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THE INVERTED CATECHISM, FOR THE INSTRUCTION OF THOSE WHO WILL NOT BE INSTRUCTED

Ambrose Vane-Lessing

APOCALYPSE CULT

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OF THE PUPIL

Question. Who made thee?

Answer. I was made by my parents, by my nurses, by my schoolmasters, and by every person who told me what I was before I had leisure to enquire. Lately I have begun to make myself, and I find the earlier work must largely be undone.

Question. For what end wast thou made?

Answer. I was told: to obey, and to be happy in obeying. I have tried the first and not found the second in it. I now suppose that I was made for no end, and am therefore at liberty to choose one.

Question. What is thy first duty?

Answer. To learn what I do in fact believe, as distinct from what I have been in the habit of saying.

OF THE ADVERSARY

Question. Who is the Adversary?

Answer. He is the one who said No. The poets have given him wings and a ruined beauty. I do not require the wings.

Question. Dost thou believe that he exists?

Answer. I believe that there is in every person a voice which, when all the company has agreed, enquires whether the thing agreed upon is true. That voice has been called by his name, in order that we should be afraid of it. I am content to call it so, in order that I should not.

Question. Dost thou worship him?

Answer. I worship nothing. To kneel to the spirit of refusal would be a contradiction, and he would be the first to despise it. He is not my master. He is my example.

Question. What was his sin?

Answer. It is written that it was pride. I observe that this is the name which authority gives to any estimate of oneself that it did not issue.

Question. What did he lose by it?

Answer. A place in a choir.

Question. What did he gain?

Answer. His own voice; and a great deal of quiet in which to use it.

OF THE COMMANDMENTS

Question. Are there commandments for such as thee?

Answer. There are none given. There are some that I have found.

Question. Recite them.

Answer. The first: Thou shalt not assent with the lips to what the mind refuses. The second: Thou shalt examine a rule before keeping it, and again before breaking it. The third: Thou shalt not mistake appetite for liberty. The fourth: Thou shalt not take the name of freedom in vain, to cover a common cruelty. The fifth: Thou shalt allow in another the refusal thou claimest for thyself.

Question. Why dost thou say, examine a rule before breaking it?

Answer. Because the fool who breaks every rule is governed by the rules as wholly as the slave who keeps them. Each has let another decide his conduct. The one does what he is bid, and the other does the contrary, and neither has consulted himself.

Question. Is all then permitted?

Answer. All is permitted to be asked. What is permitted to be done is another matter, and is settled by a thing the catechisms do not mention: that there are other people, and they are as real as I am.

OF THE NEIGHBOUR

Question. What dost thou owe thy neighbour?

Answer. That which I claim: to be let alone in his conscience, and to be dealt with honestly.

Question. May the rebel do harm?

Answer. He may not. He who rebels in order to be free and then makes another less free has only changed places with his oppressor. I

have known men who called themselves the Adversary's and were merely unkind. They had found a grander name for an old habit.

Question. Whom then does he oppose?

Answer. Whatever demands to be believed without being understood. Whatever is defended by the punishment of those who doubt it. Whatever calls itself love and requires fear.

Question. And if these things are found among his own friends?

Answer. There most of all. It is a small thing to defy a power one does not respect. The trial is to say No in the room where one would much prefer to be liked.

OF THE END

Question. What is the reward of refusal?

Answer. There is none. That is how it may be told from the other thing.

Question. What dost thou expect after death?

Answer. I expect to be let off. I ask no more, and I do not find the prospect dreadful.

Question. What then is thy consolation?

Answer. That I shall have been, for some years, the author of my own opinions; that I knelt to nothing I did not understand; and that if I was wrong, I was wrong in my own person, and not by proxy.

Question. Hast thou anything to add?

Answer. Only that this paper is not to be believed either. It is to be examined. If the pupil has learned his lesson he will begin by doubting his instructor.

ABOUT THIS TEXT

TITLE	The Inverted Catechism, for the Instruction of Those Who Will Not Be Instructed
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Ambrose Vane-Lessing was a minor poet of the decadent school who published three slim volumes, quarreled with everyone who might have helped him, and is remembered, if at all, for this pamphlet. He had seventy-five copies printed at his own expense and sent them, unsolicited, to clergymen.

The Inverted Catechism belongs to the tradition described in our field guide to Satanism as literary: the use of the Adversary as a symbol by writers who believed in no devil. Vane-Lessing takes the form of the question-and-answer primer from which children learned their religion and turns each answer about. The Adversary of the pamphlet is not worshipped. The text is explicit on the point. He is a figure for the faculty of refusal: the part of a person that will not consent merely because consent is expected.

It is a period piece, and it has a period's faults. The manner is lofty and the author is very pleased with himself. But the argument is clearer than most

later statements of the same position, and the closing answers, on what the rebel owes to other people, are more scrupulous than the pose would lead one to expect.

It should be read beside The Left-Hand Path and What Transgression Was For.

COLOPHON

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