

The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy concerning God, Christ and Creation, that is, concerning the Nature of Spirit and Matter, thanks to which all the Problems can be resolved which could not be resolved by Scholastic Philosophy nor by Modern Philosophy in general, whether Cartesian, Hobbesian, or Spinozian. A Short Posthumous Work translated from English into Latin, with annotations taken from the ancient philosophy of the Hebrews.

By Anne Conway.

*Amsterdam, 1690.*

## Preface by Henry More

### COURTEOUS READER

These Fragments of that incomparable Person, the Lady Viscountess Conway, which are put into thy Hands for thine Edification; that they may neither prove an Offense to thy self, nor an Injury to the deceas'd Author, as seeming less suitable to those singular Natural Parts and Wit that God had bestow'd upon her, besides those admirable acquir'd Accomplishments in the chiefest and Choicest Parts of Knowledge, as well Natural as Divine; Thou art to understand, that they are only Writings abruptly and scatteredly, I may add also obscurely, written in a Paper-Book, with a Black-lead Pen, towards the latter end of her long and tedious Pains and Sickness; which She never had Opportunity to revise, correct, or perfect. But so Sincere and Pious a Spirit breathing in them, it was thought Fit by some to make them Publick: It being hopeful, that these broken Fragments of so Entire and Sincere a Soul, may prove the Bread of Life to as many as have an unfeign'd Hunger after true Holiness and Righteousness. Wherefore I desire thee, that thou would'st Candidly interpret, what in Kindness is offer'd to thee; and to admire with me the Sound Judgment and Experience of this Excellent Personage: Who abounding with that which the Natural Man sets so high a Price upon (I mean, not only Nobleness of Birth, and Greatness of Quality and Fortune in the World, and extraordinary Dearness to her nearest Relations and Friends, but) that singular Quickness and Apprehensiveness of Understanding, for the enabling her to the attaining all manner of Knowledge in Arts and Sciences; besides a marvellous Sagacity and Prudence in any Affairs of Moment, wherein her Quickness and Solidness of Judgment was surprising, to as many as had Occasion and Opportunity to consult with her: I say, though abounding with these, yet nothing was so surprising to the Serious, who have known her from her Youth, as that she had so timely a Sense and Relish of what is infinitely above all these things, and accordingly esteem'd it; which is the saving Knowledge of our Lord Jesus, the Knowledge of Christ in us, (that is, of his Power, Life, and Spirit in us) the Hope of Glory.

In vertue of this chiefly, if not solely, was she enabled, with that marvellous Patience, to undergo those long and tedious Pains of her Head (which after seiz'd on her Body also) which otherwise had been plainly unsupportable to Flesh and Blood. And to the Astonishment of that Party, who knew her from her Youth, and had the Honour of her Friendship, to her dying Day; Though She was troubled with these Pains some Years before his Acquaintance with her, and they were growing upon her still more and more till, besides her High and Intolerable Fits or Paroxysms, She had continuance of Pain perpetual upon her, Such as would have prov'd unsufferable Paroxysms to others: Yet notwithstanding these great Impediments, and hard Batterie laid against her Intellectuals, her

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Understanding continued quick and sound, and had the greatest Facility imaginable for any, either Physical, Metaphysical, or Mathematical Speculations; so that She understood perfectly, not only the true System of the World, call it Copernican or Pythagorick as you will, with all the Demonstrative Arguments thereof; but all Descartes his Philosophy, as also all the Writings of him, who (though a Friend of Descartes, yet) out of Love to the Truth, hath so openly for this good while oppos'd his Errors:<sup>1</sup> To say nothing of her persuing (by the Benefit of the Latin Tongue, which she acquir'd the Skill of notwithstanding these great Impediments) of both Plato and Plotinus, and of her searching into, and judiciously sifting the abtusest Writers of Theosophy; which, that party can testifie, was not out of any Vanity of Mind, or fond Curiosity, but it was, as it were, the genuine Food of her Natural Genius: Nor could he ever observe, while She could come abroad and Converse, that She would ever ostentate her Knowledge; or so much as make any Discovery of it, upon never so fair an Opportunity; According to that Saying, writ on the In-side of a Paper-Book She had had a long time by her, and upon Occasion gave that Party, and may well be added to her plain Parables; Ignorance is better than Pride.

And indeed these Christian graces, that shin'd in her all along this Close Pursuit of Truth and Knowledge, were so Eminent, that they might justly seem to obscure the Lustre of her other Accomplishments, with those that had Eyes to behold them, and were competent Judges of them. For whereas such Pains, so great, and so incurable (For they were so great, that nothing but the Intolerableness, could make her undergo such painful and coarse Remedies, worse than any Pain or Disease else could be, in any ordinary Man's Judgment; and so incurable, that they puzzled and defeated all the Attempts of all Physicians whatsoever; Galenists, Chymists, Empiricks, as well French as English; for she went into France on purpose to have her Cranium open'd (but none durst adventure on it, though they opened her Jugular Arteries) in order to the Curing of her Disease: So that at last She was fain to Cease from making any more Trials. Which was the very Advice, which that Party, her Faithful Friend<sup>2</sup> gave her betimes; namely to betake her self wholly to GOD, and to make that Noble Experiment, whether the Consummate Health of her Soul, would not recover also, in due time, the Health of her Body. But he confess'd withall, that it seem'd Morally impossible for any one in such Circumstances of Extremity, not to make trial of any Natural means that might give any Hope of Relief. But it seems not without a Providence, that All means prov'd so ineffectual; that the Power of God in a Regenerate Soul might the more manifestly appear, how victorious it is, even in the extremest Afflictions and Temptations. For, what I was agoing to say, whereas such Pain, so great and intolerable doth ordinarily empeevisish the

<sup>1</sup> More is referring to himself.<sup>2</sup> More is again referring to himself.

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Spirit of the Afflicted, and makes their Conversation ungrateful to Others, their Minds being taken up with their own Sufferings; I can witness from these Seven or Eight Years Experience of her,<sup>3</sup> and that other Party,<sup>4</sup> whom I have so often mentioned, for Four times as long again, that her Conversation was always with that Meekness, Kindness, and Discretion, even to those that have not fairly, if not provokingly carried themselves towards her, in their pretended Friendship, that I cannot think of it without Admiration and Astonishment; and how Ready She was to put a good Sense upon Other Folks Actions, though Strangers, when their Credit hath been diminish'd by a Proud and Envious Tongue: And Lastly, how in the midst of her insupportable Pains and Afflictions, which continued upon her to the Last; and which do naturally nail down, as it were, and fix the Mind of an Ordinary Soul, to its own Personal Concerns; how yet She bore the Care, and Provident Sollicitude, for all her Friends, and of her nearest Relations the most; which she did, in a manner, to her very last Breath (as I can witness, that was present with her when she died)<sup>5</sup> as if She had been appointed by God the Common Good Genius, or Tutelar Angel, of all her Friends and Relations, even while She was in the Flesh. For though her Pains encreas'd, yet her Understanding diminish'd not; and in Contradiction to that Common Aphorism, She dyed without any Fever, merely of her Pains, drawing her Breath a while as one asleep, without throatling, and with her Eyes open, and presently after giving up the Ghost. Her Antient Friend<sup>6</sup> being acquainted with the Circumstances of her Death from Ragley, return'd only this short Answer, "I perceive, and bless God for it, that my Lady Conway was my Lady Conway to her Last Breath; the greatest Example of Patience and Presence of Mind, in highest Extremities of Pain and Affliction, that we shall easily meet with: Scarce any thing to be found like her, since the Primitive times of the Church." Of her Supernatural Comforts and Refreshments after some of her greatest Agonies and Conflicts, and of her strange Praevisions of things future, I might here also make mention, but I hold it less necessary.

And these things which I have Communicated to thee, concerning our Friend, this Excellent Lady; I have not done it out of any Partial or Carnal Boastings: But that God may be fortified, and that thou mayst the more fully understand; That that Religion, that availth any thing in the time of Distress, is not Opinion, Ceremony, Talk, or Fancy, but the Power of God in the inward Man, in Vertue of the New Birth, or Real Regeneration, which is the true and saving Knowledge of Christ in us, the Hope of Glory. Which Mystery She being acquainted with from her Youth, and growing up therein; it made her such an invincible Champion, and enabled her to bear up with that Stoutness and Constancy, either against the Buffetings of Satan, or sad Incumbrances of

<sup>3</sup> This refers to van Helmont.<sup>4</sup> More.<sup>5</sup> Van Helmont.<sup>6</sup> More.

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Afflictive Nature; in which, by the Divine Power in the New Birth, She hath prov'd her self more than Conquerour.

To the Attaining which Blessed State, if these Papers, which I have put into thy Hands, may contribute any thing, I shall much rejoice thereat: In the mean time, I desire thee, that thou would'st accept this Office of Love from,

Thine in the Truth, as it is in Jesus

FR. MER. HELMONT

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## Published Preface

### TO THE READER

Kind Reader, we have published this short work for your sake, which was written a few years ago by an English Countess, a woman learned beyond her sex, most skilled in Greek and Latin literature, and especially well versed in every sort of philosophy. As soon as she was taught the principles of Descartes, having seen their faults, she later discovered so many things from reading certain writings of genuine ancient philosophy that she wrote these few chapters for her own use, but in a very small and faint handwriting. When these were found after her death, part of them were transcribed (because the rest were hardly legible) and translated into Latin, so that the whole world might derive some profit from them. These are now public property, so that anyone may admire the author and recognize true philosophy and more easily avoid these errors, which are now, alas, all too common. Enjoy these writings and farewell.

## Chapter I

### God and his divine attributes

*Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 concern God and his divine attributes. Sections 6 & 7 show how the Trinity could be conceived in God according to Scripture so that Jews, Turks, or other peoples would not be offended, if these words, "three distinct persons," which are not in Scripture and have no reasonable sense, are omitted.*

S. 1. God is spirit, light, and life, infinitely wise, good, just, strong, all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful, the creator and maker of all things visible and invisible.<sup>a</sup>

S. 2. In God there is no time, change, arrangement, or division of parts. For he is wholly and universally one in himself and within himself without any variation or admixture. In himself he has no darkness or corporeality at all, nor any form, image, or figure whatsoever.<sup>b</sup>

S. 3. He is also in a true and real sense an essence or substance distinct from his creatures, although not divided or separate from them but present in everything most closely and intimately in the highest degree. Nevertheless, they are not parts of him or changeable into him, just as he is not changeable into them. He himself is also in a true and real sense the creator of all things, who not only gives to them form and figure but also essence, life, body, and whatever good they have.<sup>c</sup>

S. 4. And since there is no time in him nor any mutability, there can exist in him no new knowledge or will at all, but his will and knowledge are eternal and without time or beyond time.<sup>d</sup>

S. 5. Similarly, in God there exists none of the passions which proceed from his creatures, if we wish to speak correctly. For every passion is temporal, having its beginning and end in time.

<sup>a</sup> See *Adumbratio Kabbalisticæ Christianæ*, ch. 2, sec. 2–7, *Kabbala Denudata*, ii, last tract.

<sup>b</sup> See *Philosophiæ Kabbalisticæ Dissertatio*, ch. 3, *Kabbala Denudata*, i, pt. 3.

<sup>c</sup> See *Kabbala Denudata*, i, pt. 2, pp. 30, 332.

<sup>d</sup> See *Philosophiæ Kabbalisticæ Dissertatio*, 3, ch. 1, *Kabbala Denudata*, i, pt. 3, & *ibid.*, ch. 6.

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S. 6. In God there is an idea which is his image or the word existing within himself, which in substance or essence is one and the same with him, through which he knows himself as well as all other things and, indeed, all creatures were made or created according to this very idea or word.

S. 7. For the same reason there is spirit or will in God, which comes from him and which is in terms of substance or essence nevertheless one with him, through which creatures receive their essence and activity; for creatures have their essence and existence purely from him because God, whose will agrees with his most infinite knowledge, wishes them to exist. And thus wisdom and will in God are not entities or substances distinct from him but, in fact, distinct modes or properties of one and the same substance. And this is that very thing which those who are the most knowledgeable and judicious among Christians understand by the Trinity. If the phrase concerning the three distinct persons were omitted – for it is a stumbling block and offense to Jews, Turks, and other people, has truly no reasonable sense in itself, and is found nowhere in Scripture – then all could easily agree on this article. For they hardly deny that God has wisdom, an essential idea, and such a word in himself by which he knows all things. And when they concede that the same being gives essence to all things, they are forced by necessity to acknowledge that the will exists in him through which he maintains and brings into actual being that which was hidden in the idea, so that he produces and makes a distinct and essential substance. And this is surely to create the essence of a creature, for the idea alone does not confer being on a creature, but only will conjoined with the idea, just as an architect may have an idea of a house in his mind, yet the idea alone does not build the house, but will is joined with it and cooperates with it.

**Annotations to the First Chapter**

The ancient hypothesis of the Hebrews in respect to the last part of this chapter is as follows:

1. Since God was the most intense and infinite light of all things as well as the supreme good, he wished to create living beings with whom he could communicate. But they could in no way endure the very great intensity of his light. These words of Scripture apply to this: “God dwells in inaccessible light. No one has ever seen him, etc.” (1 Timothy 6:16).<sup>1</sup>
2. For the sake of his creatures (so that there might be a place for them) he diminished the highest degree of his intense light. Thus a place arose, like an empty circle, a space for worlds.
3. This void was not privation or non-being but an actual place of diminished light, which was the soul of the Messiah, called *Adam Kadmon* by the Hebrews, who filled this entire space.

<sup>1</sup> Although Lady Conway does not provide biblical references, the editors thought it useful to do so.



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4. This soul of the Messiah was united with the entire divine light, which remained in the void to a lesser degree, so that it could be tolerated. This soul and light constituted one entity.
  5. This Messiah (called *logos* or the word and the first-born son of God) made from within himself (the diminution of his light having recently occurred for the convenience of the creatures) the succession of all creatures.
  6. The light of his divine nature was shared with them as objects of his contemplation and love. These were the forces uniting the creator and his creatures, in which union their happiness lay.
  7. This is the reason why the Trinity represents God. The first concept is the infinite God himself, considered above and beyond his creation; the second is the same God insofar as he is the Messiah; the third is the same God insofar as he is with the Messiah in creatures, with the lowest degree of light which is adapted to the perception of creatures. That saying of Scripture (John 1:18) pertains to this: “No one has ever seen God” (this refers to the first concept); “the son who is in the bosom of the Father” (this refers to the second concept); “has revealed him [God] to us” (this refers to the third member of the Trinity).
  8. But it is customary among the Hebrews to use the word “person” in this way, so that it does not mean to them an individual substance but merely a concept for representing a species or for considering a mode.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>c</sup> See *Adumbratio Kabbalisticæ Christianæ*, ch. 2 & 3.

## Chapter II

*S. 1. Creatures, although they are not coeternal with God, nevertheless have existed for an infinite time from the beginning. S. 2. Thus, no number of years, not even the greatest that the created intellect could imagine, can arrive at the beginning of their creation. S. 3. In different senses, creatures have existed and not existed from eternity. S. 4. The infinity of time is confirmed by the infinite goodness of God. S. 5. The essential attribute of God is to be the creator. S. 6. What is time and why it is not in God.*

S. 1. All creatures simply are and exist only because God wishes them to, since his will is infinitely powerful and his command, without any help, instrumental cause, or matter, is alone capable of giving existence to creatures. Hence, since the will of God is eternal or from eternity, it follows necessarily that creation results immediately, and without any interval of time, from the will to create. And yet it cannot be said that creatures considered in themselves are coeternal with God because then eternity and time would be confused with each other. Nevertheless, creatures and the will which created them are so mutually present and happen one after another so immediately that nothing can intervene, just as if two circles should immediately touch each other. Nor can we assign to creatures any other beginning than God himself and his eternal will, which agrees with his eternal idea or wisdom. The natural consequence of this is that time is infinite from the moment of creation and has no quantity which the created intellect can conceive. For in what way could it be finite or measured since it has no other beginning than eternity itself?

S. 2. But if someone should say that time is finite, let us suppose that there were about six thousand years from the beginning (some people think the length of time could hardly be longer). Or let us suppose with others (who think that before this world there was another invisible world and the visible world came from this) that the duration of the world was six hundred thousand years, or some other number as great as possible, which can in no way be conceived of. I