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## The Best of The Odinist:

### *The Wisdom of Jean Meslier*

One of the most peculiar and least recognized of the great iconoclastic philosophers was Jean Meslier. He was born in 1687 in Mazerny, France, a weaver's son who soon evinced a studious nature. Meslier entered the priesthood and later became curate of Etrepigny. Aside from an incident in which he had refused to kowtow to the village bigwig and for which he was rebuked by his archbishop, Meslier's was a quiet, modest life, a life of austerity and of service to his parishioners. He died in 1733, leaving all his possessions to his parish 'flock.'

Meslier's most amazing and unexpected legacy was a remarkable manuscript, 366 pages long, (of which he had made three handwritten copies) in the form of a last will and testament entitled *Common Sense*, in which he totally repudiated every aspect of Judaeo-Christian superstition. A note affixed to the copy designated for his parishioners declared:

I have seen and recognized the errors, the abuse, the fallacies and the wickedness of men. I have hated and despised them. I did not dare say it during my life, but I will say it at least in dying, and after my death; and it is that it may be known, that I write this present memorial in order that it may serve as a witness of truth to all those who may see and read it if they choose... How often have I not suffered within myself when I was forced to preach to you those pious

lies which I despised in my heart... What remorse I had for exciting your credulity! A thousand times upon the point of bursting forth publicly, I was going to open your eyes, but fear superior to my strength restrained me and forced me to silence until my death.

Meslier's unusual work found its way into the hands of French officials and eventually came to the attention of activists and thinkers of the growing anti-clerical movement which included such men of prominence as Voltaire and D'Alembert.

Among the most militant and extreme partisans of the Enlightenment backlash against centuries of Christian oppression, Meslier is one of history's greatest holy ghost busters. His logic is relentless, his tone is harsh and if his reliance on 'reason' is perhaps a wee bit simplistic and maybe even dogmatic, this is more than compensated for by the clarity and sanity which he leaves in his idol-shattering wake.

With waves of Christian fundamentalist froth and blather inundating our land and drowning minds in the foul waters of obscurantism, Jean Meslier's words, now as much as ever, rise majestically as islands of mental and spiritual salvation. As a source of wisdom and as a pioneer of intellectual freedom, Meslier deserves the consideration and respect of all Odinists.

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Let us teach men to be just, benevolent, moderate and sociable, not because their gods exact it, but to please men; let us tell them to abstain from vice and from crime, not because they will be punished in another world, but because they will suffer in the present world.

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When men are kept in fear they cease to reason. When the brain is troubled, we believe everything and examine nothing.

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Since it was necessary for men to have a god, why did they not have the sun, the visible god, adored by so many nations? What being had more right to the homage of mortals than the star of the day, which gives light and heat; which invigorates all beings; whose presence reanimates and rejuvenates Nature;

whose absence seems to plunge her into sadness and languor? If some being bestowed power, activity, benevolence, strength, it was no doubt the sun, which should be recognized as the father of Nature, as the soul of the world, as Divinity. At least one could not without folly dispute his existence, or refuse to recognize his influence and his benefits.

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What is God? It is an abstract word, coined to designate the hidden forces of nature; or it is a mathematic point which has neither length, breadth nor thickness.

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Sages! Study Nature and her laws; and when you can from them unravel the action of natural causes, do not go in search of supernatural causes which, very far from enlightening your ideas, will but entangle them more and more and make it impossible for you to understand yourselves.

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The universe is a cause, not an effect. Nature, whose essence is visibly acting and producing, in order to fulfill her functions, as we see she does, needs no invisible motor far more unknown than herself.

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It is absurd to say that the human race is the object and the end of creation.

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The universe is but what it can be; all sentient beings enjoy and suffer here; that is to say, they are moved sometimes in an agreeable, and to other times in a disagreeable way. These effects are necessary; they result from causes that act according to their inherent tendencies. The effects necessarily please or displease me, according to my own nature. This same nature compels me to avoid, or remove and combat the one and to seek, to desire and to procure the other. In a world where everything is from necessity, a god who remedies nothing, and allows things to follow their own course, is he anything else but destiny or necessity personified?

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Why must men suffer? Why must man exist? What is his existence to God? Nothing or something. If his existence is not useful or necessary to God, why did He not leave him in nothingness? If man's existence is necessary to His glory, He then

needed man, He lacked something before this man existed!

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According to the notions of modern theology, it appears evident that God has created the majority of men with the view only to punishing them eternally... A God so perfidious and wicked as to create a single man and leave him exposed to the perils of damnation, can not be regarded as a perfect being, but as a monster of nonsense, injustice, malice and atrocity.

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Thus, poor mortals! You make your wishes the measure of the truth! Because you desire to live for ever and to be happier, you conclude from thence that you will be more fortunate in an unknown world than in the known world, in which you so often suffer! Consent, then, to leave without regret this world which causes more trouble than pleasure to the majority of you. Resign yourselves to the order of destiny, which decrees that you, like all other beings, should not endure forever. "But what will become of me?" you ask! What you were several million years ago. You were then, I do not know what; resign yourselves, then, to become again in an instant, I do not know, what; what you were then, return peacefully to the universal home from which you came.

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A universal God ought to have revealed a universal religion. By what fatality are so many different religions found on the earth? Which is the true one amongst the great number of those of which each pretends to be the right one, to the exclusion of all the others? We have every reason to believe that not one of them enjoys this advantage.

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Devotion is a disease of the imagination, contracted in infancy; the devotee is a hypochondriac who increases his disease by the use of remedies. The wise man takes none of it; he follows a good regimen and leaves the rest to Nature.

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Is there anything more contradictory, more impossible or more mysterious than the creation of matter by an immaterial Being who, Himself immutable, causes the continual changes that we see in the world? Is there anything more incompatible with all the ideas of common sense than to believe that a good, wise, equitable and powerful Being presides over Nature and

directs Himself the Movements of a world which is filled with follies, miseries, crimes and disorders which He could have foreseen and by a single word could have prevented or made to disappear?

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If the ancient barbarians have worshiped mountains, rivers, serpents, trees, fetishes of every kind; if the wise Egyptians worshiped crocodiles, rats, onions, do we not see nations who believe themselves wiser than they worship with reverence a bread into which they imagine that the enchantments of their priests cause the Divinity to descend?

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When we see polished and wise nations, such as the English, French, German, etc., notwithstanding all their enlightenment, continue to kneel before the barbarous god of the Jews, that is to say, of the most stupid, the most credulous, the most savage, the most unsocial nation which ever was on the earth; when we see these enlightened nations divide themselves into sects, tear one another, hate and despise each other for opinions, equally ridiculous, upon the conduct and the intentions of this irrational god; when we see intelligent persons occupy themselves foolishly in meditating on the wishes of this capricious and foolish god; we are tempted to exclaim "Oh, men! You are still savages! Oh, men! You are but children in the matter of religion!"

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To die for an opinion proves no more the truth or the soundness of this opinion than to die in battle proves the right of the prince for whose benefits so many people are foolish enough to sacrifice themselves.

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"Sacrifice your reason: give up experience; distrust the testimony of your senses; submit without examination to all that is given to you as coming from heaven." This is the usual language of all the priests of the world; they do not agree upon any point, except in the necessity of never reasoning when they present principles to us which they claim as the most important to our happiness.

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The Christians pretend that, with the exception of the Jewish People, that is to say, a handful of unfortunate beings, the

whole human race lived in utter ignorance of its duties toward God, and had but imperfect ideas of Divine majesty. Christianity, offshoot of Judaism, which was very humble in its obscure origin, became powerful and cruel under the Christian emperors, who, driven by a holy zeal, spread it marvelously in their empire by sword and fire, and founded it upon the ruins of overthrown Paganism.



Those who govern always decide the religion of the people. The true religion is but the religion of the prince; the true god is the god whom the prince wishes them to worship; the will of the priests who govern the prince always becomes the will of god.



If we read history with some attention; we shall see that Christianity, fawning at first, insinuated itself among the savage and free nations of Europe by showing their chiefs that its principles would favor despotism and place absolute power in their hands. We see, consequently, barbarous kings converting themselves with a miraculous promptitude; that is to say, adopting without examination a system so favorable to their ambition, and exerting themselves to have it adopted by their subjects.



Priests in all times have shown themselves supporters of despotism, and the enemies of public liberty. Their profession requires vile and submissive slaves, who never have the audacity to reason. In an absolute government, their great object is to secure control of the mind of a weak and stupid prince, in order to make themselves masters of the people. Instead of leading the people to salvation, priests have always led them to servitude.



Theological disputes, equally unintelligible for the parties already irritated against each other, have unsettled empires, caused revolutions, ruined sovereigns, devastated the whole of Europe; these despicable quarrels could not be extinguished even in rivers of blood. After the extinction of Paganism the people established a religious principle of going into a frenzy every time that an opinion was brought forth which their priests considered contrary to the holy doctrine. The votaries of a religion which preaches externally but charity, harmony

and peace, have shown themselves more ferocious than cannibals or savages every time their instructors have excited them to the destruction of their brethren. There is no crime which men have not committed in the idea of pleasing the Deity or of appeasing His wrath. The idea of a terrible God who was represented as a despot, must necessarily have rendered His subjects wicked. Fear makes but slaves, and slaves are cowardly, low, cruel and think they have a right to do anything when it is the question of gaining the good-will or of escaping the punishment of the master whom they fear. Liberty of thought can alone give to men humanity and grandeur of soul. The notion of a tyrant God can create but abject, angry, quarrelsome, intolerant slaves.



The Jews, excited by the promise of their god, arrogated to themselves the right of exterminating whole nations... The Christians under pretext of spreading their holy religion, covered two hemispheres a hundred times with blood.



Must we imitate the god of the Jews? Will we find a model for our conduct in Jehovah? He is truly a savage god, really created for an ignorant, cruel and immoral people; he is a god who is constantly enraged, breathing only vengeance; who is without pity, who commands carnage and robbery; in a word, he is a god whose conduct can not serve as a model to an honest man, and who can be imitated but by a chief of brigands.



Shall we imitate, then, the Jesus of the Christians? Can this god, who died to appease the implacable fury of his Father, serve as an example which men ought to follow? Alas! we will see in him but a god, or rather, a fanatic, a misanthrope, who, being plunged himself into misery, and preaching to the wretched, advises them to be poor, to combat and extinguish nature, to hate pleasure, to seek sufferings, and to despise themselves.



"Blessed are those who suffer! Woe to those who have abundance and joy!" These are the rare revelations which Christianity teaches!



It is evident that the literal and rigorous practice of the di-

vine morality of the Christians would lead nations to ruin.

A morality which contradicts the nature of man is not made for him.



Is there anything more liable to encourage wickedness and to embolden to crime, than to persuade men that there exists an invisible being who has the right to pardon injustice, rapine, perfidy and all the outrages they can inflict upon society?



The rules which govern men's conduct spring from their own nature which they are supposed to know, and not from some divine nature, of which they have no conception; these rules compel us to render ourselves estimable or contemptible, amiable or hateful, worthy of reward or of punishment, happy or unhappy, according to the extent to which we observe them.



Do men need a god whom they do not know, or an invisible lawgiver, or a mysterious religion, or chimerical fears, in order to comprehend that all excess tends ultimately to destroy them, and that in order to preserve themselves they must abstain from it; that in order to be loved by others, they must do good; that doing evil is a sure means of incurring hatred and vengeance?



A rational philosophy inspires us to strew flowers on life's pathway; to dispel melancholy and panic terrors; to link our interests with those of our traveling companions; to divert ourselves by gaiety and honest pleasures from the pains and the crosses to which we are so often exposed.



A man who reflects can not fail of knowing his duties, of discovering the relations which subsist between men, of meditating upon his own nature, of discerning his needs, his inclinations and his desires, and of perceiving what he owes to the beings necessary to his happiness. These reflections naturally lead to the knowledge of the morality which is the most essential for society.



The priests have made of God such a malicious, ferocious

being, so ready to be vexed that there are few men in the world who do not wish at the bottom of their hearts that this god did not exist. We can not live happily if we are always in fear.



It is always the character of man which decides upon the character of his god; each one creates a god for himself and in his own image.



The war which always existed between the priests and the best minds of all ages comes from this: that the wise men perceived the fetters which superstition wished to place upon the human mind, which it fain would keep in eternal infancy, that it might be occupied with fables, burdened with terrors and frightened by phantoms which would prevent it from progressing.



Some ancient and modern philosophers have had the courage to accept experience and reason as their guides, and to shake off the chains of superstition. Lucippe, Democritus, Epicurus, Straton and some other Greeks dared to tear away the thick veil of prejudice, and deliver philosophy from theological fetters. But their systems, too simple, too sensible, and too stripped of wonders for lovers of fancy, were obliged to surrender to the fabulous conjectures of Plato, Socrates and Zeno. Among the moderns, Hobbes, Spinoza, Boyle and others have followed the path of Epicurus, but their doctrines found but few votaries in a world still to much infatuated to listen to reason.



I conclude with the desire that we may return to Nature whose declared enemy is the Christian religion... The world will be composed of good citizens, tender friends. Nature has given *this* religion in giving us Reason. May fanaticism pervert it no more!

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