from his office of historiographer in 1677.

There were many scholars and historians of Renaissance France and throughout Europe who contributed to the formation of the modern discipline of history. They attempted to gather together all possible sources on a topic before undertaking to write its history. It became the rule for these historians to give exact citations to their sources. They employed in a systematic fashion what came to be called the auxiliary sciences of history, including chronology, diplomatics, epigraphy, and archaeology. As Edouard Fueter wrote of the beginning of two domains of modern history, "L'analyse réaliste et compétente de la vie religieuse intérieure commence avec les Jésuits, comme l'analyse utilitaire du calcul politique commence avec Mahiavel et Guichardin."³⁴ The contributions of Bayle, Maimbourg, and the others who were involved in what was

³³Fueter, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 347. I have taken Fueter to mean that these skills were not history *per se*, but rather that they were necessary prerequisites to the historian of these domains.

called "La Controverse"--that is, the many theological and historical disputes centred on the Protestant Reformation--helped develop an erudite, sceptical brand of methodology based on the philology of the humanists and the rational intellect of modern times.

2.3 Maimbourg and the *Histoire du calvinisme*

Although virtually forgotten today, Louis Maimbourg was a very popular author and controversial figure of the late seventeenth century. Of noble origin, he was born at Nancy in 1610 and died at the Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris in 1686. At the age of sixteen he entered the Jesuit order. After completing his humanities he went to Rome where he studied theology, subsequently returning to France to teach humanities at the Jesuit college in Rouen.

Wealthy and aristocratic, Maimbourg also enjoyed very good connections to a number of important figures of the time. His director of studies at Rome, Jean de Lugo (1583-1652), was a noble Spanish Jesuit whom Urban VIII made a cardinal in 1643. He was a friend of Louis XIV's Jesuit confessors, first Jean Ferrier (1614-1674) and then François d'Aix de la Chaise (1624-1709). These connections gave Maimbourg access to the Court and the King's printer, "Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, Imprimeur ordinaire de Sa

Majesté, & Directeur de son Imprimerie Royale de Louvre."³⁵ Indeed, as Bayle claimed in the *Critique générale*, Maimbourg even had at his disposal Louis XIV's infamous "lettres de cachet."

After a number of years of teaching at Rouen, Maimbourg turned to religious polemic. He joined in with a number of his Jesuit colleagues who were attacking Jansenism and Jansenist publications, in particular the Jansenist translation of the Bible known as the "Version de Mons," and he published the *Lettre d'un docteur en théologie à un de ses amis sur la traduction du Nouveau Testament imprimée à Mons* (1667). Maimbourg also wrote against Protestantism, publishing, along other works, *La Méthode pacifique pour ramener sans dispute les protestants à la vraie foi* (1670).³⁶

Never losing his taste for religious controversy, Maimbourg turned to the writing of church history, earning himself an international reputation. From 1673 to 1686 he wrote and published a dozen historical monographs dealing with the many schisms and conflicts that had occurred in Latin Christendom since late Roman times. Among the most

³⁵From the title page to Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme*.

³⁶For a complete listing of Maimbourg's works, reprints, and translations, see the articles "Maimbourg" in Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* and in the *Dictionnaire de théologie chrétienne* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1908-1950).

successful of these histories were the *Histoire de l'arianisme depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa fin, avec l'origine et le progrès de l'hérésie des sociniens* (1673), the *Histoire de la décadence de l'Empire depuis Charlemagne et des différends des empereurs avec les papes, au sujet des investitures et de l'indépendance, depuis la mort de Charlemagne en 814 jusqu'en 1356* (1679), and the *Histoire du luthéranisme* (1680). Shortly after Maimbourg's death in 1686, his histories were brought together and published under the title *Histoires du sieur Maimbourg* (1686), a sort of universal history of the church.

Maimbourg himself became the object of controversy on account of certain Gallican views found in many of his histories. As a Jesuit, he was a member of a society that expected complete submission to papal supremacy in both the spiritual and temporal spheres. Yet in his histories Maimbourg supported many Gallican positions in defiance of his order and the pope. At particular issue were the matters of the papal authority to depose a monarch on religious grounds and of the "Régale." Those of his histories containing challenges to papal supremacy were placed on the Index, including the *Histoire de la décadence de l'empire* and the *Histoire du luthéranisme*. Furthermore, the Pope himself intervened to expel Maimbourg from the Jesuits just as the *Histoire du calvinisme* came to press, a fact which Bayle played to great advantage.

Nonetheless Maimbourg's histories found great favour at court and with the reading public.³⁷ His was an easily read, narrative style, which brought to life through vivid characterisations of the historical actors, "les portraits," the high drama of political intrigue, great battles, and blood curdling atrocities. Even Maimbourg's most severe critic, Bayle, acknowledged his ability as an author, though he also charged that Maimbourg wrote not histories but rather "romans." Indeed, Maimbourg's very success hastened Bayle and other Protestants to publish their rebuttals.

The *Histoire du calvinisme* was the most successful and most controversial of Maimbourg's histories. In its third edition it comprised two volumes divided into six books for a total of some eight hundred pages. Book one began with the Lutheran roots to Calvinism and the developments in France and Switzerland. Book two covered the period of the last year of Henri II's reign and that of his son François II, including an interesting anecdote about a Calvinist attempt to settle in North America. Books three and four dealt with events at the time of the Colloquium of Poissy, including the Scottish Reformation and the death of

³⁷Copies of Maimbourg's works in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris contain the "ex libris" and "reliure" of such famous and important individuals as the Grand Dauphin, the Prince de Condé, Gaston d'Orléans, and Pierre-Daniel Huet (Bishop of Avranches). See Elisabeth Israels Perry, *From Theology to History: French Religious Controversy and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 69, note 77.

Calvin. Books five and six covered the reign of Charles IX up to the massacre of St. Bartholomew Day (1572).

Maimbourg used a variety of sources and cited his references in the margins of his text. His sources included government documents, particularly the various edicts of pacification. In order to add credibility to his *Histoire du calvinisme*, he used the tactic of relying on Protestant and "politique" sources such as Bèze, La Popélinière, Castelnau, d'Aubigné, and de Thou.³⁸ However, he did not hesitate to accept Catholic authors who were openly biased against the Protestants, such as Rémond, Belleforest, and Scipion Dupleix.

Maimbourg attempted to justify Louis XIV's conduct in a number of areas. First, he supported Louis XIV's foreign policy. In his dedicatory epistle to the *Histoire du calvinisme* he praised his monarch's military accomplishments:

tous les Ennemis de Loûis le Grand [sont]
terrassez par la force de ses Armes; les
limites de son Royaume [ont été] étendus
[sic] par ses justes prétentions & par ses
conquestes jusqu'au Rhin, & mesme au-
delà."³⁹

In this way Maimbourg praised Louis XIV's acquisitions, notably Franche-Comté and territories in Alsace-Lorraine

³⁸See Chapter Three.

³⁹Louis Maimbourg, *Histoire du calvinisme par Monsieur Maimbourg*, 3e éd., (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1682).

joined to the French kingdom through "réunion." But Maimbourg also went on to suggest that the King do something greater and more glorious still, that the King will "voir dans cette Histoire quelque chose de plus grand encore, & plus digne de l'immortalité, que tout ce qu'ils ont dit de plus avantageux à vostre gloire," namely the extirpation of the Huguenots.⁴⁰

In numerous places in his *Histoire du calvinisme* Maimbourg drew parallels between the various heresies of medieval times and Calvinism. In this way he hoped to show that what the Calvinists propounded was nothing more than a collection of errors of bygone days, that is: "un ramas des erreurs de quantité d'Hérétiques, que l'Eglise avoit exterminé en divers tems depuis le dixième siècle."⁴¹

In the *Histoire du calvinisme* Maimbourg blamed the Huguenots for the social unrest and civil wars in France from the death of Henri II in 1559 to the Frondes of the mid-seventeenth century. He held that Calvinism inevitably led to rebellion. Simply put, the Huguenots "excitent des séditions."⁴² Moreover, it was the king's duty to crush the heresy in order to ensure both the political stability of the realm and the salvation of its inhabitants: "Son zele admirable pour la conversion des Huguenots, & la

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*, t. I, p. 75.

⁴²*Ibid.*, t. I, p. 295.

justification des Ordannances qu'il a faites pour les ramener doucement à l'Eglise Catholique."⁴³

Maimbourg's attack on Calvinism was far too serious for the Huguenots to permit it to pass unchallenged, especially since Louis XIV had shown himself eager to restore the religious unity of his kingdom. Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme* was simply too well written; and, on behalf of the French Catholics, he had levelled far too serious charges against the Huguenots--charges justified by the use of history--to remain silent.

In conclusion, Bayle wrote his *Critique générale* as Louis XIV moved with vigour to enforce religious uniformity in France, using every coercive means at his disposal, even to the point of violence. Included in those means was the use of propaganda, specifically, arguments from history and political necessity, before an increasing literate public. Maimbourg played a principal role for Louis XIV and the important Catholic ecclesiastics in justifying the Crown's conduct, and in encouraging it to proceed with all haste to eliminate the Protestant minority. However, an expatriate, Bayle, came forward as one of the Protestant champions to counter Maimbourg's historically based charges of sedition, violence and heresy.

⁴³*Ibid.*, t. II, p. 376.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF BAYLE'S *CRITIQUE GÉNÉRALE*

Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme* incited a flood of rebuttals from refugee Huguenots living in England, Holland, and the Protestant states of Switzerland and Germany. Among the first, and ultimately the most successful of these rebuttals proved to be Bayle's *Critique générale de l'Histoire du calvinisme*.

Chapter Three provides an analysis of Bayle's *Critique générale* from the three perspectives of style, sources, and structure. From this analysis the *Critique générale* can be seen in its internal workings, and be better placed into context of the literary age. Such an analysis also leads into a discussion of Bayle's argumentation, which will be considered in the following chapter.

3.1 Style of the *Critique générale*

Bayle wrote the *Critique générale* in the form of letters, a style known as the epistolary. This style was very popular in the seventeenth century. Its use dated back to ancient times, to the writings of such famous individuals as Cicero (106-43 B.C.) and St. Paul (ca. 5-ca. 67). The

sixteenth-century humanists found it an appealing format for their "respublica literaria et christiana," to cite the phrase of the famous Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536). In the humanist milieu an epistolary exchange, based on the existence of a courier service, provided the means by which scholars, clerics, and the great in society exchanged information on wide-ranging concerns, including theology, politics, philosophy, literature, and, towards the end of the seventeenth century, the natural sciences.

The epistolary style in literature reached its zenith in France in the mid-seventeenth century under the example of the famous French literary figure, Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac (1597-1654), an author whom Bayle cited a number of times in the *Critique générale*. In Balzac the epistolary style underwent major change. He popularised the use of the vernacular at the expense of Latin, still the language of science and the church, and he made eloquence and politeness the rule of the genre. More importantly in terms of the influence of the epistolary style, Balzac expanded its realm from the private exchanges among scholars and the literate into public exchanges or dialogues. Balzac promoted the composition of collections of letters for publication with the intention of popularising ideas and informing the public.¹

¹See Jean Mesnard, ed., *Précis de littérature française du XVIIe siècle*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), pp. 86-88; 153-156; 310. Balzac took as his

From the epistolary genre grew several other genres of literature. It contributed to the development of the novel, which in the late seventeenth century was closely tied to historical narrative.² It also had a direct impact on the development of both popular and academic journals: news gazettes such as the *Mercure français* became popular during the course of the seventeenth century, and academically oriented periodicals such as the *Journal des Savants*, which was begun in 1665, or Bayle's own *République des lettres*, took root. It can even be argued that the short, informative style of the epistolary aided in the development of the encyclopedia. However, the epistolary style began to decline somewhat in popularity towards the end of the seventeenth century. When Bayle's *Critique générale* went to press, it was already considered somewhat old-fashioned, particularly in the context of controversial or expository writing. On the one hand, writers of fiction were moving toward the novel; on the other, periodicals were

model the *Epistles* of the famous Dutch philosopher Justus Lipsius (1547-1606).

²See *ibid.*, pp. 265-268, for a brief discussion of "la littérature romanesque." See also Suzanne Gearhart, *The Open Boundary of History and Fiction: A Critical Approach to the French Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) pp. 3-56. It is very interesting to note that Bayle, when praising Maimbourg's style of writing, stated that his narration was "à la manière des Romains." See Pierre Bayle, *Histoire critique*, IV (ii), p. 19, in Tome II of *Oeuvres diverses* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965).

fast becoming the norm for the exchange of news, events, and scientific discovery.

The use of the epistolary style by Balzac and Lipsius seems nonetheless to have exercised a strong influence on Bayle because of its prevalence in Bayle's published works. Bayle had read both these authors and cited their works in his writings. He also emulated the politeness and directness of their works. Without exception Bayle used the appellations "Monsieur" and "vous" when referring to his correspondent. Throughout the work he used formal but polite syntactical constructions. No where does he let himself get carried away by invective, which was rather atypical of the critiques of the day.³

The politeness and familiarity of the *Critique générale* proved to be a novel tactic in a religious and historical controversy in which the participants felt obligated not only to demolish point by point the arguments and claims of the opposition, but also to discredit and to shame the author himself. Although Bayle openly declared himself to be sided with the cause of the Protestants, he was able to maintain a certain detachment from the controversy. In his sober but familiar manner he could claim a certain objectivity. Indeed, Bayle took great pain not to insult the Catholic reader and always attempted to

³See Jean Delvolvé, *Religion, critique et philosophie positive chez Pierre Bayle* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970) pp. 54-55.

present a reasonable stance in his style and argumentation. It was a successful tactic designed to attract the sympathy of moderate Catholic opinion in France, and it helps to explain much of the great success of Bayle's *Critique générale*.

The epistolary style offered Bayle a number of advantages not to be found in a formal expository format. A collection of letters provided a good pretext for anonymity, which was important to Bayle since he feared reprisals against his family in France.⁴ This voice provided Bayle with a powerful rhetorical tool because it brought about a certain closeness and trust between the author and the reader that would be expected in correspondence, but out of place in other literary genres. On this voice Bayle wrote in his preface to the second edition that:

On l'a trouvé [Bayle's style] sans doute inégal, sérieux en plusieurs endroits, enjoué dans quelques autres, & parsemé de plusieurs façons de parler trop populaires. Je ne demande pas que l'on me fasse quartier là-dessus Je demande seulement que l'on considère, que parce que j'écrivois à un Ami, mon stile pouvoit être enjoué & familier généralement parlant, et qu'il devoit être grave et sérieux en quelques endroits, parce que je parlois de choses fort relevées.⁵

The epistolary style also allowed for greater speed of composition. Indeed, Bayle claimed to have written the

⁴See Chapter One, p. 25.

⁵Bayle, *op cit.*, p. 5.

Critique générale in only two weeks. Written in the vernacular rather than in Latin, an epistolary work such as Bayle's *Critique générale* needed a much less rigorous structure than an expository piece or dissertation. In this way it was more flexible. It could be lengthened or shortened as required, and was compatible with a narrative style. In this way the *Critique générale* can be compared to Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, whose format was constrained only by alphabetical order and the interest of its author.

3.2 Sources of the *Critique générale*

Anyone who reads the *Critique générale*, or the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, cannot help but be struck by Bayle's impressive erudition. The wide range of his sources gives the impression that Bayle had access to a very extensive library, and that he knew its contents thoroughly. Indeed, Bayle was without doubt a very erudite individual, but even he had to rely on practical bibliographic techniques. Bayle developed a technique that is familiar to modern historian, using what amounted to a collection of index cards for his notes. From as early as 1674 he maintained his "recueils" or notes that he kept from his extensive readings, and it was from these "recueils" that he composed his writings, including the *Critique*

générale and his famous *Dictionnaire historique et critique*.⁶ Bayle classed his notes chronologically and alphabetically; his bibliographic technique helps to explain both the rapidity with which he composed his works and the great exactitude of his citations.

However, it is also true that Bayle's notes could be only as reliable as the sources from which Bayle drew them. Indeed, the success of the historical arguments put forth either by Bayle or by Maimbourg rested ultimately on the reliability of their sources and the degree to which their sources were accepted by their seventeenth-century readers. In fact, the reliability of sources was perhaps the most common battlefield of the time between Catholic and Protestant historians, the first group trusting only Catholic sources and the second only Protestant ones. Furthermore, critics delighted in pointing out the inaccurate citations of their adversaries. One would have expected that Bayle would have put a great deal of effort in finding inaccuracies in Maimbourg's citations, but he seems to have had a certain confidence in the fidelity of these citations because he told his reader early in the *Critique générale* not to expect such an approach: "Ne vous attendez pas que je vous rende raison des citations, qui se trouvent

⁶These collections of notes were found among Bayle's papers after his death and are listed by Desmaizeaux at the end of the *Vie de M. Bayle*. See Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle. Tome 1. Du pays de Foix à la cité d'Erasme* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 46-47 and 236.

à la marge de cette Histoire, car franchement je n'ai pas songé à en vérifier une seule."⁷ On the other hand, because Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme* was effectively Bayle's principal and primary source, he could not let Maimbourg's sources pass unscathed. To this end Bayle chose to show his reader that Maimbourg had misinterpreted his sources. Bayle accomplished this task by limiting himself to Catholic sources, turning them against those used by Maimbourg. Showing such inconsistencies had a powerful effect on the reader.

It was during the last quarter of the seventeenth century that historians began to differentiate between what we now term primary and secondary sources. A great deal of both primary and secondary sources were then available for historians interested in the sixteenth century. Elisabeth Israels Perry, a modern historian who is interested in the historical controversy of the late seventeenth century over the Protestant Reformation, has identified three categories of source material.⁸ First there were the public documents, letters, and memoirs of the sixteenth century, as well as narratives of the events composed by eyewitnesses. Aside from the public documents, examples of this category

⁷Bayle, *op cit.*, Letter I, Section iv, p. 10b.

⁸See Elisabeth Israels Perry, *From Theology to History: French Religious Controversy and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), pp. 25ff.

include, from the Protestant side, the writings of the influential Calvinist leader Théodore de Bèze (1519-1605) and his *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France en laquelle est descrite au vray la renaissance et accroissement d'icelles, depuis l'an 1521 jusqu'à l'année 1563* (Anvers, 1580). On the Catholic side were such authors as Florimond de Rémond (1540?-1601), a lawyer and member of the "Parlement" of Bordeaux, who wrote the *Histoire de la naissance, progrèz et décadence de l'hérésie de ce siècle* (Rouen, 1623).

More "politique" than the preceding were such authors as Johann Philippi (1506-1566), known as Sleidan. A lawyer who was educated in France, he was from 1537 secretary to Cardinal Jean du Bellay, and acted as a diplomat with the Schmalkaldic League. He acted as the official historian for the Schmalkaldic League and the Republic of Strasbourg, writing a number of works including *De statu religionis et reipublicae Carolo quinto Caesare* (Strasbourg, 1555).

Perhaps the single most important source to either the Catholic or the Protestant sides was the *Jac.-Augusti Thuani historiarum sui temporis* (1606-1609) written by the French magistrate and diplomat Jacques-Auguste de Thou (1553-1617). A member of the "politiques," he showed a moderation towards the Protestants which earned his history a place on the Catholic Index of forbidden books. This

fact, and the fact of de Thou's integrity and accuracy made him a favourite source for both sides of the controversy.

From this first group, or primary material, Bayle chose little in the way of public documents, and what he used in this regard was often cited in the works of others. His primary sources included some public documents, such as various "arrêts" from a number of France's "Parlements," various ecclesiastical documents, and numerous royal edicts, but he relied more heavily on the memoirs and published writings of individuals who had lived during the Reformation. All of these sources were partisan, supporting either the Protestant, the Catholic, or the "politique" side, the politiques favouring religious toleration.

Bayle used only a few Protestant sources, including Théodore de Bèze's *Histoire ecclésiastique* and La Popelinière's *Histoire de France*. La Popelinière (1541-1608) was a favoured source for the Catholics because, in the way of the "politiques," he had tried to remain neutral, criticising both Huguenot and Catholic leaders as necessary. In a number of instances he drew on Sleidan and his *De statu religionis et reipublicae Carolo quinto Cesare* (1555) and on Jean Crespin's *Le livre des martyrs* (1554). Bayle often seemed to rely much more on Catholic sources, using Florimond de Rémond's *Histoire de la naissance, progrès et décadence de l'hérésie de ce siècle*, one of Maimbourg's favoured sources.

Bayle also cited a number of memoirs, including those of Michel de Castelnau (1520-1592), a soldier and diplomat during the regency of Catherine de Medici, who supported the politique position of Chancellor Michel de l'Hôpital, and the Protestant soldier Théodore-Agrippa d'Aubigné (1552-1630). He consulted as well the mémoires and biographies composed by Pierre de Bourdeilles, Abbé de Brantôme (1537-1614). Brantôme was heavily involved in Court life, and his writings shed much light on courtly life; but they were largely distrusted by Protestants because of his sympathies for the Guise family.⁹

The second group of sources identified by Perry included the histories written by individuals who were not eyewitnesses to the events of the Reformation or civil wars, but who had drawn upon the material from the eyewitnesses. Examples of these authors include: Archbishop Hardouin de Péréfixe's *Vie de Henri IV* and Mézeray's *Histoire de France depuis Faramond jusqu'à présent* and his *Abrégé chronologique ou extrait de l'histoire de France*.¹⁰ Bayle cited both these sources, though Mézeray appeared much more frequently.

Thirdly, there were the writings of the early and mid-seventeenth century published by controversialists who neither used the materials of the first group, nor were eyewitnesses to the events in question. Examples of this

⁹Perry, *op cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁰On Mézeray, see Chapter Two.

group include: the *libertin* Gabriel Naudé (1600-1653) and his *Science des princes, ou Considérations politiques sur les coups d'état* (1639); another *libertin*, François de La Mothe le Vayer and his *Deux discours, le premier du peu de certitude qu'il y a dans l'histoire, le second de la connoissance de soy-mesme* (1668); Cardinal Richelieu and his *Les principaux points de la foi de l'Eglise catholique* (1617); and the Protestant minister John Cameron (ca. 1579-1625) and his *Traicté auquel sont examinez les préjugez de ceux de l'Eglise romaine contre la religion réformée* (1617). Of this group, Bayle made use of only Naudé and La Mothe le Vayer, and that on account of sceptical methods.¹¹

In short, Bayle drew on a wide range of sources in his refutation of Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme*. He generally preferred using materials from eyewitnesses. He took great delight in using Maimbourg's own sources against him, finding this an effective critical technique.¹²

3.3 Structure of the *Critique générale*

Beneath the seemingly disordered epistolary style of the *Critique générale* lies a structure whose effect was

¹¹See "Historical pyrrhonism" in Chapter Four.

¹²Bayle said in the *Critique générale* that "Or cet avantage que nous avons de trouver dans les livres de nos Adversaires mêmes, la honte de leur Eglise, n'est pas petit." Bayle, *op cit.*, p. 69a.

devastating on Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme*. For although the outward style of the *Critique générale* harkened back to traditional means of communication and argumentation, its structure contained a novel analytic approach which helped to cut Maimbourg's version of the Reformation to pieces and which reflected Bayle's plan of attack.

Despite the advances in scientific methodology made during the course of the seventeenth century, such as those initiated by Francis Bacon (1561-1626) in his *Novum Organum* (1620), or those made by René Descartes (1596-1650) in his *Discours de la méthode* (1644), proofs in historical, political, and religious domains were still accomplished for the most part by traditional scholastic means in which individual axioms or facts were argued, both *pro* and *con*, until a resolution was reached. Thus a refutation or critique of a work involved its point by point dissection.

Bayle took enough of an untraditional approach to the task of refuting Maimbourg that he felt it necessary to apologise to his reader for not having made "une réponse en forme." Rather than composing the usual point by point critique, in Bayle's words, "pied à pied," he put together a collection of letters presenting "quelques reflexions" on

Maimbourg designed to undermine key elements of Maimbourg's history.¹³

It must be noted that the *Critique générale* reached its definitive state only in its third edition. In fact, over the course of its three editions it underwent substantial changes, most of which Bayle indicated to the reader in a general way in his prefaces to the second and third editions, and, more specifically in the marginal notes to the third edition.

In the first and second editions, the *Critique générale* contained a total of twenty-seven letters divided into three parts, whereas it had thirty letters divided into four parts in the third edition. These first two editions were constructed as follows: Part I included the first five letters, dealing with general reflections on Maimbourg, his book, and history in general. Part II consisted of letters six to twenty, examining specific comments on particular points raised in Maimbourg's book. Part III encompassed letters twenty-one to twenty-seven, which concentrated on refuting Maimbourg's thesis regarding the Protestant

¹³See Chapter Four for a discussion of these points. In the preface to the first edition of the *Critique générale*, Bayle stated: "Que l'Auteur de ces Lettres, dont on ne m'a rien appris, n'ayant pas prétendu réfuter l'*Histoire du calvinisme*, mais seulement faire quelques réflexions sur les faits qu'elle rapporte ... car son principal but a été de faire connoître quel jugement on devroit faire des choses, si on supposoit qu'elles sont telles que Mr. Maimbourg les rapporte."

Reformation. Throughout the *Critique générale* the reader found comments on the religious controversy itself.

For the third edition Bayle divided his book into four parts. Part I and Part II corresponded to those in the first two editions, whereas Part III was made up of letters twenty-one to twenty-three and Part IV, letters twenty-four to thirty. According to Bayle, these letters contained information that, for the most part, had already been published in the second edition, where most of the additions had been made. To explain this change in structure, Bayle stated in his preface to the third edition that this reorganisation "a renvoyé à la fin du Livre ces Digressions ... [de] la Controverse," so that "elles fissent comme un corps à part, détaché de la Critique de l'Histoire du Calvinisme ... en faveur de ceux qui étant dégoûtés de la Controverse, étoient fâchés de trouver ces digressions en chemin."¹⁴ Thus this "new" Part IV dealt with the religious controversy between the Protestants and Catholics of France.

The third edition also witnessed a number of changes designed to aid the reader. To each of the four parts of the *Critique générale* Bayle gave a subtitle describing what the reader could expect to find within it. He divided his letters into numbered sections, giving each a brief description of the contents of individual letters. From these additions Bayle derived a table of contents, one

¹⁴Bayle, *op cit.*, p. 6a.

detailed enough that it seems to be as much an index as a table of contents. In this way Bayle gave his work a much more structured appearance.

So according to the structure of the third edition, Part I of the *Critique générale* was where Bayle set the stage of his critique of Maimbourg, pointing out the high probability of uncertainty in historical writing and the biases inherent in Maimbourg. Part II contained Bayle's critique of specific "facts" as put forth by Maimbourg, whereas Part III dealt with Maimbourg's historical views concerning the Reformation. Part III also contained Bayle's first exposition of his doctrine of religious toleration, a doctrine based on philosophy and the historical record. Finally, Part IV examined the religious and historical controversies, and the effect of Maimbourg's history on them. This structure, from the general, to the specific, and back to the general, supported Bayle's intention of first creating a doubt in the mind of his reader, then of presenting a number of instances where Maimbourg had erred, and finally of suggesting that Maimbourg's history did more harm than good.

Despite Bayle's unorthodox approach to his critique of Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme*, he did not completely escape the traditional point by point methodology. A close inspection of the body of the *Critique générale* reveals that Bayle followed Maimbourg's chronological organisation. This

chronological critique begins in the second section of the first letter of Part II--that is, Letter VI--with an examination of Maimbourg's *Epitre dédicatoire* and continues with few interruptions until the final letter of Part III--that is, Letter XXIII.

In conclusion, there were a number of reasons for the success of the *Critique générale*. Witty, easily read, but deadly serious in subject matter and method, it offered to both the Protestant and the "politique" Catholic reader a timely and lively attack on Maimbourg and his *Histoire du calvinisme*. Beneath its traditional form the reader found great originality in that Bayle adapted the epistolary style to the genre of criticism. By pursuing an analytic approach to the task of refuting Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme*, Bayle not only circumvented the two week time constraint within which he wrote the *Critique générale*, but he also provided himself with a methodological advantage over his adversary. In the end, its highly effective blend of traditional literary style, a comprehensive and exacting erudition, and analytical structure helped Bayle strike out in a novel way to demolish Maimbourg's Catholic version of the Protestant Reformation in France.

CHAPTER FOUR

BAYLE'S REFUTATION OF MAIMBOURG

In order to refute Maimbourg's very popular *Histoire du calvinisme*, Bayle had to resort to the strongest possible means of criticism available to him. These means he found in philosophy, both ancient and modern, and in theology, both Catholic and Protestant. Common to both philosophy and theology were the traditional methodology of the dialectic and the more novel one of scepticism. With these two tools, Bayle worked diligently to achieve his primary goal of instilling in his reader a certain sense of doubt regarding Maimbourg as a reliable historian, and the *Histoire du calvinisme* as an accurate work of history.

Chapter Four examines the critical methodology in Bayle's *Critique générale*, and his consequent interpretation of the Protestant Reformation. The first section of this chapter deals with Bayle's dialectic, defining it and providing a selection of examples of his use of it. The second section explores Bayle's concept of historical pyrrhonism, a term that he coined and that first found expression in the *Critique générale*. The third section sets out what Bayle offered to the reader in way of positive

arguments and justifications for the Protestant version of the Reformation.

4.1 Bayle's Dialectic

The reader of the *Critique générale* cannot help but see that at every opportunity Bayle turned Maimbourg's sources and arguments completely around, interpreting them in a diametrically opposed fashion. To accomplish this reversal, Bayle employed dialectical reasoning. Dialectical reasoning was nothing new to the intellectuals of Bayle's time, though it did not then have its Hegelian or Marxian significance. It was a traditional technique of logical argumentation that Bayle had mastered during his studies with the Jesuits at Toulouse. Indeed, he would posthumously receive the great praise of the famous Enlightenment philosopher, Denis Diderot (1713-1784).¹ Yet Bayle's idea and use of dialectic became all the more potent because of his acceptance of certain Cartesian ideas, especially that of *évidence*.

Examples of Bayle's of dialectic can be found throughout his writings. Not long before he started to teach at Sedan, he described an aggressive, unrelenting method of questioning to his younger brother Joseph in a letter of January 1675. He wrote that:

¹Article "Bayle" in *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772).

Il faut user ... de rigueur contre soi-même et exercer contre son esprit le personnage d'un questionneur fâcheux, je veux dire qu'il se faut figurer qu'on a à comparoître devant des examinateurs rigides, qui vous font expliquer sans rémission tout ce qu'il leur plaît de vous demander.²

Twenty years later, in Rotterdam, writing his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Bayle chose not a judicial comparison for the dialectic, but rather a military one:

Les disputes philosophiques suivent l'esprit de l'art militaire, selon lequel on se campe le plus avantageusement que l'on peut et l'on tâche de réduire l'ennemi à des campemens incommodes; on l'attaque par son endroit le plus foible et l'on destine à cela tout ce que l'on peut se procurer de supériorité, tant à l'égard du nombre qu'à l'égard de la qualité des troupes.³

To Bayle, therefore, the dialectic was the flawlessly rigorous application of logic to argue the *pros* and the *cons* of a premise until only one of them remained or until the premise itself fell. It became characteristic of Bayle's published works, much to the pleasure of his allies, and to the discomfort of his adversaries.

The foundation of Bayle's dialectic was laid in large part by the work of the Renaissance philologists and the French jurists of the late sixteenth century.⁴ By

²Cited by Elisabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle: Hétérodoxie et Rigorisme* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964.) p. 132.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

⁴See, for instance, Blandine Barret-Kriegel, *La Défaite de l'érudition*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), pp. 23-46.

applying these philological principles to the study of history, he placed himself on the forefront of the historical methodology of the day.

Bayle identified at least four ways in which the historian could manipulate the facts in order to arrive at a predetermined result. He gave these ways as follows: suppression; transposition; omission; and supposition. According to Bayle:

Deux lignes supprimées, ou pour, ou contre, dans l'exposition d'un fait, sont capables de faire paroître un homme, ou fort innocent, ou fort coupable : & comme par la seule transposition de quelques mots, on peut faire d'un discours fort saint, un discours impie; de même par la seule transposition de quelques circonstances, l'on peut faire de l'action du monde la plus criminelle, l'action la plus vertueuse. L'omission d'une circonstance, la supposition d'une autre, que l'on coule adroitement en cinq ou six mots; un je ne sai quel tour que l'on donne aux choses, changent entièrement la qualité des actions."⁵

In fact, using the example of the judiciary to describe the dialectical nature of the work of the historian, Bayle pointed out the ease with which a lawyer could argue a case either pro or con:

Il n'est rien de plus aisé, quand on a beaucoup d'esprit, & beaucoup d'expérience dans la profession d'auteur, que de faire une Histoire Satyrique, composée des même faits qui ont servi à faire un Eloge Cela paroît tous les jours dans le Barreau :

⁵Bayle, *Critique générale*, in *Oeuvres diverses*, Vol. II, (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965) p. 10a.

il n'y a point de faits qui entre les mains de deux habiles Avocats appointez contraires, ne prennent des formes toutes différentes. Un historien comme Tacite, qui agiroit de mauvaise foi, feroit une vie de Louis XIV peu glorieuse, sur les mêmes faits qui porteront au souverain degré de la Gloire le nom de ce grand Monarque; & l'on peut dire qu'à l'égard de la réputation, toute la destinée des Princes est entre les mains des Historiens.⁶

Bayle made a display of his dialectic throughout the *Critique générale*. Sometimes he made a show of it on certain issues he felt to be of great importance. Other times he simply picked up on a small point, a detail, and proceeded to demolish it and Maimbourg's credibility. For example, in Letter XV, Bayle chose from the multitude of events and characters that Maimbourg had included in the *Histoire du calvinisme*, a seemingly innocuous event in the life of François Coligny d'Andelot (1521-1569).

D'Andelot was the youngest and least influential of the three Coligny brothers, though he had been the first of the three to become Protestant. The incident at issue was d'Andelot's consent to attend a Catholic mass performed in his room in the company of his wife and a number of courtiers. Maimbourg had portrayed this event as an embarrassment to the Huguenots, and thus as a victory for the Catholics.⁷ However, Bayle turned Maimbourg's charge

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Louis Maimbourg, *Histoire du calvinisme par Monsieur Maimbourg*, 3e éd. (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1682) p. 108.

back on itself by showing that the event had in fact scandalised both the Huguenots and the Catholics. As Bayle put it:

Il faut être bien chagrin pour faire une chicane là-dessus; car non seulement la chose dont il est question, étoit un scandale très effectif pour les Huguenots, mais aussi pour les Catholiques. Pour les Huguenots, parce qu'ils croient que l'on n'offre rien à Dieu dans le Sacrifice, de la Messe, que du pain & du vin; d'où il s'ensuit qu'ils ne peuvent assister à ce Sacrifice, sans rendre à la Créature le souverain culte de latrie, qui n'est dû qu'à Dieu; & pour les Catholiques, parce que n'ignorant pas quels étoient les sentiments de d'Andelot, ils devoient être persuadez, qu'il n'avoit assisté à leurs Mystères, que pour se délivrer des importunités qu'on lui faisoit, n'ayant du reste que du mépris, & de l'horreur, pour ces prétendus Mystères, & par conséquent n'ayant pû que les profaner par sa présence.⁸

Thus in Bayle's opinion, although d'Andelot's actions had brought scandal upon himself, the actions of the Catholics had been worse in that they had scandalised them all.

Bayle's rebuttal also provided a convenient springboard to launch a short but effective counter attack on the current Catholic authorities for compelling the "nouveaux Catholiques," that is, the forcibly converted Huguenots, to attend Catholic mass. Then he went on to question whether a faithful Christian could use troops and violence to force religious conversion and conformity, such as what was taking place in the French province of Poitou

⁸Bayle, *op cit.*, p. 63a.

just as Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme* came to press. With an effective streak of irony, Bayle simply said: "Esprit de Christianisme, qu'êtes-vous devenu?"⁹ What better counter argument existed?

Returning to d'Andelot, Bayle admitted that d'Andelot's presence at the mass had shown less courage than that shown by the early Christians who had faced persecution after persecution. Nevertheless, d'Andelot had not in actuality been convinced to attend on religious grounds, but on the contrary had been coerced through "les larmes de sa femme" and through imprisonment, attending the Mass being the price of release.¹⁰

In this instance, seizing a rather innocuous event, Bayle took Maimbourg's attack on the religious behaviour of a prominent historical figure of the Protestant party, and turned it completely around by pointing to faulty logic in Maimbourg and certain omitted facts in order to discredit Maimbourg's historical argument in particular and the actions of the Catholics in general.

Other, more prominent examples of Bayle's dialectic in action against Maimbourg's historical assertions can be found elsewhere in the *Critique générale*. For instance, in an earlier letter, Letter VIII, where Bayle began his critique of the body of Maimbourg's text, Bayle attacked the

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

first and most important of Maimbourg's historical assertions, namely, that the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century had intended to achieve the success of their reformed religion through violent means.

Bayle devoted six of the seven sections comprising Letter VIII to refute Maimbourg's assertion, the seventh section serving as a convenient addition on the related topic of whether the reform-minded officials of early sixteenth-century Zurich had the right to hold an assembly to decide upon religious reform. In the first section of this letter Bayle set out Maimbourg's assertion by means of an appropriate citation from the *Histoire du calvinisme*:

Cette malheureuse secte fait voir
manifestement par la seule manière violente,
& toute contraire à l'Evangile, dont elle
s'est voulu établir, qu'elle est fausse &
qu'elle ne fut jamais de Jésus-Christ, qui
est le Dieu de paix.¹¹

A little further down, Bayle also remarked upon, though did not cite, Maimbourg's very next statement that:

C'est là l'unique fin que je me suis
proposée quand j'ay entrepris d'écrire cette
Histoire, où j'espère que Dieu, de qui
j'implore l'assistance, me fera la grace de
découvrir, & d'exposer si clairement la
vérité, que nos Protestans mesmes, pour peu
qu'ils veulent estre sincères, seront
constraints de convenir de ce que je vais

¹¹Cited in *Critique générale*, p. 36a. Bayle's citation varies to a minor degree from the wording in the third edition of the *Histoire du Calvinisme*, and with respect to pagination.

dire du commencement, & du progrès du Calvinisme.¹²

This argument had long been one of the principal arguments for the Catholic controversialists, and it had furnished Maimbourg with the cornerstone of his history. Indeed, Maimbourg's attack on the Huguenots centred on the premise that the Reformation had been established "par le fer & par le feu, s'il eust pû, sur les ruines de la Religion & de l'Etat."¹³ For Bayle, pulverising it was absolutely critical.

Bayle then proceeded to give his reader a synopsis of the generally received Protestant rebuttal to the Catholic point of view, according to which a measure of religious and civil tolerance was all that the first Protestant reformers sought. As for the violence, this originated with the Catholics, although the Protestants, too, fell short of imitating the ideal behaviour of the early Christians of the Roman Empire period. Bayle made explicit mention of the rights of the Princes of the Blood during the periods of regency government in order to justify Protestant hostilities during the Civil Wars. Finally, in way of corroboration, Bayle referred the reader to a book entitled *Des derniers efforts de l'innocence affligée*, claiming that it provided overwhelming proof of the

¹²Maimbourg, *op cit.*, pp. 4-5.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 2.

Protestants' historical claims, especially regarding the impact of religious reform to Renaissance France, the causes of the French civil wars, and the role of the Princes of the Blood.

In the second and subsequent sections of Letter VIII Bayle moved further afield in order to turn Maimbourg's historical claim upside down. He posed an ethical question, followed by its logical conclusion based on a Christian view of non-violence. He began his argument by stating that "c'est qu'il ne s'ensuit pas qu'une religion soit mauvaise, de ce qu'elle n'imite pas entièrement les premiers Chrétiens."¹⁴ He pursued this point, adding that "il ne faut pas condamner comme une Eglise réprouvée de Dieu, toutes les Sociétés où l'on ne voit pas régner l'esprit du véritable Christianisme." In this way, Bayle opened up the possibility of legitimacy for the Protestant Reformation, despite the actions of some of its individual members.

Such an idea, however, that one could not summarily condemn a society simply because it was not Christian, was considered to be heresy to Catholic and Protestant clergy alike. Nevertheless the idea had emerged in the wake of European contacts with the peoples of other continents, most especially, America. In fact, Bayle used it to great advantage in order to question the legitimacy of the Catholic church. Citing Catholic controversialists who

¹⁴Bayle, *op cit.*, p. 36.

claimed that the legitimacy of the Catholic church rested in part on its long tradition, Bayle gave convincing arguments that coercion and violence were not proper means of religious instruction and conversion:

Si la violence est une marque de fausse Religion, jamais la vraie Religion ne se sert de violence ni dans ses commencemens, ni dans ses progrès : & si la vraie Religion peut subsister avec la violence, lors qu'elle a seize cens ans, elle pourroit être violente dès ses premiers jours, sans cesser d'être la véritable Eglise. Pour ce qui est de la longue possession, ou elle n'excuse point la violence, ou elle excuse la violence de Neron, & des autres Persécuteurs de l'Eglise, qui accusoient les Chrétiens de venir troubler un culte établi de temps immémorial.¹⁵

Bayle then went on to excoriate Maimbourg for a faulty use of reason in the latter's attempt to prove an absence of legitimacy in Protestantism and in the Protestant reformers because of their part in the violence of the Reformation. Bayle wrote that:

Pour faire voir que la raison de Monsieur Maimbourg est un pur Sophisme, il ne faut considérer, sinon qu'elle prouve trop, car elle prouve que dans le siècle passé, il n'y avoit plus de véritable Religion Chrétienne en France. Selon lui, les Calvinistes

¹⁵*Ibid.* Bayle went even further on the following page by giving the following argument regarding the Spanish conversion of Amerindians: (1) Toute Religion, selon ces Messieurs, qui va troubler une longue possession par des manières violentes, est fausse: (2) La Religion Catholique est allée troubler la longue possession des Américains, par des manières violentes: (3) Donc, selon ces Messieurs, la Religion Catholique est fausse. Indeed, Bayle took great delight in attacking the idea of tradition as used by the Catholic Church in general, and Bishop Bossuet in particular.

n'étoient point cette véritable Religion; pourquoi? Parce qu'ils se servoient de violence pour s'établir, & que la violence est éloignée de l'Evangile, qui ne respire que la paix. Mais par la même raison les Catholiques n'étoient point la vraie Eglise; pourquoi? Parce qu'ils se servoient pour exterminer les Huguenots d'une violence aussi inhumaine, que celle des Empereurs Payens Cela prouve manifestement, ou qu'il n'y avoit point de Christianisme dans ce Royaume, ou que la raison de Mr. Maimbourg ne prouve rien.¹⁶

Thus turning Maimbourg's assertion completely around, Bayle was able to paint the Catholics black as Maimbourg had done to the Protestants, and to claim with philosophical certainty that Maimbourg had erred in at least one vital historical assertion.

Bayle was also certain to demolish Maimbourg's contention that "l'Hérésie est l'ennemie capitale d'un état." As Bayle often did, he began by citing an appropriate passage from his adversary:

Ils crurent (les Protestans) qu'ils pourroient tirer grand avantage de l'affliction publique, où l'on étoit après la Bataille de S. Quentin. Car l'hérésie, qui sous un puissant Prince Catholique est toujours foible, ne souhaite rien tant que de le voir fort affoibli, pour s'élever par son abaissement, & même, si elle le pouvoit, sur les ruines de la Monarchie dont elle est l'ennemie capitale.¹⁷

He pointed out that because Maimbourg had taken as a maxim that "c'est le propre de l'Hérésie de souhaiter le

¹⁶*Ibid.*, VIII, ii, p. 36b.

¹⁷Maimbourg, *op cit.*, p. 96, cited by Bayle in *Critique générale*, p. 54a.

renversement des Royaumes où on la souffre," he should have also made explicit its corollary, namely, that "les Orthodoxes ne souhaitent jamais le renversement de la Monarchie où on les souffre."¹⁸

Then Bayle turned to the counter attack by pointing out that Catholics, among all the Christian groups, were alone in their allegiance to a foreign sovereign power, namely the Papacy. He also pointed out the difficulties such a proposition had for Catholics living in Protestant countries, and the difficulties of Jesuit missionaries in the New World and in the Asian countries. He went on to assert that experience, or History, showed, quite to the contrary of Maimbourg's claim, the political unreliability of Catholics living under a Catholic or non-Catholic sovereign and provided a long list of Catholic uprisings dating back to the fifth century.¹⁹

Throughout the *Critique générale* Bayle hammered away with his dialectic at key arguments in Maimbourg's version of the history of Calvinism, turning them against themselves because by refuting even one of these arguments, Bayle showed the likelihood that Maimbourg's work as a whole ceased to have value as a work of history. He brought to bear a sharp and unrelenting philosophical reasoning in order to prove beyond reasonable doubt that some of certain

¹⁸Bayle, *op cit.*, p. 54a

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 55b.

internal Maimbourg's facts and claims were, quite simply, impossible. This strategy was one that Voltaire, writing as an historian, would make such good use of a half century later, when he asked whether a certain action or event was *vraisemblable*. In this way Bayle hoped to show the reader that Maimbourg's book was polemic, not history.

4.2 Historical Pyrrhonism

Since the late seventeenth century, the words sceptic and Bayle have been taken by scholars as synonymous. An understanding of Bayle and his writings depends in great measure on an understanding of scepticism and his use of it. Indeed, the unique quality of Bayle's historical method lies in his conception and application of what he termed "pyrrhonisme historique," or historical pyrrhonism. So in order to examine Bayle's historical pyrrhonism, this section sets out what he meant by this term, why he thought it necessary, and how he made use of it in the *Critique générale*.

Little known today in its seventeenth-century guise, Bayle's historical pyrrhonism has been called nothing but a rhetorical device that Bayle used against Maimbourg.²⁰ On

²⁰Heather Williams, "The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns," in *The Decline of the Age of Louis XIV or, French Literature 1687-1715*, ed. by Arthur Tilley (New York: Barnes + Noble, 1968), pp. 366-368.

the other hand, historical pyrrhonism provided Bayle with a powerful weapon to destroy key arguments in Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme*. Such is the view of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), who took it as a fundamental step in the development of modern historical method.²¹

Despite the fact that Bayle coined the term historical pyrrhonism in the *Critique générale*, its origins are considerably older than the seventeenth century. Indeed, its origins are to be found in the sceptical philosophies of the ancient Greeks, in particular those of the Platonic Academy and those of the followers of the sceptic Pyrrho of Elis (ca. 360-275 B.C.). In the *Le Robert: dictionnaire historique de la langue française* the word pyrrhonism is identified as having originated in Renaissance France from the name of Pyrrho of Elis, and as having entered the French language through the writings of Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). It signified "la doctrine philosophique sceptique et, par extension, la tendance à douter de tout."²²

²¹Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. by Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettigrove (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965) p. 207.

²²*Le Robert: dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1992).

In Antoine Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* (1690) one finds the word "pyrrhonien," though it appears under the word "sceptique:"

Secte & doctrine d'anciens Philosophes Grecs, qui a eu Pyrrhon pour fondateur, dont le dogme principal étoit de douter de tout, & de nier tous les principes. Diogene Laërce fait une ample mention de la Philosophie sceptique, qu'on nomme aussi Pyrrhonienne, & Ephestique. La Mothe le Vayer a fait plusieurs Traitez sur les principes des Philosophes Sceptiques.²³

A similar but more comprehensive definition can be found in the Catholic *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, where "Pyrrhonien" is identified as:

Nom de Secte dont Pyrrhon a été le Chef ... Ce Philosophe faisoit procession de douter de tout, prétendant que les hommes ne jugeoient de toutes choses que par les apparences du vrai & du faux. C'est pourquoi il se tenoit dans une suspension perpetuelle d'esprit, sans se determiner, pour ne point juger temerairement. Or l'on a étendu ce nom à tous ceux qui paroissent dans la même situation d'esprit, et qui mettent tout en question Le Pyrrhonisme que Montaigne a voulu renouveler, n'est pas une secte de gens persuadez de ce qu'ils pensent, c'est une secte de menteurs. Leur coeur ne peut s'accorder avec leur langue.²⁴

In the case of the Academic sceptics, they claimed that uncertainty regarding the validity of the human senses, the unreliability of the human reason, and the lack of a

²³Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, contenant généralement tous les mots français, tant vieux que modernes, & les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts [1690] (Paris: Le Robert, 1978).

²⁴*Dictionnaire universel françois & latin ...* (Trévoux: Estienne Ganeau, 1704).

universal standard of truth led to the conclusion that no true knowledge could be obtained. In the case of the Pyrrhonian sceptics, they employed a series of "tropes" or sceptical arguments with the intention of finding the means by which one could suspend judgement on a given question. In other words, whereas the dogmatist claimed that something can be known, and the Academic sceptic claimed that nothing can be known, the pyrrhonist simply asserted that insufficient and inadequate evidence existed to determine whether any knowledge was possible.²⁵ It was this view that Bayle had in mind when he said of the historical controversy surrounding the causes of the French civil wars: "Je veux être Pyrrhonien; je n'affirme ni l'une, ni l'autre, & cela me suffit pour ne trouver, dans toutes ces guerres, aucun préjugé legitime contre la Divinité de ma Religion."²⁶

The thought of the Academic sceptics was passed down through the writings of Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, and Saint Augustine. What is known of Pyrrho and pyrrhonist thought has been passed down through the writings of Sextus Empiricus (fl. ca. A.D. 200). These writings were forgotten during the Middle Ages, and it was not until the time of Montaigne in the late sixteenth century that they came back to light with his famous expression, "Que sais-je?." In

²⁵See Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, rev. ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) pp. xii ff.

²⁶Bayle, *op cit.*, p. 11a.

fact, Montaigne initiated a revival of pyrrhonism among certain French intellectuals and clergy of the early seventeenth century. For example, St. François de Sales (1567-1622), the famous counter-Reformation missionary of Savoy, used sceptical arguments, both theological and historical, to proselytise the Protestant Savoyards regarding key tenets of Calvinist doctrine, a method employed by a number of subsequent French clerics including Cardinal Richelieu himself.²⁷ Lay intellectuals also found it to be a useful concept. For example, René Descartes based on it his revolutionary assertion, "Je pense, donc je suis." It even found its way into the writings of a small number of historians, including La Popelinière and La Mothe le Vayer, especially in regard to the inherent partiality of the historian.²⁸ Nevertheless, Bayle was the first to write explicitly of historical pyrrhonism, to elaborate on it, and, ironically enough, to put it to constructive use.

To be sure, Bayle used historical pyrrhonism in the *Critique générale* as a weapon to undermine Maimbourg's historical assertions and credibility. In the manner of the Catholic missionaries such as St. François de Sales, Bayle began with an attempt to instill a measure of doubt into the subject matter. In the first section of Letter I Bayle began his critical attack by stating: "Il n'est rien de si

²⁷See Chapter One, p. 21.

²⁸See Chapter Three, p. 87.

difficile que d'attraper, sur des apparences spécieuses, la vraie cause et le principal ressort des actions de l'Homme."²⁹ Later on in the same letter, he spoke of the "Incertitude de l'Histoire" and the "Indifference de l'Auteur [Bayle] sur ce sujet." Although he acknowledged and endorsed the historian's need to authenticate and verify citations, he bypassed this need aside in order to strike at the heart of the matter:

je vous avoue que je ne lis presque jamais les Historiens dans la vue de m'instruire des choses qui se sont passées, mais seulement pour savoir de que l'on dit dans chaque Nation & dans chaque parti, sur les choses qui se sont passées. Quand je lis les Histoires des Guerres civiles du dernier siècle, composées par nos Auteurs, je trouve que les Protestans de France n'étoient jamais dans leur tort. Mais quand je lis les même Guerres dans les Historiens du parti contraire ... je me trouve transporté dans un autre país où je ne me reconnois plus.³⁰

In this way Bayle attacked Maimbourg on the most basic element of history: whether to believe the historian, his

²⁹Bayle, *op cit.*, p. 7. If human motivations were difficult to ascertain, those of God were next to impossible: "la Nature divine étant infinie en toutes ses perfections, il faut nécessairement que la sagesse, avec laquelle Dieu gouverne toutes choses, soit infinie, & par conséquent incompréhensible à l'homme; de sorte qu'il est impossible de faire voir la raison prochaine & immédiate de la sagesse de Dieu, dans chaque événement particulier." *Ibid.*, p. 128a.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 10a. Cf. p. 19a where Bayle stated: "Mr. Pellisson ... nous apprend, qu'il a toujours bien plus cherché en lisant un Livre, l'esprit & le génie de celui qui l'a composé, que les choses mêmes dont il traite. J'ai toujours imité cette méthode depuis ce tems-là.

"facts," or his history. Indeed, true to a Cartesian way of thinking, Bayle went so far as to question whether history had any value at all:

Après cela n'est-ce point peine perdue que de lire l'Histoire? Car si d'un côté le bon sens veut que je me défie d'un Historien Huguenot ... de l'autre côté le même bon sens veut aussi, que je me défie d'un Historien de la Communion Romaine.³¹

He explained his position in more detail in Letter XII. The many faults and "préjugés" of the historian obscured the very "facts" of history, thus necessitating a reliance on historical pyrrhonism:

Un tel fait est-il vrai? Les uns le nient, les autres l'assurent, c'est ce qu'il y a de certain. Pour le reste, la vérité n'est guère moins le désespoir de l'Histoire, que celui de la Philosophie à cause de la malignité de l'homme, ou de sa préoccupation.³²

This situation became even more complicated on account of imperfect sources and the sheer volume of incorrect histories:

Je ne suis pas le seul qui donne dans cette espèce de Pyrrhonisme Historique. La partialité qui se remarque dans la plupart des Historiens, entraîne dans cette Secte-là un très-grand nombre de gens d'esprit. Cette partialité commence avec son plus grand désordre dans les Gazettes, & se répand de là au long & au large dans une infinité de méchants Historiens, qui ne composent leurs Rapsodies que de ces misérables pièces. Ce sont des Historiens qui ne valent rien à la vérité, mais leur

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 11a.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 53a.

grand nombre leur tient lieu d'un certain mérite, qui fait qu'on les oppose à l'autorité d'un bon Historiographe, & par là les choses deviennent problématiques.³³

Thus Bayle was able to conclude that "je ne suis pas trop mal fondé de ne chercher dans l'Histoire, que l'esprit, les préjugés, les intérêts, & le goût du parti dans lequel se rencontre l'Historien."³⁴ A little later on, at the end of Letter III, he reiterated this point, stating: qu'il n'y a qu'abus & qu'incertitude dans l'Histoire; qu'il ne faut la lire que pour y reconnoître le génie de l'Historien, & celui de sa partialité."³⁵

Despite such sceptical comments, Bayle acknowledged nevertheless the possibility of achieving a certain degree of certitude in history by advocating a method by which the historian can weed out historical error. In Letter II, Section I, Bayle stated the principle that:

Je vous avoue aujourd'hui, que l'on peut quelquefois pousser la certitude jusques à quelque détail. Par exemple, l'on peut être persuadé d'un fait, ou d'un dessein, ou d'un motif particulier, lors que tous les partis en conviennent; lors qu'étant infame à l'un des partis, il ne laisse pas d'être avoué par ceux à qui il est infame; ou bien lors qu'étant glorieux à l'un des partis, il n'est pas contesté par l'autre.³⁶

³³*Ibid.*, p. 13a.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 19a.

³⁶*Ibid.* p. 11f.

Bayle also gave a method for discerning whether a witness can be believed by the historian. In Letter XI he related a method used by the famous Spanish statesman, the Duke of Olivares (1587-1645), that Bayle claimed to have read in the *Histoire de l'Académie française*:

Je me souviens encore une fois de l'*Histoire de l'Académie française*, où j'ai lû que le Comte Duc d'Olivarez jugeoit d'ordinaire des hommes plutôt par le mal, que par le bien qu'on en disoit: c'est-à-dire, que s'il voyoit qu'on dit peu de mal de quelqu'un, ou avec peu de certitude, il en concevoit bonne opinion. La méthode est bonne universellement parlant, mais de Turc à More, elle ne vaut rien. Quand c'est un ennemi qui parle, il faut juger de son ennemi plutôt par le bien, que par le mal qu'il en dit: c'est-à-dire, qu'il faut ajouter plus de foi aux louanges qu'il lui donne, qu'aux injures qu'il lui dit. Il y a une maxime dans le Droit, qui veut que le témoignage des amis de l'accusé, ne soit guere considérable pour le décharger, mais le soit beaucoup pour le charger, & qu'au contraire celui de ses ennemis n'ait guere de force pour le charger, mais en ait beaucoup pour le décharger.³⁷

Perhaps one of the most revealing comments Bayle made about the value of an historical fact arose during a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the execution of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Showing that Elizabeth I was unwilling to execute her rebellious cousin, Bayle provided information proving that Elizabeth relented only when secretly pushed to it by Henri III's ambassador on account of dynastic reasons and very much to the contrary of Henri's

³⁷*Ibid*, pp. 50f.

public exhortation for clemency for a fellow Catholic monarch. According to Bayle, such a revelation was "une chose qui vaut seule plus que cent découvertes de Physique, dont on fait aujourd'hui tant de cas."³⁸

Thus although Bayle advocated historical pyrrhonism, he did not use it in the manner of the ancient sceptics. Rather, he used it in a methodical way to destroy key arguments in Maimbourg's *Histoire du calvinisme*, as a means of ascertaining whether the truth could be known, and as a means of arriving at this truth if possible. Without remission he sought out the contradictions in his adversary's history, and he used them to bring Maimbourg's historical interpretation down upon itself.

4.3 Bayle and the Reformation

Over the course of the seventeenth century, the disputes between Catholic and Protestant controversialists came down to three main arguments used either to denounce or to justify the Protestant Reformation. First, there was the question of the legitimacy and morality of the first Protestant reformers, particularly Martin Luther (1483-1546)

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 13f. Toward the end of this letter, in the first and second editions only, Bayle made the following comment on this and similar historical revelations, that these were "des vérités importantes, & plus précieuses que les découvertes des Philosophes; car il vaut mieux connaître les profondeurs de l'esprit & du coeur de l'homme, que celles du mouvement de la matière." *Ibid.*, p. 14, note.

and Jean Calvin (1509-1564). Secondly there was the question of whether the morals of the time had required religious reformation, or in other words, what had caused the Reformation. Thirdly, there was the all important question of the causes of the dynastic wars in France during the second half of the sixteenth century, and what role the religious upheavals had played in them.

First, Bayle devoted Letter XI to counter Maimbourg's attack on Calvin, but he did so in a way that was unusual for the time. Rather than attacking Maimbourg's portrait of Calvin on religious grounds, he attacked it on historical grounds. Bayle began by showing that Maimbourg had made a small, but revealing mistake about whether Calvin was a theologian. According to Maimbourg, Calvin could not have been a theologian since he had not earned the proper university degree. Bayle did not dispute this point; rather, he simply Bayle compared Calvin to St. Augustine and asked whether Augustine had ever completed the doctorate in theology.

Bayle also criticised Maimbourg for the claim that Calvin had brought into existence a dry faith devoid of ceremony. Aside from a number of philosophical reasons against the pomp and ceremony of the Catholic church, Bayle presented an historical argument. Like the reformers of the sixteenth century, Bayle compared the ceremonies of the Protestants with those of the early church of the Roman

Empire. He compared their simplicity to the pomp and circumstance of the Catholics, and most particularly of the papacy itself. For the coup de grâce, Bayle turned Maimbourg's criticism entirely around by comparing the Catholic position to that of the pagans of Rome:

Nous avons la gloire de voir que l'on nous reproche la sécheresse & la maigreur de notre Réforme, & qu'on l'oppose à la Majesté pompeuse des Cérémonies Romaines, de la même manière que les Payens opposaient l'éclat auguste de leurs cérémonies, à la simplicité des premiers Chrétiens.³⁹

Indeed, Bayle often made the comparison of the contemporary church to that of the early Christians in order to justify the actions of the Protestants.

Bayle devoted Letter IX to the second element required in justifying the Reformation, namely that the immoral condition of the sixteenth-century church warranted reform. For this element Bayle again refrained from giving a complete listing of all the usual charges regarding the corruption of the Catholic clergy. Rather, he stated that most any history of the time would detail them. Nevertheless, he gave a few selected citations from respected Catholic histories so that the Catholics would incriminate themselves. From the biography of the famous Counter-Reformation archbishop of Milan, St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), written by Bishop Godeau of Vence, Bayle recounted the scandalous behaviour of the clerics of

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 48a.

that time. Then Bayle cited Machiaveli, who had written that such scandalous conditions existed throughout Italy of the early sixteenth century. Bayle even found ammunition within Maimbourg's book itself, in what Maimbourg had written about the Protestant mother of Henri IV, Jeanne d'Albret (1528-1572), and about the French statesman Michel de l'Hôpital (1505-1573). Relying on Catholic admissions alone, Bayle proved that there were serious problems with the Catholic clergy:

Je pourrais vous alléguer un bon nombre de témoignages irréprochables, qui font voir que les plus sensez de nos adversaires reconnoissent, que la mauvaise vie des Ecclésiastiques fut la principale cause des grands progrès de notre Réformation.⁴⁰

For the third element Bayle took a subtle approach. Throughout a number of letters in the *Critique générale* he cited evidence leading to the conclusion that religion played only a small or incidental role in the dynastic wars in France during the sixteenth century. He wrote of the legitimate authority of the Princes of the Blood during a minority, when government was unstable and factious, with particular respect to the Prince de Condé:

Reconnoissons que ni le Duc de Guise, ni le Prince de Condé, n'ont agi par Principe de Religion, mais par cet esprit de Politique & de vanité, qui fait que les Grands d'un Royaume, Hérétiques, Schismatiques, Romains, Grecs, Turcs, Perses, Afriquains, Chinois, Chrétiens, Infidèles, & tout ce qu'il vous plaira, forment plusieurs partis, pour se

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 43.

supplanter les uns les autres,
principalement sous une Minorité.⁴¹

Insofar as religion played a role it was due to the
violation of the liberty of conscience:

C'est un attentat assurément contre les
droits de la Divinité, que de vouloir forcer
la conscience, & c'est à un attentat de
cette espece, que l'on doit imputer les
malheurs qui désolèrent ce Royaume. Si on
eût voulu tolérer nos Ancêtres, on n'eût vû
aucune guerre civile.⁴²

Indeed, insofar as the political leaders were concerned,
Bayle pointed to their quest for power: "Les Princes ont
beau faire & beau dire, on voit bien que pour si jaloux
qu'ils soient d'amplifier leur Religion, ils le sont encore
plus d'amplifier leur puissance temporelle."⁴³

It is ironic that although Bayle defended the
Protestant conception of the Reformation, nevertheless he
helped to point the way toward a non-theological
interpretation of history. Bayle helped initiate this
change through the use of his concept of historical
pyrrhonism to show incertitude in Maimbourg's historical
facts and assertions. He offered his reader some very
plausible explanations of the causes, events, and personal
motivations associated with the Protestant Reformation, thus
showing the possibility of an alternative interpretation of

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 75. Cf. p. 64.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p 81a.

the history of Calvinism to the one put forth by Maimbourg,
but he also showed the possibility of omitting God
altogether by his reliance on human causes in human history.

CHAPTER FIVE
BAYLE AND THE HISTORIAN

Although Bayle was a professor of philosophy and history at the Ecole Illustre in Rotterdam, he seems never to have considered himself to be an historian. In fact, in the only work of history that he wrote, the incomplete and unpublished *Vie de Gustave-Adolphe*, he attempted a style of writing quite atypical in comparison to the rest of his work, not least in his omission of citations.¹ Yet even if Bayle did not consider himself to be an historian, nevertheless he acted very often in this capacity. He did this in his criticisms of other historians and their works, in what he had to offer in way of rebuttals, and in his unceasing attempts to achieve historical accuracy.²

¹The manuscript was found in Bayle's papers after his death. He wrote it in the fall of 1683 in an attempt to gain a post as historiographer to William of Orange, an admirer of that Protestant champion of the Thirty Years War, though nothing came of this attempt. See Elisabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle. Tome I. Du pays de Foix à la cité d'Erasmus* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 194-5, n. 94.

²Ernst Cassirer was so impressed with Bayle's attention to accuracy that he called him the "father of historical accuracy," in *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 206.

Chapter Five examines what Bayle considered to be the essential qualities of the historian and his work. The many remarks that Bayle made in the *Critique générale*, often in passing, provide the basis of the examination of these qualities, but because of the great dispersal of this kind of comments in Bayle work, some recourse will be made to his other writings.

Before examining Bayle's conception of the historian, it is necessary to define the word history as understood in the late seventeenth century. At that time the word history had no one, clear definition. In fact, in Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* of 1690 the word "histoire" contained eight separate entries, all of which are derived from the Greek language.³ From the Greek word *historia* came the idea of "recherche des choses curieuses, envie de sçavoir," and from *historein*, "connoistre, sçavoir une chose comme l'ayant veuë." From this etymology, Furetière provided a general definition of history as the:

description, narration des choses comme elles sont, ou des actions comme elles se sont passées, ou comme elles se pouvoient passer signifie aussi l'exposition des choses dont nous avons esté les spectateurs.

³Antoine Furetière (1619-1688), author and member of the *Académie française*, was expelled from this body in 1684 on account of his *Essai d'un dictionnaire universel* (1684). His *Dictionnaire universel* was published posthumously at Rotterdam by Bayle's publisher, Reinier Leers. Bayle knew this work because he wrote its preface.

Then he gave a number of specific usages: "un discours long & ennuyeux;" "Romans, des narrations fabuleuses, mais vraisemblables;" and, in four other entries, the meaning related to "récits," "adventures," or "le bruit commun." Only one of his eight entries corresponded to the work of the historian, and used examples of their work:

narration véritable suivie & enchaînée de plusieurs événements mémorables qui sont arrivés en une ou en plusieurs nations, en un ou en plusieurs siècles. Baronius a écrit l'*Histoire universelle de l'Eglise*; Mezeray l'*Histoire de France*, Coesseteau l'*Histoire romaine*, on a imprimé quantité de Mémoires servant à l'*Histoire*, il possède l'*Histoire ancienne & moderne*, l'*Histoire sainte & profane*, *Histoire universelle*.

Furetière defined "historien" as "celui qui a recueilli les Histoires, les actions des siècles passés. Tite Live, Corneille, Tacite, Saluste ont servi de modèle aux autres Historiens." For "historiographe" he stated:

celui qui a écrit ou qui écrit l'*Histoire*, qui s'applique particulièrement à cette étude. Les anciens *Historiographes*. On le dit plus particulièrement de ceux qui ont une commission, un brevet particulier pour écrire l'*Histoire* de leur temps. Les rois ont toujours soin d'avoir de bons *Historiographes*, il y a des *Historiographes* en titre d'office.

Because Bayle did not himself give explicit definitions in the *Critique générale*, and on account of the fact that he prefaced Furetière's dictionary in a flattering manner,

these definitions shall provide the starting point for determining his conception of the historian.⁴

According to Furetière's definitions, narration provided the vehicle by which the historian accomplished his work. Therefore, part of the task of the historian was to be an author and, at least insofar as history relied upon the narrative, it constituted a branch of literature. In this regard, Bayle had no quarrel with Maimbourg. On the contrary, he praised Maimbourg's work and held it out as a good example of what one expected of the historian. Maimbourg was an author who had

un certain air de narrer les choses de bonne grace, & en ton de maître; de ramasser de part et d'autre plusieurs ornements empruntez, & de les insérer adroitement dans le corps de son Histoire, avec les portraits qu'il nous donne du corps & de l'ame de ses personnages sans épargner même les Grands & les Evêques de Cour.⁵

In the style of the Roman historians, Maimbourg gave an easily read narrative. It contained exciting accounts of past events and vivid portraits of the historical characters. His description had been done "en ton de maître" or, in other words, in a style that reflected the author's mastery of the subject matter. His historical

⁴The possibility of a woman historian does not seem to have been considered by the intellectual élite of the time. It would be interesting to study this possibility.

⁵Pierre Bayle, *Critique générale*, in *Oeuvres diverses. Tome II* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), p. 19b.

narrative followed the cycle of life, as was generally the case during the late seventeenth century, whether it was the history of an individual, a group, or even an institution. Bayle cited Maimbourg's description of the *Histoire du calvinisme* as an attempt to show "la naissance, le progrès & l'anéantissement du Calvinisme."⁶

Bayle believed that the historian had to have a good measure of independence. This independence was at two levels, one financial, and the other intellectual. First, Bayle knew from his own personal experience that remuneration was both a necessity and a powerful motivation, but he seldom mentioned in any of his writings the need of the historian to earn a living. Ideally, the historian enjoyed financial independence from having been born into a wealthy family. In this vein Bayle commented on the vocation of preacher, criticising the lack of intellect and education on the part of many Catholic clerics who had obtained their positions through gentle birth:

On n'a besoin pour prêcher que de beaucoup d'éloquence, & de quelques pensées vives qui puissent tenir l'Auditeur attentif, & remuer ses passions. Une science superficielle suffit pour cela, lors qu'on ne manque point d'ailleurs d'une belle naissance pour la Chaire⁷

Although Bayle was simply making an oblique criticism of Maimbourg's gentle birth, nevertheless he pointed out how a

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 7a.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 20a.

great many writers were able to support themselves. Yet Bayle went much further in his criticism by explicitly denigrating Maimbourg for being in the employ of Louis XIV. Maimbourg, "dont la plume est hypothéquée au roi," received "une grosse pension," the title of "Historiographe," and the protection of "le plus grand Prince du monde."⁸ In Bayle's opinion, such a relationship seems to have compromised the independence of the historian, despite the fact that it was the normal practice of the day.⁹

The intellectual independence of the historian preoccupied Bayle a great deal more than his financial situation. Indeed, it was one of Bayle's principal themes in his refutation of Maimbourg. Bayle described this aspect of the historian by using terms such as "sens froid," "sang froid" and "préjugez." These terms reflect Bayle's recognition of a division between conscious and unconscious aspects to the intellectual independence of the historian. In the first case, Bayle considered the historian's self-control of emotion and passion to be fundamental to the writing of good history. Without this self-control and a

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 9a and 9b. Bayle also used the expression "Historiographe à pension" on p. 27b. Although Maimbourg did in fact receive an income from Louis XIV, his name does not appear on any extant record of payments to the king's historiographers. See François Fossier, "A propos du titre d'Historiographe sous l'Ancien Régime," in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 32 (1985), Appendix.

⁹See Orest Ranum, *Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 23-24.

certain sobriety, the historian crossed over into the realm of rhetoric, leaving aside the critical element to history of "narration véritable."

Bayle went to great lengths to place himself on the side of accuracy and veracity by emphasising how Maimbourg's ulterior motives made him and his *Histoire du calvinisme* untrustworthy. Bayle first made this point in the opening letter of the *Critique générale*. After having listed a number of potential biases in Maimbourg such as his having been a Jesuit and his heated conflicts with the Jansenists, Bayle states that:

Mais la grande raison qui a fait que le Père Maimbourg a écrit l'Histoire du Calvinisme avec des emportements si outrez, & si dignes d'un jeune Déclamateur, qui s'exerce sur les lieux communs de l'Invective, la voici: c'est qu'il a vû la Cour de France déterminée à ruiner le Calvinisme, en aussi peu de temps qu'il en mettroit à composer son Histoire.¹⁰

To further his point Bayle resorted to the use of an expression that became common to the philosophers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that of "bons sens." He told his reader in his matter of fact way that "Le bon sens veut qu'on n'ajoute point de foi à un Historien, qui est si peu Maître de sa préoccupation, que sa

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 9a. In the "Seconde Addition" to the *Critique générale*, Bayle revealed his belief that the historian needed both time and accuracy in order properly to accomplish the writing of history by criticising Maimbourg for a lack of both qualities. *Ibid.*, p. 158b

colere & sa haine sautent aux yeux de tout le monde."¹¹ In addition, Bayle claimed repeatedly in his refutation that he had kept his emotions in check. Throughout the *Critique générale* the reader found references to Bayle's claims of objectivity, beginning in the first letter where he said:

Pour moi qui suis difficile à émouvoir, je n'ai point senti la moindre tentation de colere en lisant ce Livre. Je l'ai lû d'un bout à l'autre avec un sens froid qui a peu d'exemples, & si je sortois quelquefois de ce sens froid, c'était seulement, ou pour avoir pitié, ou pour rire des emportemens de Mr. Maimbourg.¹²

In Letter XVII of the *Critique générale* Bayle shed more light on the idea of "sens froid" and its role in the process of reasoning. He used the term when criticising the Catholic leaders, in particular the magistrates, of the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacre of 1572. Decrying the manner in which they decided with "sens froid" to initiate a massacre of the Huguenots, he went on to describe the reasoning process in the following way:

La St. Barthélemy tire sa plus grande atrocité de ce que ce fut un massacre médité, & résolu de sens froid, dans un Conseil où on représenta mûrement & tranquillement les raisons pour & contre.¹³

¹¹*Ibid.*, 10b.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 8a.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 76a.

Bayle was even more specific about the work of the historian. Echoing the definition found in Furetière's dictionary, he stated that:

J'avoue encore qu'en examinant l'enchainure de plusieurs faits, en considérant le génie des Acteurs, en pesant toutes les circonstances, en comparant ensemble ce qui a été dit par les uns & par les autres, on peut éclaircir bien des choses, découvrir bien des impostures, réfuter bien des calomnies. Mais en ces choses-là, Monsieur, soyez assuré que l'Historien qui a le plus d'esprit, est ordinairement celui dont la cause paroît la meilleure, & qui est bien malaisé de parvenir jusqu'à l'évidence.¹⁴

Such in Bayle's view was the proper reasoning process of the historian.

In conclusion, the historian's effort was very much worthwhile in Bayle's opinion. Given proper measures of eloquence, good evidence, right reasoning, and independence, the historian was capable of revealing the inner workings of the human spirit. Unlike many of his contemporaries who viewed the new science as more valuable than the traditional erudition, he claimed that historical truth was "une chose qui vaut seule plus que cent découvertes de Physique, dont on fait aujourd'hui tant de cas."¹⁵

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 12a.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 13a.

CONCLUSION

Bayle's *Critique générale* presents a paradox to the modern researcher. On the one hand, it belongs quite clearly to the virulent political, religious, and historical polemic of the last quarter of the seventeenth century between French Catholics and French Protestants. Bayle sides openly with the Protestants, explicitly stating his intention to demolish Maimbourg's interpretation of the Protestant Reformation. He luxuriates in his criticisms of a superstitious and "infallible" Roman Catholic Church. He shows Maimbourg that history, far from showing the need for religious intolerance, in fact proves the opposite, that rights of the individual conscience must be respected.

On the other hand, the *Critique générale* contains the exposition of a critical methodology that would provide the basis of modern historical criticism. By means of rigorous erudition and the coordinated use of rationalism and scepticism, Bayle destroys the credibility of Maimbourg and the *Histoire du calvinisme*, along with the Catholic view of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic reliance on tradition as a criterion of truth. He exposes Maimbourg's partiality in great detail and handily disproves several of

Maimbourg's key arguments, thus pointing the way to a novel form of historical criticism.

Bayle accomplished his tasks by using the methods of the humanist, the publicist, and the rationalist. He was the traditional humanist in his unrelenting return to original sources and his collection of historical data. He was the not so traditional publicist by the way he communicated his information, in a clear, concise, and often informal manner. Lastly, he was the next generation rationalist by his insistence on exactitude, by his use of clear and distinct ideas, and by his reliance on evidence as opposed to sentiment.

Pierre Bayle has long been an enigma and a source of controversy. Known as the great sceptic of the Enlightenment, the forbear of Voltaire, he has only recently come to be known as a sincere Christian. No other historical actor of his generation brings to life so well Hazard's appellation of the late seventeenth century, *la crise de la conscience européenne*.

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