

Article

Richard Simon, Biblical Criticism and Voltaire

Jan Starczewski

Department of French, Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, MI 49242, USA; jstarczewski@hillsdale.edu

Abstract: French Enlightenment philosophe Voltaire's ambivalence vis-à-vis the biblical text is well documented. On the one hand he highlights irregularities and contradictions in Scripture to undermine the clergy's authority and legitimacy. On the other, he clearly was fond of reading it and the sheer volume of his work devoted to it confirms that he was certainly not indifferent to its content. This article shows how Voltaire's use of different biblical scholars, particularly the seventeenth-century French biblical critic Richard Simon, informed his understanding of Scripture and how it manifested in his works, both those of a satirical and of a serious tone. This analysis problematizes the role of religion and of biblical criticism in French seventeenth and eighteenth-century literature. If Richard Simon's method was not always welcomed during his lifetime, his main goal was to pursue truth. Voltaire, however, used the tools of Simon to undermine traditional Christianity and to emphasize his own understanding of what religion entails.

Keywords: Voltaire; Richard Simon; Bible; French Enlightenment; biblical criticism; Trinity; biblical authorship

1. Introduction

As Sheehan (2005) and Legaspi (2010, 2016) have shown, perceptions of and approaches to the Bible dramatically changed in the early modern era. Initially a source of devotion, it increasingly served as an object of scientific investigation, and the chasm between these two functions grew wider and wider. As Legaspi put it: "As a text, an object of critical analysis, the Bible came into clearer focus; however, as Scripture, the Bible became increasingly opaque" (Legaspi 2010, p. 4). The work of Richard Simon (1638–1712), a Catholic priest at the Oratory, biblical critic, and theologian, emblematises this tension. In eighteenth-century France, Voltaire's (1694–1778) ambivalent treatment of the Bible was taken even further, reducing the sacred text to a mere moral manual.

Today, the French *philosophe*, known as the "patriarch" of the French Enlightenment thinkers, is well-known for his anticlerical stance. However, while Voltaire's views are traditionally portrayed as "extremely anti-religious" (Popkin 1979, p. 105), his relationship with religion—Christianity in particular—is rather complex.¹ If he was championing a form of enlightened absolutism, he also left no stone unturned when it came to defending the oppressed (the Calas affair). Overall, his satirical attacks against the Bible were often meant to target the Church associated with the Holy Book. At the same time, he enjoyed reading Scriptures; the sheer volume of his work devoted to the Bible certainly speaks to how important it was to him in his intellectual life (Gargett 2009; Pomeau 1969, p. 370; Cotoni 2006, 1984, pp. 306–63). As Gargett pointed out, Voltaire's references to the Bible—direct or indirect—were varied and numerous, particularly when it came to approaching the holy text from a scientific perspective. As he notes: "Voltaire sometimes responded positively to the Bible and was capable of insightful judgements beyond the received wisdom of his times as to its composition, context and background" (Gargett 2009, pp. 199–200). Still, his emphasis on its "absurdities and contradictions" (Voltaire [1752] 1877–1885c)² leaves little doubt that one of Voltaire's motivations in writing about the Holy Book, beyond scholarly interest, was to undermine its authority. The tension of leaning on the very development of biblical scholarship, particularly that of Simon, in order to discredit biblical revelation, I



Citation: Starczewski, Jan. 2022. Richard Simon, Biblical Criticism and Voltaire. *Religions* 13: 995. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100995>

Academic Editor: Stephen E. Lewis

Received: 10 September 2022

Accepted: 9 October 2022

Published: 20 October 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

contend, characterizes Voltaire's *modus operandi*. Ironically, Voltaire can be seen to fit in the conversation within the Church that Simon had taken part of almost a century earlier, but, as we shall see, accomplishing something very different.

Voltaire's scholarly work on the Bible had many sources; though it was principally inspired by the *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament* (1707–1716) of Dom Augustin Calmet (1672–1757) ([Gargett 2009](#), p. 196), he also frequently made reference to biblical critic Richard Simon ([Voltaire \[1752\] 1877–1885c](#), [\[1768\] 1877–1885b](#), [\[1772\] 1768–1777](#)).³ While Simon was not afraid to venture off the beaten path of traditional and accepted Catholic exegesis, Calmet remained well within the doxa of tradition. While Gargett lumps Simon in with "other sources of potentially anti-biblical documentation" ([Gargett 2009](#), p. 195), Reiser conversely stipulates that "Eighteenth-century exegesis did not attempt to follow Richard Simon, nor to maintain his high level of critical research. [...] [and] could not progress beyond Simon" ([Reiser 2016](#), p. 84). Though Voltaire used and criticized Calmet ([Schwarzbach 2002](#), p. 451), I propose that Voltaire's exegetical and hermeneutical work on the Bible adheres closer to Simon's unconventional ways.⁴

As many scholars have pointed out, the process of secularization in the early modern era did not emerge in total opposition to religion, but rather from within religion itself ([Coleman 2010](#), p. 369; [Sorkin 2008](#)). As Legaspi puts it: "the Enlightenment, despite the rhetorical excesses of figures like Voltaire, was not really aimed at the eradication of religion, but rather at its transformation" ([Legaspi 2016](#), p. 186). Indeed, Voltaire himself was part and parcel of that process. [Piqué \(2018\)](#) suggests that Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756) can be read as a critique of *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681) by Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), the Bishop of Meaux, who maintained close ties to the court of King Louis XIV. If the history of humanity appears to be chaotic and disorganized, it is Moses and Christ, for Bossuet and the Church, who are the two cornerstones of the tradition upon which the Church rests. This origin, then, is what guarantees order and structure in the world, a "continuity and unity" ([Piqué 2018](#), no pagination). Voltaire questions this paradigm and emphasizes "diversity and discontinuity" (*ibid.*). With his *Essai sur les mœurs*, Voltaire's focus was the natural physical world and its political dimension, the secular history of humankind. With the assistance of Simon, however, he found in biblical erudition a solid basis to challenge the figures of Moses and Christ. As a champion of Catholic orthodoxy, Bossuet had been concerned that Simon's biblical criticism would bring about subversive consequences for the Church and the faithful. Posthumously, his fears materialized when Voltaire built upon Simon's challenges to tradition and important doctrines linked to the tridentine resolutions.

Although Simon's intent may not have been to compromise fundamental tenets of Christianity, by questioning the authorship of Moses and by putting forth an ambivalent approach to the Socinians' work⁵, he opened the door for Voltaire to pursue his own reshaping of religion.⁶ Voltaire not only followed in Simon's footsteps, he upped the ante by using Simon's own tools to undo the very building blocks of Christianity. Hence, Simon's influence on Voltaire goes beyond biblical criticism and its methodology, reaching the confines of ideology. As we shall see, by denying that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, Voltaire was able to challenge the divine inspiration of the sacred books. Moreover, both men shared a mutual admiration of Socinianism. If Simon's motive was to unite Catholics and Protestants ([Tambrun 2020](#), p. 268), Voltaire did not hesitate to use Socinianism to attack and deny the divinity of Christ. Such rapprochements between Simon and Voltaire shed light on the complex relationship between biblical criticism, the Catholic Church, and Tradition, along with the ongoing secularization of society at large, which draws from all these tensions in early modern France.

2. Simon, Voltaire and Biblical Scholarship in Early Modern France

In France's historical and cultural landscape, François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire, is an iconic figure. Celebrated or despised for his witty satire and fierce anti-clericalism, the eighteenth-century figurehead *philosophe* still represents, for many French

people today, a champion of tolerance.⁷ A prolific author, some of his works, such as Zadig (1747) and Candide (1759) especially, have been widely translated in different languages and are still popular today. Amongst some of his lesser known works, however, were biblical commentaries, such as *La Bible enfin expliquée par plusieurs aumôniers de S.M.L.R.D.P* (1776). Of a surprisingly erudite nature at times, these texts came to fruition near the end of Voltaire's life.

While biblical scholarship originating in early modern France is often depicted as lacking when compared with its European counterparts, both Simon's and Voltaire's work shows that, though marginal, scholarly work on the Bible in France was not entirely neglected. When compared with England and Germany, France, it is argued, did not pursue historical critical studies of the Bible with the same rigor. For Jonathan Sheehan, this was due to confessional differences. While Protestants were eager to "rebuild" the Bible, "Catholic France—philosophes or not—had little interest in rehabilitating the biblical text" (Sheehan 2005, p. xii). Nineteenth-century French author, Ernest Renan, a scholar of religion, attempted to explain the supremacy of Germany in biblical studies. According to Renan, it was Bossuet who "killed biblical studies in France" (Schwarzbach 1987, p. 226). Bossuet, a representative of legitimate ecclesiastical authority, was indeed involved in a dispute with Richard Simon, and Voltaire followed in Simon's steps, making himself a posthumous enemy of the seventeenth-century bishop.

3. Richard Simon

Richard Simon is considered by many scholars as one of the most important Catholic exegetes of the early modern era (Lehner 2016, p. 30; Reiser 2016, p. 83; Popkin 1979, p. 220). His extensive use of different sources makes his method similar to that of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), whose "humanistic exegesis was first of all a philological program" (Reventlow 1988, p. 176). While other theologians often interpreted the biblical text to confirm and support dogma, Simon insisted instead on presenting it merely for what it said, not necessarily agreeing with or approving the Fathers and tradition.⁸ Simon was not the only one to pioneer such a philological, literal, critical, and historical analysis of the biblical text; his work was regularly—and negatively—associated with the works of Spinoza, Hobbes and La Peyrière, among others (Legaspi 2010, p. 4).

Yet unlike most other European scholars at the time, Simon was well versed in the Oriental languages, along with Latin and Greek. He believed that knowing Hebrew and the Judaic culture was fundamental when studying the biblical text. In the preface of one of his essays, he wrote: "Since the authors of the New Testament were Jews, it is impossible to explain this book without any reference to Judaism"⁹ (Reiser 2016, p. 81). He emphasized original texts and studying the best manuscripts possible, which led him to believe that there was an older and better version than the Masoretic Hebrew Text,¹⁰ a surmise that contemporary scholarship has since confirmed (Ska 2009, pp. 310–12).¹¹

Another key aspect of Simon's biblical criticism, one that is echoed in Voltaire's approach, is the shift he makes from "theology to history". Inspired by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, Simon distinguishes between prophets and public scribes. According to Simon, the former group were individuals inspired by God, whereas the latter were occupied primarily with recording important events regarding the nation of Israel (Ska 2009, p. 313). This conceptual shift separating those who were inspired from simple historical record keepers was, unsurprisingly, perceived by the Church as a threat. This was critiqued at length by Simon's detractors. As an anonymous Calvinist author wrote in the 1685 preface to the *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*: "He [Author of the *Examination of the Methods Proposed by the Gentlemen of the Clergy of France*] accuses him [Richard Simon] to have established as the main foundation of his work that the prophets of the Jews were merely simple scribes responsible for writing down most important events in their republic" (Simon 1685, no pagination, 25/764).¹² Indeed, if a specific biblical text can no longer be attributed to a specific author, and if the author(s) are mere civil servants responsible for simple transcription, how can the canon retain its authoritative and divinely inspired

status? These concerns were made even more blatant with regard to the authorship of the Pentateuch.

4. Mosaic Authorship

For someone like Voltaire, questioning whether Moses was the author of the Pentateuch or not served at least two purposes. First, it opened the door to criticize the cohesion and unity of the first five books of the Old Testament; it also enabled him to denounce to what extent the Church was holding on to tradition when empirical evidence that Moses was not the author, according to Voltaire, was compelling. Both during the Renaissance and throughout the early modern era, Moses was perceived to be and used as an example of a good political leader, one whose interest aligned with the nation/state. Thus, authors such as Machiavelli and Spinoza tended to distinguish between the theological Moses and the political one, minimizing the importance of the former while emphasizing that of the latter (Legaspi 2010, pp. 131–37). This distinction was important insofar as it eroded the divine revelation status of the Bible. Had Moses received a revelation from the “One True God” (Yahweh) or was he simply a sagacious political leader, albeit a brilliant one?

In the seventeenth century, questions pertaining to the legacy of Moses—divine or political—were hotly debated. If Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch, then his role as mediator between God and men could be questioned: on whose authority could the first five books of the Hebrew Bible claim that they were divinely inspired (Popkin 1979, pp. 217–18)? As Popkin (1979, p. 217) puts it: “The significance of questioning the Mosaic authorship of the Bible for Judeo-Christianity is tremendous if taken seriously”. According to Catholic writer Louis Ellies-Du Pin (1657–1719): “Of all the paradoxes that have been advanced in our century there is no one, in my opinion with more temerity, nor more dangerous, than the opinion of those who have dared to deny that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch” (quoted by Popkin 1979, p. 221). Among the names that Ellies-Du Pin credited for espousing this view were Hobbes, La Peyrière, Spinoza, and Richard Simon (ibid.).

In April 1678, the *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*, Richard Simon’s *magnum opus*, had just been approved by the syndic of the Sorbonne as well as the General of the Oratory and was awaiting the King’s approval before its publication. Yet, upon reading its table of contents and preface, Bossuet, the Bishop of Meaux, was struck by what he saw. He realized that “this book was a mass of impieties and a rampart of freethinking (*libertinage*)” (quoted by Lambe 1985, p. 156). Bossuet’s condemnation of the *Histoire Critique* had important ramifications: notably, it led to its eventual censorship and the confiscation of 600 of its copies (Lambe 1985, p. 157). Indeed, in the 1685 edition of *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, published in the more tolerant nation of Holland, Simon leads one chapter with the following heading: “Proof of additions and other changes that have been made in Scripture, in particular in the Pentateuch. Moses cannot be the author of all that is in the books that were attributed to him. Different examples” (Simon 1685, p. 31)¹³. Simon’s theory (Simon 1685, p. 32), which he elaborates in the opening pages of his *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*, is that a group of public scribes quoted other “books, proverbs and verses or claims [*sentences*] that one cannot doubt were written after Moses”.

Like Simon, Voltaire also denied Moses authorship of the Pentateuch. From the very beginning of his commentary on the book of Deuteronomy, Voltaire notes that “the scholar La Croze” claims that Moses could not have written “any of the books that ignorance grants him,”¹⁴ and repeats four times that it is inaccurate¹⁵ to place Moses beyond the Jordan, etc. (Voltaire [1776] 2012a, pp. 264–265). In disagreement with Dom Calmet, Voltaire continues by stating that “the author [of Deuteronomy], *whoever he might be*, has Moses speak on the bank of the Red Sea [. . .] to give more weight to his narrative” (Voltaire [1776] 2012a, p. 265).¹⁶ In another passage of Deuteronomy (13: 12–15), Voltaire comments on the curses that Moses warned Israel would endure if they did not obey, and in so doing, has a casual conversation with “those who are persuaded that Esdras or another Levite wrote this book” (Voltaire [1776] 2012a, p. 269). Finally, Voltaire becomes more explicit when, at the end of

his commentary of the same book, alluding to a passage that continues to articulate Moses' warnings regarding the consequences of disobedience,¹⁷ he writes in a note that critics have shown that these events took place during the siege of Samaria, and that the High Priest Helkia only found the Pentateuch eighty years after the siege. This, according to Voltaire, persuaded critics that it was a Levite who wrote Deuteronomy, since it would have been easy to predict those events after they happened ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012a](#), p. 272).

Interestingly, Schwarzbach observes that none of the writings of Mathurin Veyssiére de La Croze (1661–1739), orientalist and librarian of the king of Prussia, discuss whether or not Moses was the author of the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012b](#), note 3 p. 633). Voltaire discredits the fact that La Croze is the author of those writings, by addressing his commentary to him, "or the one who has taken his name" ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012a](#), p. 265). Voltaire, by confusing his readers regarding the authorship of the Pentateuch (here Deuteronomy), downplays the relevance of the matter, thus doubling down on Simon's theory, notably that who it is that wrote which part of the biblical texts is not a matter of importance.¹⁸ In many different passages, Simon suggests that Esdras was the author or the "compiler" of the Pentateuch ([Simon 1685](#), pp. 26–29, 52–55 etc.; [Ska 2009](#), p. 307),¹⁹ and Voltaire, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, says as much ([Voltaire \[1764\] 1968b](#), p. 388). However, most importantly, since it called into question the reliability and authenticity of the biblical text, Voltaire quotes Dom Calmet arguing that there had been, in fact, some additions made to the text, which, according to Voltaire, delegitimized the biblical text altogether ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012a](#), p. 265).

5. Implications for Inspiration of Scripture

If Voltaire could argue that the Bible had been written by mere men, and that the text had undergone multiple changes through time, he could call into question the divine inspiration of Scripture: "if the Holy Spirit did not dictate it all," he asks, "how will one distinguish his work from the work of men?" ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012a](#), p. 265).²⁰ In so doing, Voltaire was echoing a controversy that had taken place in the seventeenth century. Both Hugo Grotius and Spinoza had distinguished between "Prophets," men who were directly inspired by God, such as "Moses, Jeremiah and others," and "individual scholars," who were godly but not necessarily inspired ([Hunwick 2013](#), p. 232). Simon, however, in dialogue with Grotius and Spinoza, did not agree: "These people are mistaken when they are not willing to recognize any other inspiration than the one of Prophecies" ([Simon 1689](#), p. 275).²¹ Although Simon recognized there was indeed a difference between "writing a History and Letters" and "Prophecies," he affirms that "[t]he Books of Moses, Joshua, and in sum all of the Historical Books of the Old Testament," which had not been written in this manner, that is, beginning with "The Word of God came to . . . , were equally inspired.²² After all, "Josephus and all the Ancient Jews, as well as the newer ones, call[ed] them prophetic, believing that they had truly been inspired by God" ([Simon 1689](#), p. 275). He concluded with this bold statement: "It is not necessary for a Book to have been dictated word for word from God for it to be inspired".²³ In denying that the other books of the Bible (outside of the "Prophecies") were equally inspired, Grotius, Spinoza and Leclerc, according to Simon, were pitting themselves against the testimony of history, whether Jewish or Christian ([Simon 1689](#), p. 275).²⁴ Simon would have thus disagreed with Voltaire, who, in this instance, sided with the like of Grotius, Spinoza and Leclerc.

Simon knew that because changes and additions (or retractions) had been made to the biblical text, the question as to whether every book in the Bible had the same divine and canonic status would (and did) occur ([Simon 1685](#), preface np 31/764). He was well aware that, given the sheer number of manuscripts (many he had access to) along with all their copies, the quality of the transcription often varied. Learned in distinguishing the variants, discrepancies, and errors ([Twining 2018](#), pp. 429–34), his objective was to explain the "changes and additions that were found in the Sacred Books" ([Simon 1685](#), preface np 30/764). "More importantly, he was arguing that scholars had to think about the text as a whole in a new way, and to try to understand the complex process of compilation

and redaction behind the books as they stood” ([Twining 2018](#), p. 450). Indeed, Simon insisted that it was impossible to find manuscripts that were without error. While Simon’s goal of his *Critique*, then, was to reestablish [*rétablir*] the text ([Simon 1685](#), preface np 41/764), Voltaire exploited the hierarchical differential of inspiration to interrogate the divine inspiration of the text.

In contrast to Voltaire, Simon felt that God did not need to take control of the writers—men bestowed with their own personality and responsible for making their own choices—to dictate Scripture word for word. For Simon, notably when comparing the Septuagint version with the older Hebrew text, some changes and additions were evident, but those “newer” versions were still inspired. This was in agreement with the Church Fathers, whom Simon referenced to make his point ([Auvray 1974](#), pp. 89–92). Voltaire plays with these discrepancies within the biblical text, especially, as seen above, when it comes to situating Moses vis-à-vis the Jordan or the Red Sea.²⁵ Nonetheless, in a final note at the end of his commentary, one of the fictitious commentators invented by Voltaire himself affirms his belief that Moses was the sole author of the Pentateuch “as the Church believes it,” going further to suggest that only the account of his death was not written by him. The commentator adds: “we merely shared the opinion of our adversaries candidly” ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012a](#), pp. 23, 272).²⁶ Voltaire thus remains cautious: when articulating polemical views, he does not embrace them entirely, and admits that this is all a conundrum and that the only way out is to rely on the Church, whose decisions are “infallible” ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012a](#), p. 265).²⁷ Still, if there have been additions and changes, as Calmet recognized, Voltaire challenges the notion that the Holy Spirit dictated them all. For this reason, Voltaire seemingly questions Simon’s treatment of inspiration (though without mentioning him explicitly) and opposes the work of the Holy Spirit with the work of men. Voltaire was thus clearly following a path that had been paved over a century before him, “especially [by] Father Simon” ([Voltaire \[1752\] 1877–1885a](#), tome 23), but his conclusions were fundamentally different.

6. The Problem with Tradition

Despite the fact that Voltaire and Simon had different motives, both were, at best, seeking to reassess the Catholic Church tradition; at worst, to overturn it.²⁸ In denying that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible, along with targeting Saint Augustine, as we shall see, Simon was challenging centuries of Church tradition. Not content with merely following Simon in his challenge of the Mosaic authorship, Voltaire also criticized Saint Augustine, one of the pillars of Western Christian Tradition.

In his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, however, Simon appears to defend tradition against his Protestant detractors, at times associating it with “oral law”.²⁹ Oral law, he argues, improves comprehension of Scripture. According to him, both rabbis and the Church Fathers agreed that the “text alone of Scripture cannot be understood without the help of oral law or tradition” ([Simon 1685](#), p. 40). Further, he argues on many occasions that the Jews, especially after the destruction of their temple,³⁰ were not so much concerned with perfecting their manuscripts (i.e., ridding them of errors), as with preserving, protecting, and putting into practice the tradition of their forefathers ([Simon 1685](#), pp. 98, 112).³¹ Although one could argue that Simon was favorable to tradition, Bossuet felt otherwise; the main clash between the two religious scholars took place when Bossuet perused the *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*’s table of contents,³² taking offense upon learning that Simon was challenging Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. To him, it was a direct attack against tradition. However, Bossuet also took issue with a version of the New Testament Simon had translated into French himself, the so-called “version de Trévoux” ([Monod 1921](#)), which he felt also threatened tradition. In a letter to the Abbé Bertin, a friend of Simon, Bossuet expressed his position:

All of his remarks tend towards an indifference to the dogmas [of the Church], and a weakening of all its traditions and doctrinal decisions, and that is his true system, which carries with it, as you see, the complete subversion of religion. [. . .] I will go further, and assure you that his true system in his *Critique du Vieux Testament* is to destroy the authenticity of the canonical Scriptures; in that of the New Testament it is, in short, to make a direct attack upon inspiration, and to dissect or render doubtful many passages in the Scripture, against the express decree of the Council of Trent; in his critique of the commentators, it is to weaken the whole of Patristic doctrine, and, in particular, that of Saint Augustine on grace. (Quoted by Lambe 1985, p. 168³³)

Simon's stance regarding tradition is thus at the very least ambivalent. Historian Bernier (2008) argues that Simon appeared to agree with tradition (at least on its face); he appears submissive to it in his preface of *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* in order to protect himself from Catholic authorities, but distances himself from it throughout the rest of the book. Tambrun (2020, pp. 255–59) writes persuasively that for Simon, the consistency of tradition was compromised with Saint Augustine. If tradition is “the conservation and the transmission of a *deposit*,” which would encompass the canon of Scripture, oral tradition and all the decisions that were made by the different councils from Nicaea to Trent, Simon believes tradition was permeated with new philosophical ideas introduced by Saint Augustine (Tambrun 2020, pp. 251–52, 256–57).³⁴

In a chapter partly devoted to Saint Augustine, Simon's attitude towards the theologian can be characterized as a mix of reverence and criticism. On the one hand, he agrees with Saint Augustine that mastery of Hebrew and Greek is necessary (Simon 1685, p. 387), that to understand Scripture literally is an arduous task, and that recourse to allegories is oftentimes unavoidable (Simon 1685, p. 386). On the other hand, he disapproves of his interpretation of the Psalms, citing the fact that Augustine does not know Hebrew well enough to understand the literal meaning and thus must rely heavily on allegorical interpretation (Le Brun 2012, p. 261). Overall, Simon finds it unfortunate that Saint Augustine, influenced by Platonism, preferred allegorical interpretations, which Simon condemns, to literal ones (Simon 1685, p. 388). Simon shows how Augustine warned his audience not to interpret passages that required figurative interpretation literally and, conversely, not to interpret figuratively a proper and natural meaning [*signification propre et naturelle*]. Simon then quotes the Cardinal du Perron who accused Augustine of being too allegorical in order to entertain his audience, compromising the literal meaning of the Bible in the process (Simon 1685, p. 390).

This critique of the Church Father was shared by Voltaire. In a long note to one of his poems, “Le Marseillais et le lion,” Voltaire, comparing Saint Augustine to Rabelais, writes that “Saint Augustine was not as knowledgeable; he knew neither Greek, nor Hebrew” (Sareil 1965, p. 178).³⁵ Voltaire, very much in the spirit of the Enlightenment *philosophes*, did not accept the doctrine of original sin. In his article entitled “original sin,” he argues that the concept is nowhere to be found in Scripture (Voltaire [1764] 1968b, p. 424), and identifies Saint Augustine as the source of the doctrine (Voltaire [1764] 1968b, p. 427).³⁶ Much before him, Simon disagreed with Saint Augustine on the grammatical interpretation of two Greek words in Paul's Letter to the Romans. For Simon, the notion of “original sin” did not stem from old tradition or the orthodox Greek tradition—which he favored—but, as Voltaire put it, was “asserted” by Saint Augustine himself (Tambrun 2020, pp. 257–58; Voltaire [1764] 1968b, p. 427).

7. Simon, Voltaire, and the Trinity

Voltaire's reproach of Augustine typifies his struggle against *l'infâme*.³⁷ Calling into question the doctrine of original sin as well as mocking discussions about grace and the incarnation allowed Voltaire to challenge the authority of the Church. Furthermore, by denying one of the most important articles of faith, the dogma of the Trinity, Voltaire was

able to cast doubt on the divinity of Christ himself. Once more, even though Simon's intent was not to sabotage the fundamental doctrine, Voltaire was likely inspired by Simon's *Histoire Critique*. Tambrun (2020, pp. 258–59) shows persuasively how Simon questioned the reliability of Augustine vis-à-vis Tradition, choosing to adhere to a tradition that preceded Augustine, one that is rooted in the Apostles, the Fathers, and the Jewish Tradition (Tambrun 2020, pp. 266, 272). In contesting the decisions made by the Church during the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, Simon interrogates the Christian dogma of the Trinity (Tambrun 2020, p. 266).

In mid eighteenth-century France, Socinianism, a non-trinitarian doctrine from Italy, was the source of multiple disputes, notably the article "Genève" in the *Encyclopédie*, written by d'Alembert, which claimed that several pastors in Geneva had embraced the controversial opinion. Voltaire, who thought the Socinians embodied natural religion because of their emphasis on reason and tolerance,³⁸ is known to have inspired d'Alembert, the official author (Stenger 2016, p. 11). Indeed, in some of the *philosophes'* eyes, Socinianism was the middle point between Protestantism and Deism (Florida 1973, p. 357) and a necessary step to move away from revealed religion. While Simon did not seem concerned with the theological implications that his textual criticism could provoke, Voltaire is happy to carry on with the heresy, making it a central argument against Christianity, and, in turn, illustrating what Legaspi (2010) deems "the death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies".

Simon's treatment of the Socinians is ambivalent. Not only does he criticize them for sharing with Protestants the belief that "the only and true principle of religion is Scripture" (Simon 1685, p. 448), he also felt that their method contained as many errors as that of the Protestants, since they interpreted Scripture according to their own biases (Simon 1685, p. 451). Yet, despite deriding the Socinians for embracing the *Sola Scriptura* principle, and for having little regard for the old Testament or Hebrew (Simon 1685, pp. 449–50), Simon devotes an entire chapter to them,³⁹ wherein he presents their beliefs in a seemingly respectable way. In fact, this angered Bossuet, who accused Simon of being a "Socinian in disguise" (Tambrun 2020, p. 266). Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) and his disciples, reviving the antitrinitarian Arian heresy, argued that Jesus Christ, while being conceived by the Holy Spirit, was not divine, but merely a man and, since they also believed the Holy Spirit to be a power inherent to God, not a divine person (Tambrun 2020, p. 264).⁴⁰ Preceding him, the Christian priest, Arius (c. 250–336), "believed that the Son had to be a part of God's creation: preexistent but not eternal" (Ferkenstad 2002, p. 293). Arius also claimed that "The Son is not equal to the Father/ Nor does he share the same substance" (Ferkenstad 2002, p. 295).⁴¹

Simon was well aware of these controversies, which, in agreement with the Church, he called "heresies". Yet, rather neutrally,⁴² he describes how the uncle of Faustus Socinus, Laelius Socinus, returned to the Jewish sources as closely as possible and eliminated the "mysteries of Trinity, the incarnation, original sin, and grace" (Simon 1685, p. 449): Mysteries that to the present day are fundamental to the Christian faith and were central to Augustine's theology.

It bears mentioning that even if Simon believed that Scripture did not teach the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly, it is difficult to know for sure whether he subscribed to it or not. We saw a similar situation in the case of the authorship of Moses: the Church approved the attribution of the texts to Moses, and Simon, while he did not believe that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, accepted they belonged to the canon. Likewise, when it came to the dogma of the Trinity, as Tambrun (2020, p. 263) showed, he merely pointed to the fact that, prior to the council of Nicaea i.e., before the Church settled the question once and for all, there were two "equal parties," those who supported Arius and those who supported Athanasius of Alexandria. To a figure such as Bossuet, however, the Socinians were at fault since they did not accept the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople (or any other), which firmly established the divinity of each person of the Trinity and the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son.

Voltaire was certainly less ambiguous. In the article “Antitrinitaires” of his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, he presents the doctrine of the Trinity as being “against reason” and non-scriptural, suggesting that the Godhead including “several distinct persons in the divine essence [. . .] is to introduce into the Church of Jesus Christ the most vulgar and dangerous error, since it openly favors polytheism” (Voltaire [1764] 1968a, pp. 351–52).⁴³ To make matters worse, Voltaire writes that Saint Augustine “himself [. . .] was forced to recognize that nothing intelligible [on the topic] could be said” (Voltaire [1764] 1968a, p. 353).⁴⁴ To provide some specificity, Voltaire then quotes Calmet and his work on 1 John 5: 6–7. The famous Bible scholar claimed that these sentences: “For there are three that bear record on earth, the spirit, the water and the blood: and these three are one. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one”⁴⁵ were not in any old manuscript, nor in any gospel from the canon, nor in the apocrypha. Satirically, and dealing a blow to Tradition, Voltaire concludes that the only reason the antitrinitarians were considered heretics was due to the decisions made by the councils (Voltaire [1764] 1968a, pp. 356–57).⁴⁶

Stenger (2016, p. 2) suggests that in the eighteenth century, it was Newton who pointed out in *An Historical Account of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture* (1754) that neither the word “trinity” nor the doctrine of the trinity were in the Bible, and that the words: “in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” did not exist in the original Greek. Stenger than attributes to Newton the idea that a marginal note including these words introduced itself in the Latin versions. However, it was Simon who initially pointed this out. As Iliffe showed, Newton actually changed his interpretation of the Johannine passage, the so-called *Johannine comma*, after reading Simon (Iliffe 2006).⁴⁷ Given how enamored Voltaire was of Newton’s work,⁴⁸ it can be reasonably deduced that in a (direct or indirect) way, Voltaire was also influenced once again by Simon.

Indeed, Richard Simon in his *Histoire Critique du Texte du Nouveau Testament* devotes an entire chapter to the controversy: “Chapter Eighteen. Exegetic discussion of 1 John 5:7, not present in most Greek manuscripts or other Western texts, nor in the earliest Latin manuscripts” (Hunwick 2013, p. 173).⁴⁹ Simon argues that the passage: “For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” is not in many ancient Greek manuscripts nor in any recent ones. He claims that it was initially a note in the margins of First John, and was later inserted within the body of the text by copyists (*ibid.*).⁵⁰ After having consulted manuscripts from the libraries of King Louis XIV and of his First Minister of State, Colbert, he shows how what was originally a mere scholia, a note, transitioned into the text, dating it “about five hundred years old” (Hunwick 2013, p. 174).⁵¹ Simon goes to great lengths to refute Erasmus, who claimed that Jerome was responsible for adding the incriminated passage (Hunwick 2013, pp. 173, 179–80).⁵² Simon explains: “From this it can be seen that by the three witnesses St. John speaks of—the spirit, the water and the blood—the scholiast understood the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit” (Hunwick 2013, p. 174).⁵³ He adds that there are also notes, “scholias” in the margin of the text, that refer to “one Divinity, one God” and “a bearing of witness to God the Father and the Holy Spirit” (Hunwick 2013, p. 174).⁵⁴ Simon is very specific, meticulously providing all the references of the manuscripts he consulted (*ibid.*). The words of John, “spirit, water and blood” are thus interpreted to refer to the testimony of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Hunwick 2013, p. 181).⁵⁵ Whereas Simon argues that Saint Cyprian and Facundus (who came long before Jerome) used the words (“the testimony of Father, Son and Holy Spirit”) as an explanation, that is, they did not quote it as if from St. John, “the theologian Froidmont of Louvain” asserted that the Arians had removed that passage because it blatantly proved the Trinity, which Simon finds utterly absurd (Hunwick 2013, pp. 181–82).⁵⁶ To Simon, whether the passage was added or omitted in certain manuscripts was of secondary importance because what mattered was the fact that the three persons of the Trinity as “one” is a belief of the Church (Hunwick 2013, p. 182). While even Luther elected not to include the passage in his New Testament

due to its “spurious” nature (Hunwick 2013, p. 183),⁵⁷ those who followed him added it to serve as an ultimate proof against the Antitrinitarians.⁵⁸

The way in which Simon approached the question of 1 John 5:6–7 is a manifest illustration of how he distinguished between the literal and historical analysis of the biblical text on the one hand and its theological meaning on the other. In Simon’s mind, these were two distinct spheres that did not need always to agree. Notwithstanding the evidence pointing to the absence of the *Johannine comma* from ancient manuscripts, Simon concludes the chapter by saying that he accepted it.⁵⁹

8. Conclusion

The focus on the parallels between Richard Simon and Voltaire on the Pentateuch’s authorship and the historical-textual criticism of 1 John 5:6–7, highlights the transition from theology to history,⁶⁰ whereby the divine sense of order and God-sourced sovereign immutability were replaced by human contingency and agency.

Simon’s incentive, however, was to find a way for Catholics and Protestants to agree on central tenets of the Christian faith and eschew confessional conflicts despite their doctrinal differences. Simon’s purpose was to go back to a point in time when all these doctrinal disputes had no weight for the purpose of reconciliation between different Christian sects (Tambrun 2020, p. 268). In this sense Simon played the role of “[t]he professor [who is a] hero digging beneath layers of accumulated tradition to recover the truth and humanity of the Bible” (Legaspi 2016, p. 194). Voltaire undoubtedly shared this concern for religious tolerance, but his incentive was social and societal harmony, not Christian unity: “if you were all to share the same opinion [. . .] even if there were only one man with an opposite point of view, you should forgive him,” admonished Nature in Voltaire’s *Treaty on Toleration* (Voltaire [1762] 1877–1885d).⁶¹

If Voltaire readily acknowledged what Simon had pointed out regarding mistakes, errors, and changes the biblical text had undergone, the retrieval of the most accurate and literal meaning—unlike Simon—was not his priority. In an article entitled “Contradictions,” he insists that: “we would rather say with the most enlightened scholars that the Gospels were given to us to teach us how to live saintly, and not to criticize learnedly” (Voltaire [1772] 1768–1777). Whereas Simon’s goal was to pursue truth and more precisely the “truth of religion” (Le Brun [1981] 1988, p. 185), Voltaire, in his *Éléments de la philosophie de Newton* (1736) argued that the Bible was to teach us how to become better, not to further our understanding of the natural world (Voltaire [1736] 1968c, p. 280).⁶²

Simon’s legacy and influence on Voltaire goes beyond the scope of this article and merits further investigation.⁶³ The relationship between the works of the two authors is complex, but what this analysis illustrates is that Voltaire’s interest in biblical criticism was not just of marginal interest; Voltaire did not simply read the Bible as presumably many of his peers (both philosophes and theologians) did, he studied it in earnest. However, his main agenda was to enshroud it with doubt and satire. In the cases of Mosaic authorship and the Johannine Comma, Voltaire specifically used biblical criticism to attack Christianity. This would obviously not be Voltaire’s first and last attempt, but it shows that in undermining Christianity, and in promoting deism, Voltaire, ironically, could not have done it to the extent that he did without Richard Simon’s biblical scholarship.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank David Sorkin, who initially suggested that I work on Richard Simon and Spinoza in the context of a Masters thesis. I also wish to thank my wife, Whitney, for reading a previous version of this paper and for making insightful stylistic comments. I am also

very grateful for the feedback of the two anonymous reviewers. Finally, I am particularly indebted to Stephen E. Lewis Jr., who invited me to contribute to this Special Issue, who took the time to read my paper carefully and helped me frame my argument in a meaningful way.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 To better understand the complexity of Voltaire's relationship with religion, see [Pomeau \(1969\)](#).
- 2 In "Livres". *L'Opinion en alphabet*, to cite one of many examples. All translations in this article are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
- 3 To name just a few examples. Voltaire's admiration for biblical critic Richard Simon is evidenced in different texts. In his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, in his catalogue of writers («Catalogue des écrivains») the brief entry for Richard Simon mentions that he was an "excellent critic" and that his works "are read by all scholars" "sont lues de tous les savants". ([Voltaire \[1733\] 1775. Le Siècle de Louis XIV: La Henriade, divers autres poèmes](#). Genève: Cramer et Bardin. tome 18 19).«Catalogue des écrivains 10: SIMON (Richard) né en 1638, de l'Oratoire. Excellent critique. Son Histoire de l'origine et du progrès des revenus ecclésiastiques, son Histoire critique du Vieux Testament etc. sont lues de tous les savants: mort à Dieppe en 1712». Voltaire would have encountered the biblical scholar during his education ([Gargett 2009](#), p. 196).
- 4 "Unconventional" from the perspective of the Catholic Church—mostly Bossuet, at the time.
- 5 The Socinians or Antitrinitarians were a 16th century group of believers who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity.
- 6 [Legaspi \(2010](#), p. 136) shows conclusively that it was not Simon's intention to undermine the legitimacy of the Pentateuch, "In the preceding century, Richard Simon had used a theory of sources to neutralize Spinoza's literary-critical denigration of the Bible. Like Simon, Astruc stripped Moses of a meaningful authorial role precisely in order to defend him. Both severed the gangrenous limb of Mosaic authorship in order to save the whole body of biblical authority".
- 7 The sales of his *Treatise on Tolerance*, originally published in 1763, skyrocketed after the terrorist attacks on satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*'s offices in Paris in January 2015. See for example: "Charlie Hebdo: Le «Traité sur la tolérance» de Voltaire, star des ventes» https://www.francetvinfo.fr/culture/livres/charlie-hebdo-le-traite-sur-la-tolerance-de-voltaire-star-des-ventes_3332245.html (accessed on 2 June 2022) and "After Paris Attacks, Voltaire's 'Tolerance' Is Back In Vogue" <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/02/15/385422239/after-paris-attacks-voltaires-tolerance-is-back-in-vogue> (accessed on 2 June 2022).
- 8 Such as Bossuet, for instance. See [Monod \(1921](#), p. 322).
- 9 From «Comparaison des Cérémonies des Juifs et de la Discipline de l'Église » (1681 edition) as quoted by Marius Reiser, "The History of Catholic Exegesis, 1600–1800". The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800. Eds Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, and A.G. Roeber, 2016, p. 81. www.oxfordhandbooks.com (accessed on 5 May 2022).
- 10 The Masoretic text was considered the most reliable in delivering the closest text to the original books of the Old Testament. A system of vowels and punctuation was added to it by rabbis to make it more readable and to be able to pronounce it. See [Twining \(2018](#), pp. 458–60).
- 11 See also ([Reiser 2016](#), p. 81), who shows how Protestant authors "defended [...] the Masoretic Hebrew text of the Bible as authentic".
- 12 «Il [l'Auteur de l'examen des méthodes proposées par Messieurs du Clergé de France] l'accuse d'avoir établi pour principal fondement de son ouvrage, que les prophètes des juifs n'ont été que de simples scribes chargés d'écrire ce qui se passait de plus important dans leur République.» Anonymous preface ([Simon 1685](#)).
For the anonymous author identified as a Calvinist, see [Ska \(2009](#), p. 308).
- 13 «Preuves des additions et autres changements qui ont été faits dans l'Écriture, et en particulier dans le Pentateuque. Moïse ne peut être l'auteur de tout ce qui est dans les livres qui lui sont attribués. Divers exemples.» in Simon, Richard. 1685. *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*. Rotterdam: Reinier Leers. [Gallica.Bnf.Fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr), Book I, chapter 5, p. 31. My translation.
- 14 «que l'ignorance lui attribue».
- 15 «faux et impossible».
- 16 emphasis added.
- 17 "Then you will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and distress that your enemy will inflict on you. The most gentle and refined man among you will begrudge his brother, the wife he embraces, and the rest of his children who have survived, refusing to share with any of them the flesh of his children he will eat because he has nothing left in the siege and distress that your enemy will inflict on you within all your gates." Voltaire does not specify it, but it's in Deuteronomy, chapter 28: 53–55 Berean Study Bible.
- 18 As long as the said author is a "prophet" or inspired by God. See [Auvray \(1974](#), pp. 43–44).
- 19 Simon does not think that Esdras was the last compiler, however. See [Simon \(1685](#), p. 55).
- 20 There are other instances in which Voltaire doesn't seem to bother, however, and seems to align with Simon ([Voltaire \[1764\] 1968b](#), "Moïse" article).

- ²¹ «[. . .] ces gens-là se trompent, quand ils ne veulent point reconnaître d'autre inspiration que celle des Prophéties».
- ²² In *Votum pro pace*, as well as in his polemic with French Huguenot theologian André Rivet (1572–1651), *Rivenati apologetic discussion*, Grotius argued that not all of the content of Scripture was equally inspired. If the biblical passage did not specifically allude to God directly speaking to a prophet, as in “The Word of God came to . . . ” (Grotius used the name of the evangelist Luke), then chances were, what had been written had not been “dictated by the Holy Spirit”. Biblical historians like Luke, for instance, were good moral men. Their capacity to memorize and their abilities “in copying the commentaries of the Ancients” were enough. Simon did not approve of this manner of distinguishing between the prophecies which were inspired and the histories which were not. See [Reventlow \(1988, p. 180\)](#).
- ²³ «Il n'est pas nécessaire qu'un Livre pour être inspiré ait été dicté de Dieu mot pour mot». This is noteworthy for while Simon could conceive that historians may have written of events they had simply witnessed without requiring an inspiration from God, they were nonetheless “led by the Spirit of God” in order “not to fall in error” (de ne pas tomber dans l'erreur).
- ²⁴ «toute l'antiquité tant Juive que Chrétienne».
- ²⁵ Voltaire also points out the famous contradiction that the author of Deuteronomy wrote that Moses was 80 years old when he came out of Egypt but died at the age of 120. Thus Moses was already dead when the book of Deuteronomy have him speak ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012a, p. 265](#)).
- ²⁶ “Nous croyons fermement que Mosé, appelé chez nous Moyse, est le seul auteur du Pentateuque comme l'Eglise le croit, et qu'il n'y a que le récit de sa mort qui ne soit pas écrit par lui. Nous avons seulement exposé avec candeur l'opinion de nos adversaires”. ([Voltaire \[1776\] 2012a, pp. 23, 272](#)).
- ²⁷ It is difficult to assess whether Voltaire is sincere or simply protecting himself from censorship.
- ²⁸ [Bernier \(2008, p. 221\)](#) argues that Simon purposefully leaves his readers in the dark regarding his true position regarding Tradition, so as not to be censored by other Catholics.
- ²⁹ Or “Law of Mouth” that he attributes to “R. Moïse de Cotsi, Jewish scholar,” who emphasized the importance of oral tradition ([Simon 1685, pp. 39–40](#)).
- ³⁰ Though Simon does not specify, it would likely be the first temple ([Simon 1685, p. 112](#)).
- ³¹ Henri Margival, *Essai sur Richard Simon et la Critique Biblique au XVIIe Siècle* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), 116. See also Monod.
- ³² From C. Urbain and E. Levesque, eds., *Correspondance de Bossuet* [15 vols.; Paris: Hachette, 1909–25] 13. 327–28).
- ³³ I am summarizing and paraphrasing [Tambrun's \(2020\)](#) argument.
- ³⁴ There are other examples.
- ³⁵ «Saint Augustin n'était pas si savant; il ne savait ni le grec, ni l'hébreu».
- ³⁶ Stenger's article (2018) led me to this line of reflection.
- ³⁷ «A l'origine, sous la plume de Voltaire, l'*infâme* renvoie aux crimes et aux abus religieux, donc nécessairement à la Religion. Le terme était de droit dans la France du temps, d'évidence usuelle et massive, pour désigner le christianisme de dogme, de canon et de magistère catholiques, religion du prince et de ses sujets, unique dans le royaume très-chrétien, dominante en Europe, missionnaire et puissamment présente sur tous les continents. L'*infâme*, chez Voltaire, c'est d'abord l'empreinte et l'emprise historiques du christianisme dans des événements, des pratiques et des actes, qui à toute religion (à lui-même, en conscience) devraient valoir un jugement d'*infamie*- de faute devant Dieu (s'il existe) et d'*indignité* devant les hommes.» ([Magnan 2014, p. 7](#)).
- ³⁸ However, both theologian Jacob Vernet and Pastor Jacob Vernes, Calvinists whom Voltaire had befriended, among others, felt that Voltaire was going too far in wanting to destroy Christianity and decided to cut ties with the French *philosophe* ([Pomeau 1969, pp. 291–98](#)).
- ³⁹ ([Simon 1685](#)) Simon, Richard. 1685. *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*. Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, book 3, chp.16.
- ⁴⁰ I am paraphrasing.
- ⁴¹ Arius in *Thalia* quoted by Payne Robert (1957), *The Holy Fire*, New York: Harper & Brothers, pp. 82–83.
- ⁴² Too neutral or “indifferent” to Bossuet ([Tambrun 2020, pp. 263–73](#)).
- ⁴³ «Que soutenir, comme font leurs adversaires, qu'il y a plusieurs personnes distinctes dans l'essence divine, et que ce n'est pas l'Éternel qui est le seul vrai Dieu, mais qu'il y faut joindre le Fils et le Saint-Esprit, c'est introduire dans l'Eglise de Jésus-Christ, l'erreur la plus grossière et la plus dangereuse; puisque c'est favoriser ouvertement le polythéisme. »
- ⁴⁴ «Que St Augustin lui-même, après avoir avancé sur ce sujet mille raisonnements aussi faux que ténébreux, a été forcé d'avouer qu'on ne pouvait rien dire sur cela d'intelligible».
- ⁴⁵ I used King James Version, but modified verse 6 to better render the version (de Sacy) Voltaire used in French: “*il y en a trois qui donnent témoignage en terre, l'esprit, l'eau et le sang, et ces trois sont un. Il y en a trois qui donnent témoignage au ciel, le Père, le Verbe et l'Esprit, et ces trois sont un.*”
- ⁴⁶ «Ajoutons à cet article ce que dit dom Calmet dans sa dissertation sur le passage de l'épître de Jean l'Evangéliste, *il y en a trois qui donnent témoignage en terre, l'esprit, l'eau et le sang, et ces trois sont un. Il y en a trois qui donnent témoignage au ciel, le Père, le Verbe et l'Esprit, et ces trois sont un.* * Dom Calmet avoue que ces deux passages ne sont dans aucune Bible ancienne,* et il serait en

- effet bien étrange que St Jean eût parlé de la Trinité dans une lettre, et n'en eût pas dit un seul mot dans son Evangile.* On ne voit nulle trace de ce dogme ni dans les Evangiles canoniques, ni dans les apocryphes.* Toutes ces raisons et beaucoup d'autres pourraient excuser les antitrinitaires, si les conciles n'avaient pas décidé.*—357—Mais comme les hérétiques ne font nul cas des conciles, on ne sait plus comment s'y prendre pour les confondre».
- ⁴⁷ Iliffe (2006) points out that even though there were “dissonances and consonances between their positions” (p. 138) notably regarding the role of Jerome in the addition of the comma, Richard Simon’s Critical History of the Text of the New Testament was instrumental in forming Newton’s opinion (Iliffe 2006, p. 139).
- ⁴⁸ Voltaire’s mistress, Mme du Châtelet, translated Newton’s Principia. Voltaire admired Newton (Toulmonde 2022, pp. 235–54).
- ⁴⁹ «Critique du passage de l’Épitre I de Saint Jean, ch. 5, v 7 qui n’est point dans la plupart des exemplaires grecs et des autres livres orientaux, ni dans les plus anciens exemplaires latins» (Simon 1689, p. 203).
- ⁵⁰ Simon (1689, p. 203) for the French.
- ⁵¹ Simon (1689, p. 204) for the French.
- ⁵² “Car il y en a trois qui rendent témoignage dans le ciel, le Père, le Verbe et le Saint Esprit et ces trois sont une même chose” (p. 203). For the role of Jerome regarding the comma, see Iliffe (2006).
- ⁵³ «On voit par là que le scoliaste a entendu le Père, le Verbe et le Saint Esprit par ces trois témoins dont parle Saint Jean l’esprit, l’eau et le sang» (p. 204).
- ⁵⁴ «Témoignage de Dieu le Père et du Saint Esprit» (p. 204).
- ⁵⁵ Simon (1689, p. 213) for the French.
- ⁵⁶ Simon (1689, p. 214) for the French.
- ⁵⁷ «not beyond doubt» in French (“hors de doute”) (Simon 1689, p. 216).
- ⁵⁸ but Simon thinks it was a mistake since it was “spurious” (p. 184), not beyond doubt (217).
- ⁵⁹ In a note Hunwick (2013, p. 185, note 39) hypothesizes that Simon wrote this to protect himself from being accused of “unorthodoxy” by Bossuet. Hunwick points to Auvray (1974), pp. 124–31.
- ⁶⁰ Shift that Ska and others have highlighted (Ska 2009, p. 313).
- ⁶¹ «puisque vous êtes ignorants, éclairez-vous et supportez-vous. Quand vous seriez tous du même avis, ce qui certainement n’arrivera jamais, quand il n’y aurait qu’un seul homme d’un avis contraire, vous devriez lui pardonner» (Voltaire [1762] 1877–1885d, chp. 25).
- ⁶² «Il faut donc qu’ils reconnaissent avec tous les gens de bon sens, que ce n’est point des vérités de physique qu’il faut chercher dans la Bible, et que nous devons y apprendre à devenir meilleurs, et non pas à connaître la nature. (280)».
- ⁶³ Schwarzbach has shown that through Simon’s work, Voltaire was exposed to the works of Grotius and Cappel (Voltaire [1776] 2012a, p. 62).

References

- Auvray, Paul. 1974. *Richard Simon 1638–1712: Étude bio-bibliographique avec des texts inédits*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Bernier, Jean. 2008. Le Problème De La Tradition Chez Richard Simon Et Jean Le Clerc. *Revue Des Sciences Religieuses* 82: 199–223. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Coleman, Charly. 2010. Resacralizing the World: The Fate of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography. *The Journal of Modern History* 82: 368–95. Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/> (accessed on 1 February 2014). [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Cotoni, Marie-Hélène. 1984. *L’Exégèse du Nouveau Testament dans la philosophie française du dix-huitième siècle*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution.
- Cotoni, Marie-Hélène. 2006. Intertextualité et humour dans *Le taureau blanc* de Voltaire. *Cahiers de Narratologie*. [En ligne] 13. Available online: <http://journals.openedition.org/narratologie/323> (accessed on 1 January 2020).
- Ferkenstad, Craig A. 2002. Nicaea to Constantinople Achieving Doctrinal Consensus. *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 42: 292–311.
- Florida, Robert Edwin. 1973. Voltaire and the Socinians. Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada, May.
- Gargett, Graham. 2009. Voltaire and the Bible. In *The Cambridge Companion to Voltaire*. Edited by Nicholas Cronk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 193–204.
- Hunwick, Andrew W. R. 2013. *Richard Simon Critical History of the Text of the New Testament: Wherein Is Established the Truth of the Acts on Which the Christian Religion Is Based*. Leiden: Brill. Available online: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> (accessed on 17 May 2022).
- Iliffe, Rob. 2006. Friendly Criticism: Richard Simon, John Locke, Isaac Newton and the Johannine Comma. In *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England*. Edited by Nicholas Keene and Ariel Hessayon. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 137–57.
- Lambe, Patrick J. 1985. Biblical Criticism and Censorship in Ancien Régime France: The Case of Richard Simon. *The Harvard Theological Review* 78: 149–77. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Le Brun, Jacques. 1988. Sens et portée du retour aux origines dans l’œuvre de Richard Simon. *XVIIème Siècle* 33: 185–98. First published 1981.

- Le Brun, Jacques. 2012. L’Antiaugustinisme de Richard Simon. *Revue de l’histoire des Religions* 2: 257–73. Available online: <http://journals.openedition.org> (accessed on 5 March 2019). [CrossRef]
- Legaspi, Michael C. 2010. *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Legaspi, Michael C. 2016. Merely Academic: A Brief History of Modern Biblical Criticism. In *What Is the Bible? The Patristic Doctrine of Scripture*. Edited by Matthew Baker and Mark Mourachian. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pp. 181–200.
- Lehner, Ulrich. 2016. *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Magnan, André. 2014. Penser l’infâme. *Cahiers Voltaire* 13: 7–50.
- Monod, Albert. 1921. La Controverse de Bossuet et de Richard Simon au sujet de la ‘version de Trévoux’. *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie Religieuses* 1: 197–219. [CrossRef]
- Piqué, Nicolas. 2018. Critiques de l’origine et historicité du monde chez Voltaire et Rousseau. *Monde Français du Dix-Huitième Siècle* 3. [CrossRef]
- Pomeau, René. 1969. *La Religion de Voltaire*. Paris: Librairie Nizet.
- Popkin, Richard H. 1979. *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Reiser, Marius. 2016. The History of Catholic Exegesis, 1600–1800. *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800*. Edited by Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller and Anthony Gregg Roeber. Available online: <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com> (accessed on 5 May 2022).
- Reventlow, Henning Graf. 1988. Humanistic Exegesis: The Famous Hugo Grotius. In *Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries*. Edited by Benjamin Uffenheimer and Henning Graf Reventlow. Sheffield: JSOT Press, pp. 175–92.
- Sareil, Jean. 1965. Voltaire juge de Rabelais. *Romanic Review* 56: 171–80.
- Schwarzbach, Bertram Eugene. 2002. Dom Augustin Calmet: Homme des Lumières malgré lui? *Dix-huitième Siècle* 34: 451–63. [CrossRef]
- Schwarzbach, Betram Eugene. 1987. La Fortune de Richard Simon au XVIIIème siècle. *Revue des Études Juives* CXLVI: 225–39. [CrossRef]
- Sheehan, Jonathan. 2005. *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Simon, Richard. 1685. *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*. Rotterdam: Reinier Leers. Available online: [Gallica.bnf.fr](https://gallica.bnf.fr) (accessed on 17 May 2022).
- Simon, Richard. 1689. *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament où l’on établit la vérité des actes sur lesquels la religion chrétienne est fondée*. Rotterdam: Reinier Leers. Available online: [Gallica.bnf.fr](https://gallica.bnf.fr) (accessed on 17 May 2022).
- Ska, Jean-Louis. 2009. Richard Simon: Un pionnier sur les sentiers de la tradition. *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 97: 307–16. [CrossRef]
- Sorkin, David. 2008. *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Stenger, Gerhardt. 2016. Le socinianisme dans le “Dictionnaire philosophique” de Voltaire. In *Rousseau et les Lumières. Mélanges à la mémoire de Raymond Trousson (1936–2013)*. Edited by Christophe Van Staen. Paris: Honoré Champion, pp. 205–24. Available online: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01676954> (accessed on 10 June 2022).
- Tambrun, Brigitte. 2020. La Tradition sans l’exclusion: Richard Simon, Bossuet et le socinianisme face aux critères de l’authenticité. *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 95: 249–73. [CrossRef]
- Toulmonde, Michel. 2022. Emilie du Châtelet and Newton’s *Principia*. In *Époque Émilienne Philosophy and Science in the Age of Emilie Du Châtelet (1706–1749)*. Edited by Ruth Edith Hagengruber. Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences. Cham: Springer, vol. 11. [CrossRef]
- Twining, Timothy. 2018. Richard Simon and the Remaking of Seventeenth-Century Biblical Criticism. *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 3: 421–87. [CrossRef]
- Voltaire. 1768–1777. *Questions sur l’Encyclopédie (C-E)*. In *Collection complète des œuvres de M. de Voltaire*. Genève: Cramer, tome 23–24, “Contradictions”. First published 1772.
- Voltaire. 1775. *Le Siècle de Louis XIV: La Henriade, divers autres poèmes*. Genève: Cramer et Bardin. First published 1733.
- Voltaire. 1877–1885a. *Défense de milord Bolingbroke*. In *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*. Edited by Louis Moland. Paris: Garnier, tome 23. Available online: <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/tout-voltaire> (accessed on 18 July 2022). First published 1752.
- Voltaire. 1877–1885b. *Le Pyrrhonisme de l’histoire*. In *Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire*. Edited by Louis Moland. Paris: Garnier, tome 27, chapitre 4. Available online: <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/tout-voltaire> (accessed on 18 July 2022). First published 1768.
- Voltaire. 1877–1885c. *L’Opinion en alphabet*. In *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*. Edited by Louis Moland. Paris: Garnier, tome 17–20. First published 1752.
- Voltaire. 1877–1885d. *Traité sur la tolérance à l’occasion de la mort de Jean Calas*. In *Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire*. Edited by Louis Moland. Paris: Garnier. First published 1762.
- Voltaire. 1968a. *Dictionnaire philosophique I: Abbé–Critique*. In *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire/Complete Works of Voltaire*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, tome 35. First published 1764.
- Voltaire. 1968b. *Dictionnaire philosophique II: David–Vertu*. In *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire/Complete Works of Voltaire*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, tome 36. First published 1764.
- Voltaire. 1968c. *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton*. In *Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire/Complete Works of Voltaire*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, tome 15, Partie 2, Chapitre 2. First published 1736.

- Voltaire. 2012a. *La Bible enfin expliquée par plusieurs aumôniers de S.M. L. R. D. P.* In *Les Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire 79 A (I)*. Edition critique par Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation. First published 1776.
- Voltaire. 2012b. *La Bible enfin expliquée par plusieurs aumôniers de S.M. L. R. D. P.* In *Les Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire 79 A (II)*. Edition critique par Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation. First published 1776.