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**Questioning Authorities: Scepticism and Anti-Christian
Arguments in the *Colloquium Heptaplomeres***

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10,793 WORDS – **10,898** AFTER CORRECTIONS

Summary

Bodin's *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* is one of the most important clandestine manuscripts of the early modern period. A fascinating dialogue between seven different religions it tackles some of the main debates of the early modern era. It has long in the historiography been recognised as a key text promoting toleration. However, a close reading of the text and a focus on the way in which it used and debated written authorities (from ancient literature to the Scriptures) directs us toward another crucial issue of the period. Indeed, it challenges and questions received authorities by making use of the dialogue form to question each in turn. Each character relies on the likes of Aristotle, Augustine or the Bible to support their views only to see them challenged by the others through the use of counter interpretations or other authorities. This leads to see the text as fundamentally imbedded in the sceptical arguments developing at the time as noted by early modern readers who voiced their concerns about the way in which this text led to doubt rather than about the potential toleration it promoted.

Keywords: Bodin; *Colloquium Heptaplomeres*; early modern scepticism; authorities; biblical criticism; dialogue

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The *Colloquium* and scepticism?

The *Colloquium Heptaplomeres*, traditionally attributed to Jean Bodin, was too radical to be printed before the 19th century and circulated clandestinely across Europe during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.¹ The text would have been written by the French political writer at some point between 1588 and 1596. Yet, the earliest pieces of evidence of the circulation of this text emerge in the late 1620's and early 1630's through private correspondence of men such as Hugo Grotius and with Naudé's *Bibliographia Politica* which seems to be the first reference in print.² Men such as Bayle, Huet, Leibniz were involved in the circulation and propagation of the text in the seventeenth century. Its clandestine circulation is acknowledged by the well-known story of Queen Christina of Sweden's long search for the controversial manuscript – 33 years during which in spite of knocking on the doors of individuals known to have copies her envoys Isaac Vossius and Claude Sarrau failed to provide her with a copy.³ Furthermore, Jean Chapelain when he learnt that his friend Henri Conring had a copy of the text declared that '[he] would not have believed that there were still copies of Bodin's *Heptaplomeres* outside of Paris. Yet, since you have it amongst your manuscripts you can consider it as a treasure at least in rarity.'⁴ In 1720, a German scholar Polycarp Leyser attempted to publish the text but his project was crushed by the authorities of Hanover and Saxony. The text thus remained exclusively in manuscript form until 1841.⁵

¹ For a sense of the widespread circulation of the *Colloquium* one can refer to the list of extant manuscripts in Karl Faltenbacher 'Aktuelles Verzeichnis der handschriftlichen Kopien des *Colloquium heptaplomeres* bzw. des *Colloque entre sept sçavans* (Stand: November 2008) in *Der Kritische Dialog des Colloquium heptaplomeres: Wissenschaft, Philosophie und Religion zu Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts, Ergebnisse der Ragung vom 6 bis 7 November 2006 am Frankreich-Zentrum der Freien Universität Berlin* edited by Karl Faltenbacher (Mainz, 2009), 285-308.

² BNF, MS f. 1. 6566 first folio recto bears the mention 'Guido Patinus, Bellovacus, Doctor Medicus Parisiensis. 1627. Ex dono Dom. Caroli Guillemeau, Regis Christianissimi medici ordinarij'. Indicated that Guillemeau gave Patin this copy in 1627. Hugo Grotius, 'To Cordesius 12 February 1632', *Epistolae*, Amsterdam, 1687, 106, Gabriel Naudé, *Bibliographia Politica*, Venice, 1633, 48-49. Since the late 1980's a debate has emerged on the attribution of the text with Karl Faltenbacher leading the thesis that the work was not by Bodin but in fact the work of an early seventeenth century author. However Noel Malcolm in an article published in 2006 supported the attribution to Bodin with convincing arguments. For the debate see essays by Faltenbacher, Wooton, Céard, Patin and Malcolm in Karl Faltenbacher, *Das Colloquium Heptaplomeres, ein Religionsgespräch zwischen Scholastik und Aufklärung: Untersuchungen zur Thematik und zur Frage der Autorschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), Karl Faltenbacher, *Das Colloquium heptaplomeres und das neue Weltbild Galileis: zur Datierung, Autorschaft und Thematik des Siebenergesprächs* (Mainz, 1993), Karl Faltenbacher, 'Überlegungen zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des Colloquium heptaplomeres' and 'Stand der Forschung', *Magie, Religion und Wissenschaft im Colloquium Heptaplomeres, Ergebnisse der Tagungen in Paris 1994 und der Villa Vigoni 1999*, edited by Karl Faltenbacher, (Mainz, 2002), 1-52, Noel Malcolm, 'Jean Bodin, and the authorship of the Colloquium Heptaplomeres', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LXIX (2006), 95-150, Karl Faltenbacher, 'Stand der Forschung. Eine kurze Entgegnung auf Noel Malcolm', *Der Kritische Dialog des Colloquium heptaplomeres*, 44-50.

³ Jean Bodin, *Colloque entre sept sçavans qui sont de differens entimens des secrets cachez des choses relevees, traduction anonyme du Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Jean Bodin* (manuscrit français 1923 de la bibliothèque nationale de Paris), edited by François Berriot (Genève, 1984), XXVII-XXVII, thereafter Berriot. Susanna Akerman, 'Christina Alexandra's Search of Clandestine Manuscripts', in *Jean Bodins Colloquium Heptaplomeres: Vorträge, gehalten anlässlich eines Arbeitsgesprächs vom 8 bis 11 September 1991 in der Herzog August Bibliothek*, edited by Günter Gawlick and Friedrich Niewöhner, (Wiesbaden, 1996), pp. 153-64.

⁴ 'Je n'eusse pas creu, que hors de Paris il y eut encore un exemplaire de l'Eptaplomeres de Bodin, mais puisque vous l'avez entre vos MSC., vous le pouvez regarder come un tresor du moins en rareté. in 'Joh. Capellanus consil. Reg. In litteris ad H. Conringium Paris 30. Jan. 1673' (Chapelain to Conring) in Berlin Staatsbibliothek Ms. Lat. Fol. 388, p. 566 or f. 283v.

⁵ Gottschalk Eduard Guhrauer, *Das Heptaplomeres des Jean Bodin, zur Geschichte der Cultur und Literatur im Jahrhundert der Reformation, mit einem Schreiben an den Herhausgeber von U. Reander* (Berlin, 1841), Jean

This work portrays the meetings of seven characters, all of different religions (Coronaeus: Catholic, Curtius: Calvinist, Friderichus: Lutheran, Salomon: Jew, Octavius: Catholic converted to Islam, Toralba: Natural Philosopher, Senamus: Sceptic/Pagan.). These men are described as equals in learning and virtue. Over the six books of the *Colloquium* – which span over five days – the characters discuss God, nature, the particulars of their different religions and their respective values. The text can be divided in two main parts. The first part comprising the first three books sees the seven characters agreeing on a number of general principles concerning God, the existence of Angels and Demons and their interaction with the world. They also agree on the authority and importance of the Old Testament emphasising in particular the Decalogue which outlines fundamental principles. The second part comprising the three remaining books represents the most controversial part of the text in which the seven men all attempt to show how their religious convictions relate to the true religion. They confront their various practices, their diverse ways of worshipping God, and the value of their different confessions. These are all points on which they often fail to agree. In this section the confrontation of the different views leaves no one unscathed. In particular the belief in Christ supported by three of the characters is strongly attacked. Alongside this element emerges a conversation concerning harmony and tolerance which placed the *Colloquium* and its author in the historiography surrounding the issue of toleration. In this historiography, the fourth book of the text is considered as a central point in which the concept of harmony is developed through a discussion about music and enharmony which provides an analogy for society and politics. Music is presented as a model in which diversity is more pleasing than homogeneity following the principle that the combination of a low and a high voice is made harmonious by adding a middle one. This is found to be true in society as well when two extremes views are reconciled by an intermediate one.⁶

Yet, it seems that this interest in the development of a theory of toleration is in some way a largely modern concern. Indeed, early modern readers tended to focus more on the heterodoxy they perceived in it. The fifth and sixth books are particularly important for this

Bodin, *Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Rerum Sublimium Arcanis Abditis*, edited by Ludovicus Noack (Paris, 1857). Gurhaeur's edition was only partial. Noack is the first full Latin edition of the *Colloquium*.

⁶ For the historiography on the *Colloquium* and toleration see: Georg Roellenbleck, *Offenbarung, Natur und jüdische Überlieferung bei Jean Bodin. Eine Interpretation des Heptaplomeres* (Gütersloh, 1964); Georg Roellenbleck, 'Der Schluß des "Heptapomeres" und die Begründung der Toleranz bei Bodin' in *Jean Bodin. Verhandlungen der internationalen Bodin Tagung in München*, edited by Denzer Horst (München, 1973), 53-67; Marion Kuntz, 'Harmony and the *Heptaplomeres* of Jean Bodin', in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 12 (1974), 31-41; Marion Kuntz, 'The home of Coronaeus in Jean Bodin's *Colloquium Heptaplomeres*: and example of a Venetian academy' in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Boniensis, Proceedings of the fourth international congress of Neo-Latin studies, Bologna, 16 August-1 September 1979*, (Medieval and Renaissance texts and studies 37), edited by R. J. Shoock (Binghamton, New York, 1985), 277-83; Marion Kuntz 'The concept of toleration in the *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* of Jean Bodin', in *Beyond the persecuting society: religious toleration before the Enlightenment*, edited by John Christian Laursen and Cary J. Nederman, (Philadelphia, 1988), 125-144; Marion Kuntz, 'Structure, form and meaning in the *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* of Jean Bodin', in *Jean Bodins Colloquium Heptaplomeres: Vorträge, gehalten anlässlich eines Arbeitsgesprächs vom 8 bis 11 September 1991 in der Herzog August Bibliothek*, edited by Günter Gawlick and Friedrich Niewöhner, (Wiesbaden, 1996), 99-120; Marion Kuntz, 'Nature, law and music in the *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* of Jean Bodin: a paradigm for toleration', in *Bodinus Polymeres, neue Studien zu Bodins Spätwerk*, edited by Ralph Häfner, (Wiesbaden, 1997), 145-64; Gary Remer, 'Dialogues of toleration: Erasmus and Bodin', *The Review of Politics*, 56 (1994), 305-36; Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (Pennsylvania, 1996), 203-30; Gary Remer, 'Bodin's pluralistic theory of toleration', in *Difference and Dissent, Theories of Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by Cary J. Nederman and John Christian Laursen, (Boston, 1996), 119-37; Pierre Magnard, 'Le *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* et la religion de la raison' in *Jean Bodin, nature, histoire, droit et politique*, edited by Yves Charles Zarka, (Paris, 1996), 71-88; Andrea Suggi, *Sovranità e armonia: la tolleranza religiosa nel Colloquium Heptaplomeres di Jean Bodin* (Roma, 2005).

interpretation as they address the problem of knowing which religion is true and debate at length on the role and nature of Christ. The questions raised throughout the *Colloquium* and the dialogue form used in the work led readers to assert firmly that Bodin was attacking the Christian religion and even destroying all religions. Indeed as noted by Julius Hackeberg presenting an account of exchanges between Gabriel Naudé and his friend Guy Patin: ‘This is a very well crafted book, but is very dangerous. Because it mocks all religions, and finally concludes that there are none’.⁷ This interpretation was certainly further supported by the fact that Bodin’s orthodoxy was under suspicion. His contemporaries and later readers thought he was a Jew, a natural philosopher or even an atheist and his works were all put on the Index.⁸

Turning our attention to the more heterodox argument of the text would tend to displace the core of the text to the fifth and sixth book of the *Colloquium* most of which is an assault on Christ. Thus, it was the radical and sceptical aspect of the dialogue that generated anxieties about the work even in the later time of its circulation. The text mocked and aimed at a refutation of all religions or at least of Christianity. Certainly, the arguments raised against Christianity, and particularly those centred around the figure of Christ which will be explored here motivated this reading of the text. Furthermore, it clearly enacted the crisis that had shaken the Christian world since the Reformation, fostering new disputes over religious matters and crucial debates over the nature of cultural authorities.⁹ Indeed, a large part of the *Colloquium* discusses the relative values of various textual authorities, notably of Scripture. From this perspective Bodin’s writing could be branded as ‘atheist’.¹⁰ The presentation of sceptical arguments, the discussion, and the challenge to ideas central to the Christian belief, were all enough for the cries of atheism to resound in the early modern period. Analysing the Bible critically in the early modern period was an activity that required one to tread carefully as it could easily lead to being branded an atheist as the famous examples of Erasmus, Hobbes, Spinoza, or Richard Simon demonstrate. Moreover, discussing religion was understood as a dangerous activity to undertake because religion played a social and political role in the maintaining of order.¹¹ Bodin himself makes the claim in the *Six Livres de la République* (and in the *Colloquium*) that public discussion of religion could lead to atheism and the destruction of a well organised state.¹² It is important here to consider more closely

⁷ *Julii Hackebergi Judicium (...) quae sequuntur annotavit Parisiis*, following the version in MS. Theol. 274, Teil B p. 103 at Göttingen Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek ‘C’est un livre bien fait, mais fort dangereux. Parce qu’il se moque des toutes les Religions, et en fin conclud, qu’il n’y en point’. All translations into English are mine except otherwise stated.

⁸ Roger Chauviré, *Jean Bodin, auteur de la République* (Paris 1914), passim; Paul L. Rose, *Bodin and the Great God of nature, The moral and Religious Universe of a Judaiser* (Genève, 1980), passim; Jean Bodin, *Colloque entre sept scavans qui sont de differens entimens des secrets cachez des choses relevees, traduction anonyme du Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Jean Bodin* (manuscrit français 1923 de la bibliothèque nationale de Paris), edited by François Berriot (Genève, 1984), XVIII-XXIV.

⁹ Richard H. Popkin, *The history of scepticism, from Savonarola to Bayle*, Revised and Expanded Edition, (Oxford, 2003), 3-43.

¹⁰ On atheism in the early modern period see: Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l’incroyance au XVIe siècle: la religion de Rabelais*, Nouvelle Edition (Paris, 1942, 2003); François Berriot, *Atheismes et athéistes au XVIe siècle en France* (Paris, 1984); David Wootton, ‘Lucien Febvre and the problem of early modern unbelief’, *Journal of Modern History*, 60 (1988), 695-730; *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, edited by Michael Hunter and David Wootton, (Oxford, 1992).

¹¹ David Wootton ‘The Fear of God in Early Modern Political Theory’ *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, 18 (1983), 56-80.

¹² Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la République*, (Paris, 1576), 509-10; Jean Bodin, *Colloquium of the seven about Secrets of the Sublime*, edited by Marion Kuntz (Princeton and London, 1975), 163-70, thereafter Kuntz; Jean Bodin, *Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Rerum Sublimium Arcanis Abditis*, edited by Ludovicus Noack (Paris, 1857), 125-31, thereafter Noack; Jean Bodin, *Colloque entre sept scavans qui sont de differens entimens des secrets cachez des choses relevees, traduction anonyme du Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Jean Bodin* (manuscrit français 1923 de la bibliothèque nationale de Paris), edited by François Berriot (Genève, 1984), 198-

the fact that this text brought forward some of the key philosophical and theological challenges of the time. It embodied the ‘crisis of conscience’ that emerged out of the religious conflicts of the Reformation.¹³ As part of this tradition, this text is an essential witness to the doubts raised surrounding the validity of competing claims to authority. Indeed, one of the essential aspects emerging in the dialogue is the growth of scepticism concerning authorities that claimed, in particular, to establish religious truth. This interpretation of the *Colloquium* will thus underline the ways in which its arguments were promoting a sceptical attitude based mostly on a critical evaluation of textual authorities among which the sacred text took a prominent position. The traditions of textual and biblical criticism were mobilised here to discuss one of the key questions of the text: how to identify the truth of any religious claims in order to determine the true religion? Among these questions surrounding the value of written authorities the Bible comes to be challenged. The text follows in the footsteps of humanists who developed tools to critically analyse the sacred text outlining its instability through time. In particular, questions surrounding the validity of the New Testament emerged. The insistence from the non-Christian characters on the alterations and changes the text suffered over time is key to the arguments laid out in the *Colloquium*. One can see the impact of biblical criticism in this work which opens the question of how to interpret the sacred text.

This attitude is clearly stated in the fourth book where Senamus raises one of the central problems of the dialogue. This places the text firmly within the sceptical tradition that this character embodies:

Necessarily, the religion which has God as its author is the true religion, but the difficulty is in discerning whether He is the author of this religion or that religion. This is the task and difficulty.¹⁴

Searching for the true religion is problematic in itself and, as will be shown, the dialogue form used in the *Colloquium* stresses the sense of doubt and instability concerning the validity of the claims of each confession. This is the case even though each of the seven characters is deeply convinced of the truth of his own religion. Indeed, none of the characters change religion in the course of the dialogue. In the end they agree to live together in harmony but will never discuss religion again.¹⁵ Through a very carefully crafted series of dialogues the identity of the seven characters is outlined by clear identifiable features. It is in particular through their use of written authorities to support their differing positions on God, religion and the world that these identities are delineated.

This paper intends to show how the religious identities of the characters were built on different sets of authorities upon which each of them relies. This approach enables us to reflect on the way in which the text was built and to decipher how the sceptical feel of the text was created. An understanding of the sources used in the text as a whole and by each character subsequently will illuminate the way in which the dialogue form serves as a tool to contrast, oppose, sustain, contradict, legitimise or invalidate the claims of these different authorities. The interactions between the characters endanger the position of each text or

207 thereafter Berriot. All direct citations from the *Colloquium* will be taken from the English translation, references will be given to the passages in the text in the Latin edition by Noack and the French edition by Berriot.

¹³ Popkin, *The history of scepticism*, 3-43.

¹⁴ Kuntz, 172; Noack, 132; Berriot, 209.

¹⁵ Kuntz, 471; Noack, 358; Berriot, 569.

author meant to support a position. As a result, the tone of the work creates a sense of insecurity as one considers the succession of arguments and the claims of each character to support the value of their different sources. This insecurity linked to the sceptical doubt toward ‘authorities’ is a feature that runs across the whole text. Rather than a defining feature of any one dominant character it is provoked in the reader, through the combination of the different discourses. Although the presence of Senamus allows for sceptical arguments to be presented more clearly, the dialogue form was the best means to establish these. As the author describes each of the characters as equals each of their arguments while in opposition have the same value and potency. This underlines the weakness of each of their claims to absolute truth when no criterion is available to give one more strength over the other.¹⁶ It is this confrontation of each position that leads to doubt the validity of each claim. This questioning of authorities (religious, scientific, literary) in the discourse is one of the essential intentions of the text.

This approach enables one to investigate how the debate concerning authorities orchestrated in the *Colloquium* lies behind the presentation of this text as heterodox and even atheist by its early modern readers. A survey of the sources used in the text and the way in which they are treated will provide a background to examine a crucial issue: the critical dialogue around the figure of Christ which places the text in the tradition of an anti-Christian, anti-Trinitarian literature. The analysis of this argument will underline the heterodox features of the text. Furthermore, the importance of this debate in books five and six enables us to consider these sections as crucial in understanding the concerns of readers about the heterodox nature of the text and to focus more closely on these to appreciate its value.

The sources used in the *Colloquium*- building identities

As a first step towards understanding the debate surrounding authorities one will investigate first the sources used in the *Colloquium*. A more detailed investigation will then sketch out the specific set of sources that each character relies upon to convey his position. The manner in which these are referred to in the course of the discussions are key to decipher the *Colloquium*. It will become clear that the text exhibits an ‘eclectic choice of authorities’ which displays the vast range of literature available to the Renaissance scholar.¹⁷ An attitude that was present in some of Bodin’s other works such as the *Theatrum*.¹⁸ This varied choice of authority makes it difficult to attach the author to one particular school of thought. The dialogue form increases the complexity of the issue through the interplay of the different religious identities and philosophical positions, without ever specifying which one is used as a namesake, if any.

As it would be difficult to present a comprehensive list the focus is on the eighteen authors and texts cited more than twenty times in the *Colloquium* either directly referenced in speeches or via marginal notes.¹⁹ This provides a broad picture of the literature used in the text.²⁰ The sources identified are grouped under four main categories (Table 1).

Ancient and Patristic literature and in particular authors such as Aristotle and St Augustine are used prominently. Yet, the written source that is the most used in the *Colloquium* is the Scriptures which emphasised the significance of the debates about their status and nature. This

¹⁶ Kuntz, 4; Noack, 2; Berriot, 2.

¹⁷ Ann Blair, *The theatre of nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance science*, (Princeton, 1997), 107.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The list has been compiled from the Berriot edition of the text which dedicated particular attention to the footnotes in the different manuscripts collated. See Berriot, LXI.

²⁰ One could argue that this choice is too restrictive because it focuses on a small sample of the 3226 references, however, the references studied here account for nearly half of the references in the text (1590). The presence of other type of literature can be seen in the bibliographies of each character.

treatment of Scriptures in a sixteenth century text in which several religious positions are advocated and presented as equal raises a number of significant points. During the Reformation, the dispute over true religion was accompanied by some necessary questions about textual accuracy and authenticity, apocrypha and canon. Scholars such as Erasmus, Lefèvre d'Étaples, Luther raised questions and debated on these themes. These are central throughout the dialogue and remained at the core of Biblical scholarship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (which explains in part the persistence of a text such as the *Colloquium*).²¹ The development and refinement of a critical scholarship was a consequence of these early modern problems. This was particularly true as Catholics challenged the Protestant claim to base faith on Scripture alone.

As implied earlier in this paper, each character's view is supported by different sets of sources. It is noteworthy that the seven characters do not rely on the same sort of sources, nor is their reliance on written authorities of the same intensity or nature; very different patterns apply to each of them. This allowed the author of the *Colloquium* to construct a debate in which each character's identity could be identified by his reactions to different sources. In turn, this creates the strong sceptical tone of the work as the authorities are challenged. In order to chart these patterns the authorities mentioned more than four times by each speaker are presented here. From one end of the spectrum to the other Coronaeus relies on few sources – only seven remarkable sources while Salomon makes a heavy use of written authorities – fifty identifiable sources. In the meantime, Curtius and Octavius bring into play thirty references, Fridericus twenty-three, Toralba, seventeen, and Senamus only eleven. The skill of the author is displayed here through a careful attribution of sources to each character.

Furthermore, one can observe markedly different patterns for each character (Table 2). Indeed, although this table confirms that the prominent sorts of literature in the *Colloquium* are Ancient and Patristic literature, two genres recognised as crucial in Bodin's other works, yet they draw on these in varying degree.²² Even those who rarely make reference to lay sources would favour Ancient and Patristic. Salomon appears as an exception since he relies more heavily on Jewish literature to support his arguments. This feature reflects of course the religious identity of the speaker. It is also striking to see that the characters all have specific types of sources to call upon and favour some more than others in order to support their faith while attempting to show the weakness of the others.

The differences between the characters are also highlighted by the balance between lay and scriptural sources in their interventions (Table 3). Salomon distinguishes himself from the others by his considerable knowledge and use of Scriptures. It is in fact acknowledged in the text that he can mobilise the Hebrew and Chaldean traditions. Moreover, the men in Coronaeus' household recognise that his old age adds to the depth of his wisdom. He is the only one who makes more use of Scriptural sources than of 'lay sources'. This table also underlines the differences between the Catholic and the Protestant characters. The Protestant emphasis on reading the Bible is opposed to the Catholic reliance on the Church and its chosen authorities to mediate between the believer and his God. We can see a balance between lay and Scriptural sources for the Protestant characters while the Catholic will favour lay sources, although it must be noted that the latter rarely use sources. This might be explained by his role as host and mediator in the conversations. All the characters tend to follow patterns which reflect their proposed religious allegiance. Both Senamus and Toralba will favour 'lay sources'; Toralba who wants to rely on nature and reason is one of those who refers the least to Scripture. The author has built the identities of

²¹ See for instance: Pierre Gilbert, *L'invention critique de la Bible*, (Paris, 2010).

²² Blair, *The theatre of nature*, 107-15; Roger Chauviré, *Jean Bodin, auteur de la République* (Paris 1914), 171-185.

his characters carefully. As the conversation progresses these defining features play their part in the challenges put to authorities.

Authorities in dialogue or the creation of doubt

Key to the argument developed here, concerning the importance of the sceptical nature of the text to understand the reception of the *Colloquium*, is that all these sources are scrutinised by the characters as they evaluate them against one another, and against the value of reason. Each of them in assessing competing authorities to buttress their views adds to this issue. The *Colloquium* is therefore at the very centre of a debate about the value of authorities whether they emanate from ancient or early modern writers or from the Scriptures. These are assessed in view of the validity of their claims about God, nature, religion, Church and the nature of man. This was of course one of the key debates that emerged out of the Reformation and endured throughout the period. In addition, the revival of ancient scepticism at this time certainly provided tools to think about the issue of the validity of authorities and accompanies the dialogue. However, it is interesting to note that the sources of ancient scepticism do not figure in the text. The author chose to stage conflicting voices rather than to use these sources to lead the reader to consider sceptical arguments.

One can for instance consider the treatment of Aristotle at the forefront of the Ancient literature drawn upon in the dialogue. Despite the extensive use of the philosopher's work his authority is fundamentally challenged. Toralba is the character who contests Aristotle's positions about the world and God the most. This opposition to Aristotle was an attitude that was fundamental to Bodin's thought.²³ In the dialogue, only Senamus appears sympathetic to Aristotle, which gives an opportunity to the others to refute him and to explain their position. Aristotle is particularly present in the second book when an agreement is reached about a basic cosmology. In this context, Aristotle's views about the nature of God, or about the eternity of the world are evaluated.²⁴

TORALBA: Aristotle writes many intolerable things about God as when he calls him an "animal"*. This was unseemly not merely for a natural scientist but even for a metaphysician [...].²⁵

*Metaphys. XII. 7. 9.

This is only one example among many others that all point to the rejection of Aristotle's metaphysics.²⁶ Aristotelian ideas are consistently challenged, in this we can see some of the problems that were arising in early modern debates challenging the Aristotelian Christian views that had emerged from the fourteenth century.

Another example that illuminates the challenge to received authorities in the text is that of the examination of Patristic sources. The numerous references to the Fathers of the Church are interesting because they relate to one of the important issues of the text, namely the search for the most antique sources of religion. Fridericus, Curtius, Octavius and Coroneus are the characters mobilising the Fathers the most. These authorities are generally

²³ Blair, *The theatre of nature*, 109-11; Anne Blair, 'Tradition and innovation in early modern natural philosophy: Jean Bodin and Jean-Cecile Frey', *Perspectives on science*, 2 (1994), 428-54.

²⁴ Kuntz, 26-30, Noack, 19-22, Berriot, 32-35.

²⁵ Kuntz, 28, Noack, 20, Berriot, 33.

²⁶ See other rejections of Aristotle's metaphysics Kuntz, pp 63-64, pp. 121-23 Noack, pp. 48-49, pp. 93-95, Berriot, pp. 80-81, p. 150-52, where not only Toralba but also Salomon, and even Senamus reject the position held by the philosopher.

used in the last three books of the *Colloquium*, and particularly in the last book. Patristic literature was at the centre of the problematic of the text and of the idea of debating the worth and values of sources:

OCTAVIUS: Augustine said that the Manichaeian heresy defended original sin*.

FRIDERICUS: Here Augustine meant the heresy of the Manichaeians who assumed two infinite principles of good and evil from eternity, a God of good and a God of evil with equal power. Augustine clung to this heresy for a very long time. This is indeed a sin of origin. But do not think that Augustine denies the Fall of human origin. His books and letters are full of original sin. Indeed he spoke thus against Pelagius: "All men are bound by original sin".

TORALBA: If we attribute more to the authority of councils, which are yet rejected by the Swiss and Germans, than we do to reason, there will be no place for discussion and proof. Rather we must rashly agree on everything because Augustine, Jerome, Scotus, and Galatinus said it. But I beg our discussions to be drawn more clearly from reasons and arguments.²⁷

*De civ. Dei XIV. 5 ; De haeres. XLVI.

This excerpt shows three characters and their relation to the writings of St Augustine. Octavius uses him to undermine one of the central tenets of Christianity, Fridericus defends the Father of the Church against the accusation just made, and Toralba invites them to use their reason over authorities. This exchange is prompted by an attack against Christianity which is assimilated to a polytheist religion.²⁸ This is a case in point showing how the claims to absolute truth made by an author such as Augustine are challenged. One of the fundamental Church Fathers becomes the target of suspicion. In more general terms, the arguments presented to defend the positions of the Church Fathers or to establish their authority are systematically weakened by repeated attacks.

In addition, the disputes between the Christians are exemplified as they reject or approve different Church Fathers to promote their different positions. Most arguments involving the Church Fathers revolve around discussions about particular points of doctrine. Furthermore, Salomon and Octavius use them to point at the inconsistencies or errors found among the Fathers of the Church, whereas the three Christians oppose different interpretations or passages to prove the validity of their own vision of Christianity. The prominence of references to St Augustine clearly shows that he was at the centre of the debate among Christian confessions.²⁹

However, the critical assessment of 'authorities' is not restricted to 'lay sources': the Scriptures are also submitted to the close scrutiny of the seven men. This is especially the case in books five and six from which all the following examples but one are taken. This highlights the link noted in the introduction between this section of the work and its reception early modern readers. Among the literature the seven speakers use throughout the *Colloquium*, sacred texts are a key set of sources of argumentation, proof, and authority.

A few examples will now demonstrate the debates on the respective values of the Old and New Testaments. One must bear in mind that four of the speakers do not recognise the authority of the latter thereby rejecting Christianity (Salomon, Octavius, Senamus and Toralba). This is underlined by Octavius' answer to Fridericus in book III:

²⁷ Kuntz, 393-94, Noack, 297-98, Berriot, 466-67

²⁸ Kuntz, 435-46, Noack, 331-32, Berriot 525-27.

²⁹ Berthold Altaner, *Patrology*, (Edinburgh-London, 1960), 493.

FRIDERICUS: Who can doubt that the Christian religion is the true religion or rather the only one?

OCTAVIUS: Almost all the world – Asia, large as it is, most of Africa, a great part of Europe – has an infinite variety of sects, and each group thinks the religion which he especially loves is the most beautiful and noble.³⁰

When discussing the nature of Scriptures, Fridericus notes that Salomon does not take on board the evidence of the New Testament. The latter replies by pointing at the instability and contradictions of the text and at its doubtful origin:

SALOMON: Let us grant this about testaments and covenants, provided the author of the later and earlier testament is the same and the books are not false and suspect. But the New Testament of the Christians is not the testament of him who wrote and promulgated the first tables of the laws [...] No one can say what kind or whose writing the New Testament is. Yet in the New Testament we see so many things have been deleted and added, uncertain, and changed that it has more than three hundred variant readings, not only in letters or syllables or phrases, but also in additions, changes and deletions of sentences and whole chapters [...].³¹

In this example, one sees how the *Colloquium* can be placed in the tradition of contemporary clandestine texts that were relying on Jewish arguments to attack Christianity.³² Furthermore, as the characters use Scriptures to define their identity, one can witness how each of them assesses the validity of different scriptural texts. The next example gives interesting indications about how they all reflect on the use of the Scriptures:

CURTIUS: In divine matters which are most removed from demonstration, we ought to use St. Luke's words: "Lord, add to my faith"*.

SALOMON: We have said earlier that all faith depends upon clear arguments or blameless perceptions or divine oracles and that faith is not infused unless through the divine voice of prophecy given by God to man, which is more certain than any knowledge. However, since the divine prophecies are very rare now, we must rely on the divine responses of the prophets which our forefathers left to posterity with supreme faith, since the Christian rejects the Koran, the Ismaelites the New Testament and the Hebrews both.³³

*Luke 17:5

This excerpt exemplifies clearly an essential point of debate in the *Colloquium*, namely the engagement with the nature of 'authority' and the way in which claims to truth were put to the test. Curtius makes a statement using the New Testament and consequently reaffirms his affiliation to Christianity. Salomon's reaction shows that he is far from accepting this text as a valuable authority. He denies the fact that the New Testament could give 'clear and sure arguments' to support faith and stresses that only the Old Testament (recognised by all of

³⁰ Kuntz, 163; Noack, 125; Berriot, 198.

³¹ Kuntz, 280-81; Noack, 215; Berriot, 336.

³² Richard H. Popkin, 'Jewish anti-Christian arguments as a source of irreligion from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century', *Atheism*, edited by Hunter and Wootton, 159-182.

³³ Kuntz, 252; Noack, 193; Berriot, 304-5.

them) should be used as a reference. Octavius steps into the breach opened by Salomon against the Christian's text:

Indeed, the Ismaelite rejects these books of the Gospels as completely corrupted by heretics, while Christian hands wear them thin. The Ismaelites think the true Gospels, which, nevertheless, they themselves do not have, have perished completely.³⁴

The authenticity of the New Testament is violently attacked with the claim that the true texts are now lost forever. The true Islamic faith rejects a corrupted Church, reverting to a purer form of worship. Yet, Fridericus also uses the tools of the Muslims to protect his own faith, playing on two levels, as he rejects at the same time the value of the Qur'an:

FRIDERICUS: Why, therefore, does Muhammad show Gabriel speaking thus: "If you have any doubt concerning the laws and edicts which have been sent to you, read the books of your elders, and you will hesitate no more." Likewise the Azora which begins thus: "Destiny has given you the *amr*; God, the merciful, living, highest, has given you first the Old Testament, next the New Testament, finally the true Fātiha, the confirmer of our law." Therefore, each of the testaments, the old and new, either must be completely accepted or completely rejected. Notwithstanding, nothing has been expressed in the New Testament writings which we deem inconsistent with divine laws and prophetic inspirations.³⁵

He uses Octavius' own sacred text to discard the attack showing that the Qur'an itself proves the validity of the New Testament. This technique aims to destabilise Octavius' case, showing that either he does not know enough about his religion, or that his religion is the one that is inconsistent. Fridericus takes here a typical Christian stance as it was recognised early on by Christians that the Qur'an and Islam contained both truth and errors.³⁶ It is striking in this extract that Fridericus should use a text he rejects, yet one that will convince his interlocutor. Furthermore, he clearly underlines the link between the Old and the New Testament, a point that will fuel the debates between the seven men.

Salomon certainly takes pleasure in this confrontation between the two 'others' as it confirms his own argument. Because both the New Testament and the Qur'an cannot be used with confidence, the discussion naturally proves his point that one should only rely on the Old Testament. He emphasises that the laws of the Old Testament are immortal: a sign of the true Church.

SALOMON: The Ismaelites, Christians, and Jews approve the ancient writings of our elders. However, when the reliability of the Koran and new writings are considered dubious, we must use the old writings, and witnesses greater than any exception must be employed. Moreover, we must, search out these witnesses from the true church whose authority is so great that if the records of all the Scriptures and letters should perish, the truth and memory of things done by the church still existent would reside forever with posterity. For this reason Moses said in a gathering of the peoples: "you will tell these things to your sons, lest anyone think that the divine law will perish with the Scriptures."³⁷

³⁴ Kuntz, 252; Noack, 193; Berriot, 305.

³⁵ Kuntz, 252-53; Noack, 193; Berriot, 305.

³⁶ Norman A. Daniel, *Islam and the West: the making of an image*, (Edinburgh, 1960, reprint. 1962), 163-68.

³⁷ Kuntz, 253; Noack, 193-94; Berriot, 305

These different examples illustrate how the different characters define their religious identity through their use of the Scriptures, evaluating the different texts through the eyeglass of their different confessions. What comes out of the reading of these different arguments is once again an acute relativism. The author has orchestrated the presentation of a diversity of views about Scripture which in turn allows the possibility of criticism and reveals the historical instability of the texts. In this way the *Colloquium* seems to embrace the tradition of clandestine erudition that raised attacks on the Bible and the history of religions.³⁸

Throughout the dialogue of the seven confessions 'lay sources' and Scripture are put to the test. The diverse standpoints shake the foundations on which they were built. The text thus appears to develop a central sceptical argument. It demonstrates the difficulties of relying on received authorities the value of which can be challenged by different cultures or positions. This is even more the case as the character are presented as all being of equal value and worth. The heterodox nature of the text emerging here will be reinforced by analysing the next and final question this paper will address. This issue was at the heart of the concern of readers who considered that this work endangered religion: how did this questioning of authority impact on the idea of Christ and, as a result, make the *Colloquium* a text that could be described as anti-Christian?

The dialogue about Christ

The problematic nature of Christ among the seven characters is clearly outlined in book four by Senamus when he declares, 'But the point of disagreement among Christians and Jews, as well as among Mahommedans and Christians is whether or not Christ is God'.³⁹ Indeed, while many issues are debated in the *Colloquium*, this question feeds the main discussion all along the fifth and sixth books from which the following examples are all drawn. The treatment of the figure of Christ leads Henri Busson to describe Bodin as an 'achriste'.⁴⁰ Andrea Suggi has recently used this controversy about Christ in the *Colloquium* as a means to explore Bodin's theory of toleration, emphasising the anti-trinitarian position of the author.⁴¹ Whether the arguments presented in the text aimed to establish the falsity of Christianity or not, often depends on the importance given to each character. Salomon, Toralba and Senamus are frequently seen as the main representatives of the author's position. Yet, neither the three Christians nor the Muslim character should be neglected as their positions in the dialogue enable the exposition of varied arguments. This is essential as the equal value of each character underlined by the author emphasises the problem of identifying a 'true' religion. This case study will look at a sample of the arguments developed about Christ showing how different sets of authoritative sources and ideas contribute to it. It will not contextualise the debate on Christ outside of the text itself, although one must bear in mind the significance of the debate surrounding Arianism in the early modern period in order to perceive better how these arguments could be controversial.⁴²

³⁸ J.S. Spink, *French free-thought from Gassendi to Voltaire*, (London, 1960), 280-99.

³⁹ Kuntz, 171; Noack, 131; Berriot, 207

⁴⁰ Henri Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature de la Renaissance 1533-1601* (Paris, 1957), 541-60.

⁴¹ Suggi, *Sovranità*, pp. 185-420, passim.

⁴² Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy, Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford, 1996), 52-181; John Marshall, *John Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture* (Cambridge and New York, 2006), passim; Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution, The Challenge of Socinianism*, Kindle edition (Cambridge, 2010), 13-62.

It should be noted that the thrust of the arguments against Christianity are essential in the historical context of the *Colloquium's* afterlife. The implied threats of Socinianism, Arianism, deism and atheism are important in the prolongation of the importance of Bodin's text. The persistent connection between arguments about the relationship between reason and faith, and a discussion of Trinitarian arguments were long lived in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.⁴³

Echoing the treatment of prophetic figures in the later clandestine text *Traité des Trois Imposteurs* Muhammad is not spared either. The *Colloquium* undoubtedly prepared the ground for part of this tradition of imposture where Moses, Christ and Muhammad were all accused of being manipulators, clever legislators rather than true prophetic figures. In fact, Bodin had at one stage been suspected of having written the famed treatise on the three impostors because of the *Colloquium* as one can see in Prosper Marchand's article detailing the medieval tradition behind the seventeenth century text.⁴⁴ In the *Colloquium*, Muhammad and Christ are partly presented in this way however Moses is not dramatically challenged. As Busson notes, 'mostly it is Christ's divinity that he unrelentingly attacks.'⁴⁵ It was precisely this treatment that caused problems and anxieties for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers. Christ, and the Christian religion, were both contradicted and challenged, either by being placed on the same level as the other religions, or by being dismissed as superstitious and false.

A range of issues concerning the status of Christ are introduced: the incarnation and the virgin birth, the prophecies of the Old Testament, Christ's relation to miracles, the character of his life, his relationship to God and the question of the Trinity. In the following examples, different authorities summoned by the seven men play their part in attacking or defending Christ.⁴⁶ At the centre of the discussion is whether Christ was divine. Octavius, ex-Catholic, using his command of Christian history, emphasises the fact that the early Councils did not recognise Christ as a divinity, but only as a creature:

OCTAVIUS: [...] Indeed, the opinion of the Arians is the foundation of the Mahommedan religion, since both admit that Christ is the son and creature of a virgin, but still they deny that He is God. This opinion of the Arians has been confirmed by eight councils, namely, those which were held at Tyre, Sardes, Smyrna, Milan, Seleucia, Nicaea, Tarsus, and especially at the synod of Rimini, where six hundred bishops harmoniously approved the Arian religion. More renowned is Nestorius who openly denied that Mary was the Mother of God.

This point raises the problem of consistency and history in regards to the Christian Church, and reflects the problem of Arianism which challenged the Christian Church (of either confession) throughout the early modern period. It also interestingly links Arianism and Islam, another motive of religious arguments in the period. Curtius' answer reveals the difficulty facing those in charge of defining canonical orthodoxy.

⁴³ Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, 52-181; Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 13-62.

⁴⁴ Prosper Marchand, *Dictionnaire Historique, ou mémoires critiques et littéraires, concernant la vie et les ouvrages de divers personnages distingués, particulièrement dans la République des Lettres*, (La Haye, 1758), 319.

⁴⁵ 'Mais surtout il s'acharne sur la divinité de Jésus-Christ.' in Busson, *Le rationalisme*, 555.

⁴⁶ Busson, *Le Rationalisme*, 541-60.

CURTIUS: If a multitude of heretics conspiring together ought to be called synod, what hinders a crowd of Epicureans from being called churches or councils? Even lawyers do not allow any league for crimes or any society of wicked men to meet, how much less ought the wicked conspiracies of the Nestorians, the Sabellians, and the Arians against God be called councils, since they denied the supreme point of faith, namely the deity of Christ and the Trinity of three Persons in the essence of One. We ought to safeguard this doctrine which has been strengthened by the firmest foundations of countless councils and especially of the Nicene synod.⁴⁷

The only way for the Christians to claim consistency is to reject some of the early councils as assemblies of heretics, and to stress the legitimacy of the ones they embrace. This is another example of voices arguing about the values of each other's authorities to establish or question the veracity of the central doctrine of Christianity. Inconsistencies in the history of the Christian Church do not stop at whether Christ is divine or not, but extend to the question of the nature of the Trinity.

As Octavius underlines again, not only the early councils do not recognise Christ as a divinity, they also present inconsistent accounts of the Holy Spirit:

Even the opinion of the Arians, which placed Christ among the creatures, held so much validity that it was confirmed by eight councils which were held at Tyre, Sardes, Milan, Smyrna, Seleucia, Nicaea, Tarsus, and Rimini, and especially the Synod of Rimini in which six hundred bishops had gathered. Although the deity of Christ was restored by the Council of Constantinople after twenty years, still concerning the third Person no one had supposed that he should fabricate a new God; nor was there anything about the Trinity. However, at length in the year of Christ 430, the Holy Spirit was brought into the number of gods at the Synod of Ephesus [...].⁴⁸

Both times, Octavius establishes the evolution of the Christian faith, and suggests that the doctrines of Christ's divinity and of the Trinity were fabricated and politically constructed, and as such are a deviation from God's words and nature. This historical variation shows that Christianity is neither stable nor permanent: it can therefore not be representative of the true and ancient religion. The conclusion of Octavius' argument is that Christ is not God, and that the Trinity is a human fancy. Thereby, the use of the founding texts of the Christian faith not only enables a debate about the idea of Christ and the creation of his divine nature, but also about the inconsistency of the Christian Church itself in relation to him. Theological, metaphysical and natural arguments are used against several beliefs relating to Christ. The prophecy of Christ in the Old Testament, the virgin birth, the necessity of Christ's death to realise salvation, the double nature of Christ, the Trinity, and the Eucharist are all put under the same type of scrutiny by the non-Christian characters.

This divinity of Christ is further questioned by the four non-Christian characters as Salomon rejects it arguing that Christ was possessed by the demon and 'what is more alien to divine power than for God to be tormented by a demon'.⁴⁹ This statement is made within a discussion about a passage from St Luke, chapter four in which the Holy Spirit would have descended on Christ after his baptism – yet Christ was still possessed by a demon afterward.⁵⁰ Not

⁴⁷ Kuntz, 232; Noack, 177; Berriot, 278.

⁴⁸ Kuntz, 374; Noack, 283; Berriot, 443.

⁴⁹ Kuntz, 302; Noack, 231; Berriot, 361.

⁵⁰ Kuntz, 302-3; Noack, 231-32; Berriot, 361-62.

only this is inconsistent with the nature of God, but Salomon reinforces the discrepancy between God and Christ:

If he thus had been deprived of the Holy Spirit, as is thought, why did He use these words: “The Holy Spirit, when it shall have come, will teach you all things?” One knows from this that the things which were known to the Holy Spirit were unknown to Him, or He would not or could not teach the most beloved disciples these things. In no way can these things be consistent with God.⁵¹

Salomon calls on Scripture to invalidate the belief in Christ. In the meantime, Octavius resorts to the authority of the Qur’an, and in order to maintain the definition of God developed throughout the first three books insists on the discrepancy between Christ and God:

The Ismaelites state that Christ was neither God nor the Son of God. For thus it is written in the sacred books of the Koran: “Many lie in saying that God has a son”. Likewise: Azora 121: “Constantly tell those that God is one and incorporeal, and He neither begat nor was born, nor does have anyone like unto Himself. [...]”.⁵²

The nature of God is indeed one of the points of contention in the debate about the divinity of Christ. God was understood as unique and unchangeable; accepting Christ as a God would mean accepting that God had changed, an argument that Toralba rejects vividly:

Indeed, is any one so limited in his mental capacities that he agrees that God eternal, who had been incorporeal for 600,000 centuries, indeed from infinite time, came down from heaven not so long ago and hid himself in the womb of a young woman for nine months; then clothed with flesh, bones, and blood, and born from a virgin womb, after a little while suffered a shameful punishment, was buried, and rose again, and took to heaven that bodily mass which was unknown there before? All Hebrew and Ismaelite people and all groups of philosophers uniformly deny that this so new and unusual change befits God. Indeed that awesome, heavenly word stands in the way: “I am God eternal, and I am not changed”. These words not only pertain to essence but also to those things which are thought to happen to that essence.⁵³

Toralba is at first very offensive accusing those who believe in Christ of lack of judgement. Then, he mobilises the universal agreement on the nature of God, citing Scripture as a witness of God’s own nature. He reiterates Salomon’s idea of the ineptitude of the belief in Christ when he asserts:

I do not doubt that the unlearned could be persuaded of those things, but I am amazed that the learned could be persuaded. For if, extremes having been known, the intermediate things are not therefore known, even if they were connected by an essential order of causes, who can comprehend Christ, who, they say, is of a human and

⁵¹ Kuntz, 303; Noack, 232; Berriot, 362.

⁵² Kuntz, 284; Noack, 217; Berriot, 340.

⁵³ Kuntz, 327; Noack, 250; Berriot, 391.

divine nature, since God can be connected by no order of nature with man, and even less than the sky can be united to the earth? ⁵⁴

The idea of Christ as true God is also rejected by Octavius who denigrates that belief by drawing attention to the fact that it was easy to persuade the Greeks and the Romans that a man was a God. Indeed he notes:

it is not strange if the pagans were persuaded to believe that Christ, who had been famous for the integrity of his life and the number of his miracles, was born from God and a virgin, since they had already been imbued with a similar generation of gods.⁵⁵

The assimilation of Christianity and Paganism was offensive to the Christian. Nonetheless, the similarity to Pagan customs and institutions is not the only disparaging comparison thrown at Christ. Senamus, compares Christ to magicians such as Simon Magus and ridicules Christ when he points out that the Senate deified Simon Magus while it rejected Jesus Christ from its pantheon.⁵⁶ Christ was not even raised to the same status as Simon Magus by the Romans, and the similarity between the so-called miracles of Christ and the actions of sorcerers is also emphasised several times by Octavius. As a matter of fact, Christ did not even compare with Apollonius of Thyana.⁵⁷

Therefore, both the historical record of early Christianity and the Bible become a battlefield in which Christ is the disputed territory. From discussions about the prophetic nature of the Old Testament arises the important argument over the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. For Christians this issue is obviously sensitive since the Old Testament first prophesied the coming of Christ as told in the New. On this matter the *Colloquium* coincides with the debates about prophecies and miracles which challenged the Christian Church in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The key argument involves Salomon, Fridericus and Curtius who oppose different biblical passages to sustain their positions. Salomon claims,

I think I must advise you that the ancient Latins and Greeks did not sufficiently comprehend what the word for Messiah indicated. Indeed a Messiah is nothing other than an anointed one [...] Therefore, those who think that there is or will be only one Messiah are mistaken. Still of all the errors none is more dangerous than the error of those who think that this Messiah, who we hope will come, will be God. Yet I think those make a more serious mistake who call the Messiah – whoever he shall be or whoever will come – the saviour of the human race.⁵⁸

This attack not only describes the Christian as generally ignorant and over-reliant on a corrupted version of the Bible, but also reinforces the ineptness of belief in Christ as a saviour for mankind. Curtius, counterattacking Salomon's theory of the anointed kings:

⁵⁴ Kuntz, 329; Noack, 251; Berriot, 394.

⁵⁵ Kuntz, 329; Noack, 251; Berriot, 393.

⁵⁶ Kuntz, 332; Noack, 253; Berriot, 397.

⁵⁷ Kuntz, 329-33; Noack, 251-53; Berriot, 394-96.

⁵⁸ Kuntz, 269-70; Noack, 205-6; Berriot, 322-23.

Then it is plain that here you have clung to the prophecy of your ancestor so much that no one of you could untangle himself in treating the Hebrew and Chaldaic texts, which are clear when related to Jesus. Let us proceed to other matters lest the Jews seem to have clung to only one point; to this, I believe, that prophecy of Isaiah refers: “Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel*”. Luke explains that this pertains to Christ.⁵⁹

*Isaiah 7:14

The accusation raised here is one of hypocrisy. The Jews, unwilling to recognise the doctrine of Christ, misread the prophecies of the Old Testament, whereas Christians used the New Testament to interpret it. In the following section Salomon contradicts this interpretation of the New Testament, to show that it is the result of mistranslation, misinterpretation and corruption of the textual evidence by the Christians. The corruption of the New Testament, compared with the authority of the Hebrew Old Testament, is reiterated by Salomon.

The ‘Christian’ voices of the *Colloquium* react to Salomon’s assertion of the pre-eminence of the Old Testament, recognising its significance, but not granting it the status of final authority. As Curtius explains, in no uncertain terms, to deny the currency of the Old Testament is not to compromise the importance of Christ:

CURTIUS: [...]What of Jerome* who said “A prayer which does not go through Christ is a sin”. Therefore, since no man ought to hope for salvation without Christ-God, why do we hold any longer to the Mosaic laws which have already passed away because of their age?⁶⁰

*commentary on Psalm 109 (110)

From the examples cited here it becomes apparent that a debate over authorities is an integral part of the debate over Christ. Assessing the worth and value of certain texts and authors means that one either believes in Christ, true God and man, or rejects that belief. Skilfully the arguments go back and forth. References to the Bible, to the Fathers, to ancient thinkers are combined to establish the position of each character.

While the existence of the Trinity is also put under pressure by the non-Christian religions, this does not mean that the three Christian figures are reconciled within this debate. They also regard each other as wrong and unorthodox. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that in the early modern period the question of the Trinity and the nature of Christ was not only fundamental to the debate between Protestants and Catholics, but was also a strong issue among the different forms of Protestantism. Challenges to the divinity of Christ came from sects such as the Socinians. It was an aspect of their belief that the Christians had to defend in the face of the new diversity of religions they encountered.

Of course questioning the divine nature of Christ also leads the characters to raise questions about the validity of the doctrine of Christ, and particularly whether his life and sacrifice had any effective value for the salvation of men, which in turn leads to questions around the doctrine of original sin⁶¹, and reveals the tensions between the Christian characters concerning baptism.⁶² In these debates, Toralba insists on the priority of reason over textual

⁵⁹ Kuntz, 273; Noack, 208; Berriot, 327.

⁶⁰ Kuntz, 434; Noack, 330; Berriot, 524.

⁶¹ For instance Kuntz, 404; Noack, 305-6; Berriot, 479-80.

⁶² Kuntz, 444; Noack, 338; Berriot, 536.

authorities: 'I beg that we not allow the light of reason of our intelligence to be extinguished or blotted out by the authority of small councils or insignificant writers and unlearned men'.⁶³ The doctrine of Christ is therefore problematic for the Christians themselves, and the issues of baptism, the Eucharist and transubstantiation exposes the fact that Coroneaus finds himself in opposition to all the other characters.⁶⁴

Conclusion

From this study has clearly emerged the presence of early modern scepticism as well as reasons for the persistence of the text in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as the key issues presented in the dialogue lived on in that period. Questions about the relationship of Christianity with other religions, the different approaches to revelation, the relation between dogma, faith, reason, and grace all permeate through the dialogue. This dialogue form allows for an assessment of the values of different authorities while presenting the reader with erudite arguments endangering orthodox beliefs. This inevitably gave the text a controversial status. The eclecticism of the sources and the use of Scripture meant the work had durability even if some of its arguments - mainly about demons - lost some potency in the course of its circulation. Indeed, the very eclecticism of the author combined with the dialogue form and the juxtaposition and confrontation of the different voices provoke a palpable relativism. Although this eclectic scepticism was not the only intention of the author – as we also find developed constructive ideas of friendship and harmony, in which several voices are essential to achieve the conditions of a tolerant world created by God – it seems clear that one cannot overlook the sceptical challenge raised by such a text. The *Colloquium* was undeniably presented as a dangerous heterodox text that led to scepticism. As we find explained in Nicéron's *Mémoires illustres*:

One can find in several libraries copies of a work by Bodin that has never been printed. It is entitled: *De abditis rerum sublimium arcanis Colloquium Heptaplomeres Libris sex digestum*. This is one of his most dangerous productions, and the one that revealed his truest feelings since he completed it eight years before his death, that is to say in 1588. The title: *Heptaplomeres* was given to it according to the number of speakers who are seven and who each has his task. Some were meant to attack while others were meant to defend. The Catholic Church is the first to be attacked, Lutherans are next; the blow falls in third on all sects in general; the fourth falls on the Naturalists; the fifth on Calvinists; the sixth on the Jews, and the last on Mahomet's followers. The author organises his fighters in such a way that the Christians are always beaten, whether Catholics, Lutherans or Calvinists. The triumph is for the others and mostly for the Naturalists and the Jews. This led some Authors to argue that he died a Jew; but maybe he was no more a Jew than a Christian, and the constant incertitude concerning religion left him with no fixed feeling about any of them.⁶⁵

⁶³ Kuntz, 398-99; Noack, 301-2; Berriot, 472-73.

⁶⁴ Kuntz, 444; Noack, 338; Berriot, 536.

⁶⁵ 'On trouve dans plusieurs bibliothèques des copies d'un Ouvrage de Bodin, qui n'a jamais été imprimé. Il est intitulé: *De abditis rerum sublimium arcanis Colloquium Heptaplomeres Libris sex digestum*. C'est une des ses plus dangereuses productions, et celle qui fait le mieux connoître ses véritables sentimens, puisqu'il l'acheva huit ans avant sa mort, c'est-à-dire en 1588. Le titre d'*Heptaplomeres* lui a été donné par rapport au nombre des Interlocuteurs qui sont sept, et dont chacun a sa tâche, les uns étant destinés à attaquer, et les autres à défendre. L'Eglise Catholique y est attaquée la première; les Lutheriens viennent ensuite sur les rangs; le troisième choc tombe sur toutes les Sectes en général; le quatrième sur les naturalistes; le cinquième sur le Calvinistes; le

In order to understand the place of the *Colloquium* in the intellectual history of the early modern period, and the reasons behind its circulation it is important to go back to the concerns and opinions voiced by its early modern readers. This is why it is crucial to bring the attention to its potent challenge to orthodox religion. This approach can help to understand the position of such works, which circulated mostly through clandestine and manuscript channels, in the Radical Enlightenment.⁶⁶ The *Colloquium* integrated in its body the strong challenge to authorities that was born out of the Reformation. It made use of the critical arguments that were available at the time and ended up with an argument that could only worry subsequent readers through its strong attacks on the Bible and Christ. It contributed to the undermining of written authorities that started with the Reformation. These arguments were particularly prominent in the two final books of the *Colloquium* which caused enough concern for a later reader l'abbé Clayperon to delete most of these from one of his copy and to comment that 'The author organises his fighters in such a way that the Christians are always beaten and overcome by their adversaries'.⁶⁷ The comments by early modern readers presented in this article and the nature of the arguments developed in books five and six contribute to emphasise the importance of this section of the text to understand the reception of the *Colloquium* and its possible contribution or at least affinity with a radical Enlightenment.

sixième sur les Juifs; et le dernier sur les sectateurs de Mahomet. L'auteur ménage de telle sorte ses combattans, que les Chrétiens sont toujours battus, soit qu'ils soutiennent le religion Catholique, ou le Lutheranisme, ou le Calvinisme, le triomphe est pour les autres, et surtout pour les Naturalistes et pour les Juifs. C'est ce qui a fait dire à quelques Auteurs qu'il étoit mort Juif; mais peut-être qu'il ne l'étoit pas plus que Chrétien, et que les incertitudes continuelles par rapport à la religion, l'avoient réduit à n'avoir sur elle aucun sentiment fixe.' in Nicéron, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres dans la republique des lettres*, tome XVII(Paris, 1732), 261-62.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment, philosophy and the making of modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford, 2001), 684-703; Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment, Philosophy, Revolution and Human Rights 1750-1790* (Oxford, 2011), 1-35.

⁶⁷ MS Français 2506, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, first leaf verso. Berriot, XLIII-XLIV.