Sacy's *Préface à la Genèse:*
Exegesis in the Service of Apology

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PREFACE**

A modern introduction to a translation of Genesis might very well not mention the New Testament at all. Sacy's *Préface à la Genèse,* however, is a document of a totally different order. Sacy proposes his *Préface* as an introduction to his translation of the entire Bible. His principal aim in this introduction is to exclude the possibility of a rationalist examination of the Old Testament by showing that the authority of Moses rests on that of Christ himself. That which the New Testament specifically designates as forming part of Revelation, Sacy will attempt to prove, cannot be subjected to ordinary standards of textual criticism.

Sacy's approach to this traditional idea of the unity of the two Testaments finds an important parallel in the *Pensées.* Pascal's "Preuve des deux Testaments à la fois," proposed in outline form in fragment 305/274, however, is never developed into a completely organized proof. In the *liasses* corresponding to the "table de 1658," Pascal organized part of the vast quantity of materials he had collected for this proof under such chapter headings as "Preuves de Moïse," "Preuves de Jésus-Christ," "Que la Loi était figurative," and "Prophéties." Even the most highly organized of these arguments, the proofs of Moses and Christ, however, are in far from finished form. The remainder of the material destined for the "Preuve des deux Testaments à la fois" is scattered throughout the other *liasses* and often consists only of extensive catalogues of biblical citations.

In the *Préface à la Genèse,* Sacy presents, in a highly organized form, many of the same arguments sketched by Pascal. Among these arguments are various proofs of Christ's divinity, a defense of the historicity of the Pentateuch, a critique of Islam, and a theory of "figuratifs." Sacy's *Préface,* a document long ignored by, or unknown to, commentators and editors of the *Pensées,* often suggests the finished form that Pascal's arguments might have taken in a proof designed to establish the authority and authenticity of the Bible. I will therefore present a summary and an analysis of the *Préface à la Genèse* in order to establish a comparative text of potential interpretive
LA GENÈSE
TRADUITE EN FRANÇOIS.

Avec l'explication du sens littéral & du sens spirituel.

Tirée des SS. Peres & des Auteurs Ecclesiastiques.

A PARIS,
Chez Lambert Roulland, Imprimeur Libraire ordinaire de la Reyne, rue S. Jacques,
aux Armes de la Reyne.

M. D. C. LXXXIII.
Avec Approbation & Privilege du Roy.

Figure 3. Title page, La Genèse, 1683 (Service photographique, Bibliothèque Nationale)
value. Specific comparisons with the *Pensées* will generally be reserved for subsequent chapters.

In analyzing Sacy's arguments, it seems necessary to treat them in more or less the order in which he presents them. Sacy's arrangement of his proofs has a definite apologetic purpose. He first shows how Christ himself established the authority of Moses as a prophet. He then presents a proof of Christ's divinity based upon the prophecies. Admitting that his argument might be taken to be a circular one, Sacy then produces additional proofs of Christ's divinity drawn (1) from the Fathers and (2) from outside Revelation. Only when he has firmly established the principle of the unity of the Old and New Testaments does Sacy then explain his approach to exegesis. Exegesis, in turn, is then put in the service of apology. Sacy's theory of "figuratifs" is the source of an argument designed to safeguard the Old Testament from rationalist analysis.

**MOSES AND THE NEW TESTAMENT**

"Le premier des livres de l'Écriture est la *Genèse* et l'auteur qui l'a écrit est Moyse." At the very beginning of his *Préface à la Genèse*, Sacy undertakes a defense of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He first invites his reader to consider Moses as a historical figure "sans comparaison plus ancien que tous ces auteurs si illustres dans le monde qui ont acquis à la Grèce le nom de mère des sciences." Moses, Sacy points out to those who might be tempted to see traces of pagan myths in Scripture, preceded Homer by more than five hundred years.

Moses' miracles—the plagues called down upon Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea—merit respect in their own right according to Sacy. They are "certainement des oeuvres de Dieu." Yet Sacy does not ask his reader to accept such miracles on their own authority. The proof that authorizes them is of greater authority: "qui est que Moyse a esté Prophète et que c'est de Jésus-Christ mesme que nous apprenons la déférence et la vénération qui luy est deue." The authority of Moses is established by the New Testament: "c'est le Fils de Dieu mesme qui rend témoignage à la loy que ce Saint a publiée." For instance, Sacy points out, the New Testament recounts that Jesus voluntarily submitted to the Law of Moses in his circumcision, in sending those he had cured to the priests of the Temple, and in a multitude of other matters.

Sacy goes on to argue that Jesus, by citing Moses as his own authority in his public teaching, establishes Moses' credibility as a prophet. Sacy lays particular emphasis on Luke 20:37-38. Jesus, seeking to prove the resurrection of the dead to the Sadducees, reminds them of the way in which Moses had addressed God:

*Et quant à ce que les morts doivent ressusciter un jour, Moyse le déclare assez*
lui-même, lors qu'étant auprès du buisson il appelle le Seigneur le Dieu d'Abraham, le Dieu d'Isaac et le Dieu de Jacob.

Or Dieu n'est point le Dieu des morts, mais des vivans; parce que tous sont vivans devant luy [Sacy's translation].

By citing Moses in connection with the Resurrection, Sacy concludes, Christ establishes a “grand principe”: “que ce que Moyse enseigne dans ses livres estoit la figure de ce qui se devoit faire dans la loy nouvelle.”

Sacy’s second proof of the authority of Moses proceeds from the first. Christ, not content simply to establish the “grand principe” that his life and miracles are prefigured in the writings of Moses, “explique luy-mesme quelques-unes de ces figures.” As his primary example of such an explication performed by Christ, Sacy cites Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3:14–15:

Et comme Moïse éleva dans le désert le serpent d'airain, il faut de même que le Fils-de-l'homme soit élevé en haut afin que tout homme qui croit en lui ne périsse point, mais qu'il ait la vie éternelle [Sacy's translation].

According to Sacy, this passage in the New Testament represents Christ’s explication of a corresponding passage in the book of Numbers (21:8–9):

Et le Seigneur lui dit: Faites un serpent d'airain, et mettez-le pour servir de signe; quiconque étant blessé des serpens le regardera, sera guéri. Moïse fit donc un serpent d'airain, et il le mit pour servir de signe; et ceux qui ayant été blessés le regardoient, étoient guéris [Sacy's translation].

The “serpent d'airain,” Sacy explains, prefigures Christ on the Cross. The meaning of this “figure,” however, remained incomplete until the event it anticipated came to pass. Moses’ serpent was but an image of a serpent, “la figure et non le venin du serpent,” because it prefigured the fact that Christ “porterait une chair mortelle semblable à celle du péche et non le péché mesme.” The healing of the bites of real serpents by the image set up by Moses prefigured the Redemption, in which “la veue et l'adoration de Jésus-Christ élevé sur la Croix guériroit les playes que nous a faites le démon, appelé dans l'Ecriture l'ancien serpent.” (See figure 4.)

Sacy's exegesis of this passage is by no means original. He adopts the interpretation of Saint Augustine, who had in turn expanded upon that of Saint Paul. While founding his interpretation upon Patristic and Pauline models, Sacy at the same time insists that it was Christ himself, not any subsequent exegete, who drew the parallel between himself and the serpent in Numbers 21:8–9. Christ himself authorizes a Christian interpretation of events in the Old Testament. Protestant exegetes, Sacy observes, imagine any explication of Scripture that is not purely literal to be “une chose inventée et arbitraire.” They err not only in rejecting holy tradition but in ignoring the exegetical model proposed by Christ himself. “Le sens allégorique”
bears the authority of Revelation itself. "Ce n'est pas un homme qui l'a inventé, mais c'est Jésus-Christ même qui nous assure, non seulement que Moïse a dit plusieurs choses qui ont rapport au Fils de Dieu, mais que c'est de lui qu'il a écrit."

Sacy cites additional examples of how Jesus' explication of passages from the Old Testament serves to establish the authority of Moses. Jesus had explained to the Jews that the manna that their fathers had eaten in the desert was but a "figure" of the Eucharist. (John 6:32). All subsequent Christian interpretations of this event, Sacy insists, are but elaborations of this essential and primary interpretation. Christ had warned the Jews that Moses himself would be the accuser of those who refused to accept his testimony (John 5:39). Moses appeared with Christ in the Transfiguration because Christ, "voulant donner aux Apôtres une grande estime de Moïse," intended to make it clear that the Gospel would be "établissement sur le témoignage de la loy donnée par Moïse."

Sacy attaches particular importance to the words of the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27):

ET commençant par Moïse et continuant par les Prophètes, il leur expliquait ce qui avait été dit de lui dans toutes les Ecritures [Sacy's translation].

Christ's specific reference to Moses after his Resurrection, Sacy explains, makes it clear that the Old Testament is an indispensable part of Revelation. In dictating the Pentateuch to Moses, the Holy Spirit "à eu Jésus-Christ en veue." In rendering himself "l'interprète" of what Moses had writ-
ten, Christ unified the two Testaments and mandated the science of exegesis. From that point onward, the two Testaments had to be read as a single document with one meaning. From the same perspective, Pascal concludes in the “Preuves de Jésus-Christ”: “Moïse d’abord enseigne la Trinité, le péché originel, le Messie” (346/315).

Sacy’s argument suddenly takes a new direction. He acknowledges that his adversaries may not accept the authority on which he has based his proof of Moses, i.e., the authority of the New Testament. He must therefore present a series of proofs of the divinity of Christ addressed not to the libertins but “aux Chrestiens.” Sacy’s chapter title reflects his anxiety over the state of contemporary Christianity. “Plust à Dieu,” he laments, “que nostre siècle fust assez religieux pour n’avoir aucun besoin de cette preuve.” A century earlier, Sacy recalls, the Council of Trent had attributed the success of the Lutheran and Calvinist heresies to a general “dérèglement de moeurs.” In the course of the present century, Sacy observes, such a disregard for religion “s’est répandu avec un tel débordement, que l’excès des passions et l’amour du vice ont séché dans le coeur d’un grand nombre de personnes jusqu’aux moindres racines de la foi.”

Sacy’s proofs of Christ’s divinity will be neither of his own devising nor drawn from contemporary apology. They will be assembled exclusively from the works of Saint Augustine. Augustine’s proofs suit his purposes, Sacy explains, because they establish the divinity of Christ as a basis for proving the authenticity of the Old Testament. Sacy’s account of Augustine’s argument merits our attention. It is not lifted from Saint Augustine’s writings as an entity, but rather pieced together “de divers endroits de ses ouvrages.” We therefore have the opportunity to observe firsthand a neo-Augustinian synthesis of Augustinian texts. Sacy’s exposition of Augustine’s arguments, because it represents a process of selection, at the same time permits us to assess the extent to which Pascal’s borrowings from the writings of Saint Augustine were guided by a neo-Augustinian perspective.

Sacy’s first proof, for which he gives no specific reference in the writings of Saint Augustine, asserts that Christ proved his own divinity by predicting specific future events. Sacy puts special emphasis on the fulfillment of five prophecies:

1. John 12:32: Jesus’ prediction of the “mort ignominieuse” that he was to suffer;
2. Acts 1:8: the prediction of the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost;
3. Matthew 8:11: the conversion of the Gentiles;

Sacy emphasizes those events that are most easily confirmed by secular history. The accomplishment of the prediction of the Crucifixion and of the coming of the Holy Ghost, he observes, would not convince those who distrust the New Testament. The destruction of Jerusalem, however, predicted by Christ in Luke 21:24,

*Ils passeront par le fil de l'épée: ils seront emmenés captifs dans toutes les nations; et Jérusalem sera foulée aux piéz par les Gentils, jusqu'à ce que le temps des nations soit accompli* [Sacy's translation],

is confirmed by the most reliable secular sources. "Trente-sept ans après," Sacy insists, "nous voyons que cette ville malheureuse est prise et détruite en la même manière que Jésus-Christ l'avait dit." The principal witness to this event, Josephus, is a "témoign irréprochable." His testimony is all the more believable because of his great hostility to Christianity. 8

Sacy asks his readers to consider two other of Christ's prophecies that were borne out by the course of history. At a time when idolatry still reigned throughout the earth, Jesus had predicted "*que toutes les nations... auroient un jour leur place dans le royaume du ciel avec Abraham, Isaac et Jacob*" (Matthew 8:11). The conversion of the Gentiles, Sacy contends, is the dominant theme in the history of the world since the death of Christ. The Jews, the "premiers" under the Old Covenant, in accordance with Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 20:16,

*Ainsi les derniers seront les premiers, et les premiers seront les derniers* [Sacy's translation],

have fallen heir to the former fate of the Gentiles. "Ceux qui estoient alors les enfans du royaume estoient jettez dans les ténèbres extérieures." 99

Sacy's second series of arguments, drawn from Augustine's Third Epistle to Volusian, are presented under the chapter heading "Ses Miracles et l'établissement miraculeux de son Eglise." According to Sacy, the most important of Jesus' miracles was his voluntary death on the Cross, "accompagnée de toutes les circonstances qu'il avait fait écrire tant de siècles auparavant par ses Prophètes." Sacy, however, is not yet ready to present his most important proof of Christ's divinity: the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. First, he asks those who remain unconvinced of the authority of Scripture to consider the historical effects of Jesus' Resurrection, a proof that "toute la raison humaine et toute la puissance des hommes et des démons n'a pô résister."

The foundation of the Apostolic church, Sacy argues, would be inexplicable had not the Apostles really witnessed Jesus' Resurrection. In the
Gospels, these same Apostles are presented as "foibles" and "timides," as very much unlike the kind of men who could have founded a new religion on their own. After the Resurrection and Pentecost, the Apostles take on an entirely different character. They are "remplis tout d'un coup d'une force divine":

Ceux qui sçavoient à peine leur propre langue, parlent tout d'un coup les langues de tous les peuples. Ceux qui estoient des hommes sans lettres et du commun du peuple . . . pénètrent en un moment les plus grands mystères de l'Écriture, citent les paroles de Moyse et des Prophètes, et font voir qu'elles ont esté accomplies en la personne de Jésus-Christ.  

Sacy's emphasis on the historical effects of the Resurrection serves an important apologetic aim. It is meant to cause those who doubt the authenticity of Scripture to take another look at the evidence. Only at this point does Sacy then introduce his most telling proof: "Preuve des miracles par la Prophétie et de la Prophétie par les Juifs." The authenticity of the supernatural events in the life of Christ will be proved by the fact that they were predicted by the prophets. "La preuve invincible des miracles, qui confond les esprits les plus rebelles, c'est qu'ils ont esté prédits plusieurs siècles avant qu'ils ayent esté faits, et qu'ils ont esté l'accomplissement de la prophétie."

Before presenting an exposition of this proof, Sacy records two objections anticipated by Saint Augustine. In the time of the Fathers, the pagans had attributed Christ's miracles to magic. Prophecy, however, Sacy points out, does not fall within the domain of the magical arts:

La prophétie n'appartient qu'à Dieu: Il est le seul Roy de tous les tems. Il n'y a point pour luy de passé ny d'avenir. . . . C'est pourquoi il a choisi luy-mesme la prédiction des choses futures comme le caractère de sa divinité, comme la marque essentielle qui distingue le Créateur de la créature.

Following Saint Augustine, Sacy anticipates a second objection to the proof that he will present. Could not the Christians have falsified the Old Testament texts to make it look as though they predicted events in the life of Jesus? Sacy reminds the reader that Augustine had been presented with the same objection by the pagans:

Saint Augustin nous assure que lorsque l'on faisoit voir aux Payens les écrits de Moyse, de David et des Prophètes, tout ce qui estoit arrivé à Jésus-Christ, et la ruine des idoles, laquelle ils voyoient de leurs propres yeux; ils avoïoient que ces prophéties estoient claires; mais ils ajoutoient que c'étoit pour cela même qu'ils les croyoient fausses, parce qu'ils estoient persuadez qu'elles avoïoient esté faites après la venue de Jésus-Christ, et que ceux qui les avoient écrites estoient plutost des historiens que des Prophètes.  

Augustine, "pour répondre à cette objection," referred the pagans to the Jews, "qui leur déclaroient que Moyse avoit esté leur législateur et un homme envoyé de Dieu quinze cens ans avant Jésus-Christ." The pagans recognized the fact that the Jews, "tout ennemis qu'ils estoient de Jésus-
Christ, rendoient un témoignage que la vérité seule pouvait tirer de leur bouche.” Like Pascal, Sacy attaches great importance to the “perpétuité” of the Jews. Their fate since the destruction of the Temple represents “une des marques les plus claires de la vérité de nostre foy.” Moses, “décrivant comme historien la mort d’Abel tué par Cain et ce qui arriva à Caïn ensuite,” Sacy explains, “a prophétisé la mort de Jésus-Christ tué par les Juifs et la punition qui l’a suivie.”

At every point in his argument, Sacy seeks to establish a further link between the Old and New Testaments. The story of Cain and Abel for him represents yet another instance of an event in the Old Testament whose meaning remained incomplete until the events it anticipated came to pass. Following Saint Augustine’s interpretation in *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, Sacy presents an explication designed to demonstrate the prophetic character of the episode recorded in Genesis 15. Cain, marked with a sign, is condemned to “une vie errante et vagabonde.” The Jews, carrying the “signe” of circumcision, are condemned to an existence in which they are “toujours agitez, sans établissement, sans considération, sans demeure fixe, bannis en tous lieux et méprisez en tous lieux.”

According to Sacy’s interpretation, the “état présent” of the Jews is one willed by God. In spite of extreme persecution, “ils subsistent.” “Leur ré-probation est devenue plus utile à l’Eglise que n’auroit esté leur conversion.” Had they embraced Christianity, their witness to the Gentiles concerning the veracity of the Old Testament prophecies would have been suspect. God, therefore, “les a dispersez et les a fait subsistez depuis dix-sept siècles dans toute la terre comme des témoins irréprochables”:

Conservant avec un grand respect l’Ecriture sainte à la lettre de laquelle ils s’attachent inviolablement, ils présentent cette mesme Ecriture en tous lieux, afin que tous les hommes y lisent en des termes très-clairs et très convainquants la justification de nostre foy et la condamnation de leur perfidie.

**PROOFS OF CHRISTIANITY DRAWN FROM OUTSIDE REVELATION**

In the next section of his *Préface*, Sacy broadens his arguments into a defense of the authority of Revelation. His arguments, he tells his readers, will first be drawn from outside Revelation itself. In a manner that recalls Pascal’s argument in the *Entretien*, Sacy first demonstrates the inability of philosophy, and in particular of those “faux sages du siècle,” to arrive at an explanation of the enigma of the human condition. Philosophy’s remedies for the misery inherent in the human condition are easily judged to be but illusions. The philosophers promise “non seulement une santé, mais une béatitude parfaite à l’âme de l’homme accablée de langueur et de misère.” How, Sacy asks, can philosophy make such promises? Philosophers have “ny assez de lumière pour discerner nos maux, ny assez de pouvoir pour nous en tirer.”
In a fragment of the *Pensées* marked “A.P.R. pour demain,” Pascal outlines a critique of philosophy that bears a striking similarity to Sacy’s expression of the same idea:

C’est en vain, ô hommes, que vous cherchez dans vous-mêmes le remède à vos misères. Toutes vos lumières ne peuvent arriver qu’à connaître que ce n’est point dans vous-mêmes que vous trouverez ni la vérité ni le bien. Les philosophes vous l’ont promis, et ils n’ont pu le faire. Ils ne savent ni quel est votre véritable bien, ni quel est votre véritable état. . . . Comment auraient-ils donné des remèdes à vos maux qu’ils n’ont pas seulement connus. (182/149)

This fragment elaborates an idea that Pascal expresses to Sacy in the *Entre-tien*. Philosophy cannot resolve the enigma of the human condition because it knows nothing of the Fall, of the fact that “l’état de l’homme à présent diffère de celui de sa création.”16 Further along in fragment 182/149, Pascal restates the idea in almost its original form: “Vous n’êtes pas dans l’état de votre création.”

How do we explain the similarity between Sacy’s critique of philosophy in his *Préface à la Genèse* and Pascal’s statement of the same idea in fragment 182/149? This fragment, carrying the title “A.P.R. pour demain,” traditionally has been viewed as Pascal’s outline of a presentation of the main points of his projected *Apology* that he delivered to the Solitaires at Port-Royal. Did Pascal’s exposition of this idea make such a profound impression on Sacy that he later used it in his *Préface*? Or is Sacy borrowing Pascal’s expression of this idea from the first edition of the *Pensées*?

The second of these two possibilities seems unlikely. Sacy presents the notion of philosophy’s inability to arrive at an explanation of the human condition in order to then be able to explain how Scripture, in its account of the Fall, resolves this very enigma. Pascal, in his original draft of fragment 182/149, had incorporated this very idea into his argument:

Ils ne savent ni quel est votre véritable bien, ni quel est votre véritable état. Je suis la seule qui puis vous apprendre et quel est votre véritable bien et quel est votre véritable état. Je les enseigne à ceux qui m’écoutent, et les Livres que j’ai mis entre les mains des hommes les découvrent bien nettement. . . . Comment auraient-ils donné des remèdes à vos maux qu’ils n’ont pas seulement connus?17

Pascal struck through the lines that appear above in italics. This portion of fragment 182/149 was therefore not reproduced in the Edition de Port-Royal, the only version of the *Pensées* that Sacy could have consulted.

It seems impossible to say whether the idea of an opposition between Revelation and philosophy was Pascal’s or Sacy’s to begin with. Sacy’s organization of the argument, however, helps illuminate Pascal’s position. In the course of the *Pensées*, Pascal develops at length two themes that are never really synthesized: (1) the inability of philosophy to explain the ori-
gins of the human condition, and (2) a proof of the Old Testament's author-
ity as Revelation. Sacy's argument, by which Scripture is shown to explain
what philosophy cannot, suggests the missing link between these two great
themes in the Pensées.

Sacy puts great emphasis on the corruption of man's reason in the Fall.
Reason, "estant aussi malade et aussi obscure qu'elle estoit," would not be
able to impart to the philosophers "ce qu'elle n'avoir pas elle-mesme." Sa-
cy's next argument, however, involves an appeal to reason. Those who
reject the proofs Sacy has just advanced concerning Christ's divinity and
the authenticity of Scripture are guilty of faulty reasoning. "Rien n'est plus
contraire à la raison, que de prétendre de détruire une autorité divine éta-
blis sur des preuves si convinquantes, en ne luy opposant que les vaines
conjectures de l'esprit humain." 18

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the word raison had two
rather different meanings. According to the Dictionnaire de l'Académie
Française (1694), it could mean either: (1) "la puissance le l'âme par la-
quelle l'homme discourt et est distingüé des bestes" or (2) "le bon sens, le
droit usage de la raison." This distinction between these two uses of the
word reflects a corresponding dichotomy between "l'esprit" and "le juge-
ment." The former is defined as a "faculté de pénétration," the latter as a
"faculté pratique." It is to "raison" taken as "le jugement" and "le bon sens"
that Sacy makes his appeal. In Sacy's view, "raison" in its first definition
represents a "faculté de pénétration" that was irreparably corrupted in the
Fall. Man's "puissance de l'âme par laquelle il discourt" is the very source
of "les vaines conjectures de l'esprit humain."

Appealing to reason defined as "le bon sens," Sacy draws his next argu-
ment from the realm of expérience. Why, he asks, do those who refuse to
accept Revelation reason in a manner totally at odds with their use of rea-
son in everyday affairs? Sacy builds his argument on the notion of "la défe-
rence que les hommes rendent à l'autorité." "Les hommes mesme du
monde," Sacy points out, believe that it would be "déraisonnable que de ne
se rendre pas à l'autorité quand elle est bien établie."

Sacy first appeals to the principles of hereditary nobility. The antiquity
of certain families is established by "des titres non suspects" and confirmed
by historical documents. If one said to a "personne de qualité" that his
family was not "plus grande que celle des autres . . . cette personne s'o-
ffensera[it] avec raison de ces objections si frivoles." Sacy then draws anoth-
er example of deference to authority from common law. All lands and
revenues that men possess are founded on "certains papiers" that were writ-
ten, signed, and authorized according to judicial forms and rules. "Si un
homme prétendoit avoir trouvé des raisons par lesquelles il voudroit ané-
antir cette autorité sur laquelle les Juges forment leurs Arrests et décident
souverainement de tous les biens des particuliers, il passeroit pour un insensé."

In a third example, Sacy comes close to suggesting that libertinage should be viewed as a crime against the state. The ancient law of France, he points out, inhibits women from succeeding to the throne, which it reserves to the princes of the blood. Anyone who might attempt to produce reasons calling into question such an established "loy du royaume" would be subjected to the most severe punishment. He would be taken to be not only an "extravagant," but an enemy of the state and of the sovereign.

Sacy then directly addresses the libres penseurs:

Vous déférez à une autorité humaine. Vous croyez qu'un homme seroit insensé s'il raisonnait contre des faits, et contre des titres et des lois autentiques, lorsqu'il s'agit de l'établissement ou d'une maison, ou d'un état. Et vous vous persuadez en même temps qu'il soit ou selon la raison ou selon la justice d'opposer des raisons imaginaires à cette foule de preuves que Dieu a établies dans tous les siècles, pour donner à la religion de Jésus-Christ une autorité qui fust digne, non seulement d'être crue comme très-certaine, mais d'être révérée comme le plus grande ouvrage que la sagesse et la puissance du Créateur ait pu faire sur la terre.

In their attempts to be "raisonnables," Sacy tells the libertins, they have erred against the fundamental principle of bon sens. For if human laws and ordinances have "une preuve" of their authority, "la Religion Chrestienne en a mille."19

The argument he has just advanced, Sacy advises his reader, is not one of his own devising. It carries the authority of Saint Augustine, who had formulated it in his polemic against the Manicheans. Sacy draws significant parallels between Augustine's adversaries and his own. The Manicheans, who promised to lead men to God "par la voye de la raison," thought it a "foibless que de se rendre à l'autorité." Like the libres penseurs, they refused to accept the "sainteté des livres de Moyse." Augustine had replied to the Manicheans that they had never doubted that Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero had really composed the works attributed to them. Why then did they doubt the authenticity of the books written by Moses?20

Having reviewed Augustine's argument, Sacy concludes that to doubt the authenticity of the Pentateuch is to adopt a position that is "la chose du monde la plus absurde." Suppose one applied to secular history the same standards that the libres penseurs apply to the Old Testament. One would have to conclude that one could be certain of nothing recorded in written records. One would find oneself in the absurd position of maintaining that "l'on pourra dire avec raison dans deux cens ans, que tous ceux qui vivent aujourd'hui ne vivent point, que tous ceux qui écrivent n'écrivent point, que tous les Rois qui règnent ne règnent point, et généralement que tout ce qui se passe aujourd'hui de plus grand et de plus remarquable dans le
SACY'S PREFACE A LA GENESE

monde n'est qu'une fable.” In two hundred years, Sacy reminds his adversaries, “on ne sçaura rien de ce qui se fait aujourd'huy, que ce qui s'en pourra lire dans les histoires.”

Sacy contrasts the *libres penseurs* with those pagan philosophers who during the first centuries of Christianity were persuaded of the veracity of the new religion. During the time of Saint Augustine, almost all the Platonists, “sans comparaison les plus éclairez et les plus célèbres d'entre les Philosophes,” renounced idolatry and converted to Christianity. Justin, Tertullian, Saint Cyprian, Saint Hilarius, and “tant d'autres” who were respected in society “par l'éminence de leur génie, de leur éloquence et de leurs écrits” put their talents in the service of the Faith.

By contrast, Sacy laments, the “grands esprits” of the seventeenth century “se flattent d'une certaine force de raisonnement en déclarant qu'ils ne croyent rien de tout ce qu'il y a de plus fort dans les preuves de nostre Religion.” Those philosophers who are the most talented and the most eloquent use their gifts to attack and to undermine religion. Yet how, Sacy asks, can the *libres penseurs* think of themselves as reasonable when they “font profession de mépriser ce qui non seulement a persuadé, mais a ravi mesme en admiration, les plus grands esprits qui furent jamais.”

Sacy’s purpose in formulating the notion that men ordinarily defer to the authority of historical records has been to point toward the credibility of Scripture. His next proof, which takes the form of a critique of Islam, likewise seeks to underline the historical character of the Bible and of Christianity in general. Like Pascal’s analysis of the Moslem religion in “Fausseté des autres religions,” Sacy’s argument seems to be modeled on arguments drawn from Grotius’ *De veritate religionis christianae*. Sacy’s aim is to show those who maintain that Christianity is an imposture what a genuine invented religion looks like. By a process of comparison, he seeks to emphasize the authenticity of the historical records on which Christianity is founded.

Whereas Islam is founded on a single revelation purportedly received by Mohammed, Christianity represents a 1,500-year continuous revelation beginning with Moses and culminating in Christ. The Old Testament consists of legitimate historical documents that are the testimony of an entire people. The Koran, by contrast, is but the testimony of a single individual. Christ was predicted by Moses and a great number of prophets. “Mahomet n’est prédit de personne.” (cf. *Pensées*, fragment 241/209) Christ predicted “de très-grandes choses qui se vérifient très-clairement.” Mohammed personally convinced only his wife, “et par elle à beaucoup d’autres,” that his attacks of epilepsy were “des communications . . . qu’il avoit avec l’Ange Gabriel.”

The reader is invited to compare the teachings of Jesus and Mohammed. The Gospels represent “une morale divine et parfaitement sainte dans tous
ses points.” Those who adopted it spread the faith by martyrdom and “par une infinité de miracles.” The Koran, by contrast, is both morally defective and unoriginal. Mohammed’s teachings, “une religion brutale très-propre à gagner des hommes brutaux,” were propagated “avec le fer et le feu” (cf. Pensées fr. 241/209). An analysis of the Koran reveals it to amount to no more than a plagiarism of “les vérités que les plus grands esprits avaient enseignées” prior to Mohammed and which Mohammed and his followers “ont . . . souillées dans leur bouche par le mélange de l’impiété et de l’erreur.” Christ revealed a religion that had been prepared since the beginning of time. Mohammed, with the help of several renegade Jews and an apostate Christian monk, invented “une religion nouvelle.”

An essential focus of Jansenism was man’s inability to ensure his own salvation. Sacy can only regard with horror a religion which teaches that a man who dies fighting for the spread of Islam will go directly to paradise. There is nothing more important in a religion than its “fin,” than the “récompense à laquelle doivent tendre toutes les actions de ceux qui la suivent.” The beatitude that Mohammed promises those “qui seront assez fous pour le croire” shocks Sacy’s fundamental conception of the incomprehensibility of the workings of divine justice. “Le Dieu de Mahomet qui promet aux siens une telle béatitude est digne, non de l’adoration, mais de l’exécration de tout le monde.”

One can scarcely imagine the horror with which Sacy would have greeted Vatican II’s proposal of a dialogue with Islam and other non-Christian religions. For him, the teachings of Mohammed are devoid of both revelation and historical credibility. Islam amounts to nothing more than a “superstition.” Neither Judaism, from which it borrowed circumcision, nor Christianity, from which it plagiarized its moral teachings, it is “une secte monstrueuse composée de diverse erreurs qui s’entrecombattent.”

Sacy’s analysis of Islam once again appeals to the notion of bon sens. Christianity, whose mysteries are beyond the scope of man’s fallen faculté de pénétration, is a scandal to reason. Islam, however, unlike Christianity, violates the standards of bon sens. Christianity can be shown to be consistent in its teachings and verifiable in its historical foundations. Having used the example of Islam to make this point, Sacy then proceeds to the “Seconde Partie” of his Préface à la Genèse. In this section, he will put the science of exegesis in the service of apology. Scripture, when correctly interpreted according to the rules laid down by Christ and the Apostles, will be shown not to violate ordinary standards of jugement and bon sens.

Sacy’s Exposition of His Exegetical Principles

Part two of Sacy’s Préface, “De la manière dont on a traduit et éclairci la Genèse,” seeks to provide the reader with an organized summary of Sacy’s
exegetical principles. His first concern is to establish the historicity of his text. Again taking up a defense of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, he produces a proof that, like those of the preceding section, is drawn from outside Revelation. Anyone who already accepts Moses' authority as a prophet will have no trouble believing that “l'Esprit de Dieu ait révélé à Moyse tout ce qui s'estoit passé avant luy.” But for the benefit of those who believe nothing of Revelation, Sacy advances another proof, one that he establishes “sans avoir recours à la révélation.”

Sacy asks his reader to imagine Moses speaking to those of his own generation concerning the books he has written:

J'ai résolu d'écrire ce qui s'est passé depuis la création du monde jusqu'à ce temps. Et on ne peut pas en estre mieux informé que je le suis. Car Amram mon père m'a dit souvent: Mon fils, je vous diray toute l'histoire du monde jusqu'à nous, qui est celle de notre famille, selon que je l'ay apprise de Lévi mon ayeul, qui scavoit tout ce qu'il m'en disoit d'Isaac son ayeul, avec lequel il avoit vécu trente-trois ans. Et pour ce qui est d'Isaac, il avoit appris tout ce qu'il en disoit à Lévi, de Sem, avec lequel il a vécu cinquante ans.

Sacy then asks his reader to imagine Sem speaking to Isaac and verifying the accounts that Isaac would then transmit to Moses through Levi and Amram:

Vous pouvez bien me croire quand je vous parle du déluge: puisque je vous dis alors ce que j'ay vu de mes propres yeux. Et vous devez me croire quand je vous parle de la création du monde, et de tout ce qui est arrivé à Adam, puisque j'ay vécu près de cens ans avec Mathusalem mon bisayeul, qui avoit appris toutes ces choses d'Adam mesme, avec lequel il a vécu plus de deux cens soixante ans.

Such an argument has been calculated from what Sacy calls “la tradition héréditaire et domestique des Patriarches.” In other words, by noting the length of the lifespan of each of the Patriarchs, he has established which of their lifespans overlapped. We must not confuse Sacy's argument with the modern notion of oral traditions. Because of the extremely long lives of the Patriarchs, Sacy argues, only five generations separated Moses from Adam. For Moses, the Flood and the Creation were historical events within living memory. “A parler mesme humainement,” he concludes, “et sans avoir recours aux preuves surnaturelles, jamais histoire n'a mérité de trouver une si grande créance dans l'esprit des hommes que celle de la Genèse.”

Having established the authenticity of his text, Sacy next proceeds to explain his exegetical method. At the end of each chapter, he will append two explanatory sections: the first explaining “la lettre” and the second “l'esprit” of the chapter he has just translated. In clarifying the literal meaning, he will have recourse to the original Hebrew, following the counsel of
“les plus sçavans Interprètes.” In establishing the “sens spirituel,” he will be guided by Saint Paul and Saint Augustine.

Sacy has already established the notion that the exegesis of the “sens spirituel” of the Old Testament is not a human invention but a part of Revelation itself. It is a science first established by Christ himself in the New Testament. Sacy now sets down the principle that the “sens spirituel” is not only a legitimate, but the primary, meaning of any given Old Testament text. As a point of departure, he cites Saint Paul’s exegesis of a passage from Genesis in Galatians 4:21–31:

*Dites-moi, je vous prie, vous qui voulez être sous la loi, n'entendez-vous point ce que dit la loi? Car il est écrit qu'Abraham a eu deux fils, l'un de la servante, et l'autre de la femme libre. Mais celui qui naquit de la servante, naquit selon la chair; et celui qui naquit de la femme libre, naquit en vertu de la promesse de Dieu. Tout ceci est une allégorie. Car ces deux femmes sont les deux alliances* [Sacy’s translation].

Saint Paul, Sacy insists, does not simply say that one *may* found an allegory on this episode recounted by Genesis. “Il dit que toute cette histoire est une allégorie, pour nous montrer que cette histoire n'a esté écrite que pour estre une image de la vérité, et que l'intention du Saint Esprit a esté de représenter dans ces deux femmes un tableau vivant et animé de l'ancien Testament et du nouveau” (italics mine). In 1 Corinthians 10:6, Sacy goes on to point out, “Saint Paul . . . déclare en termes formels que toutes les choses qui arrivèrent autrefois aux juifs estoient des figures, et qu'elles ont esté écrites pour servir d'instruction à toute l'Eglise.”

Sacy founds his whole theory of “figuratifs” on the example and authority of Saint Paul. One of the “maximes fondamentales” of the Christian religion, he observes, is that the Christian reader of the Old Testament “doit chercher l'esprit et la vérité qui est renfermée sous la lettre.” However, Sacy by no means intends to abolish, or even to neglect, the literal meaning of the Old Testament. His exegesis, he assures his readers, will always be conducted with “une grande circonspection,” endeavoring never to “s'éloigner du vrai sens du texte.” The “sens spirituel,” though superseding the literal meaning of a given text, does not destroy it. “Encore que le Saint Esprit nous assure par la bouche de l'Apostre, qu'Agar et Sara ont esté les figures de l'ancienne alliance et de la nouvelle, il ne s'ensuit pas néanmoins que ces deux femmes ne soient qu'une parabole, et qu'elles n'ayent pas esté effectivement.”

Sacy’s emphasis on the literal and historical reality of events in the Old Testament can serve to prevent our misunderstanding of a fundamental exegetical principle set down by Pascal in the Pensées: “L’Ancien Testament . . . n’est que figuratif” (737/501). For instance, in fragment 489/590,
Pascal notes: “Les six jours que Moïse représente pour la formation d’A-dam ne sont que la peinture des six âges pour former Jésus-Christ et l’E-glise” (italics mine). We might perhaps be tempted to interpret this fragment as anticipating a modern understanding of Genesis. In one of his first studies on Pascal, Jean Mesnard concluded that this fragment shows that the apologist “n'accorde aucune valeur historique au récit de la Création en six jours.”26 In chapter four, I shall show that Pascal, to the contrary, adheres to an extremely literal interpretation of the Creation and the Fall. Sacy constantly reminds his readers that the higher truth that an event in the Old Testament prefigures never excludes its historical reality. For example, Sacy identifies “la pierre dont Moyse fit sortir une source d’eau” (Exodus 17:6–7) as a “figure” of Christ’s passion. Such an interpretation, Sacy insists, by no means suggests that the rock struck by Moses in the desert “n’ait pas esté réellement une pierre.”27

In order to insure a proper balance between the spiritual and literal meanings of a given passage, Sacy explains, he will rely upon a rule first set down by Saint Augustine. This rule excludes two extreme approaches to the Old Testament. Those who maintain that the Old Testament never prefigures events in the New Testament “combattent formellement les paroles de Jésus-Christ et les Apostres.” On the other hand, those who insist that “les plus petites circonstances” of the Old Testament are “prophétiques et mystérieuses” “semblent entreprendre une chose bien hardie et bien difficile.” “Illi mihi videntur multum errare; isti multum audere.”28

Sacy interprets Saint Augustine’s principle to mean that the exegete must always “fonder le sens spirituel sur la lettre mesme de l’Ecriture.” From the perspective of medieval exegesis, Sacy’s avowed intent to rehabilitate the “sens historique” of Scripture seems almost revolutionary. Medieval exegesis, in its passion for allegory, had tended to relegate the “sens littéral” of Scripture to a place of inferior importance. In the same way that the Jansenists sought to free theology from the trappings of scholasticism and ground it in Scripture and the Fathers, Sacy seeks to reorient biblical exegesis according to the instructions of Saint Paul and Saint Augustine.

It would be wrong, however, to view Sacy’s emphasis on “la lettre de l’Ecriture” as pointing toward modern biblical criticism. Taken by itself, Sacy’s principle of always basing the “sens spirituel” of a passage on “la lettre mesme” might seem to make common cause with Richard Simon’s attempt to establish accurate biblical texts. Such is far from the case. Simon’s very criticism of Sacy was that his explications of the “sens spirituel” were “peu propres au texte qu’il veut expliquer, parce qu'elles ne coulent point du sens littéral.”29 Sacy stands at the end of an exegetical tradition as old as Christianity itself, a tradition that had never ceased to amplify the wealth of figures it discovered in the Old Testament. With Simon began a
movement in the direction of reducing the number of such *figures*. The effects of this trend are still being felt in contemporary biblical studies.

To turn to almost any page of Sacy's biblical commentaries is to enter a world alien to that of modern textual criticism. "Les plus petites circonstances" in fact very often do take on mysterious and prophetic meanings that are completely unlike those elucidated by the modern scholar. For instance, the description in Genesis 6:14 of the boards from which Noah's ark was to be constructed Sacy finds fraught with *figures*. These planks, "unies et applanies par-dessus, afin qu'estant jointes ensemble elles demeurassent toujours fermes comme si ce n'eût esté qu'un même bois," prefigure the union that should exist between Christians. Their length is a symbol of the long wait of the soul to find God, their height an image of the elevation of the soul touched by grace.30

In his preface to *L'Exode*, Sacy further elaborates his theory of "figuratif." His explanation of the way in which the ceremonies of the Law prefigure "les vérités de l'Eglise" parallels Pascal's treatment of the same subject. Once again, Sacy appeals to *expérience*:

> Si les hommes estiment tant et mettent presque hors de prix, la représentation des choses de la nature faite par la main sçavante de ces sculpteurs anciens, ou de ces peintres célèbres dont ils considèrent les ouvrages comme des chefs-d'oeuvres de l'art; ne devrions-nous pas estimer et admirer infiniment davantage ces tableaux de l'Ecriture tracez par le doigt de Dieu qui est son Esprit, qui représentent dès le temps de Moïse, non les ouvrages de la nature, mais les merveilles de la grâce, non les choses passées ou présentes comme font les peintres, mais celles qui devoient s'accomplir tant de siècles après?21

Sacy, always faithful to the thought of Saint-Cyran, derives such an approach to Scripture from a more general theological principle laid down by his master, the idea that nature is an image of grace. "Tout le monde," Saint-Cyran had written, "n'est qu'un tableau, et Dieu en créant les choses visibles n'a fait que peindre les invisibles, comme les peintres ne nous représentent que les visibles."32 In other words, just as the visible world is but an image of the world to come, the Old Testament is an image of the New. All the ceremonies of the Law, all the "événemens visibles" of the Old Testament, represent "ce monde invisible que saint Paul appelle un monde futur, qui enferme tout ce qui devoit s'accomplir en la personne de Jésus-Christ et dans tout le corps de son Eglise."33

Sacy's explication of these "figures" that anticipate Christianity will not be limited to certain traditional motifs. To be sure, he gives extensive attention to the Passover as an image of the Eucharist, to the passage of the Red Sea as a figure of the Redemption, and to the Law as a figure of the Gospel. He goes on, however, to assign a figurative meaning to many passages that classical exegesis had tended to relegate to the status of historical detail.
“Les vestemens du grand Prêtre et les pierres prétieuses dont ils étoient enrichis,” “[les] voiles qui couvroient le tabernacle,” and “l'autel d'or” all are found to point toward “les véritez de l'Eglise” (see figure 5). Perhaps most indicative of the way in which Sacy sees the finger of God tracing the outlines of the New Testament under the “voiles sacrez” of the Old is the interpretation he gives to the manner in which Moses defeated the tribe of Amalec. “En tenant les bras étendus,” Moses prefigured the Cross on which Christ was to die.

Sacy seeks to justify the multiplicity of “figures” he will find in the Old Testament by citing Augustine’s description of the way in which the most seemingly insignificant details in the Bible serve the purposes of the Holy Spirit:

Comme dans une harpe, tout sert pour faire résonner, et tout néanmoins ne résonne pas, n'y ayant que les cordes seules qui estant touchées avec art composent l'harmonie des sons: ainsi dans l'histoire sacrée, tout généralement n'est pas une figure et une prophétie; mais les moindres choses servent comme de jointure et de liaison pour les grandes qui sont prophétiques et mystérieuses.

The comprehensiveness of Sacy’s commentaries on the Old Testament reflect his assumption that every word in the Bible plays a role in unfolding the drama of man’s salvation.

In his “instructions” to the reader of L’Exode, Sacy explains why some things in the Old Testament are not “figures.” He draws the traditional distinction between “la loi morale” and “la loi cérémoniale.” The former, exemplified in the Ten Commandments, must be observed by Christians just as “religieusement” as by the Israelites of old. Because “la loi morale” is a function of “la charité,” its precepts are to be taken literally. On the other hand, “la loi cérémoniale” must be interpreted according to its “sens spirituel.” Sacy directs his reader to regard

tout ce qui est dit du tabernacle, qui étoit alors le temple de Dieu, de l'autel des holocaustes, des sacrifices sanglans, des différentes oblations, de l'autel des parfums, des festes solennelles, et de tout ce culte extérieur que Dieu avoit prescrit aux Israélites

as being subject to the kind of exegesis that discovers “la vérité et la lumière de Dieu cachées sous ces ombres et ces figures.” The multitude of sacrifices that the Israelites were required to offer are but a single “image du grand et de l'unique sacrifice de la loy nouvelle.” Sacy’s rule for distinguishing between “figure” and “réalité” in the Old Testament is the same principle proposed by Pascal in fragment 301/270: “Tout ce qui ne va point à la charité est figure.”

Why, Sacy’s reader may ask, is so much of the Old Testament hidden
Figure 5. *La Terre sainte*; engraving, Préface, Sacy Bible, 1702 (Service photographique, Bibliothèque Nationale)
beneath “figures”? Sacy’s answer to this question ties his theory of “figuratifs” to his overall apology. Moses, Sacy explains, “a esté obligé d’y couvrir sous des ombres et sous des voiles sacrés les vérités les plus hautes” because he was writing for the Jews, “qui n’aurient pas esté capables de les comprendre s’il les eust expliquées plus clairement.” From the beginning of time, God had chosen the Jews to be the witnesses of the fulfillment of his prophecies and the guardians of his Scriptures. Yet the central truth to which Scripture speaks, “une merveille si grande et si inouïe, que le Verbe Éternel, égal à Dieu son Père, daignât s’abaisser jusqu’à se faire homme pour sauver les hommes,” would have been completely beyond their comprehension before the coming of Christ.

The Jews’ ignorance as to what was really written in the Law was a necessary part of the economy of Salvation. The Incarnation had to be announced by those who could later serve as non-suspect witnesses. Had the Jews recognized the “sens spirituel” of the Law, they would have received Christ as the Messiah. Had this happened, the Jews would not have been able to serve as hostile witnesses concerning the authenticity of the Old Testament prophecies.

Sacy, attempting to explain God’s choice of the Jews as his chosen people, advances a second reason for the figurative character of the Old Testament:

Le démon qui voyait que le connoissance de Dieu étoit imprimée comme naturellement dans le fond de l’âme, a voulu inventer une erreur très-dangereuse parmi les payens: . . . qui est que l’on ne pouvoit pas nier qu’il n’y eût un Dieu au-dessus de tous les autres, mais qu’il ne se mesloit que de régler le Ciel et le mouvement des astres. Et que ceux que l’on appelloit dieux, et que l’on révéroit par le culte des idoles (sous lesquelles cet Ange apostat se cachoit luy-même) étoient les maistres des biens de la terre.

In order to destroy this polytheism invented by the Devil, God “a voulu estre comme le Roy et le protecteur du peuple hbreu.” By leading the Jews into the Promised Land and according them “des biens charnels et terrestres,” God showed the pagans that he was master of earth as well as of heaven.

Sacy proposes yet another explanation why God blessed the Israelites with “biens terrestres.” Christ was to come in humility and poverty. It was therefore necessary “qu’il finist voir avant le tems de son Incarnation, qu’il estoit le maistre de ces mesmes biens qu’il devoit mépriser.” In the Old Testament, God therefore shows himself the master of “les biens terrestres.” In the New Testament, by contrast, “Dieu détourne les hommes de ces biens terrestres pour leur faire goûter les biens du Ciel”:

Une des fins principales que Jésus-Christ a eues dans son Incarnation, a esté de nous apprendre que cette félicité temporelle que les Juifs et les Payens
recherchoient avec tant d'ardeur n'estoit qu'une illusion qui trompoit nos
sens, et qui nous cachoit les biens véritables où nous devons tendre; et que
nôtre âme estant l'image de Dieu, ne devoit désirer, pour estre vraiment heu-
reuse, que sa grâce sur la terre et sa gloire dans le ciel.43

The "biens spirituels" dispensed by Christ in the New Testament were
reserved to the elect, just as the "biens terrestres" had been reserved for a
chosen people in the Old Testament. However, by the special favor of God,
the Patriarchs, the prophets, and several other Old Testament saints were
permitted to penetrate the veil of "figures" in which the Law was hidden.
Moses, for example, "a cru très-certainement que Jésus-Christ naîtroit et
mourroit pour les hommes." Joshua, David, and Samuel were likewise
"Chrétiens effectivement par une anticipation de grâce." Sacy warns, how­
ever, that one must not imagine that this grace was given to very many in
the Old Covenant. Only a few recognized that the "grande variété" of sacri­
fices and legal observations were but the "figure des choses qui devoient
s'accomplir en la personne de Jésus-Christ."44

Like Pascal, Sacy builds a whole exegetical principle on the opposition
between the juifs charnels and the juifs spirituels. The former simply ob­
served the external signs of the Law "sans y rien comprendre." The latter
"pénétraient en même temps sous ses voiles la vérité qui y estoit cachée."45
The juifs spirituels "ont été véritablement Chrestiens, quoy qu'ils n'en por­
tassent pas le nom." The réprouvés among the Christians, on the other
hand, fall into the very same category as the juifs charnels.46

Figures, Sacy theorizes, are the instrument used by God to blind those
who were not meant to see (the juifs charnels and the réprouvés), and to
enlighten the elect (including the juifs spirituels). Sacy's theory of "figura­
tifs" is a corollary of a larger theological principle, that of Predestination
and Election. As in the Pensées, figures are the building blocks out of which
is constructed a principle of central importance in Jansenist theology, le
Dieu caché.

ON READING THE BIBLE

However much emphasis Sacy puts on the reasonableness of the argu­
ments he presents in his Préface, he always reserves a place for those who
have no need of such arguments. Many of the saints and martyrs, he notes,
would have lacked the "lumière d'esprit" necessary for a complete under­
standing of many of the proofs he has advanced.47 In his conclusion to the
Préface à la Genèse, Sacy returns to the idea that proofs and arguments
arrived at by human reason have only a limited value. In order to under­
stand what is written in the books of the Bible, he insists, the reader must be
guided "par le même Esprit qui les a dictez."48

In his letters to penitents, Sacy repeatedly stresses that the proper frame
of mind for reading Scripture is not one of intellectual curiosity. Such a
disposition leads one to discover in the Bible only "une lettre morte." Rather, one should approach Scripture in a spirit of prayer and meditation. However helpful any commentary, only the Holy Spirit can ultimately reveal to a reader the "sens spirituel" of a given passage in the Bible. This is because the organ of perception of the "sens spirituel" of Scripture is the heart, not reason.\footnote{The Bible is not a document of human origin. "Il n'importe que ce soit Moyse . . . qui en ait esté le secrétaire. C'est Dieu certainement qui en est l'Auteur. \textit{Ce sont ses pensées et ses paroles.}" If we commonly consult "un grand esprit humain" in order to understand what is written in "les livres des grands esprits," why then should be hesitate to ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us as to the meaning of Scripture? No "sage du monde, ny vivant ny mort," has the power to "donner l'intelligence de ce livre à ceux qui ne seroient capables de l'entendre." Only God, "vivant dans le ciel, pendant que nous lisons sur la terre cette histoire sainte \textit{qu'il a dictée à Moyse}," can reveal, through his Holy Spirit, "les grandes vérités qu'elle renferme."\footnote{We have already accorded great importance to Sacy's conception of Scripture as an image of the Incarnation. In his conclusion to the \textit{Préface à la Genèse}, Sacy presents this vision of the Bible in a striking analogy. In the most ancient of the Greek liturgies, he explains, "le prestre . . . prenoit sur l'autel le livre de l'Evangile, et se tournant vers le peuple l'élevoit en haut, et en formoit un signe de Croix . . . cependant tout le peuple, estant à genoux et prosterné, adoroit ce Livre sacré, comme si c'eust esté Jésus-Christ mesme."\footnote{Sacy's whole conception of the Bible is Christocentric. Christ is hidden in Scripture just as he was hidden in the Incarnation and is present under the veil of the Eucharist. This idea stands at the heart of Sacy's approach to exegesis. It is the cornerstone of his theory of the unity of the two Testaments. It is a principle to which we shall return as we endeavor to understand the place of the Bible in the thought of Pascal. Some critics who have treated the subject have distorted Pascal's fundamental conception of the nature of Scripture. Lhermet, for example, concluded that Pascal was "un initiateur du rationalisme scripturaire" and called the apologist "le premier croyant qui se hasarda à considérer la Bible comme un livre ordinaire."\footnote{Such a view of Pascal's biblicism cannot be substantiated by a critical reading of the \textit{Pensees}. Far from being an "initiateur du rationalisme scripturaire," Pascal shares the attitude of Monsieur de Sacy concerning the inviolability of the Bible as a document of Revelation.}2. \textit{La Genèse, Préface, Première Partie, partie i.}}1. See Mesnard, \textit{Les Pensées de Pascal}, p. 27. 2. \textit{La Genèse, Préface, Première Partie, partie i.}}
16. Bedier, pp. 73–74.
17. The full text of this fragment, not given in most editions of the *Pensées*, has been restored in the recent edition of Philippe Sellier, who follows the text of the *Seconde Copie*. See *Pensées*, fragment 182, p. 108.
28. *La Genèse*, Préface, Seconde Partie, partie i. Saint Augustine's principle was a particularly important one for those at Port-Royal. Jansenius, in the preface to his *Pentateuchus* (pp. 6–7) had restated the idea: "Duo extrema cavenda sunt: primum, ne relicto sensu litterali quem verba prae se ferunt, ad allegoricas expositiones declinetur. . . . Alterum est ne, in indagando sensu historico et litterali, nimidum humanae philosophiae vel tribuamus, vel derogemus." Pascal, in fragment 284/252, renders the principle: "Deux erreurs: 1. prendre tout littéralement. 2. prendre tout spirituellement."
35. *L'Exode et Le Lévitique*, Préface, p. lxi. The reference is to Exodus 17:11–12: "And when Moses lifted up his hands, Israel overcame: but if he let them down a little, Amalec overcame."
47. *La Genèse*, Préface, Première Partie, partie vi.
51. *La Genèse*, Préface, Seconde Partie, partie iii (italics mine).
52. *Pascal et la Bible*, p. 432.
Part Two

The Bible

in the Argument of the *Pensées*