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Antioch Kantemir and the matters of faith

Antioch Kantemir i kwestia wiary

Antioch Kantemir is considered one of the greatest poets of the eighteenth century, considered a major figure of the Russian Enlightenment, and a promoter of secularism of the Russian culture. It is thus interesting to see how deep the secularist aspect of his work and art really was.

A LIFE

Kantemir was born in 1709 in Constantinople. His father Dmitrii was a ruler of Moldavia, and the family moved to Russia as the result of failure of efforts to liberate Moldavia from Turkish occupation. His father was also a scholar and was particular about good education of his children. The children of Dmitrii were home-school educated by I. I. Il'inskii, pupil of the Moscow Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy, and by the Greek priest Kondoidi. In 1722, Antioch was a student in the Capuchin school in Astrakhan. In 1726–1727, he studied in the Petersburg Academy of Sciences where prof. Christian F. Gross urged his students to study the natural theology of Samuel Clarke and Newton and the theodicy of Leibniz. That is, from early childhood Kantemir's education had a very strong theological component. In 1732 Kantemir began his diplomatic work in London (at the age of 22!) which was continued from 1738 in France. He died in 1744 in Paris having never seen Russia after he left it for London.

Kantemir was a very talented linguist. Throughout his life he translated poetry and prose from various languages beginning at least in 1725 with his translation from Latin of a chronicle by Constantine Manasses. He was also keenly interested in religious studies as testified by his interest in Manasses and by his first printed work, a concordance to the Psalter, *The symphony to the Psalter*, published in 1727. Except for *The symphony*, during his lifetime only his translation of Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* was published (in 1740). However, his fame comes from the nine satires which he started writing in 1729 and on which he continued working while abroad. In spite of his efforts, they were not published during his lifetime.

The first five satires are known in at least two versions, from among which two versions are generally acknowledged, the original versions written still in Russia and circulated in hand-copied collections, and the final version completed in England and in France and published first in free French translation (1749), then in free German translation (1752) and only afterwards in Russian long after Kantemir's death, in 1762. The differences between the two versions are sometimes significant, particularly in respect to their religious content.

IN RUSSIA

The original version of the satires and Kantemir's comments on them include a few very strongly religiously laden statements, particularly in Satire 5.

Kantemir was convinced that God "created us similar to himself" (S₁ 5.437)¹, that is, "man is created by God in the image and likeness of God, just as Moses stated in Genesis" (CS₁ 5.430). "Man was created pure and immortal for a peaceful and carefree life" (S₁ 5.438–439), but Adam and Eve ate a fruit from the tree of knowledge and only too late they saw what trouble that caused (440–450). "Problem [in their lives] and labor started and they became subjects to death and multitude of passions enslaved them and while they wanted to be equals of the Omniscient, through the sinful sickness they lost this aspect" (451–454), i.e., they ceased to have the likeness of God (CS₁ 5.454). As a consequence, they were expelled from the paradise (S₁ 5.455) and we, being their progeny, inherited their curiosity (457–458), which — as is understood — is not always a positive trait

¹ The following abbreviations will be used: CS₁, CS₂ — Kantemir's comments to his Satires, to the first version and to the final version. P — *Письма о природе и человеке*, in Антиох Кантемир, *Сочинения, пись и избранные переводы*, vol. 2, Санкт-Петербург: Глазунув, 1868, 21–96. S₁, S₂ — Satires, the first version and the final version. Sh — И.И. Шимко, Новые данные к биографии кн. Антиоха Дмитриевича и его ближайших родственников, *Журнал Министерства народного просвещения* 1891, no. 4, 352–425; no. 6, 252–333.

since it may lead to problems if it is not kept in check, and the fate of Adam and Eve is enough of a warning, Kantemir could say. To this curiosity Kantemir referred when he stated that the mind has an inborn drive to seek knowledge (Ode to the empress Anna 41–42). However, God also gave us reason to understand (Ode 1.32); therefore, the drive can be harnessed by reason. This reason will allow people to see themselves from the proper perspective: on the cosmic scale, man is “dust, nothing, subject to incessant problems, sickness, fears, death, awful passions, who is unable to provide even a drop of rain, who does not know the end of life, nor its continuation” (S₁ 392–396).

He believed in God’s providential presence in the world. People blamed the introduction of foreign customs and languages in Russia for a low yield, caused by God’s anger for these alleged infractions, but Kantemir said that laziness of peasants should be faulted, and, generally, crudeness of manners among people and offences against others caused God’s anger (CS₁ 1.63). God’s providence is also testified by the fact that God — and only God — can change an evil heart: “when there are evil morals rooted in the heart . . . then there is no hope for reform, unless Christ the savior descends to resurrect again Lazarus” (CS₁ 2.13).

People should be concerned about the future life “since the thought about the future life is not only not silly, but very prudent and very much needed” (CS₁ 5.355). As an example of laughable behavior given in the final version, Kantemir mentioned an old man who plans his funeral in detail, “giving no thought to what will happen to [his] soul” (S₂ 5.652). That is, concern about the afterlife should have primarily the spiritual dimension. The ritualistic side of it is at best secondary. He apparently believed in hell when he mentioned “a damned atheist, without soul and faith, who takes his will without measure for the law, who considers spirits [that is, angels and devils (CS₁ 3.335)] and the fire of hell in which the evil will suffer to be fables to scare children” (S₁ 3.333–336).² So, hell is not a fable, and consequently, neither is heaven. Who acquires entry to the latter? In the “Epigram on St. Peter’s icon” written some time in 1730–1731, Kantemir wrote: “‘Peter, why do you stand with a key’ — ‘I want to let in to paradise the children of the Eastern church’. — ‘And those who fell into the papal nest, will they stand behind the door?’ — ‘Yes, [but] they have their own key-keeper [the pope]; they enter by themselves’.”³ That is, salvation is open not only to the Orthodox believers but also to Catholics, and it is not impossible to assume that in this ecumenical

² These verses closely follow Boileau’s *Satire* 4.23–26.

³ Interestingly, from among all Kantemir’s poems, the censor of Nicholas I blocked from publication only the “Epigram on St. Peter’s icon”, which “puts into the mouth of this apostle words which do not correspond with his sacred character”, [Владимир В. Стасов], *Цензура в царствование императора Николая I, Русская старина* 116 (1903), no. 10, 181.

spirit Kantemir would not refuse the entry to heavens to the Protestants, but as to non-Christian faiths, it is not easy to guess what his decision would be.

Kantemir devoted a long passage to the atheists in *Satire 5* (S₁ 5.405–424). There are people who see the wonders of the world, “incomprehensible to the mind variety of living species, and the makeup of our bodies, and the cause of life — this is the work of nature (oh my, out of fear, I throw [my] pen) — this is the work of nature, they mindlessly chatter; that all made itself, and they do not know the Maker of the creation and [they claim that] what was put in motion does not need any principle/source of motion, nor there is any wise and eternal Creator, who rules over all, almighty, fearsome, infinite” (S₁ 5.405–416). They are “full of fear” (418), “their conscience is troubled” (419), they “almost await the infinite torment” (421), and yet they would say that the soul is corporeal (424), which is just unacceptable: “It is known that the soul is incorporeal”; thus, to say that the soul is a body is to pronounce a contradiction comparable to the statement that white is black and day is night (CS₁ 5.424).

Atheism also became criticized in one of the two *Odes* written in 1730–1731, entitled “Against atheists”. In rather strong terms Kantemir said, “Abandon futile wisdom of the world, evil enemies of God (богоборцы)! Turning the steer, direct your ship toward the shores of truth, your course up until now has been wrong. Acknowledge God, that [He] rules over [His] creation made by his own hands. [He] spread heavens and shines from there upon us, [He] gave us the sun — the source of light — and the stars” (Ode 1.1–8). In passing, Kantemir also expressed his displeasure with the Epicurean philosophy that posits the formation of the world as the result of random arrangement of atoms. This is, in his view, an ungodly opinion (богопротивное мнение, CS₁ 3.256).

Also, in the first version of *Satires* there is a strong presence of anticlericalism and clerical obscurantism. Kantemir mocked those who did not see any use for science asking, “What benefit will it give to the church?” (S₁ 1.29/S₂ 1.143) and blamed heresies and schisms in the church on science (S₁ 1.33–35/S₂ 1.23–25; CS₁ 5.426). However, the first version qualified this by adding that this “says someone who himself knows God only a little” (S₁ 1.36). It is not true, commented Kantemir, that studying leads to godlessness. Quite the contrary, “who learns the greatness, beauty and the order of great creation (which very well may be from books), he is even more convinced [that he should] glorify the Creator with his natural reason” (CS₁ 1.35). Therefore, he satirized those who considered the investigation of God’s attributes as unbecoming and did not take them by faith (S₁ 1.79–80).

In a way, the topic of religion being benefited by science is also taken in *Ode 4* modeled on Lucian. God sent wisdom to people to lead them to the true path (Ode 4.13–18). India was first enlightened by wisdom (33–34), then was

Egypt, Babylon, and the barbarians. Then by “seven friends of yours” wisdom was introduced in Greece and its power suddenly grew (50–51). When Rome (53) separated from wisdom, barbarians conquered them (55–60). When the Byzantium fell, scientists fled to Europe and were accepted by Medici who fostered science (medici — врачи, 62, 66). As wisdom spread, “superstition fell and [now] we know [how] to serve the king of glory with the humble heart and pure morals” (70–72). Superstition is an enemy of religion, and it should be eradicated, and this is where religion should find science as its ally, not an enemy.

Kantemir was not above generalizing some behavior when he said that during Easter “priests usually for the entire week greedily, for their own benefit glorify the resurrected Christ in all estates” (CS₁ 1.141), presumably, to be rewarded and consider the spiritual aspect secondary. In a parody of a bishop, he said that if one wants to be a bishop, it is enough to have proper apparel, gold chain around the neck, an equipage, and give signs of blessing left and right to be recognized and a shepherd (S₁ 1.18–28/S₂ 1.134–140). A “brainless churchman” cries that there is no truth, no justice among men, since he is not a bishop although he can read the prayer book, the Psalter, and the epistles, and even Chrysostom’s writings, although without understanding (S₁ 1.169–172/S₂ 1.177–180). The problem is with, in Kantemir’s opinion, the general low level of education among clergy: many priests better know which bell to toll for which occasion than they can read (CS₁ 2.254).

Kantemir was very concerned that the level of morality among the priests is not altogether high, for example, in Kantemir’s view “no one ever heard about that there can be many priests in one church without envying one another” (CS₁ 2.21/CS₂ 2.22). It is a task and duty of priests, spiritual shepherds, to give moral guidance to people, but they fail, wanting to avoid having a quarrel with people (S₁ 4.47–49/S₂ 4.47–49). So Kantemir’s dissatisfaction about the clergy came from their low level of spirituality, their laziness, obscurantism, and devotion more to the pleasures of this life than to the concern of the spiritual side of their own life and of their flock. Not surprisingly then, he also lamented over low religious consciousness among believers. It is not the same, he stated, to acknowledge God and to know Him: “every Orthodox [believer] acknowledges God, but [people] know him very little, i.e., they have [little] information concerning his attributes, the members of the St. Trinity, etc. [needed] for the true knowledge of God” (S₁ 1.36).

However, all is not bad in the church. Kantemir praised services in the Spasskii monastery in which “frequently teachers (since there is a school there) give teachings beneficial to the soul” (CS₁ 3.111). Also, Kantemir expressed his admiration to one of the major ecclesiastical figures of the age, Feofan Prokopovich.

He even dedicated Satire 3 to him, who was “the principal ruler of the entire church” (S₁ 3.307/S₂ 3.364), “who knows everything that man can know and human mind can comprehend” (S₁ 3.5–6/S₂ 3.5–6), who worked for the good of all people (CS₁ 3.308), and, as he later added, who was “under tsar, a decent defender of church’s fame” (S₂ 3.365–366); “the clear will of the Almighty comes from his mouth and leads to the true way” (368–369). Kantemir was not troubled by the fact that Prokopovich theologically assisted Peter I in subjugating the church to the power of the state, i.e., the tsar himself. In fact, Kantemir satirized those who lamented the church’s loss of power (S₂ 1.38).

ABROAD

In the midst of his diplomatic duties Kantemir found little time for his poetry. He wrote new Satires: 6, 9, 7, and 8 (in that order), which are free of religious statements or allusions, except for Satire 9 which is a fiery attack against religious hypocrisy and ignorance concerning major tenets of faith; however, it makes only very few references to religious matters as such. He reworked Satires 1–5 and in many cases expunged or at least toned down their theological content. In particular, his statements about atheists were removed from Satire 5 along with a Biblical description of the fall and so were some theologically laden comments to the Satires. It may very well be that he no longer considered discussion of theological themes in satires as quite appropriate as he explicitly stated about a discussion of the afterlife in satires (CS 7.1), but the reason may very likely have been his first-hand encounter with the atmosphere of the Enlightenment. Religion was a very important part of life also in the West, but it did not exercise such an overpowering influence as it did in Russia. He wrote from London that people there “least of all think about religion”.⁴ Kantemir may have found it liberating, and along the line of his first Satire, he looked at the world through the perspective of science and human reason. Surrounded by people who “least of all think about religion” he may also have decided that religious themes would not be interesting for the reader of his Satires, and thus removed them. This may not necessarily have meant that he abandoned religion as part of his life, but simply that, at that time, he did not want to press religious issues in his Satires. However, his social criticism, including anticlericalism, remained in his Satires, and it was as acute as before. Thus, he wrote about the clergy that they complain that science leads to heresies, to abandonment of tradition including fast days, and to distrusting the church so that the youth do not want to choose priesthood as their future, but who, instead

⁴ Letter to Prokopovich, 21 Dec. 1733, in Майков Л.Н., *Материалы для биографии кн. А.Д. Кантемира*, Санкт-Петербург: Императорская Академия Наук 1903, 25.

of taking church teaching by faith, “want to know the reason and the cause”, and believe that the church should have no secular power (S₂ 1.23–40).

However, in the midst of the whirl of political and diplomatic life, Kantemir longed for quietude more than anything, and that was reflected in his poems.

He opened *Satire 6* with the statement that “only someone satisfied little is happy in this life, knows how to live in quietness, free from vain thoughts which torment others and [who] is treading down the unfailing path of virtue to the inescapable end. Small house [of my] own built on [my] own field, which gives what is needed to the moderate will: not shabby, not devoid of food and average entertainment — where I could with others, the ones chosen to my liking, in spare time expel the yoke of boredom, where far from noise, all the remaining time being spent among the dead Greeks and Romans, investigating workings and causes of all things, learning like others what is useful, what is bad in customs, what is vile, what is likable — these are all my desires” (S 6.1–15; On quiet life 46–56). He wanted “to live in quietness, looking for what is honest, what is useful to you and to others for the improvement of customs; for sure, your fame will eternally live among good people” (S 6.155–158). This wish was not confined to his verses. As much as it was possible for a diplomat, he tried to live such a life, particularly in Paris; as his friend and first biographer described it, “in the City where pleasures offered themselves from all parts and in the shining age to taste them, he conducted the life of a Philosopher, I’d even say, of a recluse”.⁵

Although for some time there was some perceptible softening of religious issues in Kantemir’s poems written and reworked abroad, the longing for the quiet life turned his attention back to religion, and at the end of his stay in London and then during his stay in Paris he apparently reaffirmed with a new zeal the religious side of existence. In his late *Ode 2*, “On trust in God”, written some time after 1739, Kantemir wrote, “You see, Nikita [Trubetskoi], as the winged tribe does not till the earth, nor it harvests, nor sows; but from the higher hand, in its [good] time it gets food sufficient to support life” (*Ode 2.1–4*). “The voice of the law that before ages nature put in the hearts and God confirmed in the flesh [in the person of Christ], instilling what is honest [and] good — may the force of this [law] rule over you, [while] fleeing anger. Leave the care for the rest to the Almighty Father” (8–14). “What will be tomorrow — don’t trouble [yourself] to find out; considering each current day as a gift, try to make [it] useful for yourself and for others, seeking the heavenly inheritance. The owner of the world knows your need, [He] will not deprive [you] of food, nor does [He] deprive you

⁵ [Octavien de Guasco], *Vie du Prince Antiochus Cantemir*, in [Antiochus] Cantemir, *Satyres*, Londres: Jean Nourse 1749, 106.

of cloth; who humbly fulfils His will, [he] will not lose his hope in Him” (17–24). Nature evokes this sentiment in the poet: “God, Your generosity toward us is immeasurable! Immeasurable blessing, you are the source/principle of all, You are the creator, all of this was made by You” (On quiet life 26–28).

In final versions of the Satires there appear accents not to be found in the original versions. Concerning eschatology, Kantemir observed: I cannot determine the future and do not worry much about it, “ready to accept whatever comes to my fate from the hands of the Supreme King. For a number of my days I await, silent, His will; honest life unquivering and cheerful goes toward an inevitable end knowing that through this door it will enter the new unending age where the desirable quietness and peace rule” (S₂ 4.182–190). This moving statement leaves very little doubt in how Kantemir viewed the fate of the soul after death and on whom his fate here and there depends. To round it off, he added in a comment that “the new unending age” refers to “the other, infinite life, which after death should await those, who believe in the immortality of the soul” (CS₂ 4.189). Would it be a tinge of disclaimer here that those not believing in the immortality would not be worried about the fate of their souls after death?

All of this indicates that Kantemir did not abandon religion during his life abroad. In particular, his anticlericalism was not criticism of religion as such, but, in fact, a cry for its purity. Prayers and offerings, if only in form of candles, are fine, but doing that for show is unacceptable since “God needs in his service the heart, the intention of man” (S₂ 3.165). “Prayers, fasting, zeal in beautifying the church of God truly serve our salvation, but only these things [by themselves] are not sufficient when we do not have love for our neighbor and in particular, when we hurt our neighbor — we will not enter the paradise that way” (CS 7.7). God does not hear people’s prayers if they do not hear His commandments, in particular, the commandment of love. This sentiment was always important for Kantemir and it only got stronger with years. With years Kantemir returned to more explicit treatment of religious issues, which is also confirmed by the *Letters about nature and man*.

LETTERS ABOUT NATURE AND MAN

*Letters about nature and man*⁶ written at the end of his life and published for the first time in 1868, have been at first considered an original work of Kantemir.⁷

⁶ The title comes from the first editor of the *Letters*, P. A. Efremov.

⁷ Sh 395; П[остислав И.] Сементковский, *Энциклопедический словарь*, Санкт-Петербург: Ефрон 1895, vol. 14, 316; Алексей Н. Веселовский, *Западное влияние в новой русской литературе: Историкосравнительные очерки*, Москва: Русское Товарищество

However, it turned out that they are at times literal, at times free translation of most of the first part of Fénelon's *Traité de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu* (part 1, 1712, part 2, 1718)⁸, and, for this reason, sometimes dismissed as a source of Kantemir's philosophical views.⁹ However, first, it is interesting that Kantemir, considered a man of the Enlightenment, even considered translation of the work written by a Catholic theologian in defense of the monotheistic theology, but it could be said that the translation has been commissioned — as many translations before — and the views expressed in this work have nothing to do with Kantemir's own theology. However, the *Letters* are clearly a labor of love. They are not a pure translation: less importantly, there are occasional omissions of sentences — including a long omission of a fragment on the Epicureanism and then an omission of a long prayer at the closing of part 1 — and occasional summaries. More importantly, the style is different, and there are some of Kantemir's additions not found in the original.

Kantemir cast Fénelon's treatise in the form of eleven letters written to a woman, as it was fashionable at the time as exemplified by Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) which Kantemir himself translated into Russian. Also, there is in these *Letters* one Mirmon who first read all letters and into whose mouth Kantemir put some fragments of Fénelon's *Traité*.¹⁰ Most importantly, there are parts of the *Letters* which are not translations from Fénelon, namely *Letters* 1, 10, and 11; moreover, a dozen or so lines have been added at the beginning of *Letters* 2, 4, 8, and at end of *Letters* 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9. Some of these additions are for making smoother a transition from one letter to another, but there are some statements that actually show the reason for the entire enterprise.

The punch line is given at the beginning of *Letter* 2: "the more my eyes see various kinds [of things], the more the more I know his [God's] authority

печатного и издательского дела 1896, 62; И[ван Я.] Порфирьев, *История русской словесности*, part 2.1, Казань: Императорский Университет 1901, 143; Лев А. Петров, *Общественно-политическая и философская мысль России первой половины XVIII века*, Иркутск: Иркутский государственный университет имени А.А. Жданова 1974, 14, 56, 156, 266; having considered the *Letters* to be Kantemir's own work, Petrov quoted indiscriminantly from them as though all statements were Kantemir's own, pp. 134–135, 150, 153, 156, 162, 164–165, 167 (with wrong reference), 168–169, 173.

⁸ It is largely a translation of Part II of Fontenelle's book, as misattributed by Cornelia Cîrstea, *Antioh Cantemir*, Craiova: Scrisul Românesc 1984, 108.

⁹ Stefan Lemny, *Les Cantemir: l'aventure européenne d'une famille princière au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris: Éditions Complexe 2009, 290.

¹⁰ As explicitly stated in *Letter* 1 (P 25), Mirmon is an allusion to a popular French novel, which can only be Jean Baptiste d'Argens, *Le solitaire philosophie ou Mémoires de Mr. le Marquis de Mirmon*, Amsterdam 1736; cf. H[elmut] Grasshoff, Kantemir and Fénelon, *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 1958, 374.

and power; ... [by] what we see in the world and [by what we learn] through self-knowledge, we know the wise Creator and Lord" (P 25, 40). Kantemir was interested in the way one has to live, in the way happiness can be obtained. He believed that God exercised some influence in his life, but maybe this was not very easy to believe considering the physical and mental suffering to which he was constantly exposed. Kantemir was a sickly man, and with age, his health problems exacerbated, and very little helped to alleviate them. To this we should add a stressful life inevitably comes with the life of a politician. From a very early age he held a post of an ambassador (even if it sometimes was called differently) in London and then in Paris, which rarely gave him carefree moments. In the pressure of the moment, in the face of recurrent illness¹¹, beset by financial problems, with the political atmosphere in Russia and in France often set against him, in the midst of life not far from depression, it was sometimes difficult to believe in the presence of God in his life. Does God care what befalls people in the vicissitudes of life? Does He ever assist by helping in to suppress human pain and distress? These may have been questions that Kantemir asked himself as he turned to natural theology for an answer. He came across a spate of physico-theology books in London¹², and there was no shortage of books on the subject in Paris. Natural theology then seemed to be the way to faith; revealed theology lacked its luster in the age of Enlightenment. Looking attentively at the harmony that pervades the universe at every level — cosmic, earthly, human, and microscopic, in all kinds of being — inanimate world of minerals, landscape, atmospheric phenomena, the animate world of insects, animals, and humans — all of this convinced Kantemir that it is simply impossible that the world could have been randomly formed and that there is no superior power behind all phenomena. The world, at each level, points to the providential hand of God, which leads to the conclusion that if God cares about the world, He also cares about human lives. We cannot always explain why certain events — natural and social — take place; we cannot determine their cause nor reason, but the existence of the supreme power of God assures us that the reason does exist, and due to our insufficient insight we cannot see it. Similarly, if things happen to us, which we very much wished did not befall us, we may be assured that there is a reason for them, and that not a rebellion against God, but trust in

¹¹ Kantemir was plagued by sickness and constantly mentioned his health issues in his letters: in 1733 (Sh 267). 1740 (285), 4 Nov. 1742 (297), 15/4 Nov. 1742 (300), 16/5 May 1743 (304), 5 March 1744 (309). See also Guasco, *op. cit.*, 120–126.

¹² He owned books of William Wollaston, William Derham, and Samuel Clarke on natural theology, Helmut Grasshoff, Antioch Dmitrievič Kantemir und Westeuropa. Ein russischer Schriftsteller des 18. Jahrhunderts und seine Beziehungen zur westeuropäischen Literatur und Kunst, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1966, 148.

Him may help in enduring them and, hopefully, overcoming them. More or less explicitly, such reflections can be found in Kantemir.¹³

As he said, the reason for having written the *Letters* was to describe “what I thought and learned with my weak reason about the power of the divine providence” (P 75). He found bountiful traces of the presence of the providence in nature. Finding such traces was due to natural theology studies, to physico-theological investigations, from which Kantemir could conclude that “God is one, all-powerful and has power over us and only on him depends human happiness and thus, from my side, I should submit myself to his will and respect his divine decision concerning my life” (82, 90), and “I acknowledge in all the authority of God” (29). God can silence evil tongues, eradicate jealousy, “He can soften hardened hearts and lead [us] toward virtue; but we should submit [ourselves] to His will and seek satisfaction in ourselves. And now, the more I think about the world, the more I begin to know inexperienced fate and the providence of the Highest” (30).

Unwittingly or otherwise, Kantemir may have modeled his *Letters* to some extent on the Book of Job. The Book ends with two speeches of God to Job concerning His providential work in nature and among animals. The issue of Job’s suffering was apparently sidestepped, and it appears to be little reason for God to speak about ostriches, horses, and other animals to Job deformed by suffering so horribly that his three friends were speechless for a week. However, God’s speeches could be considered an exercise in natural theology showing that His hand is omnipresent even in the lives of animals and in various natural phenomena. The unspoken conclusion is that all the more God is present in the lives of humans, in the lives of those created in His image and likeness. Natural theology was an indirect answer to Job that his suffering was not neglected by God, unendurable as it may have been for Job. Apparently, Job understood as much by stating that he spoke about things he did not understand.

Kantemir wrote about his illness and his depression so serious that he was “close to the door of the grave” (P 91). However, “no one can examine God’s judgment” and, thankfully, God restored his health either because he purified the soul by repentance, or because he paid penance through suffering for his sins (91). Kantemir did not know why he suffered and why his suffering was removed, but since he had a good insight into the working of God in the world, since natural theology enabled him to see God’s providence, he trusted that God did not turn His back on him, that God saw his suffering and eventually freed him from it.

¹³ It is quite curious to claim after Plekhanov that Kantemir was the founder of secular philosophy in Russia in spite of the reluctant recognition, that in Kantemir’s understanding of morality, three factors counted: God, fate, and common sense, Cirstea, *op. cit.*, 107, 111.

PEACEFUL LIFE

The centerpiece of the closing *Letter* is a translation of the first short chapter, *De la solitude*, from the book by Johan T. Oxenstirn/Oxenstierna, *Pensées, réflexions et maximes morales* (1742).¹⁴ It apparently summarizes Kantemir's longstanding desire for the quiet life. Oxenstierna stated that happy is he who is far from the confusion of the world, spending his time primarily in conversations with himself, with a clean conscience, not afraid of his fate, "glorifying incessantly his Creator", taking advice from ancient teachers, not wanting the impossible, "constantly directing his thoughts toward heavens", not wanting things of the world since they are perishable, "breathing only for salvation; awaits death not desiring it, also not being afraid" of it (P 94). Kantemir's own statements concerning the life he wished he had expressed in the *Letters* and elsewhere do not bring anything new. "I look here for quiet and peaceful life" (30). People are always unsatisfied and their needs are infinite. Those who are rich or have a high position are always afraid of losing what they have, but if they realized that what they have is God's gift, they would not be so afraid (21). For happiness, it is enough to have a clean conscience and live virtuously, which includes satisfaction in what we have, curbing our needs, and not envying others. Inner peace is the main happiness in this life (22). If thoughts of dissatisfaction appear, they should be turned to God so that knowing His power we should humbly submit to His will (24). "It is better to live one's days in peace and learn about one's short life in the world thinking about the future and eternal life" (95). Having seen the world, in closing of his *Letters* Kantemir stated, "Not wanting [it], not being afraid [of it], I await death and when you manifest your love to me, I will be perfectly happy" (96). In fact, in the last days of his life he said: "The thought of death at first frightened me, but now it consoles me considering that it comes from the one who gave me life".¹⁵

That *Letters* reflect Kantemir's religious state of mind in the closing years of his life is clear from his letters to his sister Maria. "God does not allow anyone to eat bread otherwise than in the sweat of his brow. We should expect from Him the improvement of pitiful fate of our brothers [allusion to the process of Konstantin with his stepmother] and I strongly trust in His mercy and I am convinced that our

¹⁴ Therefore, 1742 gives us the terminus post quem of his *Letters*. It is suggested that the *Letters* were written during Kantemir's stay in the Plombières health resort in 1743, Marcelle Ehrhard, *Lettres sur la nature et l'homme du prince Kantemir*, *Revue des études slaves* 34 (1957), 54; Grasshoff, *Kantemir and Fénelon*, 381; Grasshoff, *Antioch Dmitrievič Kantemir und Westeuropa*, 235.

¹⁵ Guasco, *op. cit.*, 130; [В.Я.] Стоюнин, *Последше дни жизни Контемира*, in В.И. Покровский (ed.), *Антиох Дмитриевич Кантемир: его жизнь и сочинения: сборник историко-литературных статей*, Москва: Г. Лисснер и Д. Собко 1910, 48.

unfortunate situation will not last for long" (16/5 Oct. 1738, Sh 282). "I always wanted to be some day in Paris: I am here now using all possible commodities of life, nevertheless I cannot wait to the time when I can leave this" place; but, we have to be patient "until God changes for the better my situation" (5 April 1740, 283). "May God's will happen! We will await His decision which, of course, will be best for us. In truth, the life of an envoy is the most pleasant" (1 Sept. 1740, 285). And yet, as he also stated, there are so many things we have to do against our wishes and the job of an envoy is one of them, notwithstanding its benefits. "It would be much better for me to live with you and brothers at home, more poorly, but more peacefully. There is nothing better in the world than to live independently and not being forced to pay attention to what this or that [person] says. However, may God's will happen in all things! I will with humility await when it will please Him to take me from here" (7 Nov. 1740, 286). Commiserating with the situation of his sister, he said, "That was pleasing to God and with patience we have to submit to His holy will". Also, "God will not abandon me seeing sincerity of my intentions" (287). "Perhaps some day the Lord will give me the opportunity to serve my family; if this never happens, this means that the Providence wants us to be satisfied with what is" (287). "Knock, says Jesus Christ, and it will be opened unto you. I knock and everything else I leave to His will" (26/15 Jan. 1741, 289).

Religion was always an important part of Kantemir's life, religion, which was not just an intellectual exercise, but a means to have a communion with God. Keenly interested in science he did not set it against religion, but enlisted it in religion's support. As Guasco reported, "He had great respect for Christianity. I've heard him frequently say that the enlightenment was gained in vain since it has been done with the prejudice to Religion; and the more we are persuaded that it educates us, the more human knowledge turns into the advantage of the Society. 'Philosophy, he said, normally makes [people] virtuous only in words and the Christian is such in [his] actions and when I wanted to examine closely the so called Philosophers, I only found the sluggards in the study of principles and indolents in respect to consequences. One has a very false idea of Philosophy when he wants to embellish with it incredulity'. He read the best Books on Religion and on Piety. Mr. de Meaux [Bossuet] was, he said, one of his Heroes" (108–110). "If Philosophy was not harmful to Religion in the mind of Prince Kantemir, it served it to shake off prejudices" (113). His concern was the purity of religion in the sense of bringing to the fore its spiritual aspect. Science, he was convinced, would be helpful in that respect by cutting off superstitious accretions which stifled the purity and authenticity of religious beliefs. Nothing irritated and dispirited him more than the ecclesiastics who, by profession and calling, should guard this spirituality and yet made comforts of this life their priority. This was to him a sore point to the

end of his life, and that was the reason for his scurrilous admonition to his sister: “I beg you diligently that you never mention to me the monastery and your entering one; I altogether despise the monks and will never endure [the fact] that you join such a despicable rank and if you will do this against my will, I will never see you. I hope that after my coming back to fatherland you will live with me all life and will be the mistress of my home” (1744, 308). And yet, he did not denounce altogether the institutional church. He became faithful to the Orthodox church as explicitly stated in his testament¹⁶, but did not ascribe to its exclusiveness. He “acknowledged that the Pope is the Head of the Church and the Successor of St. Peter”, but he added that the abuse of his authority more than anything is an obstacle to the unification of churches which he advocated.¹⁷ However, the church as an institution should be saturated by spirituality of the officers of the church and of the believers. True spirituality consists in constant awareness that God is not only real, but present in everyday life, ready to extend His helping hand to everyone who prayerfully turns to Him. He never doubted in God’s interest in human lives and in His answering people’s prayers. Therefore, the oft-repeated suggestion that Kantemir was a deist¹⁸ is simply without foundation. He never was a deist, and his interest in science only reinforced this conviction, since science showed how complicated and harmonious the world is and led to an inescapable conclusion that no randomness can be responsible for its harmoniousness and maintenance of order and regularity. Some higher power must be constantly in charge of it for this harmony to be possible. More importantly, the same higher power is close and ready to help everyone who asks for its assistance.

¹⁶ Guasco, *op. cit.*, 133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 115–116. In London, he considered the unification of churches to be chimerical since — as already mentioned — people there “least of all think about religion”.

¹⁸ З.И. Гершкович, Об идейно-художественной эволюции А.Д. Кантемира, in Е.И. Михлин (ed.), *Проблемы русского Просвещения в литературе XVIII века*, Москва: Издательство Академии Наук СССР 1961, 227; Л.Р. Муравьева, Проблема так называемой «девятой» сатиры А.Д. Кантемира, XVIII век 5 (1962), 176–177; И.В. Шкляр, Формирование мировоззрения Антиоха Кантемира, XVIII век 5 (1962), 151; Petrov, *op. cit.*, 135, 184, 187; Георгий Ф. Бобыне, *Философские воззрения Антиоха Кантемира*, Кишинев: Штиинца 1981, 47, 49; Юрий К. Щеглов, *Антиох Кантемир и стихотворная сатира*, Санкт-Петербург: Гиперион 2004, 49, 310–311; Grasshoff, Antioch Dmitrievič Kantemir, 184, 223, 240; incongruously, Grasshoff also recognized that “in his disappointment, which his fellow-men prepared, he clung more strongly to an otherworldly being, in whose hands he placed his future, his health, and his further fate”, p. 234. Bobyne, p. 48, did not even stop at deism by making Kantemir a pantheist.

APPENDIX: PRAISE OF THE WOMAN

It is worth mentioning an interesting aside in *Letter 10*, which is a paean on the perfection of woman. In Kantemir's opinion, a woman's mind is sharper than a man's (P 92), and "in her body it is collected the best and most delightful that can be found in the entire world" (93). "The truth itself shows us the respectable characteristic of the female gender that God at the closing of all his wise [creation] created in the last day a wife for Adam, thereby ending his divine design as though without it the world would have been imperfect. The priority is indisputable, says a philosopher, that the end is always designed first and created last. Eve was the last creation of God and thus we have to believe that she was planned first". To the superiority of the woman is testified the fact that Adam was created from earth and Eve from his rib, i.e., "from matter which was first purified and perfected by his [God's] hand and in this purification it lost its baseness" (92).

The idea of the superiority of woman was fairly popular in the seventeenth century. In 1614, appeared a text by the queen Marguerite de Valois, *Discours docte et subtil*, a defense of the woman. The queen wrote in it that "God proceeds in his works in the order in which what he made first is the least and the last are most excellent, most perfect and most dignified, as he showed in the creation of the world by making man last, for whom he made all the creatures. And it must be admitted that to the woman as made even after man, as the last creation of God, must be attributed excellence and supreme degree of dignity, since the greatest perfections are in her, created, like man, by the hands of God, but from matter more elaborate as the side of man surpasses the mud in degree of excellence".¹⁹

In 1617, Ester Sowernam published a rebuttal of John Swetnam's *The arraignment of women* (1615).²⁰ She argued that God so created the world that "every succeeding worke was ever more excellent then what was formerly Created". Woman is God's "last worke, as to supply and make absolute that imperfect building which was unperfected in man". Sowernam left it to the reader to "what estimate that Creature is and ought to be", that creature which is "the end of all creation".²¹ The last chapter of Sowernam's pamphlet is a long poem by one Joane Sharp in which we read that "Women were the last worke, and therefore the best, / For what

¹⁹ Marguerite de Valois, *Mémoires et autres écrits 1574–1614*, Paris: Honoré Champion 1999, 270.

²⁰ It seems that Sowernam is a pseudonym that plays on Swetnam's name (sweet-sour, Swetnam-Sowernam).

²¹ Ester Sowernam, *Ester hath hang'd Haman*, London 1617, 5–6 [reprint in S. G. O'Malley (ed.), *The early modern Englishwoman: a facsimile library of essential works*, pt. 1, vol. 4, Aldershot: Scholar Press 1996].

was the end, excelleth the rest".²² The same year, also in response to Sowernam, Constantia Munda observed that God created woman as "the consummation of his blessed weekes worke, the end, crowne, and perfection of the never-sufficiently glorified creation, ... the greatest part of the *lesser world*".²³ In 1670 s, Mary More wrote: "For first Adams being made before Eve, is but as beasts were made before Adam, for the Evening and the Morning were the first day, none will from thence think the night better, wch rather shows the contrary for God in the work of Creation went on Gradually higher and higher, creating the choisest and best last; so that if I would be criticall I might say that Eve was the most curious peice of nature in the whole creation being left till last, untill all things were fitted to receive and entertain her, besides she was made of the most refined part of the Creation, Adam. Adam was made of the earth refined Eve of Adam. ... So that doubtless Eve was, and all (or most) women ever since are of a finer mould and mettall than most men are". Also, "our common experience shewing us then when ever Women give themselves to study etc. they prove as learned and good proficients, and with as much (or more) ease then men, but the same hath been done by Women".²⁴

It is quite possible, however, that the source of Kantemir's views was Agrippa's treatise *De nobilitate et procellentia foeminei* (1529). He wrote that "woman was created as much superior to man as the name she has received is superior to his. For Adam means earth, but Eve is translated as life. And as far as life is to be ranked above earth, so far is woman to be ranked above man".²⁵ Cf. Kantemir's statement: "some Jewish authors showed the female preeminence explaining with the names that Adam means 'earth', and Eve [means] 'life' acknowledging that God signified with names difference in property and goodness and everyone knows how much life is better than earth" (P 92). Moreover, in Agrippa's view, "woman is the ultimate end of creation, the most perfect accomplishment of all the works of God and the perfection of the universe itself ... Without her the world itself, already perfect to a fault and complete at every level, would have been imperfect". Also, "she woman was the last in time of all things created; in the conception of the divine mind, however, she was first of all ... Indeed it is a commonplace

²² Ioane Sharp, *A defence of women, in Sowernam, op. cit.*, 50. It is likely that Sharp is Sowerman (possible continuation of the word play, sour as sharp-tasting).

²³ Constantia Munda, *The worming of a mad dogge*, London 1617, 3 [reprint in S. G. O'Malley, *op. cit.*].

²⁴ Mary More, "The woman's right", in S. Trill, K. Chedgezoy, M. Osborne (eds.), *Lay by your needles ladies, take the pen: writing women in England, 1500–1700*, London: Arnold 1997, 248.

²⁵ Henricus C. Agrippa, *Declamation on the nobility and preeminence of the female sex*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1996, 44.

among philosophers to say (I cite in their own words): ‘The end is always the first in intention and the last in execution’. For the woman was the last work of God, who introduced her into our world as the queen of a kingdom already prepared for her’; therefore, all creation should respect her.²⁶

The philosophical maxim mentioned by Agrippa and Kantemir is a scholastic principle, *quod primum est in intentione, ultimum est in executione*.²⁷ However, there is a problem in the way Agrippa and Kantemir apply it. From $A \rightarrow B$ we can derive $\sim B \rightarrow \sim A$, but not $B \rightarrow A$, and yet this incorrect reasoning was used by Agrippa and particularly clearly by Kantemir, namely when they said that because woman was created last, she was the first on God’s mind which is allegedly based on the scholastic principle they quoted.

It is uncertain why Kantemir included this praise of the woman in his *Letters*. It has little to do with the main topic: the happiness in life and God’s providence in nature. It may very well be that the praise was included to please the woman to whom the *Letters* were intended. What is interesting is that Kantemir used primarily theological reasons to justify the claim, following his seventeenth century predecessors. Theological justification of the superiority of the woman, or at least equality of women, did not have much traction in the eighteenth century West. For example, one Sophia argued in 1740 that “there need but five senses to compare them [man and woman] together, to perceive that Man among the works of nature is . . . beneath the perfection of Woman”. She used a Biblical argument, but playfully, not seriously, almost in a sacrilegious manner.²⁸ And yet, theological arguments spoke to Kantemir more strongly than arguments from social equality and social order. At least one argument may have been his own, quite theological in nature: his observations indicated that the woman does not have a fear of heights the way man does; when lifted high, she even “experiences greater joy [than on the ground] as though she felt that she is closer to her element, to the height and the place of her origin” (P 92).

STRESZCZENIE

Antioch Kantemir uważany jest za jednego z największych poetów XVIII wieku, za ważną postać oświecenia rosyjskiego i za propagatora sekularyzacji kultury rosyjskiej. To ostatnie stwierdzenie jest jednak trudne do przyjęcia.

²⁶ Agrippa, *op. cit.*, 47–48.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibet* 8.2 ad 1; *De malo* 2.3c; *De pot.* 7.2 ad 10; ST 1–2.1.1 ad 1, 1–2.25.1, 2; SCG 3.66.3; Duns Scotus, *Reportata parisiensia* 1.41.3; Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae* 24.1.3, 6–7. Cf. Francis Bacon, *Opus tertium*, section *De clavibus alkimie*.

²⁸ Sophia, *Woman’s superior excellence over man*, in M. Ferguson (ed.), *First feminists*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1985, 278.

Oryginalne wersje satyr Kantemira, napisanych w Rosji, i jego komentarze do nich zawierają nieco stwierdzeń natury religijnej, szczególnie Satyra 5. Kantemir był przekonany, że „człowiek został stworzony przez Boga na obraz i podobieństwo Boga, jak Mojżesz napisał w Księdze Rodzaju” (CS₁ 5.430). Wierzył on w opatrnościową obecność Boga w świecie i w to, że tylko Bóg może zmienić ludzkie serce. Krytykował ateizm i nawoływał ateistę, by „porzucił próżną mądrość świata”, oraz uznał, że Bóg „stworzył świat swymi własnymi rękoma” (Oda 1.1–8). Wierzył w niebo i piekło oraz w zbawienie, które możliwe jest nie tylko dla prawosławnych wiernych, ale i m.in. dla katolików. Satyry jednak zawierają również krytykę obskurantyzmu duchowieństwa prawosławnego i jego opozycji wobec nauki. Kantemir uważał, że badania naukowe nie tylko nie przeczą religii, lecz nawet wzmacniają wiarę, gdyż „kto poznaje wielkość, piękno i porządek wielkiego stworzenia [...] ten jest jeszcze bardziej przekonany [że powinien] wielbić Stwórcę swym naturalnym rozumem” (CS₁ 1.35).

Za granicą Kantemir napisał nowe satyry i stonował teologiczną wymowę satyr napisanych w Rosji, powodowany zapewne atmosferą oświecenia na Zachodzie, gdzie to ludzie „najmniej ze wszystkiego myślą o religii”. Jednak życie dyplomaty nie odpowiadało mu i pragnął spokoju, co ponownie zwróciło jego uwagę na kwestie religijne. W ostatecznej wersji satyr pojawiły się nowe wątki, przedtem nieobecne. W kwestii eschatologii Kantemir zauważył, że nie może przewidzieć przyszłości i nie martwi się o to, „gotów przyjąć, cokolwiek nadejdzie w mym przeznaczeniu z rąk Najwyższego Króla” (S₂ 4/182–190).

Kantemir nigdy nie odwrócił się od kwestii religijnych. Jego antyklerykalizm był w rzeczywistości nie krytyką religii, lecz wyrazem pragnienia jej czystości. Pod koniec życia Kantemir przełożył *Traité de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu* Fénelona i zawarł w swych *Listach o przyrodzie i człowieku*. Przekład ten zawiera też sporo dodatków samego Kantemira, a ich wymowa streszcza się w stwierdzeniu otwierającym drugi *List*: „im więcej oczy moje widzą [rzeczy] różnych rodzajów, tym lepiej poznają jego [Boga] autorytet i moc [...] dzięki temu, co widzimy w świecie, i dzięki samowiedzy poznajemy mądrego Stwórcę i Pana” (P 25, 40). Świat na każdym poziomie wskazuje na opatrnościową rękę Boską i Jego troskę o świat i ludzi. Prawdziwe uduchowanie polega na uświadamianiu sobie, że Bóg jest nieustannie obecny w świecie. A zatem sugestia, że Kantemir był deistą, jest pozbawiona podstaw.