

Meeting of Minds, Episodes 9,10
version 3
April 22, 2012

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ANNOUNCER: Welcome to “Meeting of Minds.” Our four distinguished guests on this occasion are: From sixteenth-century Germany . . . Martin Luther. From eighteenth-century France . . . Voltaire. From the Golden Age of Athens, Greece . . . the philosopher Plato. And from nineteenth-century England, one of history’s most remarkable social reformers . . . Florence Nightingale. And now your host . . . Mr. Steve Allen.

STEVE: (*He enters, descending the staircase.*) It is unfortunate that we are limited to this one hour, and a second hour of our next program, for the purpose of meeting our first guest. Had he himself been an imaginary creature of another literary artist the story-line of his life would have been criticized as hopelessly improbable. In 1864, almost a century after his death, the French nation decided that his heart—which had been taken from his body when it was embalmed and preserved in a silver case—should be added to whatever remained of his corpse in the Pantheon of Heroes in Paris. When the sarcophagus was opened, however, it was discovered to be empty.

The man was known to the world as Voltaire, though his actual given name was Francois Marie Arouet.

Those who are impressed by versatility are invariably bowled over by the list of his accomplishments, although he lived in an age when it was common for men of standing in society to interest themselves seriously in a larger number of areas than is today commonly the case.

He was, for example, a true capitalist, an extremely successful businessman, with indeed so sharp a nose for making money that it is said he occasionally cut ethical corners. He was an actor, the most successful playwright of his time, a poet, a spy, a philosopher, a journalist, a courageous defender of the poor and oppressed.

But there was a darker side to Voltaire, as there is to all of us. He was vain, money-hungry, was not above employing the most obvious sort of flattery to bend others to his purposes, could be ruthless in sarcasm, and, though a harsh critic himself, was remarkably sensitive to criticism from others.

But, whatever his faults, there is no one like him in our time—not in the theatre, not in literature .

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generally, not in the dialogue on matters of public importance. Ladies and gentlemen . . . Voltaire.

VOLTAIRE: (*He enters, acknowledges the applause, and seats himself*)

STEVE: Good evening, Monsieur Voltaire. It is a pleasure to meet you.

VOLTAIRE: Thank you, sir. Whether by the conclusion of our meeting you will still consider the experience pleasurable, we'll see. (*He says this with a twinkle in his eye.*)

STEVE: I'm not concerned about that. If I may, I'd like to put a few quick questions to you about simple matters of fact, if only so that we can dispose of that sort of thing promptly and get on to more important matters.

VOLTAIRE: Very well.

STEVE: You were born in 1694 in—

VOLTAIRE: The great city of Paris. My father was Francois Arouet, a simple notary public, my mother Marie Marguerite Doumart.

STEVE: Although you eventually made many enemies among the Catholic and-for that matter—the Protestant clergy, you were yourself brought up in the faith, were you not?

VOLTAIRE: But of course; I lived in eighteenth-century France. I was baptized the day after my birth, naturally without being consulted, and at the age of ten entered the college Louis-le-Grand, a Jesuit institution.

STEVE: Where you received a good education?

VOLTAIRE: In some ways. The Jesuits are effective teachers, within the limits imposed by their philosophical assumptions.

STEVE: Sir, we hear of the frequent enmity between the church and the theatre over the centuries. There have been times in Europe, for example, when actors were not permitted to be buried in consecrated ground.

VOLTAIRE: Having had to work with quite a few actors, I can see the merits of the position.

STEVE: (*He laughs.*) But what I was getting to, sir, is that, by way of contrast, the Jesuit fathers of your day were not at all enemies of the drama and, in fact, encouraged the practice, inherited from the Renaissance, of incorporating theatres into their schools.

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VOLTAIRE: Yes, you're quite right. At our school plays were performed—not only in French but in Latin—and I'm sure this early exposure had a great deal to do with my lifelong dedication to the theatre.

STEVE: Did your mother and father encourage such interests?

VOLTAIRE: My father certainly did not. He wanted me to become a lawyer. My mother unfortunately died when I was just seven years old. She did live long enough, however, to suggest

to her friend Father de Chateaufeuf that I eventually be introduced to polite society. Because the world conducts its affairs so differently today, Mr. Allen, your viewers may not be aware of the importance of my mother's wishes in this regard.

STEVE: What do you mean?

VOLTAIRE: Well, today if a young man has the gifts of the dramatist, the poet, or the novelist, he simply sets to work, and eventually his writings must make their own way in the literary marketplace.

But it was not so in eighteenth-century Europe. Gifted people, therefore, had to enlist the interest of some member of the aristocracy, the nobility, or the monarchy. One had to be sponsored.

STEVE: I see.

VOLTAIRE: One also had to be, from time to time, protected.

STEVE: Oh? Why is that?

VOLTAIRE: There was no official freedom of the press in those clays. One could suffer painfully if what one had written displeased the authorities. Or the church.

In any event, in which time I was seventeen—I returned home and immediately faced strong opposition from my father who, as I've suggested, thought my literary ambitions were misguided.

The Abbé de Chateaufeuf, however, was wiser than my father. I am also grateful to him for introducing me to the religious philosophy of Deism because I feel—

STEVE: Pardon me for interrupting you, sir, but I'm puzzled. Father de Chateaufeuf was, of course, a Catholic priest?

VOLTAIRE: Yes.

STEVE: But there is a very wide gulf between Catholicism and Deism.

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VOLTAIRE: (*He gives him a patronizing look.*) How sensitive of you to have perceived it. And please, don't say "Touché." That tiresome response of the conversationally helpless was a bore even in my time.

But to answer your question: in eighteenth-century Europe there was a great deal of intellectual ferment. The religious certainties of fifteenth, sixteenth, and, for that matter, earlier centuries were being seriously called into question by many intellectuals, even by some who nominally remained loyal to the church.

STEVE: Well, sir, on that subject I'm sure Dr. Luther will want to have a word with you when he comes out.

VOLTAIRE: Ah, yes. I'd very much appreciate it if you'd hurry along to that. I can hardly wait to talk to the man.

STEVE: I'm sure he returns the compliment. But perhaps we should seat you two on opposite sides of the table.

VOLTAIRE: *(He laughs heartily.)* Nonsense, Martin Luther and I could never be totally at odds. One may admire him for his courage, for his wit, for his great intelligence. And then, of course, he and I share the distinction of being —er—graduates of the Catholic church. And we were certainly both reformers.

STEVE: Yes, that's true. Well, let me see . . . *(He appears momentarily undecided.)*

I had planned to put more questions to you now, sir, but perhaps we should follow your suggestion and introduce Dr. Luther at once since the two of you are so eager to—er—have at each other.

VOLTAIRE: Splendid!

STEVE: It's been typical of twentieth-century man that he sees at least several sides of a question, if not always all sides. But now I have the impression that in the present day there is a swing away from this truism, that it may describe only—roughly speaking—the situation as of the last two hundred years. Certainly extreme communists or fascists are single-minded. And the resurgent fundamentalist Christianity of our day has a tendency to see one side of important questions in a way that was not true of the more scholarly, urbane Christians of, say, the past century. But Martin

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Luther was no urbane humanist. He was one of the most single-minded and emotional men in all history.

A modern atheist, by way of contrast, may have a dignified intellectual contempt for, let us say, Luther's enemy, the Catholic church. But once Luther was committed to his task, there was nothing of aloof disdain in him. He was seized by violent, lusty hatred, which—it must be said—was returned in kind. It's possible that only a former Catholic priest could have that kind of fierce animosity toward the church, precisely because it had been his mother—and father—and he was no stranger to it.

VOLTAIRE: *(Cutting in.)* And you know, its odd; during his life-time the Italian Renaissance was blossoming. There were within the church great scholars, like the humanist Erasmus, who is so appealing to modern man because he was intellectual, fair-minded, civilized, a reasonable fellow.

Reason itself was beginning to be more honored. Luther not only took no favorable interest in this development, he hated it, and actually called reason "the devil's handmaid."

And bear in mind that the new American continent—had been discovered by Columbus in 1492. So Luther's day was also the Age of Exploration. Incredible as it now seems, he took no interest at all in these astounding geographical discoveries.

STEVE: But in this Luther is perhaps like many of us today who—at the time when man has actually walked on the moon and is approaching the planets—simply turn their backs on such dramatic achievements.

But if one said only this much about Luther one would have a very distorted impression of the man, because there was so much more to him. Hopefully we will learn more of his fullness, greatness, and wholeness this evening. Ladies and gentlemen . . . it is our honor to introduce Martin Luther.

LUTHER: *(He enters and seats himself, nodding to the others.)*

STEVE: Good evening, Dr. Luther. We're pleased to welcome you.

LUTHER: Thank you, sir.

So, Voltaire. You think we will have some grounds for agreement, eh?

VOLTAIRE: I am sure, dear Luther, that you and I would have much to agree on. You would no doubt join me in lamenting the fact that in the Paris of my day Protestants were very literally

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outlaws. The wife of a Protestant was considered only a concubine, and her children—it therefore logically follows—were regarded as illegitimate. This, in turn, meant they could not inherit property.

LUTHER: I am very glad to have you disclose these facts publicly, my friend. If I were to have vouchsafed the same information, I would be accused of prejudice, if not outright falsehood. But I could tell far worse stories, I assure you, stories of bloody crimes and atrocities.

VOLTAIRE: No doubt you could. But, of course, they could be told about the Protestant forces as well.

STEVE: Now Dr. Luther, some quick questions of fact. You were born in the year—

LUTHER: 1483, in Eisleben, Germany. My mother and father were of simple peasant stock, though my father had prospered from work in the mines. He owned several small foundries.

VOLTAIRE: People of your homeland in that day, Luther, believed in witches and sinister spirits. Did you?

LUTHER: Certainly! Prussia was full of Witches and devils. In my native country, on the top of a high mountain called Pubelsberg, there was a lake. If a stone were thrown into it, a tempest would arise over the whole region because the waters were the home of captive demons.

VOLTAIRE: *(To audience, throwing up his hands.)* I rest my case.

STEVE: Dr. Luther, it is said of you that as a young person you suffered from alternating moods of exaltation and deep depression. Is this true?

LUTHER: Yes.

STEVE: What did you have to be depressed about?

LUTHER: I am not sure. Perhaps it was that my parents were too strict. They forced me to obey, and did so with a severity that made me disheartened. Because of one small offense my mother once flogged me until the blood ran. This overly strict discipline finally moved me to enter the monastery.

STEVE: Dr. Luther, the available literature about you mentions that in your early life—while living as a monk—you experienced a painful crisis of the mind or spirit. You again felt extreme despair and were gripped by a terrible weakness and fear. If you won't consider the question too direct—exactly what were you afraid of?

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LUTHER: I was afraid, sir, of God and His law. I could not imagine how it was possible to escape the wrath of God. For the Old Testament clearly describes Him as a jealous God, an angry God.

VOLTAIRE: You're absolutely right about that, Luther. Today, of course, no intelligent Christian or Jew sees God in such a light. This is because we have cast aside the bloodthirstiness and barbarism of the Bible. In my view God was a far more appealing figure.

LUTHER: I should be more interested, Voltaire, in knowing how appealing a creature you were in God's sight! Or for that matter in man's. Your own society put you in jail.

STEVE: When was this, sir?

VOLTAIRE: (*He smiles.*) In 1718—I was nineteen at the time—I spent almost a year in the Bastille.

STEVE: For what offense?

VOLTAIRE: Having written disrespectfully about the regent, Philippe II, duc d'Orléans. While imprisoned, I wrote the tragedy *Oedipus*.

STEVE: Ah, yes, *Oedipus*. We explain so much these days by referring to our early emotional dependence on parents. I wonder if that explains much about you, Dr. Luther? Why did you become a monk?

LUTHER: Because I saw good saintly men around me, wearing the monk's cowl, and was impressed by their example. At Magdeburg I happened to see Prince William of Anhalt. I shall never forget the moment. With my own eyes I saw the prince carrying the beggar's sack like a donkey. He had given up his royal privileges to become a poor Friar begging in the streets. He had so worn himself down by fasting and vigil that he looked like a skeleton, mere bone and skin.

STEVE: How old were you at the time?

LUTHER: Fourteen. I could not look upon that man without feeling ashamed of my own life.

Then, one day in 1505—I was twenty-two at the time—I was walking along a country road on the outskirts of the village of Stotternheim. The sky was overcast. Suddenly there was a terrible storm, with pelting rain, lightning, and thunder! I became afraid.

At that moment a bolt of lightning crashed nearby. I fell to the ground in terror and cried, “St.

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Anne, help me! I will become a monk!”

STEVE: So you became a loyal Catholic monk, planning to live a simple, austere life. But you continued to suffer guilt.

VOLTAIRE: It’s small wonder you Christians suffer so from guilt, Luther. You have much to feel guilty about.

LUTHER: And so did you, Voltaire!

STEVE: You know, gentlemen, modern psychologists—even many Christian clergymen—say it is wrong to encourage or dwell on guilt feelings. That we should try to improve our conduct, of course, but not—

LUTHER: (*Interrupting.*) As I look about the world today, I am forcibly struck by what seems an almost total absence of guilt. The Christian of my day was constantly overcome by fear and guilt. It was, perhaps, an obsession with us. Initially I sought to be reconciled with my God by the traditional means, monastic abstinence, retreat, prayer, silent and penitential submission. Unfortunately these traditional means to grace did not help me at all. I was constantly tormented. In my panic I was advised by my superior, Father Staupitz, to study and teach the Scriptures. I needed help in my doubt and torment. And there—in the Bible—I found it!

STEVE: If you’ll forgive me, Dr. Luther, it’s still not quite clear why—when millions of other Christians have found peace, contentment, and strength in their faith—you were constantly tormented.

LUTHER: I followed the view of St. Paul and St. Augustine, who believed that God personally had destined some individuals for honor and others for dishonor.

VOLTAIRE: You mean regardless of their behavior?

LUTHER: That is precisely what I mean.

VOLTAIRE: That is the worst blasphemy I have ever heard. The trouble with people like you, Luther, is you think that God is just as confused and contradictory a person as you are! I have observed this strange phenomenon before, that nice people tend to believe in a rather nice God, and tormented, angry people tend to believe in a tormented, furious God.

LUTHER: I care nothing for your opinions, Voltaire, only for those of the Almighty. And I once

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blasphemed against Him knowingly. At this point in my life—while still a young monk—I did not love God, I hated Him!

STEVE: Hated God?

LUTHER: Yes. Is it not dreadful?

STEVE: But why?

LUTHER: For making man what he was. For I had come to believe, you see, that man was corrupt not only at certain moments, in certain sins, but totally, in his very nature.

Then—in the year 1517—I happened to be studying the words of Our Lord on the cross "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and it suddenly occurred to me that Christ, too, had felt the tragic desolation which wracked my own soul, that He had suffered what I was suffering, and yet He was perfect, whereas I was imperfect. How could this be?

The only answer must be that Christ took on Himself the sinfulness of us all. In that moment sunlight flooded into my soul, for I no longer saw Christ as a judge, a vengeful pursuer, but rather as my father, my brother, one of my own, to love dearly, because He personally loved me.

I took from Paul the phrase and the idea of "justification by faith," which became the basis of my reforms.

VOLTAIRE: Justification by faith alone, eh? What do you say of St. Paul to the Corinthians?

STEVE: What does he say?

VOLTAIRE: "If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

LUTHER: I never said, Voltaire, that we should not do good works. Merely that the fate of our souls does not depend on them! Later, when I was serving as parish priest in a village church in Wittenberg, I became concerned about the business of selling indulgences.

STEVE: Dr. Luther, since there are many watching who don't know—exactly what is an indulgence?

LUTHER: It is a remission, a cancellation, of the punishment due for sin, supposedly granted by the authority of the Pope.

I also became concerned with the traffic in—and belief in—relics.

STEVE: And—again, for those who don't know—what is a relic?

LUTHER: It is an object that is alleged to have been—used by a holy person such as Jesus Christ

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Himself, His mother, Mary, or one of the saints.

But Frederick the Wise, the elector of Saxony, who was prince of our area, had acquired a collection— by the year 1509—of over five thousand relics to which indulgences were attached, said to be able to reduce the length of time one might spend in Purgatory by 1,443 years.

STEVE: And—as a clarification—what is Purgatory?

LUTHER: It is a sort of part-time hell, a place of punishment for those who are not deserving of eternal damnation but are still not considered pure enough to enter into the heavenly presence.

VOLTAIRE: You were absolutely right, Luther, to become suspicious of this nonsense about relics. Among the items that Frederick the Wise—although he was not so wise in this matter—that Frederick thought he had accumulated were one portion of the diaper of the infant Christ, thirteen pieces from his crib, one wisp of straw from his crib, a piece of gold brought by the wise men, a strand of the beard of Jesus, one of the nails driven into his hands, and one piece of bread remaining from the Last Supper itself!

LUTHER: Yes. And there was said to be one twig from Moses' burning bush, obviously unburned. Well, all of this, as I say, became offensive to me.

VOLTAIRE: As it is offensive to any person with common sense.

STEVE: So it's understandable that when you finally began to speak out about these matters the church immediately took a dim view of your criticisms.

VOLTAIRE: Yes, and this was particularly true as regards the matter of indulgences, because what was involved was not merely a question of faith but one of money. The churches, you know, are rarely as serious as when they are dealing with matters of finance.

STEVE: What do you mean—a question of money?

VOLTAIRE: Simply that indulgences were not always given out to poor souls who merited them but were sold. One of your modern authors, I understand, has referred to them as the bingo of the sixteenth century.

STEVE: Dr. Luther, I know this is a question that it could take hours to properly answer, but

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perhaps you could just sum up for us: what were the background factors that brought about the Reformation?

LUTHER: There were many reasons for it, and it is very good that we discuss them because otherwise ignorant people might assume that the Reformation came about simply because I personally did something or other. No, my friends, the Reformation was inevitable.

STEVE: It would have happened if you had never been born?

LUTHER: Of course. And it is crucial to grasp that the pressures that created the Reformation did not come originally from the enemies of the Catholic church but from within the Catholic church.

Sir Thomas More also was very critical of the corruption of the church in his day. Savonarola, in Italy, preached courageously against the abuses of his day.

VOLTAIRE: He was, of course, eventually executed by the church, a fate suffered by quite a few of its critics over the centuries.

LUTHER: With so much wrong—and with so many courageous critics speaking out— it was inevitable that among the millions of faithful in Europe a certain percentage would begin to have serious doubts about the ecclesiastical authority.

I am a product of the monastic life, you know, and you must understand that the monasteries were originally created as a protest against the worldliness of the church. Unfortunately, as the years passed, the monasteries themselves became corrupted by the world rather than reforming the world.

But many of the founders of the monastic orders had recognized the problem from the beginning. Unfortunately even these early reformers could not agree among themselves. Bernard of Clairvaux, of the twelfth century, for example, came seriously into conflict with Arnold of Brescia, an Italian priest who agreed with Bernard that the laxity and growing wealth of the church was a grave threat to its morality.

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They disagreed, however, over the role of the church in the world. Arnold felt that the church should renounce all claim to temporal power. Accordingly, he placed himself at the head of a popular revolt that drove Pope Hadrian IV out of Rome and, in 1145, established a government of their own. In time Frederick Barbarossa and Pope Hadrian combined to topple Arnold, who was burned at the stake in 1155.

And about 1355 two Franciscan friars were burned at Avignon in France, for either having insulted the church of Rome or having spoken of it accurately. as the case may be. In that same century the archbishop of Armagh in Ireland was strongly critical of Rome, for which he was cruelly persecuted. And in the next century—in, I believe, 1467—the pope ordered that a Bohemian named Militzius, living in England, to be imprisoned for his religious views, among which was the assertion that the anti-Christ had already come.

But then, in the 1370s, we hear of a man who was one of the true founding fathers, one might say, of the Reformation. John Wycliffe.

STEVE: Who was Wycliffe?

LUTHER: He was divinity lecturer at Oxford University, an influential and courageous churchman. There was at that time a serious argument between the English king, Edward the Third, and the pope in Rome. When Wycliffe's views on certain religious questions came to the pope's attention, they were immediately condemned as heretical.

Letters sent from Rome to the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London, ordered the imprisonment of Wycliffe.

VOLTAIRE: May I comment, my friends, that while imprisonment is at all times and places a serious matter, you have little idea today in what great danger a man like Wycliffe could be placed by such a papal order.

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Even the holiest churchmen, down through centuries of European history believed that the perfectly proper thing to do with a heretic is precisely what you do with a slice of bacon. Which is to say that, just as you put that bacon into the fire to shrivel, sizzle, and burn, so you do exactly the same thing with the living body of a human being!

Not necessarily, may I underline, to dangerous criminals—a murderer, an assassin—but a religious man, one guilty chiefly of acting on the dictates of his own conscience. It was these good men, as I say, that churchmen—on both sides, Dr. Luther—thought it quite proper to fry, roast, to barbeque, producing, needless to say, the most hideous pain imaginable!

My own opinion is that no crime was ever as monstrous, as detestable, as this punishment. No cruel rape, no murder, no military atrocity one-millionth part as hideous as this, the actual burning alive—with the bacon-sizzling of actual human flesh— of not one, not only a minority of particularly vicious criminals, but unknown armies of individuals.

LUTHER: To return to your question, Mr. Allen, about the reasons for the Reformation—some of the popes of my day, as I assume every modern schoolchild knows, were thoroughly evil men. When I made my pilgrimage to Rome, as a young Catholic priest, I was not only shocked to see the corruption of the church, but even more saddened to observe that the common people of Rome had become blasé and cynical about religion because of the corruption they saw around them.

By this bad example, you see, many were being turned away from true religious practice and belief. But even many long centuries before my time, Christian history reveals an incredibly long series of arguments, riots, and battles among various kinds of Christians.

STEVE: Dr. Luther, a great churchman of your day was Erasmus. He, too, was critical of the church, was he not?

LUTHER: Yes. I had hoped for some sign of support from Erasmus. You must understand that at that time he was the unquestioned leader of the culture of all Europe.

The question that interested what you might call the intellectuals of that day was whether Erasmus would simply declare that my views correspond to his own, or whether he would approve of my

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actions. Well, as it turned out, he did not approve of what I did, because he feared the consequences of my break with Rome.

VOLTAIRE: Isn't it also true, Luther, that your methods were distasteful to Erasmus?

LUTHER: Oh, I suppose so. But in my opinion Erasmus was far too gentle, too scholarly, to effect the sort of real change that I thought was necessary. He did, however, publicly state that a number of my ideas appealed to him, and he was kind enough to do his best to avoid flatly condemning me. In all of this, you see, there was not a great deal of ground that Erasmus and I could stand on together. He was a leader of the humanist movement.

I am truly indebted to Erasmus, however, for publishing what was the most sensational book of our time.

STEVE: What was that?

LUTHER: The New Testament in an approved text with a new Latin translation. I studied it with intense fascination.

Oh, of course, I had been amused by Erasmus's book *Praise of Folly*, and I agreed with many of his criticisms of the abuses in the church. But the more of Erasmus I read the less I was pleased by him.

But my point of disagreement with Erasmus came not in the fact that he agreed with Aristotle, who said that we become justified because we act in a correct manner. I believed that first we must be justified and then, as a result of that, we act in a correct manner.

Erasmus, in my view, had been too much influenced by the ancient Greek and Roman classics, as a result of which he sought man's happiness on the basis of reason and philosophy.

VOLTAIRE: You, of course, had no particular respect for either reason or philosophy in and of themselves.

LUTHER: You're damned right! They seemed to me to be a definite threat to faith.

But oddly enough it was the great popularity of my own books—they were sold out as soon as they were available—that stimulated a wider popular interest in the works of Erasmus. The people of that time came to view us as two powerful reformers standing shoulder-to-shoulder.

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But, you know, I am most anxious to involve your other guests in our conversation—that remarkable Christian lady Florence Nightingale and—

VOLTAIRE: Yes, and the father of European philosophy itself, the great Plato.

STEVE: Very well.

Florence Nightingale achieved true greatness indeed. Her accomplishments in the field of hospital reform—and social reform generally—were incredible. But she was personally a confusing, contradictory personality. On the one hand, she could be tender and compassionate; on the other, hardheaded and businesslike.

She could be witty and humorous or withdrawn and depressed. At one moment a religious mystic, at another a ruthless materialist. And always one of those women of whom it is said that they have a whim of steel. From nineteenth-century England, here is Miss Florence Nightingale.

NIGHTINGALE: *(She enters—an old woman—in a wheelchair. Steve rises, moves to help.)*

STEVE: Welcome Miss Nightingale.

VOLTAIRE: Yes, welcome indeed, dear lady.

STEVE: Are you comfortable?

NIGHTINGALE: *(She nods but does not speak.)*

STEVE: Good. You know, I—uh—I wasn't entirely sure Miss Nightingale would actually appear.

LUTHER: Oh? Why not?

STEVE: Because, although she lived to be ninety, for the last fifty-three years of her life, Dr. Luther, Florence Nightingale was a recluse, an invalid, who shunned public attention and honors. She purposely cut herself off from all but a few people who were necessary for the continuation of her work which occupied her sixteen hours a day.

LUTHER: Most interesting.

STEVE: You know, Miss Nightingale, I have no wish to embarrass you, but there's something I must say. Some of the most famous women of history have graced our stage. Queen Cleopatra, Marie Antoinette, Emily Dickinson—but of all of them I find you the most admirable because,

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almost single-handedly, you attacked the British military—an old, entrenched, powerful system—and you accomplished the nearly impossible. You changed that system.

And yet so completely did you drop out of sight after your heroic service in the Crimean War that in a very short time even some British journalists thought you were dead. That comes as a shock to me.

NIGHTINGALE: (*With a slight smile.*) It was quite a shock to me too.

STEVE: But your remarkable accomplish—

NIGHTINGALE: (*She puts hand up to stop the praise.*) Please. I want no more praise.

LUTHER: No praise? Why not?

NIGHTINGALE: Because if I deserve praise for my so-called virtues, then I should also be obliged to listen to blame for my faults.

LUTHER: Faults, you say?

NIGHTINGALE: Yes. Do you know of anyone without them?

LUTHER: No, but perhaps if you had lived and worked in the church a few centuries earlier, you would have been called a saint.

NIGHTINGALE: Not by those who knew me, Dr. Luther. My critics quite correctly pointed out that I was a hard taskmistress. I could not abide stupidity. In fact the company of others so often frustrated or infuriated me that I avoided it, whenever possible.

STEVE: Well, it doesn't come as a very great surprise that you were difficult to live with, Miss Nightingale. The same certainly was true of you, Luther, and Voltaire. And—for that matter—of practically every one of the great, important personages from history we've talked to on this series of programs.

As a class you are all very peculiar people. But then aren't geniuses—by definition--peculiar people?

NIGHTINGALE: Peculiar I was. A genius? Never.

STEVE: I'm sorry, Miss Nightingale. I believe you were. You had an incredible grasp of the statistical branch of mathematics. You were a genius at organization, of administration. You had a compulsive appetite for productive work. But it's all of that that makes you—really—the most puzzling personality we've ever interviewed on this program. No matter what pattern we try to fit you into you simply don't fit. Today some make the attempt to classify you as a women's libber.

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NIGHTINGALE: I naturally thought that women should be equal before the law.

STEVE: Yes, of course, but you seemed to prefer the company of men.

Others have suspected that mentally you were somehow more masculine than feminine. But this doesn't make sense either. You were as a young woman very pretty, utterly charming. You could have had your pick of many men. In fact, your men friends remained fascinated with you throughout your life.

LUTHER: Perhaps, sir, it was difficult to classify Miss Nightingale because she was essentially a religious person.

NIGHTINGALE: Religious considerations were of enormous importance to me, Dr. Luther, but I had no interest in restrictive dogma, in ritual. Religion—to me—was service to God's creatures.

LUTHER: But the Bible tells us that there is a place for works of mercy, even though (*he glances at Voltaire*) justification is by faith alone.

NIGHTINGALE: I'm afraid you would not find my views on the Bible very congenial, my friend. The Old Testament in particular I found to contain a large mixture of myth, legend, and sheer nonsense. I care passionately about God, not about the Bible.

LUTHER: What!

VOLTAIRE: How refreshing.

STEVE: Well, all of this bears out my point. In fact your whole life was a puzzle. You were an unlikely choice to undertake the work you eventually did. You were of the British upper class. (Here we see your home, Embley.) Most young women in your world lived a pampered, selfish life. In what part of England were you born, by the way?

NIGHTINGALE: I was not born in England, sir. My birthplace was the beautiful city of Florence, Italy. I am, in fact, named after that city.

STEVE: Ah. Well, in any event being reared in a world of wealth and comfort it's odd that you chose a life of self-sacrifice and renunciation of pleasure and luxury.

LUTHER: Virtue, my friend, in this sinful world, often appears odd.

STEVE: Yes. But how did you happen to make such a strange choice?

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NIGHTINGALE: When I was seventeen I heard a voice calling me to—(*She pauses.*)

STEVE: Yes?

NIGHTINGALE: To serve mankind.

VOLTAIRE: Whose voice was it?

NIGHTINGALE: God's.

VOLTAIRE: *(In a kindly tone.)* Are you sure it was God's voice, Miss Nightingale?

NIGHTINGALE: Are you sure it was not, Monsieur Voltaire? I personally felt from then on that God had called me to His special service. By the time I was twenty-four I realized that this work would consist chiefly of relieving the sufferings of the poor.

LUTHER: Were you prepared for such work?

NIGHTINGALE: No, not at all, Dr. Luther. Like most well-to-do young women of my day, my sister Parthenope and I were involved in an endless whirl of parties, dances, but I became so guilt-ridden by all this pointless luxury—

STEVE: Why?

NIGHTINGALE: Because it was a completely selfish existence. What I needed was to work — for the benefit of others.

STEVE: When did you actually first become involved with nursing?

NIGHTINGALE: When I was thirty-two.

STEVE: Thirty-two? But you've told us God first called you at seventeen. Why the fifteen-year delay?

NIGHTINGALE: My parents' opposition. My father at least helped with my education. He tutored me personally in Greek and Latin, in philosophy and history. And—oh—I adored mathematics.

VOLTAIRE: Mathematics.

NIGHTINGALE: Yes, particularly statistics! I would rather read statistics than a novel! But for some reason my interest in mathematics was intensely annoying to my mother.

STEVE: Why?

NIGHTINGALE: She considered it a frightfully unfeminine field.

STEVE: Unfeminine. *(He thinks.)* Well, now I understand that on the Nightingale estates there were poor tenants, servants, and farmers whose lives must have been pathetic in many ways. Did you do anything for them?

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NIGHTINGALE: Oh, yes. It was common in my day, you see, for ladies of the better households to make occasional visits at least to the proximity of such cottages, delivering food for the sick, donating used clothing.

STEVE: But you did more?

NIGHTINGALE: I did. I overstepped what my mother regarded as the boundary of propriety. She was horrified. She said, "Oh, Florence, how could you actually go into those hovels, making beds for those creatures, rubbing their backs, feeding them. You'll catch a ghastly disease!"

STEVE: What on earth would your mother have preferred that you do?

NIGHTINGALE: Something more feminine. She wanted me to marry.

STEVE: Why didn't you?

NIGHTINGALE: I very nearly dida brilliant man, a reformer and member of Parliament, Richard Monckton Milnes.

Even now I'm not entirely sure why I didn't marry him. He was an eligible bachelor, much desired for his company, his wealth, his political importance, his intellect, and the liberality of his thought. He would have made an ideal husband for almost any woman, probably even for myself.

We loved each other for seven years. Until he forced me to give him an answer one way or the other. I sank to the depths of despair, even contemplating suicide. Shortly thereafter God spoke to me again, for the third time, and I began to get a glimpse of what His work for me was.

STEVE: Did you discuss your ideas about nursing with your family?

NIGHTINGALE: Oh, they would have been horrified!

STEVE: Really, Why?

NIGHTINGALE: Because nurses were then recruited from women of the lowest class. Many were alcoholics or prostitutes. Except for members of religious orders, no decent woman would think of becoming a nurse.

STEVE: That must have meant that hospitals were dreadful places.

NIGHTINGALE: You have no idea. This was, of course, before Louis Pasteur had taught the world how germs cause infection, before Lister's use of antiseptics.

But after the age of twenty-four I began to get a clearer impression as to what work was for me,

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and my formerly hazy plans began to crystallize.

STEVE: With whom did you discuss your ideas?

NIGHTINGALE: The first man to whom I revealed my desires and dreams was a visitor from America, your famous philanthropist and physician, Samuel Howe.

I said to him one morning, "Dr. Howe, do you think it would be unsuitable for a young English woman to devote herself to works of charity in hospitals, as Catholic sisters do? Do you think it would be a dreadful thing?"

Dr. Howe was surprised by my question, but he gave me an honest and encouraging answer. "My dear Miss Florence," he said, "it would be unusual, and in England whatever is unusual is thought to be unsuitable. But if you have a vocation for that way of life, then go on with it wherever it may lead you."

STEVE: Well, you had started to tell us of hospital conditions in your day.

NIGHTINGALE: Yes. Hospitals consisted of huge wards, with beds tightly packed together, people with all sorts of contagious diseases, side by side. And everywhere the most indescribable filth. Floors, walls soaked with blood and human excrement. Patients were filthy. Bedding stank and was rarely changed. Gangrene was common.

And over this inferno ruled the surgeons. They were not your clean white-jacketed doctors of today but were more like butchers, their street-clothes spattered with blood, their unsterilized knives spreading infection as well as pain and terror among their patients. There were times when their frock coats were so stiff with dried human blood that they actually could have stood up by themselves.

STEVE: I see. Well, then your family's shock at the idea of your taking up nursing was perfectly understandable.

NIGHTINGALE: What they failed to perceive was that I proposed to change all of this horror and suffering.

STEVE: I see. How did you begin such an enormous task?

NIGHTINGALE: It was not until seven years later—in 1851—that I was even allowed to learn anything about nursing. I was thirty-one at the time, and I had to go all the way to Kaiserwerth, a Protestant institution in Germany, where I studied with the deaconesses.

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LUTHER: *(He smiles.)*

STEVE: It is difficult, Miss Nightingale, to see how you so thoroughly revolutionized the care of the sick around the world simply by bathing brows, by washing diseased bodies, by changing bed linen.

NIGHTINGALE: That was a very small part of my work, sir. For years I arose at four every morning and wrote letters to hospital authorities, all over Europe, and from their responses learned a great deal about hospital conditions and administration. You must attack problems, you see, not only at the ground level but at the top as well.

STEVE: When did you accept your first formal post?

NIGHTINGALE: In 1853. I was assigned to reorganize a small hospital in London. It had what will no doubt seem now a quaint title, “The Institution for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in Distressed Circumstances.”

VOLTAIRE: (*He smiles.*) Charming.

NIGHTINGALE: My ladies’ committee felt the title referred only to the sick Church of England gentlewomen in distressed circumstances. I insisted, however, that any woman who was poor and ill should be admitted, Catholic, Jew, or Muhammadan.

STEVE: How was the problem settled?

NIGHTINGALE: By compromise.

It actually had to be put in print that we were to accept all denominations whatsoever and allow them to be visited by their respective priests, provided that—in any case not of the Church of England—I personally receive the obnoxious animal at the door, take him upstairs myself, remain at his side while he conferred with his patient, make myself responsible that he not speak to—or look at—anyone else, and then bring him downstairs again, almost on a leash, and thence usher him out into the street!

VOLTAIRE: Societies become civilized very slowly.

NIGHTINGALE: Fortunately my reorganization of the Institute was successful. It was this success, in fact, that in 1854 led my dear friend, Sidney Herbert—who had by then become secretary of war in the British Cabinet—to extend an invitation that was to change my life!

STEVE: And to change the world.

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NIGHTINGALE: Mr. Herbert asked me to undertake a nursing mission to the Crimea.

STEVE: Ah, yes. War with Russia had been declared by England in 1854, had it not?

NIGHTINGALE: Yes. And for the first time in history, war correspondents had accompanied an army and were sending dispatches back home telling what it was like to fight a war—to be wounded and to die of wounds because of the stupidity of inadequate or barbaric treatment. These reports created a wave of indignation throughout the country!

STEVE: And because of that you had won your first important battle?

NIGHTINGALE: (*She chuckles.*) Oh, not at all, sir. Many people considered it nothing short of scandalous that female nurses would be present in an all-male army hospital.

STEVE: Really?

NIGHTINGALE: Yes! And some men—today you would call them male chauvinists—were quite startled at Mr. Herbert’s suggestion.

STEVE: Why?

NIGHTINGALE: Because no woman had ever before been requested by the British government to undertake any official military mission.

VOLTAIRE: Ah, the dead hand of custom.

NIGHTINGALE: Yes, but Mr. Herbert’s mind was made up! He was kind enough to consider me the one person in England who would be capable of organizing and superintending such a scheme. Those were, in fact, his exact words, written in this letter. *(She lifts a letter from the table.)*

“If this succeeds,” he said, “an enormous good will be done now . . . and a prejudice will have been broken through, and a precedent established, which will multiply the good for all time.”

STEVE: It must have taken you several months to organize your group of nurses. Or perhaps a woman of your resources was able to accomplish the job in only weeks?

NIGHTINGALE: My party left London, sir, exactly six days after I received Mr. Herbert’s letter!

STEVE: How many of you were there?

NIGHTINGALE: We numbered forty-three. I had rounded up ten Roman Catholic sisters, and

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fourteen regular hospital nurses.

STEVE: Well, at least it was nice that religious differences were overlooked and you accepted women whether they were Catholics, Anglicans, Protestant, or—

NIGHTINGALE: Oh, I must correct you, sir. Religious differences were not overlooked. There was a great deal of criticism at the time about the high percentage of Catholics and Anglicans.

STEVE: But that’s incredible. Who on earth could have complained about such a thing?

NIGHTINGALE: *(With a wry smile.)* Non-Catholics and non-Anglicans.

STEVE: Were the regular nurses as capable as the Catholics and Anglicans.

NIGHTINGALE: Not at all, Mr. Allen. While I was very glad to have them, there were many in London who felt deep shame at having women of their station participating in our venture. As I’ve explained, except for the religious sisters, the nurses in those days were very poor women, uneducated, some of them hard drinkers, women of low station and, not infrequently, of ill-repute.

STEVE: What conditions awaited you when you landed?

NIGHTINGALE: They were incredible. British troops had been landed in the Crimea without any medical supplies whatsoever.

STEVE: How in the world had such a mistake been made?

NIGHTINGALE: It was due to the stupidity of the British military bureaucracy. The Crimean War itself, you see, was a series of disasters. We had planned to attack the great Russian naval base at Sebastopol. Unfortunately the supply department had not been advised. Consequently when the British Army embarked at the city of Varna—in Bulgaria—there were not enough transport ships to take both the army and its equipment across the Black Sea. All hospital equipment was left behind.

VOLTAIRE: Then what on earth was done with the wounded men?

NIGHTINGALE: They were put aboard ships and sent across the Black Sea to the Turkish city of Scutari. The trip often took weeks. Naturally many died on the way, more of disease than wounds.

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But thank God there was one element in the situation that was absolutely new, and it was the situation which made all the difference. For the first time in all human history, as I've mentioned, newspaper correspondents had accompanied an army and were sending dispatches back home to tell civilians what it was like to fight a war, what it was like to die, to be wounded, and to be treated for those wounds. Published reports in the London Times created a wave of indignation throughout the country!

And I must pause here to point out what a blessing all of you today have been granted in this regard. You have the news not only from your papers and periodicals but also that available through the media of radio and television. If there is a scandalous, a shocking, a disgraceful, an inhumane situation, you are told of it. This is both a great opportunity and a great challenge. I say opportunity because now the people are informed of the moral outrages that cry to heaven for justice, whereas for untold ages past suffering was known only to those who witnessed or experienced it. But now the suffering of one man can become known to almost the entire population of the world!

But, as I say, this places a heavy responsibility on each of you, for you can no longer plead ignorance of the amount of suffering in the world. You are now morally obligated first of all to feel that sense of indignation which is the mark of the civilized person in the presence of cruel suffering, and second, to act on the basis of that indignation.

STEVE: So then during the Crimean War the British people learned of the manner in which their sick and wounded were treated.

NIGHTINGALE: Precisely. The dispatches of one London Times correspondent in particular—William Howard Russell—were especially helpful during the war. He pointed out the disgraceful treatment of British soldiers and observed that the French were our superiors in that they had the

help of the Catholic Sisters of Charity, who accompanied their troops in great numbers and who were superb nurses. When the British learned this, they asked, “Why have we no Sisters of Charity?”

It then became known that there were a great many tenderhearted young Englishwomen who

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would happily travel to distant battlefields to nurse the sick and war-torn.

STEVE: What were the conditions you found in the Scutari hospital?

NIGHTINGALE: Hospital? The building didn’t deserve the name. It was a former army barracks erected over an enormous cesspool. For forty-two nurses we were allotted four rooms, previously occupied by four officers.

In the first room we entered was the dead body of a captured Russian general. We had no furniture, no supplies, no means of cooking and no beds, just wooden platforms, but plenty of rats, plenty of vermin!

VOLTAIRE: *Mon dieu.*

NIGHTINGALE: I did find some tin basins, which we had to use for everything—washing, eating, and drinking.

VOLTAIRE: Did you have enough water?

NIGHTINGALE: One pint a day, for all purposes.

STEVE: Tell us more about the conditions you discovered.

NIGHTINGALE: We found the wounded and dying lying untended on foul-smelling straw mattresses that crawled with insects. All privies—toilets—were stopped up. Thousands of the men had diarrhea! We stood an inch deep in liquid filth, even in the operating room (where, incidentally, there was no operating table).

Anyone today who tended animals in such conditions would certainly be severely dealt with, and here we found British fighting-men—sons, brothers, fathers!

STEVE: Well, at least you must have been greeted by the military authorities with a very warm welcome.

NIGHTINGALE: *(She gives him a look.)* You forgot, Mr. Allen, that we were committing the most unpardonable of sins, introducing a new idea.

VOLTAIRE: *(He laughs.)* I’ll wager you were not welcomed at all by the military officials.

NIGHTINGALE: They were furious at my arrival.

VOLTAIRE: But of course.

NIGHTINGALE: They actually thought we had been sent to spy on them and to interfere with their time-honored system of doing things.

VOLTAIRE: Nothing will so infuriate a man as telling him that you have discovered a better method

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of doing what he has been doing very poorly for a long time.

STEVE: Miss Nightingale, this is all very admirable on your part, but —er— I've heard strange reports that you at first refused to even walk into the wards with your nurses and set to work, to even offer a glass of water to the dying men.

NIGHTINGALE: The doctors did not want us!

STEVE: But men were suffering and dying.

NIGHTINGALE: The doctors had submitted only to orders to permit us to enter the hospital premises. They were not under orders to employ our services.

VOLTAIRE: But that is insane!

NIGHTINGALE: Of course. But all too typical, wouldn't you say? My women protested against the coldness of the doctors. Some of them wanted to force their way into the wards and start taking care of the men, whether the doctors were pleased or not. But I stood firm. I would not permit a single nurse to set foot in a ward until and unless invited to do so by a doctor. It was absolutely necessary that the doctors formally request our services!

STEVE: You mean that the doctors surrender to your personal wishes?

NIGHTINGALE: No! To my plans to attend to the men properly by setting up the nursing corps on a professional basis!

STEVE: Very well. How was the matter resolved?

NIGHTINGALE: It took nothing less than a full-scale military disaster! The battle of Balaclava had been fought shortly before our arrival. The wounded began to reach Scutari in shiploads. Panic seized the hospital staff, and at that moment they knew they could no longer oppose us!

STEVE: It's still hard to believe such a story. Had any plans at all been made to receive you and your nurses? Had things been prepared for you to any degree?

NIGHTINGALE: Practically not at all. And if this was not disgraceful enough, in the cellars beneath the hospital quarters was a scene that—if it were fiction—would simply not be believed.

STEVE: What do you mean?

NIGHTINGALE: Over two hundred women—of all sorts—had simply moved into the place, without being asked. Some of them were prostitutes; all of them were filthy; a good many were alcoholics.

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Some gave birth to babies; some were dying of cholera. The place was a cross between an insane asylum and hell itself!

VOLTAIRE: And meanwhile wounded soldiers were suffering and dying?

NIGHTINGALE: I'm afraid so. This insanity went on for four days. Even more wounded from the battle of Balaclava came pouring into the barracks. The patients got mostly cold food. They were given no knives and forks. Naturally they ate like animals.

There were hardly any blankets; the men lay, as I've said, in their own filth, wearing whatever mud- and blood-spattered uniforms they had worn in the field. And this, mind you, when six hundred clean hospital gowns were on shelves waiting to be worn!

STEVE: Why weren't they issued?

NIGHTINGALE: I have told you, sir. Stupidity was in command. Custom! Tradition was being observed. That it was failing was quite clear, but oh, dear God, will those now hearing our words realize—pray God that they will—that this is not an isolated horror story, a single instance important only because of its ugliness. It is all too typical. Indeed I should not be relating the details of it now were it not that I hope the moral of such stories will strike home to modern man.

LUTHER: And this was all that the mighty British Empire—at the height of its glory—could offer the brave men who had fought for it?

NIGHTINGALE: I'm afraid so. By November 14 we had in that terrible place four miles of beds, and not eighteen inches apart.

STEVE: Well, once you had, so to speak, won your battle with the doctors, Miss Nightingale, once you and your nurses were permitted to tend to the sick, to clean up the filth, to bring order out of chaos, I suppose things must finally have gone much more smoothly.

NIGHTINGALE: I wish it had been so, sir. We were constantly troubled by the stupidity of custom. To give but one example: our nurses had been making beef tea on portable stoves for poor men suffering from fever, anxious to have a drink of anything at all. Suddenly the deputy inspector general of medical services issued an order forbidding any cooking in the wards.

It was then possible to hear poor men—terribly sick and dying—pleading, saying, "Give me a drink

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for the love of God," but to have none to give because of blind adherence to so-called military discipline.

It is small wonder that between fifty and seventy men a day were being buried and that a hundred died during Christmas week! It was not necessary.

LUTHER: Well, I would imagine that in time, Miss Nightingale, the men responsible for these disgraceful conditions must have conceded their error.

NIGHTINGALE: Hah! experience, sir, is that there is precious little concession of error in this World. even when it is most called for. A Dr. John Hall was head of British Army medical services in the area at the time. He made one visit to Scutari in October 1854, after which he reported — if you can believe I t— that “the whole hospital establishment here is on a very creditable footing and nothing is lacking.”

VOLTAIRE: Was Dr. Hall as much of an ass as your description makes him sound?

NIGHTINGALE: He was worse, sir. A fossil of pure red sandstone!

If you can believe it, one of the few blessings available to the poor tortured, wounded soldiers in that day was chloroform, which was just then coming into general use. Dr. Hall, however, discouraged the use of this heaven-sent drug! He actually said that the smart use of the knife is a powerful stimulant, and it is much better to hear a man bawl lustily than to see him sink silently into the grave.

VOLTAIRE: Good God. You don't mean to say such a depraved order was actually obeyed!

NIGHTINGALE: No. Fortunately Dr. Hall's officers simply ignored him, on this point, and chloroform was frequently used.

VOLTAIRE: Well, was there no superior over Dr. Hall who could see what an imbecile he was?

NIGHTINGALE: You forget, sir, that privilege protects privilege, and custom entrenches custom.

Lord Stratford de Redcliffe could have helped, but in over two years he paid but one short visit to the hospital at Scutari, taking care to travel with twenty-five servants and many personal comforts and luxuries.

After this so-called tour of inspection he then announced that inasmuch as the hospitals had all

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they needed, the money raised for them by the London Times should be devoted to building an Anglican church in Constantinople!

STEVE: You know, Miss Nightingale, I recently had occasion to spend two and a half weeks touring Ireland and studying its history. It suddenly occurs to me that the fact that at least certain aspects of British administration in the middle of the last century were characterized by such ineptitude

makes it possible to better understand the incredible tragedies that Ireland was suffering about this same time.

NIGHTINGALE: Yes, Mr. Allen, I quite see what you mean. *(She smiles.)*

STEVE: What amuses you?

NIGHTINGALE: You know, it is amusing that we can sit here now and casually make comments about the stupidity of at least some British administrators a century ago, but if we had done so at the time, we would have been called unpatriotic, wouldn't we? And let that be a lesson to all of us.

STEVE: Well, at least, Miss Nightingale, it's an inspiration to all the world that in this time of trouble you kept your courage and hopes high.

NIGHTINGALE: *(She laughs heartily.)* Oh, sir, I did nothing of the kind. I tell you I was constantly weary, constantly exhausted. Never had I felt so much alone.

It was true that I had Sidney Herbert back in London doing what he could to help, but I daily felt discouraged, felt actually like quitting. But—no— I couldn't. I couldn't see any way to quit. So I simply kept at my job, with the older women helping, and somehow we muddled through.

STEVE: Well, it is, nevertheless, a tribute to your great inner strength that you were able to persist. But if the tide ever was turned, how did it happen?

NIGHTINGALE: It was indeed turned, sir, and for that we are indebted chiefly to the fact that a sanitary commission was appointed to investigate the deplorable conditions in the Crimean hospitals. One of its members, Dr. Sutherland, became my adviser, doctor, and dear supportive friend until his death thirty-six years later.

STEVE: Well, Miss Nightingale, at least it's gratifying to know that the many British soldiers whose lives you saved, or made more comfortable, idolized you and that before very long the adoring

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British public would liken you to Joan of Arc. That must have been very gratifying.

NIGHTINGALE: You forget, sir, that Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. There wasn't an important official at the time who would not have burned me like Joan if he could have. But the war office could not turn me out simply because, as you say, the people were with me.

The real grievance of these dunderheads was that, although we were subordinate to the medical chiefs, we were superior to them in influence and in the chance of being heard at home.

LUTHER: I suppose you must have considered your moments by the bedside of the wounded and dying men as the most important of your wartime career?

NIGHTINGALE: No, Dr. Luther. Even more important were the duties I performed at night when the men were asleep. The late hours, you see, were those during which I wrote my reports and

letters. Herbert had asked me to send him a confidential report on the conditions in the hospital at Scutari. I was able to do considerably more than that. I sent him a series of completely detailed plans for reorganizing military hospitals.

STEVE: Miss Nightingale, to the extent that you might be able to put a finger on it, is there any one thing that you might call your primary motivation? What was it that drove you to such remarkable accomplishments?

NIGHTINGALE: Anger!

STEVE: Anger?

NIGHTINGALE: Yes. Oh, I don't mean the destructive kind that causes us to attack others. No, my anger resulted from the needless and pitiful sufferings of men, women, and children all over the world.

There's a great amount of suffering and tragedy in life which is inevitable. We suffer from diseases, from accidents, from natural disasters. This terrible amount of tragedy is more than sufficient so that man ought not to add to it. We ought never to hurt another human being, but rather we ought to go to those who are already hurt and help them, to diminish their pain somehow.

I was infuriated by what I saw in Scutari. I swore, on the graves of those dear men—my children . . . Yes! . . . the only children I ever had— I stood at the altar of murdered men and swore that the

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stupidity responsible for their deaths would be opposed as long as I lived!

STEVE: Thank you, Miss Nightingale. But now I know all of you are eager to meet our next guest.

VOLTAIRE: Indeed!

STEVE: As regards Plato, it's probably correct to say that, whatever the opinions of our viewers in the English-speaking world might be, all the other historic personages who have appeared on this series of programs —obviously extremely important people in their own right—all of them would probably consider him the single most important member of their large company.

Voltaire has reminded us that Plato has been called the father of European philosophy. But it's odd, therefore, that Plato for the most part, did not write philosophical essays but rather dialogues, scripts of dramatic conversations, something like little plays although their action was largely intellectual.

He must have been a witty man because his famous *Protagoras* begins with a comic situation, and his *Symposium* is placed at a carefree party replete with gaiety, drinking, and the fun of clever conversation.

Here is . . . Plato.

PLATO: *(He enters and seats himself nodding to the others.)*

STEVE: Good evening, sir. We are honored by your presence.

VOLTAIRE: Indeed we are, Plato!

PLATO: The pleasure is mine. *(He looks about the room.)* Incredible! To actually experience the freedom of being able to move forward through time.

You, Miss Nightingale, have only had to travel less than a century to get here. Voltaire, two centuries. Luther, over four. But I have made a journey, in time, of twenty-three hundred years! Everything I see is so—so—remarkable.

STEVE: Everything?

PLATO: Yes. These strange devices about us. Your artificial light. The fact that we can be seen and heard at this moment in many parts of the world. Your attire. Astounding!

VOLTAIRE: Ah, the fresh eye of the poet.

PLATO: Well, you know, Voltaire, that is interesting. I actually started my career—such as it was—as a poet rather than as a philosopher.

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LUTHER: Really? But I have never read your verses.

PLATO: You didn't miss much, Dr. Luther. I thought they were quite poor so I destroyed them all.

NIGHTINGALE: What a pity.

PLATO: *(Smiling.)* I think you would not say so if you had read them, Miss Nightingale.

STEVE: You were born in 427 B.C., were you, sir?

PLATO: Yes, and died eighty years later.

STEVE: How did you happen to move toward philosophy?

PLATO: It was my great good fortune, at the age of eighteen to become one of the pupils of my dear master Socrates. A wonderful, warm fellow he was. Gracious, creative. I was profoundly shocked by his trial and execution.

STEVE: What had been the charge against him?

PLATO: That of corrupting youth and denying the gods. As one of his students I was perfectly aware that I had not been corrupted but was in fact enlightened by this great man.

LUTHER: Yes, my friend Erasmus was a great admirer of your teacher. After reading a translation of your works about him, Erasmus said that he thought he would be forgiven for actually saying “Saint Socrates, pray for us!”

PLATO: (*He laughs.*) In any event, some of my earliest philosophical writings were begun out of a sense of dedication to Socrates. I wished to preserve his memory and to honor him.

STEVE: You know, sir, it occurs to me that interviewing a philosopher about his work is a far more troublesome task than interviewing an author, a painter, a musician, a scientist, or an inventor.

PLATO: (*He smiles.*) Because we philosophers are so unapproachable?

STEVE: No, not at all. The difficulty lies in what philosophy is. It is not a material work of art or a marvelous machine. Its importance does not lie in a specific combination of words, as with a poem or novel— You philosophers deal chiefly in ideas and the thing is . . . we cannot hold an idea in our hands.

PLATO: You are right, of course, but you are using the word *idea* in a way quite different from my own use of it.

VOLTAIRE: I have the impression, Mr. Allen, that it is always somewhat easier to understand what a speaker says if the speaker himself is more clearly known to us. Your viewers might therefore be

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interested in knowing a bit more about Plato himself, to know, for example, that his father was of royal descent and that his mother could trace her family back to the great Solon, the lawgiver. Our distinguished guest must take great pride in his family history.

STEVE: Can a man take pride in something for which he is in no way personally responsible?

PLATO: (*He laughs.*) Socrates would have enjoyed that one.

STEVE: Well (*he shrugs*), it was only a question.

PLATO: Ah, but Socrates taught us that one of the most important of all human activities is the asking of proper questions. Obviously one hopes to proceed from the questions to their answers, but the questions themselves, as I say, are of enormous importance.

STEVE: I see. Well—your home was Athens, was it not?

PLATO: Eventually. But before settling down there I traveled widely—to Italy, to Egypt—because I was very curious about this peculiar planet we live on. In Athens I purchased the estate of a man named Academus. His home became my school, which explains the origin of your modern word *academy*.

STEVE: I see. Well, the subject of philosophy covers such an enormous area, I hardly know where to start.

PLATO: (*He smiles*) The basic question of philosophy concerns reality, or the subject of being or is-ness itself.

VOLTAIRE: To many people, Plato, that question does not seem puzzling at all. They say that they have no difficulty in telling what exists. They would observe, for example, that this table exists. (*He raps the table.*) This drinking mug exists. This man exists. (*He points to the host.*)

And what is so difficult about perceiving such obvious truth, they ask.

PLATO: (*He smiles.*) I'm not all that sure that they do ask very often, but they certainly ought to. As for myself, it seemed to me there was more to being than the totality of all those material things that we can touch, hear, smell, taste, see.

LUTHER: But as Voltaire has suggested, Plato, there are those who say that only things exist that are evident to the senses. So what argument, what defense can you offer, for your theory that other things exist?

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PLATO: I start from the view that even the things we can perceive are more or less perfect, more or less beautiful, more or less deserving of love, etc. There therefore must necessarily exist—in our minds, some might say—a being, an entity in which Goodness, Beauty, and Perfection are full and complete. Not mingled with their contraries or opposites, as is the case with material things.

In other words, a material woman may be very beautiful, but she is never totally so. A physical man or woman may be remarkably good or strong, but not totally so. So I proceeded to argue that there must exist a being which is the standard—the ground, you might say—of Beauty and Goodness and of every other admirable quality.

LUTHER: You mean God.

PLATO: Well, yes, Luther, but it should not be assumed that what I mean by God is what a thousand others might mean by the term.

No. Socrates, I repeat, had demonstrated that what we must look for, what we must somehow capture and define, regardless of the difficulty, are the essences of those things which the mind and senses apprehend.

VOLTAIRE: He felt that these essences could be expressed in verbal definitions, in words.

PLATO: Yes! The question then is: exactly what is it that the intellect perceives when it apprehends the essence of a triangle, the essence of virtue, and so forth?

Consider the word *man*. It is easy enough to point to a particular man. I can point to Stephen, to Martin, but I do not need to do that to discuss man. I can use the word itself, and each of you knows what I mean by it.

Man, then, is the word, the mental concept, that we abstract— draw from—an endless list of individual men. In the same way Triangle is something that we abstract from an infinite number of actual physical triangles.

These ideas are what I call universals. I argue that—unlike physical objects—they are unchangeable and eternal.

STEVE: But sir, what if we go back along the time scale to a very early moment before primitive man had either observed, say, a triangle in nature or constructed one himself? Do you say that

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even at a time when no actual triangle or tiger existed—or perhaps no man--the idea of triangles and tigers nevertheless existed?

PLATO: Yes, I do.

LUTHER: I confess, Plato, that while I cannot disprove your theory, neither can I accept it. Primarily because I cannot understand it.

PLATO: *(He smiles.)* You are absolutely correct, Martin. It is indeed true that you cannot understand it. Yet.

In any event, it is these ideas that enable us to contemplate in a pure and unalloyed sense the Humanity or Triangularity or Beauty, etc. in which the different beings and material objects we men, triangles, etc.—participate.

I further argue that there exist, in a supersensible world, a theoretically infinite number of models or archetypes.

STEVE: You mean things-in-themselves—triangle-in-itself, boat-in-itself, table-in-itself. *(He taps.)*

PLATO: Precisely. It is these concepts that I termed ideas since they are the object—and this is crucial, so please pay careful attention—they are the object perceived by the intellect. Not by the senses. It is only the intellect that can touch truth. So I say that these ideas are the true reality.

LUTHER: Do you mean to say, Plato, that since the objects about us—the table, the fruit, the books—are not ideas, they are therefore not true reality?

PLATO: Yes, that is exactly what I mean to say.

LUTHER: Here now, Plato. Do you mean to deny the existence of these objects? *(He holds up an apple.)*

PLATO: *(He laughs.)* No, no, my friend. Not at all. The apple in your hand really exists, but it is a weak and deceptive image of the true reality, the reality of true apple-ness, as it were.

For, though you do indeed hold an object in your hand, a thousand observers may have a thousand different opinions about the apparent reality of that actual apple. This is certainly not true knowledge. There cannot be a thousand mutually contradictory versions of the truth.

By way of illustration, consider that man is the captive of his body, of his senses, and is—in that regard—like a prisoner chained in a cave. On the wall of that cave he sees, passing before him,

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shadows of the living beings—of the actual beings—who move behind his back in the sunlight.

All he perceives—I repeat—are the fleeting shadows, which he can never truly grasp. Shadows of the idea substance; illuminated by the bright sun of God, or the idea of the Good.

VOLTAIRE: Your famous illustration, Plato, is a charming and attractive metaphor. But it is not quite the same thing as an explanation. It is poetry, not science.

STEVE: Yes, and I confess to having another difficulty with your theory, sir. There is a sense in which I can at least understand—if not totally accept—your idea—pardon me, your suggestion—that behind every actual triangle there somehow exists an immaterial but somehow perfect Triangle.

The same would apply—if you are correct—to any material object. An elephant, a chair, a piece of jewelry.

PLATO: Yes.

STEVE: But I cannot see how the same applies to things which could not possibly exist in a material sense. I refer, of course, to concepts such as Beauty or Goodness—or, for that matter—Evil.

LUTHER: Indeed. We may accurately refer to a given woman, or waterfall, or wild animal as beautiful. But as Shakespeare taught, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Certainly man cannot hold a pound of Beauty in his hand. One cannot weigh Beauty on the scales.

STEVE: That's right. And the same, of course, goes for Goodness, Virtue, and other admirable qualities.

PLATO: You raise a very fair question, gentlemen. What we are considering here, at base, is the question of the relationship between things and the ideas of these things. I repeat: things are only likenesses, or participations, of the ideas.

VOLTAIRE: I am sorry to be blunt, sir, but again you seem to be dealing in metaphor.

LUTHER: A more troublesome problem, Plato—if you are correct that nothing exists except ideas—is how you explain, sir, what the thing—the apple, the book—what it is, which participates in the idea behind it!

PLATO: It is matter.

LUTHER: (*He frowns.*) But since you argue that the ideas are that which is, you must then regard matter as that which is not.

STEVE: As did Mary Baker Eddy.

LUTHER: Yes. Misguided woman!

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But you cannot have it both ways, sir! On the one hand, you have already conceded that matter exists, and yet the force of your former argument leads to the conclusion that it does not exist, that only the idea of it exists.

PLATO: Let us leave these difficulties at rest for the moment— unresolved, I concede—and proceed on to other questions. My theory of ideas, you see, involves an entire system of philosophy, in which I deal with the nature of the physical universe.

VOLTAIRE: (*He smiles.*) Well, we have already seen how difficult it is to arrive at a consensus about human knowledge. Let us see, Plato, whether you would only further enlighten or confuse us.

PLATO: (*He smiles.*) Very well.

Human knowledge I assert, is divided into two entirely distinct categories. The one is imagination, opinion. The other is intellectual knowledge.

Now imagination and opinion, since they are concerned with those things which, of their very nature, cannot be the object of knowledge—by which I mean things in the visible and corruptible world—imagination and opinion, I say, are greatly limited and indeed lead to much of the intellectual and scientific confusion which we know is so common.

Intellectual knowledge, on the other hand, is concerned with intelligible things! Also intellectual knowledge is subdivided into two parts: reason—whose proper object is mathematical number—and intellect.

NIGHTINGALE: What do you mean by intellect?

PLATO: By intellect, Miss Nightingale, I mean that which rises— by means of reasonable argumentation and analysis—to the intuitive contemplation of these ideas or essences I've already explained, and, ultimately, of the superessential Good, which men call God.

LUTHER: God, eh? Well, God knows what you're talking about. But, now Plato, since—according to my interpretation of what you have said—these ideas of things-in-themselves cannot be derived from the senses (since they existed, you say, even before the objects we relate them to existed, and the senses being frequent victims of illusion and error) would you therefore argue that we receive our knowledge of these ideas directly from God?

PLATO: Yes, that is what I assert. I say that the sense of these ideas must be innate in us. Part of

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us, from the first. It is a very part— of the essence—of that which we describe by the word *soul*.

In a former existence, I argue that the—

LUTHER: Wait just a moment! Are you now telling us that you, I, everyone who has ever existed—who will ever exist—has an existence prior to that of the body? Before our physical conception and birth?

PLATO: Yes, I believe there is such a prior existence.

LUTHER Nonsense, sir.

PLATO: I have a sense that in that former existence, before being combined with the body, the soul somehow beheld these pure beautiful ideas and possessed remarkably complete intuitive knowledge, which—to raise the point again—could not have been gained from the senses, since the senses themselves did not then exist.

After we are born, Luther—brought into this dark and confusing world—that original knowledge still remains within us! But far from being aided by the life of the body, illuminated by the senses, it is clouded and darkened by the frequently painful and depressing experiences of our lives. It is forced out of consciousness by the requirements of our animal existence and, therefore, abides in the soul only as a faint, tantalizing memory!

VOLTAIRE: You know, Luther, there is something almost Christian about this.

LUTHER: Humph. Sounds more Oriental to me.

PLATO: Well, I saw that a part of my task, at least, was to enable mankind gradually to revive this original purification by the conscious quest for wisdom.

NIGHTINGALE: Well, now, Plato, most religious philosophies would agree with you that man has a form of self, which we may call a soul, separate from the body.

VOLTAIRE: It is kind of you, Miss Nightingale, to come to the aid of our distinguished philosopher, but his version of the soul is different, in a very important particular, from the Christian vision, the Jewish, the Muhammadan, or any other with which I am familiar.

LUTHER: Certainly! It is the Christian view, for example, that the soul is born in the same instant as the body. It would be a very great heresy if any Christian theologian argued that the soul existed—presumably for all eternity—before the body.

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PLATO: Be that as it may, my friends, man is, I still believed, a pure spirit forcibly combined with a physical body, as it were an angel imprisoned in the flesh.

NIGHTINGALE: Imprisoned angels. Plato, do you have any theory as to why the Almighty did what would certainly seem to most of us a very peculiar thing?

Why did God force this pure, beautiful spirit—able (as you argue) to perceive Truth——why did he Force it to combine with the faulty, corruptible, sometimes ugly animal body?

PLATO: The soul is tied to the body, my dear, as a punishment for some sin!

VOLTAIRE: Oh, here now, Plato! This is utter rot! Original Sin by the back door.

PLATO: Can you prove it is, sir?

VOLTAIRE: Of course not! But neither can you prove what you assert. But, you know, it suddenly occurs to me that the authors of Genesis—whoever they were—got the idea of Original Sin and its punishment from you Greeks!

PLATO: *(He shrugs.)* Perhaps.

LUTHER: No, no!

VOLTAIRE: But how can a pure, beautiful prephysical soul—as you’ve described it—possibly have any interest in committing a sin?

PLATO: I do not know, sir. But, Dr. Luther, is it not part of the Christian philosophy that pure, bodiless beings called angels existed before man, and that these angels did, in fact, commit serious sins?

LUTHER: Yes, that is part of Christian belief, although by no means all Christians hold to that particular view.

VOLTAIRE: It also occurs to me that perhaps our ancient theologians got the idea of angels from you or the other Greek philosophers.

PLATO: Perhaps. Or—we both got it from a common source!

VOLTAIRE: *(He laughs.)* But, in any event, you are not entitled, Plato, to introduce the point here since the analogy is plainly faulty.

STEVE: Faulty? How so?

LUTHER: Because even those Christians who *(he uses his fingers)* (1) believe in angels, and (2) believe that some of the most powerful angels did sin, do not proceed to argue that as a result of

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punishment for that sin, they were compelled to become human and to live on a hell called the planet Earth! Nor do Christians believe that all angels have sinned!

VOLTAIRE: I am reminded of something I understand Thomas Paine said when he graced this table during an earlier discussion: when man goes so far as to confidently assert details of God's plan for the universe he inevitably enters the area of outrageous presumption!

STEVE: If you believe, Plato, that souls are sent to live out a human existence on this planet as a punishment, then do you also argue that God—whom Christians and others consider as all-good and all-loving—deliberately created this visible universe of ours as a purposely miserable place.

PLATO: No, no. An all-good God could not do such a criminal thing.

STEVE: Then how—

PLATO: I ascribe the creation, the organization of this visible world not to God but to a demiurge.

STEVE: A what?

PLATO: A powerful spirit totally distinguished from God and, obviously, inferior to God. That spirit is responsible for the evil and suffering we see or suffer.

VOLTAIRE: That seems to me to be begging the question, my friend. First you propose something that's rather unappetizing—that the earth is a place of punishment--and then, since, as you say, you could not possibly attribute such a thing to an all good God, you create—purely out of your own mind, if you don't mind my saying so—a second being, who, since he is not perfect, can be blamed for all sorts of nonsense, evil and pain!

May I ask you, sir, was it the all-good God or this less-good secondary spirit who created all living organisms? I should be most interested in your answer to this question, since if being a human is a fate one suffers as the result of some earlier and now certainly forgotten evil, I would be interested to know what is your hypothesis explaining the creation of the beasts of the field, birds, snakes, and other creatures.

PLATO: I argue, sir, that man was the origin of all the other organisms.

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LUTHER: What? Preposterous!

STEVE: Sir, again—if you don't mind my saying so—that goes absolutely counter to everything that modern Darwinian and even most ancient science knows.

PLATO: Over the centuries science has taught a great deal of error, my friend, as well as truth. In any event, I argued that the first humans created by the gods were of the male sex.

NIGHTINGALE: Then where did woman come from?

PLATO: Very simple, dear lady. Those men who led evil lives were then, after death, changed into women.

LUTHER: Ridiculous.

PLATO: No more ridiculous than your theory, Luther, that woman came from a rib of the male skeleton. I repeat, evil men were changed into women. Women, who, in turn, if they continued to sin, were changed into irrational brutes, perhaps eventually even into plants.

VOLTAIRE: Plants! You mean the asparagus I had for dinner this evening may have been somebody's sister?!

LUTHER: Oh, now really.

STEVE: I never thought I would find myself saying this, to any great man—particularly one kind enough to agree to appear with us in the “Meeting of Minds” series—or, for that matter, saying it to a man who is clearly one of the most brilliant in the history of human achievement, but nevertheless, sir, I must say that my respect for you, now that I meet you in the flesh and hear your ideas, is somewhat—well—diminished.

VOLTAIRE: If I may, for a change, rise to the defense of our distinguished philosopher, Mr. Allen, I would explain that even the wisest and most brilliant of the ancients were generally talking nonsense when they made so bold as to speculate about science.

NIGHTINGALE: That's right! Science—properly so-called—is really quite a modern invention.

If we consider that man has been on this planet for, let us say, ten million years—just arbitrarily—then we must realize that all of true scientific achievement has been brought about in, so to speak, the last few minutes. Of all the scientists who ever lived, most are on the earth at this very moment.

As I understand Theodore Roosevelt observed when he took part in one of your earlier discussions,

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it is possible for a ten-year-old child today to know more about science than the most learned men of earlier centuries.

VOLTAIRE: And we have seen how even the great Plato is reduced in myth, fable, and simple nonsense when he imagined that he was making statements about material science.

PLATO: (*He sighs.*) I concede the point, sir. It is now clear—as I look back across the long expanse of time stretching to the present moment—that my views about the nature of the physical universe contained a certain admixture of error.

VOLTAIRE: Well, Plato, it is gracious of you to make this concession. Perhaps we should therefore forget the area of science, where—as we can see—you had no important qualifications, and proceed to the plane of ethics, where your achievements were indeed formidable.

PLATO: Thank you, sir. Yes, like my master Socrates, I established what many, at least, believe is the basic truth of moral philosophy.

STEVE: And what is that, sir?

PLATO: That God Himself—and God alone—constitutes the proper target of man’s ethical and moral aspirations.

That, in other words, it is not simple physical pleasure, nor even heroic virtue, nor any intermediate, partial good but, I repeat, God Himself to which men should attain.

NIGHTINGALE: Well, that is certainly a high-minded sentiment, sir, but how did you argue that man could attain such a good?

PLATO: By making himself as like as possible to God.

NIGHTINGALE: And how could he do that?

PLATO: By practicing virtue, by contemplation, by avoidance of sin, by practicing the four cardinal virtues.

STEVE: And what are they?

PLATO: Prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

NIGHTINGALE: It is interesting, sir, that you’ve made no mention not only of faith or hope, but not even of charity, or love, the three primary virtues in the context of Christian theology.

PLATO: *(He nods.)* I thought that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it.

NIGHTINGALE: *(She smiles.)* I personally, Plato, have been very emotionally affected by the picture you paint in your writings of the righteous sufferer, the good man accepting the buffetings of fate

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rather than permitting himself to be guided by the lust for revenge.

PLATO: Thank you. Yes, revenge is a sorry motive. I argued that the will always follows the guidance of the understanding, and I maintained that sin was simply due to lack of knowledge.

LUTHER: That is a very kindly and compassionate theory, Plato, but I for one cannot accept it.

PLATO: Why not?

LUTHER: Because, sir, it leads logically to a denial of free will! If a man does evil purely because he is ignorant, then in certain situations it follows that he literally does not have the freedom to select the more virtuous of two alternatives.

STEVE: Ah, how I wish we could hear you discuss the question of Free Will, but we're almost out of time. If I may I'll just quickly jump to the subject of your Republic, one of the most famous works ever written. It's interesting, I think, that all philosophers have given thought to the question as to how man ought to govern himself, how men in the context of society ought to conduct their affairs.

PLATO: Well, as regards government, I argued that the part exists for the whole.

STEVE: Could you be a bit less abstract, perhaps give us a concrete example?

PLATO: Certainly. The part exists for the whole means that the individual exists for the benefit of the large community. Not that the large community exists merely for the benefit of the individual.

STEVE: Aquinas said just the opposite when he was here.

PLATO: (*Dryly.*) Really? In my ideal Republic—which would be governed not by soldiers or professional politicians but by philosophers,—the individual, who is certainly prone to error and selfishness, is entirely subordinated to the good of the mass of people, or the state. It is the state alone—

VOLTAIRE: Pardon me for interrupting you, sir, but this is a most remarkable assertion. It sounds as if you agree with Karl Marx, Stalin, or Mao Tse-tung

PLATO: On this point I certainly do. It is the state alone, I repeat, which is capable of rights, the state which has the will and the power to dispose of every possible kind of property, in the interest of the greatest good of the greatest number.

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VOLTAIRE: You mean the material possessions?

PLATO: Yes, but not only that. I refer to such possessions as women and children, even to the life and liberty of its citizens.

LUTHER: But this is absolute communism.

PLATO: You are absolutely correct!

STEVE: You know, Plato, the modern philosopher Jacques Maritain has hazarded a guess that the source of your errors—if I may so describe them—seems to have been your exaggerated devotion to mathematics.

This, Maritain argues, led you to have enormous respect for what we might call abstract, pure mathematical truth, and considerably less respect for—or even interest in—empirical reality.

In his book *An Introduction to Philosophy* Maritain says—if I may quote it (*he reads from the book*):

"But of Plato himself we may say that his false principles grew in an atmosphere too pure to allow them to yield their full fruit and poison the essence of his thoughts.

"St. Augustine was therefore able to abstract from Plato's gold-mine the ore of truth."

VOLTAIRE: Yes, Plato, I hope by our rude attacks we have not obscured the fact that you are—and will always be recognized as—one of the great philosophers of history.

STEVE: Well, gentlemen—and Miss Nightingale—I'm terribly sorry to report that we've run out of time.

I know there were a thousand and one other interesting points all of you would have wanted to bring out.

But, of course, on our next program you'll have another full hour to tell us more about your fascinating life-experiences and philosophies.

We are very indebted to you indeed for having joined us this evening. *(To camera.)* And to you for having witnessed another "Meeting of Minds." Do come back for our next get-together.

Good night.

Episode 10

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STEVE: (*He enters, descending the staircase.*) On our last program our four guests—each of whom could boast of incredible accomplishments—got into some rather heated arguments. Of all the issues they discussed, the Reformation seems to have been of the greatest personal importance, in the minds of our audience, at least.

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Let's join again Dr. Luther, along with the eminent philosopher of ancient Greece, Plato, the indomitable social reformer Florence Nightingale, and the dazzling star of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Voltaire.

(*He moves to the table.*) Good evening.

VOLTAIRE: Good evening, Mr. Allen. Dr. Luther was just telling us that he and his followers can claim partial credit not only for the Reformation, which goes without saying, but for the counter Reformation within the Catholic church itself.

STEVE: Oh? How do you mean?

LUTHER: Well, it's very simple. If we had not made an international issue of the corruption of the church, the Catholics would not have been forced to clean up their own house.

That they did so was certainly all to the good. After the weak, vain, and sometimes depraved popes, there were a number of conscientious popes in the sixteenth century. They had been elected by churchmen who realized that the Roman church could no longer afford the luxury of decadence, financial greed, and general sinfulness. They successfully eradicated moral depravity among the residents of the city of Rome; they put a stop to nepotism, bribery, and other crimes. And they were wise enough to put a stop to the former papal custom of selling church offices at the pope's disposal.

VOLTAIRE: Luther is absolutely right about this. The Italian family of the Carafas, who gave the church Pope Paul VI, in 1555, deserved part of the credit. Former popes had frequently put actual criminals and incompetents into high church office.

NIGHTINGALE: Incredible.

LUTHER: Yes. This would be the equivalent, Mr. Allen, of appointing some of your modern Mafia leaders to the office of cardinal.

VOLTAIRE: But Pope Paul—by way of contrast—put the most troublesome members of his family in jail, where they certainly belonged, and his successor Pius IV had some of them executed.

STEVE: You know, to those of us raised in the Catholic church, as I was, its—

LUTHER: And I.

VOLTAIRE: And I.

STEVE: Yes. But in the American branch we have not been as familiar as we should be with the

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footnotes of European history, so to speak, and so it comes as something of a shock to hear such things said publicly.

LUTHER: My friend, the truth shall make us free. Has not our Lord Jesus taught us this?

VOLTAIRE: He did indeed, Luther, but I assume he meant the whole truth, not just the Protestant version of it.

LUTHER: (*He joins the laughter.*) Well, you have had on your program before, the two Catholic saints, Thomas Aquinas and Thomas More, is that right?

STEVE: Yes.

LUTHER: Good. Then now we Evangelicals shall have, as you say, "equal time."

But quite seriously, it is important for everyone to grasp that when we talk about corruption in the church in my day we are not speaking about those little human weaknesses, to which, sad to say, we are all prone. No, indeed, the papacy in that day was corrupt through and through—root and branch.

STEVE: But there were many good men—and women—in the church, were there not?

LUTHER: Oh, of course. There was, in fact, a strong spirit of moral revival sweeping through the Western world. Unfortunately the Papal Curia—and the popes themselves—not only failed to encourage this admirable Christian spirit, they deliberately stifled it.

STEVE: Really?

LUTHER: Absolutely! Why, even Queen Isabella of Spain—herself a very devout woman—was perfectly aware that any solid reform of the church in Spain would have to be accomplished without the help of the papacy, in fact practically over its dead body.

The reason—come to think of it—that the Spanish nation remains loyal to the Catholic church to this day has nothing whatever to do with papal virtue. It came about largely because the Catholic kings took it upon themselves to revitalize the Spanish church, with the help of zealous leaders such as Cardinal Francisco Jimenez de Cisneros.

VOLTAIRE: But we ought not to suggest, Dr. Luther, that the Christian revival in the church in Spain was entirely virtuous. It led not only to the persecution of the Jews and Moors of Spain but

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even to the cruel treatment of those among them who had been converted to Christianity. And it led in time, did it not, to the Spanish Inquisition?

LUTHER: Of course. I'm obviously far from pleased that Spain is still Catholic. My point was merely to demonstrate that the very devout and even fanatical Catholics of Spain were perfectly aware that their reform of the church could in no way be helped by the corrupt and frequently depraved practices that were common then in Rome.

Yes, Pope Alexander VI alone would establish the point. This man—who ruled the Catholic church for thirteen years, from 1492 to 1503—carved out of the papal states a principality for his thoroughly disreputable son Cesare Borgia. This father-and-son team was willing to employ military action, vile treachery, even assassination by poison, to secure their ends!

NIGHTINGALE: Yes. The Borgia reputation was such that in some cases those accepting invitations to dine with them actually took the precaution of making out their wills before leaving home.

VOLTAIRE: Dr. Luther is, of course, quite right in his condemnation of the corruption of the papacy in the sixteenth century. But, my friend, when the princes and kings of Europe took away from Rome the power to appoint officers of the church the results were no happier.

PLATO: What do you mean?

VOLTAIRE: The men the European rulers appointed bishops and archbishops in many cases disgraced both the church and their calling. They were seldom chosen because of their piety or devotion but more often because they were personal cronies and sycophants of the generous rulers.

A good many of these bums in clerical garb, in fact, never once in their lives reported for duty at the actual places where they held high office.

STEVE: On the subject of intolerance, may I put a question to all of you?

I'm going to quickly recite, if I may, a few items from a list of political and social proposals, a

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program for reform. I'd appreciate it if you would simply comment on the general wisdom—or lack of it—of this program.

1. Each church parish should by right choose its own pastor.
2. Tithing—giving ten percent of one's income to the church—might be continued, but other arbitrary dues imposed on poor people should be removed.

3. Serfdom should be abolished, since a serf is not a great deal better than a slave.
4. The rights of hunting and fishing for food, and collecting wood in the wilderness, should be unrestricted.
5. A political community should have a standard coinage.
6. Weights and measures ought to be standardized throughout a nation.
7. People ought to be able to use public roads without paying tolls.
8. A country's judicial system should be improved.
9. If members of the nobility suffer any personal loss as a result of these changes, then they should be paid for their losses.
10. Finally, inasmuch as the church is really the property of its people, its property—real estate—should be completely secularized.

Now then ... the question is: What would all of you think of such a program?

VOLTAIRE: I don't see how anyone can fail to see the essential wisdom and fairness of it.

PLATO: It seems an eminently reasonable program; the demands seem quite modest.

NIGHTINGALE: Absolutely.

STEVE: I thought you might say as much. Well, as it happens these were the essential points of what were called the "twelve articles" of 1525, put forth by a group of poor German peasants.

LUTHER: I see what you're up to, sir!

STEVE: Pardon me, Dr. Luther. As it happens, the aristocracy of that time turned the whole program down flat and—not very surprisingly—there were immediate violent confrontations.

Since the demands seemed reasonable to the poor people of Germany, thousands of peasants began to organize and protest. The German princes—being outnumbered—panicked, submitted .

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to these demands, which now seem so modest.

LUTHER: Yes, yes! A peasants' parliament was convened in the town of Heilbronn in an attempt to formalize the new form of the empire. But one branch of the peasant movement, which became known as the Anabaptist, was making more radical demands, some of them communistic!

VOLTAIRE: At the time this group alarmed many people and aroused opposition. The upper classes at last having pulled themselves together militarily, the poor peasants were, in just a few months, brutally defeated.

LUTHER: Wait a minute! All right, all right! You are going to share with the world the deep dark secret that I rejected the peasants' "twelve articles," eh?

I still say the peasants were wrong! Consider, for example, their ridiculous claim that tithe payments should be used in the first place to pay the local minister, and second to support the very poor of the parish. That article was mere plunder and highway robbery, I tell you!

What the peasants really wanted was to seize the tithes for themselves. But that money was not rightfully theirs; it belonged to their masters. If they wished to give and do good for the poorest among them, fine. But they should be so generous only with their own goods!

VOLTAIRE: But whose goods do you suppose it was, Dr. Luther, that provided part of the tithe payments in the first place?

And were you not aware that the tithe payments were often oppressive, that they sometimes equaled as much as a third of the peasants' harvest? That they were never, under any circumstances, employed for the benefit of the community, but only for the selfish service of the nobles living in their fine castles on the hilltops?

LUTHER: Listen, Voltaire! I argued at the time that the peasants should be strangled, like the mad dogs they were!

STEVE: Strangled!? Sir, if any clergyman—Protestant or Catholic—were to take such a warlike position today, people would be shocked.

LUTHER: (*Sarcastically.*) Really? I'm surprised that you moderns retain the capacity to be shocked, by anything!

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STEVE: Well, with the exception of the Anabaptists, Dr. Luther, I imagine you must have great respect for the other heroes of the Reformation.

LUTHER: It would be misleading to agree. In regard to the other so-called reformers, I judged them as heretical as I would have when I was still a Catholic priest.

Ulrich Zwingli, the reformer from Zurich, Switzerland, and I met for a discussion at Marburg Castle, but we could not see eye to eye on various important points. Zwingli and his Swiss followers requested that I consider them as brethren in the faith. I told them I could not at all agree to this. I was exceedingly surprised that they should regard me as brother if they seriously believed their own doctrines.

STEVE: What was your chief point of disagreement with the Swiss Protestants?

LUTHER: It concerned the question as to whether Christ is truly present in the communion service.

They believed this is true only in a spiritual sense. Zwingli pleaded—with tears in his eyes—at Margrave, for me to accept him, saying: "There are no people on earth with whom I would rather be in harmony than the Wittenbergers." But I told his followers that they had a different spirit from ours!

STEVE: You know, Dr. Luther, you're such an interesting man that we'd like to keep you here for hours to learn more about you, but of course we don't have that luxury. So, if I may, I'd like to put a number of questions to you quickly, to find out what your views were on various subjects.

LUTHER: Very well.

STEVE: As a Catholic monk you had taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Did you feel any guilt when you finally not only married but married a woman who had herself been a nun?

LUTHER: No! I was forty-two at the time, and although I grew to love my dear Catherine very much, it would not be correct to say that ours was initially a relationship of passion.

You see, I had urged that a number of nuns leave their convent, and after they did, I thought the least I could do was find them husbands. *(He chuckles.)* I got them all married off but one, Catherina von Bora. She would have preferred to marry a young fellow her own age—who was only twenty-six—but he had other ideas and finally ... well, I thought perhaps I should marry her myself.

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I agreed with St. Paul that it is better to marry than to burn.

STEVE: Well, since I understand you had six children you must have had a very open and healthy attitude toward sex and marriage.

LUTHER: *(He frowns.)* I'm not sure what you mean, sir. I believed that copulation was sinful, even in marriage.

PLATO: Sinful? Well, then did you hold up the idea of virginity as an ideal?

LUTHER: Not at all. Virginity is a violation of the divine instruction to increase and multiply.

STEVE: *(Puzzled.)* Well then, as regards either alternative, you—

LUTHER: *(He sighs deeply.)* As for sex, it always seemed to me that the Almighty might have worked out a better arrangement.

VOLTAIRE: *(He laughs.)*

LUTHER: *(He remains good-natured.)* If God had consulted me in the matter, I should have advised him to continue the generation of the species by fashioning human beings out of clay, as Adam was made.

VOLTAIRE: Oh, he was not!

NIGHTINGALE: We mentioned that your wife had once been a nun. Was she an educated woman?

LUTHER: Educated? God forbid! I could not abide women who talked too much or tried to impress others with their intelligence.

NIGHTINGALE: *(She smiles.)*

LUTHER: I say, take women away from their duties as housewives, and they are good for nothing!

NIGHTINGALE: You mean you believe that a woman's duty is to be the servant of her husband, to keep the house, to bear children?

LUTHER: Absolutely! And if women get tired and finally die of bearing children, there's no harm in that either. Let them die, as long as they bear!

VOLTAIRE: Oh, now really!

LUTHER: After all, they were made for that, weren't they? Would you argue with God?

VOLTAIRE: I'd be delighted to, if such a thing were possible. And so would you.

LUTHER: In any event, women were made with larger backsides so that they should stay at home

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and sit on them.

STEVE: Well, apparently, Dr. Luther, you had no inordinate interest in sex. Was this the case as regards eating and—

LUTHER: No, no, no. I ate too much, and I drank too much. Although I was no drunkard, make no mistake about that!

But our loving God wills that we eat, drink, and be merry. If he created pikefish and Rhine wine, we may enjoy them. I sought and accepted joy, wherever I could find it. I told my followers it was perfectly all right for them to feast richly, and to dance on Sunday if they liked!

I saw nothing wrong with playing a good game of chess, a good game of cards. I don't understand these narrow-minded Baptists and Calvinists at all!

STEVE: I imagine then you must have been an optimist about the average man's chances for spiritual salvation.

LUTHER: *(He frowns.)* You imagine incorrectly, sir. I believed that nine out of every ten souls were destined for everlasting fire and damnation!

VOLTAIRE: *(To Steve, throwing up his hands.)* Your witness!

PLATO: Really, Luther, what do you mean "destined"?

LUTHER: I mean, Plato, that God—knowing all things, including the future—was perfectly aware, when he brought the millions of living souls into the world—that almost all of them were divinely predestined to burn in hell!

PLATO: This is the worst sort of rot I've ever heard!

STEVE: Well, let's find how many in the assemblage agree with you, Dr. Luther.

PLATO: Good idea! You moderns here in this room. I know little of you but would like to know whether you agree with Luther in this regard. Do you think that nine out of every ten innocent children born will one day be destined to suffer for all eternity the excruciating pains of actual fire?

AUDIENCE: *(They express their views.)*

VOLTAIRE: You see, Luther? Your views find small favor in the modern world.

LUTHER: I am not surprised. The modern world itself seems to be going straight to hell!

NIGHTINGALE: I doubt if even people who call themselves Lutherans would agree with you about all this, Luther. Or about a good many other things, for that matter.

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VOLTAIRE: Yes. Do any of you who are Lutherans—or Christians of any kind—today believe in actual goblins, witches?

Do you believe that medical cures can be brought about by the application of live toads?

Do you believe there are actually evil spirits who impregnate innocent girls?

Well, Luther did, and if any of you do, I say you're as mad as Luther!

LUTHER: Do not provoke me, sir!

STEVE: Gentlemen, forgive me for interrupting, but a violent argument would hardly be edifying to our millions of viewers. Speaking of violent arguments, Dr. Luther, many people who read your criticisms of the Catholic church—of certain Catholic practices and beliefs in your time, I should say—are shocked now by the heat, the fervor of your arguments.

LUTHER: Oh, are they? Well, that is their problem, not mine!

Many in my own day thought I was too fierce in speaking out against popery. They were mistaken! I was too mild! I wish I could have breathed out lightning against pope and popedom, and that every bodily wind had been a thunderbolt!

I wished to curse and scold the scoundrels until I entered my grave! They would get no civil words from me, for I was unable even to pray without cursing them at the same time. If I was prompted to say, "Hallowed be Thy name," I was forced to add, "cursed, damned, outraged be the name of papists."

If I was prompted to say, "Thy kingdom come," I had to add, "cursed, damned, destroyed must be the papacy!" Indeed. I prayed thus out loud, every day, and in my heart as well. *Hier stehe ich. Ich dann nicht anders. Gott helfe mir! Amen.*

STEVE: You seem to have never worked better than when you were inspired by anger!

LUTHER: Precisely! When I was angry, I could write, pray, and preach very well, for then my whole temperament was quickened and my understanding sharpened.

Do you think you can intimidate me now with your paltry criticisms? When I was subjected to tornadoes, hurricanes of abuse in my own day? My enemies studied my every word the better to trap me and criticize me. Well, it did them no good. Words are unequal to express the contempt I had for them!

Like animals, they pored over everything I did. If I broke wind in Wittenberg they smelled it in

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Rome!

STEVE: *(He is shocked.)* Sir, if you'll forgive me, we are not accustomed to such language on television. Or in polite society of any kind.

LUTHER: No? Then get accustomed to it. The truth is not always pleasant!

PLATO: Your truth certainly isn't!

STEVE: Well, as long as you're speaking this frankly, Dr. Luther—

LUTHER: I always speak frankly.

STEVE: Evidently. Well, then perhaps you will frankly tell us if it is true, as historical reports make out, that you thought it was perfectly proper to put heretics to death!

LUTHER: *(He pauses, amazed at the man's stupidity.)* Of course it was proper to put heretics to death! All Christian churches in my day agreed on this! *(He begins to leaf through a Bible on the table.)* Does not the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy say, "neither shalt thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou conceal him, even though it be thy brother, or thy son, or the wife of thy bosom ... but thou shalt surely kill him. Thy hand shall be the first upon him, to put him to death!"

You, sir, are you an atheist, or an infidel, or a Jew?

STEVE: No, as it happens I cannot make any of those claims to philosophical distinction. I am a Christian, of sorts, but no doubt some of my own religious views, although I shall not trouble you with them, would be regarded by you as heresy.

So the logic of your position must force you to conclude that I personally should be put to death. Would you agree?

LUTHER: If you preach your heresies publicly, yes!

STEVE: As I occasionally do.

LUTHER: Then I would not only agree, I would insist!

NIGHTINGALE: Dr. Luther, in regard to this matter, at least, you reflect no credit on Christianity.

LUTHER: (*He gives her a quick glance but ignores her.*) I should not lay a hand on you myself, sir, but if proper authority sentence you to be destroyed I should support that authority!

VOLTAIRE: Lest we think Dr. Luther unusually uncivilized in this regard, Miss Nightingale, we should remember, as Luther says, that his attitudes were all too common during his period of Christian history and, alas, in other centuries as well. Both the reformers and their enemies in the established church were quite prepared to resort to the axe, the dungeon, or the fires of the stake

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when religious debate seemed to have reached its limits.

STEVE: But what about the ideal of freedom?

VOLTAIRE: To the churches, sir, freedom was a singularly dirty word. In those days men cared only about their own freedom.

STEVE: On that subject, by the way, is it true that you once said that even though you disagreed with what someone said you nevertheless defended his right to say it?

VOLTAIRE: No. I probably said it more gracefully, but the view itself is the very essence of the practice of freedom.

STEVE: Well, let's see how freedom—and the other important political ideals—fared in ancient Greece.

Plato, you and Socrates, among others, were very critical of the Sophists of your time. The word sophist survives to the present day, as does the word sophisticated, and it has a negative connotation. To call a man a sophist is certainly to insult him. Can you explain to us, please, just why the Sophists were so terrible, if indeed they were.

PLATO: (*He smiles.*) I like that "if indeed they were." There is some hope for you, sir.

STEVE: Thank you.

PLATO: I am not sure that men should be thanked for speaking the truth, since it is certainly their obligation to do so. But the Sophists will always deserve vigorous criticism—as long as men respect rational thought—because they gave philosophy a bad name.

LUTHER: And how did they do that?

PLATO: By taking advantage of the techniques of argument—what might be called the tricks or tools of the philosophers' or debaters' trade—without having the slightest respect for the ideals of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty themselves. As far as they were concerned, the only thing worth teaching was rhetoric.

STEVE: Rhetoric.

PLATO: Yes, the art of persuading others of the actual or alleged truth of one's own views. Or views one adopts because one has been paid to do so.

STEVE: As are lawyers or advertisers.

PLATO: Quite so. Now rhetoric is a useful and effective device.

Which of us, if listening to two speakers—one fumbling, listless in his style, weak in his arguments,

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and the other vigorous, outspoken, offering a well-laid-out argument—which of us would not find the second speaker more interesting, more attractive?

But there is a great danger in this, and those of the modern age who profess to respect the ideal of Democracy should give particular heed to it.

STEVE: Oh? Why is that?

PLATO: Well, if you, as individual members of an audience, are not as well informed as the speaker, he can take advantage of you.

After all, he has had time to prepare his arguments, to add grace or wit to his remarks. Or to dazzle or confuse you with statistics. Perhaps he appeals to your prejudices, to your fears, to your hatreds, to your religious beliefs, to your patriotism.

STEVE: As did Hitler, for example.

VOLTAIRE: Yes. And it is a sad thing to face, but the fact is that almost any nonsensical or absurd proposition can be defended by argument.

PLATO: Indeed. Tyrants and dictators know this quite well. Although the ultimate decision of history may not go in their favor, nevertheless they are rarely totally wrong in their arguments. They are therefore able to sway many people, sometimes even by appealing to our virtues. Most of us feel guilt after we have been gripped by extreme anger. But the demagogue will often not try to make us more peaceable, more reasonable, by diminishing our anger. He will actually seek to arouse it. He will make out the case that our anger is justified.

But to return to the Sophists, they argued that beauty, for example, was in the eye of the beholder and therefore nothing certain could be said of it.

NIGHTINGALE: But did not the great master Shakespeare make exactly the same point?

PLATO: I understand that he did. So let us consider the point for a moment. Shakespeare and the Sophists were of course entirely correct in observing that individuals will differ in their tastes. But from this obvious-enough area of freedom of choice in the appreciation of beauty the Sophists took the argument to the extreme that beauty was totally a matter of opinion and had nothing real about it whatever.

And yet who, my friends, would argue that, let us say, the most beautiful woman on Earth is really

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no more attractive than the vilest dung heap in a filthy sewer?

NIGHTINGALE: But consider the old folk saying, "Handsome is as handsome does." Isn't it possible, Plato, that there could even be some rare instances—consider, for example, the case of a farmer who has an urgent need for fertilizer for his crops. Let us assume, second, that this individual farmer, for whatever reasons, has no interest at all in the opposite sex. Perhaps he is a homosexual. Now, if a beautiful young woman were to walk past the sewer, isn't it possible that our farmer might actually consider the dung-heap of greater interest than—

PLATO: I see what you're getting at, madam. And it would be folly to deny that, in certain rare combinations of circumstances, peculiar choices may be made, although I would consider it highly unlikely that the case you sketch has ever actually occurred.

But in all known human cultures we do find an ideal of beauty. We do find the common opinion that a healthy, growing flower, for example, is considered more beautiful than one that has withered, sickened, and died. In all cultures a young, firm, well-constructed human body—male or female—is considered more beautiful than one that is old or ill or deformed. In all cultures men are impressed by the beauty of a clear blue sky, or they agree that a sky touched by the golden rays of a sunset is more beautiful than one that is overcast and dull.

I argue that this is by no means merely a matter of social conditioning, of having been taught that a sky colored blue, pink, and amber is more visually appealing than one that seems all black or gray. There is some innate sense in us—I insist—that makes us recognize certain sensory evidence as beautiful.

So much for the Sophists' error as regards Beauty. They were equally unwise, as I've said, concerning Truth, Goodness, Justice, and the other virtues. They created nothing so much as doubt and lack of respect for the traditional verities. Among the more intelligent men of our time—and in ages since—the Sophists undermined confidence in all intellectual order, and consequently opened the door to moral and intellectual anarchy.

It was our master Socrates who tried to reestablish intellectual order, who opposed the Sophists of his day.

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NIGHTINGALE: And—so little respect has wisdom been shown in some times and places—the Athenians condemned him to death as a result of his labors!

PLATO: You are quite right, my dear. The democrats of that day—who made the serious error of confusing Socrates' teachings with those of the Sophists, whom, as I say, he actually opposed—blamed poor Socrates for the religious skepticism and amorality of their day.

VOLTAIRE: Speaking of religion, Plato—to me, the most utterly fascinating, the most crucial point about the gods of ancient Greece is that they were purely figments of the imagination.

Today there is no one alive who believes that there ever was a real Zeus, who believes that there was actually an Apollo who watched over the arts, that Athena was a patron of crafts, that a god named Poseidon actually was ruler of earthquakes and of upper-class horsemen.

It was Euripides—was it not?—who exposed the gods of Greek mythology as adulterers, cheats, liars, sometimes fools. No, it was all, without exception, nonsense and lies. Christians say it was nonsense and lies, Muhammadans say it was nonsense and lies, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, the whole modern world now acknowledges that the Greek Pantheon was inhabited by figures that represented nothing more than the fears and—

PLATO: And, in some instances, the virtuous aspirations—

VOLTAIRE: Yes, quite so. But regardless of whether the motivation was primarily fear or virtue the result is the same.

PLATO: *(He smiles.)* How fortunate we would be if man always had twenty-five hundred years of hindsight to aid him in making such sweeping assessments.

STEVE: *(He laughs.)* Well, since the subject has come up, may I put some questions to you on the subject of religion, sir?

PLATO: Certainly. It's unfortunate that I would not have the luxury of, say, a full year's time to respond to such questions, since the answers to them in turn invariably give rise to other equally important questions. But one must learn to live under limitations.

STEVE: Very well. You believed in the existence of a God, did you not?

PLATO: Oh, yes. Although it must be appreciated that if a dozen men use the word god, they may not share one definition but each may have his separate definition.

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Concerning the gods, there are three wicked philosophies abroad in the world.

LUTHER: Wicked? And what are these beliefs?

PLATO: First that the gods do not exist. Second, that the gods do indeed exist but do not care for the human race. And third, that the gods can be influenced by prayers, rituals, sacrifices, or other religious disciplines.

LUTHER: Belief in the power of prayer is, you say, a wicked philosophy? !

PLATO: Absolutely. Such prayers and ceremonies are even worse than outright atheism, for an atheist is a man who is simply unable to accept belief in a god because the arguments for God's existence seem unreasonable to him. But a believer who thinks that he personally can affect the behavior of the gods by such attempts at bribery is therefore assuming that the gods are corruptible!

STEVE: Then you do not believe in prayer at all.

PLATO: *(Sarcastically.)* Congratulations, sir. You are very quick of mind.

STEVE: *(He joins the laughter.)* I run the risk of being so insulted merely by way of clarifying the point for some of our viewers who may perhaps have moments of inattention.

PLATO: Well, not only do I disapprove of such practices, but I go so far as to say that anyone who encourages them, who teaches them as religious doctrine, should be either exiled or put to death!

LUTHER: What?!

PLATO: Yes, Luther. You see, I, too thought severe punishment was justified for those who preached dangerous nonsense.

VOLTAIRE: Fascinating! So Luther and Plato would have each other put to death! *(He laughs heartily.)*

PLATO: It is of no importance to me if a man wishes to say a prayer, light a candle, or burn incense as a way of showing his respect for the gods. But if he thinks for one minute that by doing so he is causing God to suspend the rules of nature or do him personally special favors, in my view he is very much mistaken.

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And all such practices are wrong, I argue, because they are once removed from reality. The important thing for human beings is not to kill lambs and spill their blood on altars, not to touch their heads to the floor ten times and all such nonsense. The important thing for man is to live the virtuous life!

NIGHTINGALE: Hear, hear!

PLATO: Those who are qualified should also indulge in philosophy, which is merely thinking reasonably about life, about nature, about human experience.

If you were God, sir, which would you rather see on the planet you had created, your children sending up the smoke of burnt animals to you, or behaving toward each other in a decent, rational, and civilized way?

NIGHTINGALE: You know, Plato, as a young girl I assisted in translating and editing some of your dialogues, and it was ideas such as those you've just shared with us that not only deepened my own religious thought but helped inspire my life's work.

STEVE: Speaking of that work, Miss Nightingale, on the basis of your own incredible achievements, is there any advice you might give to others?

NIGHTINGALE: Oh, dear. I suppose there's a great deal of advice one could give. But do I correctly infer that you mean advice to those who are trying to reform the establishment?

STEVE: Yes. Forgive me for not making that clear.

NIGHTINGALE: *(Smiling.)* You are forgiven.

I would suggest that it is important, first of all, to be quite sure that one is correct in one's own views. There are a great many people, I fear, who want to alter the status quo but whose own ideas have not been properly worked out. Such people, in fact, often act upon the whim of the moment or out of a passing interest in some momentarily fashionable cause. But if you are really convinced that the world badly needs a specific reform, as I was, then you must dedicate all possible energy—your whole life, perhaps—to the campaign.

You must realize, first of all, that we live in a sadly unreasonable world. One might think that when there are dreadfully serious problems that have, for a very long time, gone unsolved, the world would eagerly welcome someone whose ideas could bring about improvement.

VOLTAIRE: Ha! What often happens is that the innovator will become the victim of the most intense opposition.

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NIGHTINGALE: Oh, indeed. One might be forgiven for wondering how long society will go on making this same dreadful mistake. History already records that hundreds of individual saints, seers, prophets, philosophers, scientists, artists, have had to overcome criticism—sometimes outright hatred—simply because they proposed a new idea.

In my own case, think of how many hundreds of thousands of lives might have been saved if my ideas had been accepted when I first proposed them! But no, people who were already failing at the task of saving lives themselves still fought against my ideas.

PLATO: Yes. It is almost as if a man were drowning, while several who cannot swim stand beside the stream. Along comes one who is a perfectly good swimmer and who proposes to jump in and save the drowning person, only to find that those about him are determined that he should not go into the water and that the poor swimmer shall, in fact, drown.

VOLTAIRE: *(With a smile he addresses the audience.)* But, my friends, it is not enough to conclude, from the endless repetition of such infuriating stories, that your forefathers were stupid. They were indeed, but you will miss the all-important moral if you stop at the point of criticism of those who have lived before you.

The point is that your society today is just as stupid, just as obstructive, just as determined to preserve the status quo, as were societies of the past.

NIGHTINGALE: The way of the reformer is always hard. Look at what happened to Sir James Simpson, who introduced chloroform in my lifetime.

Now anyone who has the slightest sensitivity to pain, whether his own or that of others, must regard with horror the fact that, for untold thousands of years, men wounded by assault, by accident, or by disease simply lay like stricken animals, sometimes howling from the tortures caused by their suffering. Think, my friends, really think what a blessing it was when anesthetics were introduced into medicine.

STEVE: What happened to Sir James Simpson?

NIGHTINGALE: He was reminded, by some clergymen of the day, that he was taking godlike powers upon himself and thinking very dangerous thoughts. Eventually some ignoramus with

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clerical collars actually argued that it was wrong to administer anesthetics to women in childbirth.

STEVE: In God's name, why not?

NIGHTINGALE: Because in Genesis we are told that God had said to Eve, "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." And if a woman were under the influence of chloroform, these dunces wanted to know, how could she properly sorrow?

LUTHER: I see nothing wrong with the question.

PLATO: Incredible.

NIGHTINGALE: Yes, sir, except that it did happen. *(She smiles again.)* But, you know, Sir James was very clever. He argued that since God Himself was said to have put Adam to sleep when he

extracted the rib from which woman was made there was apparently nothing wrong in principle with administering anesthetics to men. It actually took quite some time before anesthetics could be used in childbirth.

STEVE: Miss Nightingale, your personal story would be fascinating, inspiring, had it stopped with your remarkable achievements in the fields of nursing, of hospital administration, and of reform of nothing less than the British war office itself. But you went on to do a great deal more. You had a powerful influence on the entire program of public health in what was then the British colony of India. You were responsible for reforming not only the law but the actual treatment of the poor in England. At the time of your death, in 1910, over one thousand training schools for nurses, inspired by you personally, had been opened in the United States alone!

It's small wonder that when—in 1907—you had been awarded the Order of Merit by King Edward VII—the first woman to be so honored, by the way—you were one of the most famed and beloved persons on earth. Literally—to use the overworked phrase—a legend in your own time.

And yet, for the greater part of your life—your last fifty-three years on Earth—you were an invalid, living in a wheelchair, on a couch, a bed, living, for the most part, in what seemed to many a rather strange sort of seclusion. And the strange part of this is that medical and psychological science now feels that there was really nothing organically wrong with you at all, that your illness

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was, as we say, of psychological origin, that you not only created your illness but actually made use of it to manipulate those about you. That you—

NIGHTINGALE: Just a moment, Mr. Allen. Do you understand yourself as well as you claim to understand me?

STEVE: Well, forgive me, Miss Nightingale. I certainly claim no analytical powers for myself. As I say, I am merely repeating the opinion of many medical doctors, scholars, historians, that yours is what—thanks to Sigmund Freud and his followers—now is referred to as a psychosomatic illness.

NIGHTINGALE: Are you suggesting that I was pretending to be ill?

STEVE: Oh, not at all, Miss Nightingale. A psychosomatic illness is real enough. In fact, there is a rather well known and amusing cartoon of our time in which the scene is that of a new grave in a cemetery. A number of friends of the deceased are standing about looking down, and one of them finally says, "Well, I guess it wasn't psychosomatic after all."

NIGHTINGALE: Well, there you are!

STEVE: But, you see, the cartoonist misunderstood the medical realities here. People can die from psychosomatic illnesses, although ordinarily they do not.

PLATO: How long did you live, Miss Nightingale?

NIGHTINGALE: Ninety years, sir.

PLATO: Well, that certainly suggests that your problems were not truly organic.

STEVE: Right. According to one modern author, a doctor named George Pickering, who has found you as fascinating as all of us do, your illness was created because it solved so many of your problems.

NIGHTINGALE: Problems?

STEVE: Yes! Dr. Pickering, among others, suggests that you found the company of your mother and your sister intensely annoying, and that you therefore used your illness as an excuse, a way of saying that you could not tolerate the intrusion of such visitors.

VOLTAIRE: Could it be, Miss Nightingale, that your real motive, whether you personally recognized it or not, was that you had so much work to do you literally had no time or energy for small talk, for social pretension, and that sort of thing?

NIGHTINGALE: Absolutely. The whole conception of my sister Parthe and my mother was to lie on

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their sofas and say to each other, "Darling, don't get overtired from arranging the flowers."

VOLTAIRE: Ah, but you, too, found time to lie on sofas.

NIGHTINGALE: I was not just lying, sir. I was working! And, Monsieur Voltaire, I honestly thought I was dying, on more than one occasion.

(To host.) I did crave solitude. I cared nothing at all for public notice, for what men call fame, and for the silliness of social activity, the endless serving of tea, the showing off of dresses and jewelry, and that incredible emptiness. I could not understand, after looking at the world about me, after seeing such an enormous amount of pain, suffering—I could not see how anyone at all could waste time in idle and vain pursuits.

During the Crimean War, only a century ago, the British fighting man was considered the scum of the earth, even though the Empire itself depended on his courage! Well, our nurses showed he was worth caring for, worth loving. And because of this, the British people completely changed their attitude toward the men in the trenches and on the battlefields, so that in the two World Wars they were respected and recognized as heroes!

This proves that we can change people's minds! We can make them care! Good Lord, is it not clear enough that your hospitals today still need to be improved, that orphanages need to be civilized—or emptied—that your prisons need to be made therapeutic and not punitive institutions? And—oh—your mental hospitals need the most compassionate attention. They have not changed very much from the one in which my sister Parthenope died. We really are our brothers' keepers.

LUTHER: So, Miss Nightingale, you too draw inspiration from the Scriptures.

NIGHTINGALE: (*She smiles, with tears in her eyes.*)

STEVE: You know, gentlemen, it's interesting. Miss Nightingale was never concerned with the frills of society, even as regards her death. She refused burial in Westminster Abbey, insisted on a quiet funeral, and instructed that her gravestone read—as it does—simply: F.N.—1820-1910.

Which leads to a question about Protestantism. Dr. Luther, throughout the history of

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Protestantism—as contrasted with Catholicism—there runs a certain stream of influence which some scholars have interpreted as antiartistic, which is to say a tendency to be opposed to the use of religious statuary, opposed to use of stained-glass windows, ornate and luxurious cathedrals, paintings, fine silken vestments, and that sort of thing. With some exceptions Protestantism tends more toward plainness, simplicity, and lack of ostentation.

LUTHER: Well, sir, you must understand why this came about. To say the church was corrupt in my day, and at other times as well, is merely to use an abstraction. In fact there were churchmen who became so involved with the material that they lost sight of the spiritual. In my revolution I preached that man can go directly to God and does not need the services of go-betweens, whether human or inanimate. That he can find God in his own heart and does not need—er—visual aids, as you moderns might say.

But I am pleased to note that we Protestants did not throw out the art of music, that glorious beautiful gift of God. The sister, in fact, of theology.

NIGHTINGALE: (*She sings, softly.*) "A mighty fortress is our God. His bulwark never faileth." Oh, Dr. Luther, of all your hymns, that was my favorite.

STEVE: My favorite was the lovely little Christmas song. (*He steps to a harpsichord, as Luther and Florence Nightingale sing with him.*) "Away in a manger, no crib for his head, the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head."

NIGHTINGALE: You played the lute—or the flute?

LUTHER: Yes, I was interested in the development of musical arts of my day. I did, however, think it important to simplify music so that the common people in churches could sing it, rather than just leaving it to gifted specialists with glorious voices.

I made the German hymn a basic element of the Protestant service, and I'm pleased to see that the practice continues to the present day. I would go so far as to say that my influence in this regard even had an effect on some of your popular folk music and gospel music today, as you call it.

STEVE: Fascinating point.

PLATO: But what about the other arts?

LUTHER: Frankly, I had little interest in them. As for poetry and the drama, I consider them useful

only insofar as they can instruct.

STEVE: On that point then you agree with Mao Tse-tung of China.

VOLTAIRE: Is it actually true, Luther, that when in the year 1511 you traveled through northern Italy to Rome—at the height of the glorious Italian Renaissance—you actually wrote not a word, in your daily journals, about the beauty of architecture, statuary, and painting that you must have witnessed?

LUTHER: There's no sense in beating around the bush about this. Yes, yes, yes! I was very little interested in art.

STEVE: Well, if you were not interested in the arts, could yours have been described as a scientific mind?

LUTHER: Well, I don't think I—

VOLTAIRE: (*He shakes his head.*) Not at all, sir. Luther was instinctual, visceral, not scientific in the slightest.

PLATO: Sir, it has been acknowledged the world over, for centuries, that Julius Caesar was the single most able political genius and military strategist of ancient Rome. Are the reports true that you called Caesar "a mere ape"?

LUTHER: Yes, that's just what I called him. The world has suffered much from such politicians and generals!

PLATO: And is it also true that you praised Cicero far above my pupil Aristotle as a philosopher, when scholars have believed that Aristotle's was the most creative and universal mind of ancient Greece?

LUTHER: Again I say, gentlemen, yes, yes, yes! I called Aristotle a "lazy ass," because he did not—like Cicero—place his gifts at the service of the state!

STEVE: Again you agree with Mao Tse-tung.

PLATO: But Aristotle did instruct Alexander the Great.

LUTHER: But what is the point of these impertinent questions? To demonstrate that I was less than perfect? Who will claim perfection? Anyone at this table? I know something of you people, too, you know! And if any of you would care to have a list of your inadequacies recited—

STEVE: Well, no, Dr. Luther, I'm sure that's beside the point.

LUTHER: Oh, is it?

STEVE: But you have been so remarkably influential, you see, on the development of Western history since your time, that I'm sure our other guest's questions were intended merely to draw out more information about you, so that our millions of viewers from various parts of the world might be able to know you better.

LUTHER: *(Sarcastically.)* Is that all there was behind the questions? I doubt it.

STEVE: Dr. Luther, in these discussions, one of our basic assumptions is that there is no perfection in this world. This requires that we—from time to time—discuss the imperfections of our various distinguished guests. Your opponents—and even impartial historians—have said—and we

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touched on this briefly earlier—that one of the least admirable things about you is that you urged your followers to commit murder if they thought it was the—

LUTHER: *(He angrily interrupts.)* Just a moment, sir! Let us not waste time! *(He gets himself under control.)* I did indeed urge my brethren to kill, in a pamphlet that I would still vigorously defend. It was titled *Against The Murdering, Thieving Hordes of the Peasants!*

PLATO: Incredible.

LUTHER: At first I defended the German peasants against the landowners. The German landowners of my day were as heartless as those of any time and place. I warned them that God was going to punish them by the rebellion of the oppressed, who could no longer endure their tyranny and insolence .

But after I said as much, the ignorant peasants claimed that I supported their demands. I did nothing of the sort! I simply pointed out the injustices and the cruelties that the landlords had inflicted. I warned the rebellious peasants that If they were anxious to appeal to the rights laid down in the Gospel, they ought to remember that one of those rights consisted of suffering with Christ on the cross!

STEVE: Sir, with all due respect, did you not do a great deal more than that?

May I quote from your works? You can tell me if I quote incorrectly.

"If the peasant is in open rebellion, then he is outside the law of God, for rebellion is not simply murder, but it is like a great fire, which attacks and lays waste a whole land. Thus, rebellion brings with it a land full of murders and bloodshed, makes widows and orphans, and turns

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everything upside down like a great disaster. Therefore ... let everyone who can smite, slay, and stab—secretly or openly—remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel!

LUTHER: You quote me correctly, sir.

VOLTAIRE: Yes, and so do the enemies of Christianity, Dr. Luther, who, when Christians preach peace, often tell them that their deeds are so fierce one can hardly hear their words.

Oh, incidentally in 1546, Luther, we are told that you inscribed a friend's book with a text from the gospel of St. John, quote—"If anyone obeys my teaching, he shall never know what it is to die." And yet, two days later, you yourself died.

LUTHER: We interpret the word death differently, sir.

How incredible is such a text, and yet—don't you see—it is the truth. If a man takes God's word in full earnest, and believes in it and then falls asleep, he slips away without noticing death and is safe on the other side.

NIGHTINGALE: How beautiful.

PLATO: I quite agree.

VOLTAIRE: Speaking of the four gospels, Dr. Luther—those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—which do you prefer?

LUTHER: Since I lived before you, Monsieur, you probably know perfectly well that I had a special liking for the Gospel of St. John, the one tender, true chief gospel and far, far preferable to the other three.

VOLTAIRE: But if all four were inspired by God, how can you possibly prefer one version of God's handiwork to another? For in making such a choice you are placing three-fourths of these particular words of God in an inferior position. You, a mere man, are criticizing the work of God.

LUTHER: And you, Voltaire, did exactly the same thing!

VOLTAIRE: But don't you see, learned doctor, that I am perfectly free to do so and you are not? For I do not believe for one moment that these confused and self-contradictory writings could possibly, in any sense, be the work of an all-wise, all-knowing God. So there is no dilemma at all in this matter for me. But there certainly is for you.

Father Martin your intellectual dilemma is inescapable. Once you had come to the point of

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challenging the authority of the church it was inevitable that, having to replace it with another authority, you would settle upon that of the Bible, which in your day was considered to be infallible.

But perfectly devout Christian theologians of the present age know that, despite its many virtues, the Bible is not infallible at all but, in fact, contains a certain amount of error. Would you concede as much?

LUTHER: Not for one moment, sir! If the Bible is the word of God—and I assert that it certainly is—then it cannot possibly contain error, for would it not be illogical to say that the author of Truth itself has produced a book which is partly mistaken?

VOLTAIRE: You are quite right, my friend. It would be illogical indeed. But the illogicality need not trouble us in the slightest once we realize that it depends on an acceptance of your primary assumption, which is that God was the true or primary author of the Scriptures.

I cannot accept any such premise. I would, in fact, reason as follows: first, since anyone may see for himself perfectly clearly, merely by reading the Bible, that it contains many factual errors and self-contradictions—and since, second, God Himself cannot teach error, it therefore follows that God Himself did not write the Bible.

We do know, in any event, that it was written by men, although we are by no means so certain today, as we claimed to be in past times, just who these men were.

PLATO: And you must remember, sir, that successful communication has not taken place until the last step in the process—the reception of the message—has been accurately accomplished.

VOLTAIRE: Precisely! But concerning the Scriptures we can certainly not say that they have been successfully communicated to mankind. The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of planet Earth has never heard them, nor have most of the world's inhabitants any interest in them at the present moment.

LUTHER: Damn you, Voltaire! That does not mean that such an end may not yet be in sight. I am more impressed by the fact that hundreds of millions do have profound respect for the Scriptures.

VOLTAIRE: I agree with you, Luther. The fact is impressive. I am, of course, familiar with the popularity of the Scriptures. But if Almighty God—the Author of all Truth—be personally involved

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with the process, how then do you explain the incredible diversity in interpretation of His message?

There are three main branches of Christendom itself—the Eastern Orthodox, the Roman, and the Protestant. In your Protestant division there are some three hundred separate churches! And among the original authors of the Scriptures—the Jews—there are the three main divisions: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed.

Would you seriously argue that mankind is perfectly entitled to interpret the literal word of one God in hundreds of separate and mutually contradictory ways?

LUTHER: Certainly not! But God is not responsible for the foolishness of man.

VOLTAIRE: Indeed he is not, my friend. It now remains only for you to separate for us the fools from the wise men, and then second, to get general agreement on the point among the millions you classify as fools!

LUTHER: I hope, Monsieur Voltaire, that you will look around the world and see what has been the result of your so-called critical commentary on the Scriptures. There is no mistaking it; the old faith has been weakened. The unity of Christian belief has been shattered.

VOLTAIRE: Martin, are you serious? Are you actually suggesting that you are qualified to lecture us on the subject of Christian unity? You, who more firmly ripped what you would describe as the seamless robe than has any other man!

But surely you must know that the robe was never seamless. From the very first days, in which Christ Himself walked the earth, there were divisions, arguments, and misunderstandings among his followers.

And it was not long after the death of Christ that His disciples became so heated in debate as to set upon one another and begin slaughtering each other (*he turns to the audience*), which I observe, to my sorrow, they continue to the present day.

But in any event, sir, it is by no means my fault—or the fault of any other earnest student of the Christian and Jewish Scriptures—if a combination of scholarship and intelligence points out to him glaring contradictions in the Bible, mistakes of fact, mistakes of history, instances in which the

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Bible says one thing on one page and the direct opposite on another.

Whoever points out such errors, my friend, does mankind a very great service, for we must pursue the ideal of Truth wherever it leads us, without fear, always trusting in the idea that to increase the store of human knowledge, to increase the human capacity for understanding, will—because it must—lead to a more humane, a more rational existence.

LUTHER: How dare you presume to weaken any man's faith!

VOLTAIRE: Oh, come, come! You did the same! To millions of sincere Catholics.

I concede that there is something sad when the faith of simple people is weakened by the discoveries of science or other scholarship. But the blame in such cases does not lie with scientists, scholars, or philosophers. It lies in the damnable error that was taught in the first place!

LUTHER: I see. It is to Monsieur Voltaire the world should report to find out which of its beliefs are true and which are in error. Are you presumptuous enough to set yourself upon so high a throne, my friend?

VOLTAIRE: Of course not. My philosophical arrogance was far less imposing than your own! But I—unlike you Christians—have never even remotely suggested that I personally had any monopoly on Truth or even any special gifts at unearthing it. What I do insist is that we respect Truth, that we search it out for ourselves, and not receive it blindly, without ever once questioning the wisdom or authority of those who seek to impose their views upon us.

PLATO: Very well put, sir.

VOLTAIRE: Am I correct, Luther, in assuming that you absolutely insist that belief is a gift of God, rather than something a man might achieve purely on the basis of his own personal efforts?

LUTHER: You are indeed correct, sir. Only God can open spiritually blind eyes. Only the Holy Spirit can convince us of the truth of Christ's message.

VOLTAIRE: Thank you; I am reassured. But then it inescapably follows that even if we grant—purely for purposes of discussion, you understand—that the Christian theology is valid, then I—and the hundreds of millions of others who are unable to accept your theology—are perfectly blameless in such a context.

LUTHER: What?

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VOLTAIRE: Well, we have already agreed that faith is a gift of God?

And yet we observe that God has not dispensed such a gift to the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the planet Earth. I do not see, then, on what grounds you can blame those who do not believe as you do.

LUTHER: You are quite correct, Monsieur Voltaire. You do not see. There are, nevertheless, ample grounds on which the Almighty can condemn you and the other nonbelievers. For perhaps you are at fault in—

VOLTAIRE: I wish you wouldn't use such words as perhaps, my friend, when pontificating.

LUTHER: Pontificating? Particularly inappropriate choice of term, wouldn't you agree?

VOLTAIRE: *(He laughs heartily.)* Absolutely, sir.

STEVE: A good instance of the wit for which you are so justly famed, Dr. Luther.

VOLTAIRE: Quite so. But I must emphasize that when you introduce a word such as perhaps into your theological assertions, you are thereby conceding that you are indulging in guesswork.

LUTHER: Please, sir. Our time here is so limited that I doubt it entitles us to the luxury of belaboring the obvious.

VOLTAIRE: I agree with you wholeheartedly, Luther, but must observe that what seems obvious to you may not always seem so to one who does not share your philosophy.

LUTHER: But I wish to emphasize that "perhaps" those who have not received the gift of faith have not sufficiently prepared themselves to receive it!

VOLTAIRE: I very much wish, learned doctor, that you Christians would not use the word *faith* as if you had some special patent on it. How dare you imply that the millions of Buddhists or Hindus know nothing of faith, that the followers of Confucius are incapable of faith, that the Jews of the world have no faith that followers of Muhammad are without faith? ’

The fact is, sir, that there is no shortage of faith whatever on his troubled planet!

PLATO: Yes. One might argue just the reverse, that there is far too much faith, and far too little of knowledge based on an impartial observation of the factual realities about us.

NIGHTINGALE: To speak of faith in the absence of any specific content is to speak meaninglessly.

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Faith, like any other force, may be either good or evil and will frequently be both.

VOLTAIRE: You, sir, once had a very firm faith indeed in the truth of the Roman Catholic religion, did you not?

LUTHER: But of course. And so did you.

VOLTAIRE: Most assuredly. So you and I have both lost that particular faith. But was that faith the gift of God? If you now answer no, then you have contradicted yourself, for you have earlier argued that faith in the Christian religion is a gift of God.

LUTHER: God led me from faith in one form to faith in a better form.

VOLTAIRE: If you can believe that of yourself, then why not believe that He did the same for me?

NIGHTINGALE: Dr. Luther, a good many people in the present, I understand—not only clergymen or philosophers—are seriously concerned about the wave of pornography, general sexual excess, the breakdown of the family, to name only a few of the ills that afflict the modern world. Would you care to comment?

LUTHER: What minister of the gospel would not? But, quite seriously, it is all very sad. I suspect that beneath the surface the problem may be worse than even the more pessimistic of you suppose.

STEVE: What do you mean?

LUTHER: It may be helpful, sir, to consider the present excesses in the context of the glorious vision dreamed by your nation’s Founding Fathers. They created something unprecedented in all human history, before or since their time. A free nation where the dispossessed, the downtrodden, the poverty—stricken, the dissatisfied, from all corners of the earth, could come together and live in peace, something these same peoples had never been able to do in their homelands.

Your Thomas Jefferson, for example, imagined something almost like Augustine’s City of God, a community where the importance of education was stressed, where civic morality was crucial, a

community where the tragic mistakes of Europe would not be repeated. But see what has come of Jefferson's dream in a short two hundred years.

It is in this context, as I say, that one is saddened by the present prospect in your country, where most men seem to be guided not by the question as to what is good for the community, what is

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good for the nation, what is good for the human race, but only what is pleasurable—or profitable—for themselves. (*To the audience.*) I warn you, my friends, this is pure moral anarchy, and unless it is reversed, your troubles are likely to increase, not diminish.

PLATO: Anarchy. But, Luther, is that not precisely the crime of which you were accused, in pitting your solitary opinion against that of the centuries—old power, authority, and tradition of the Roman church?

LUTHER: But, of course, Plato. Your analogy, however, is invalid.

It is true that I preached the right of the individual to speak and act as his own conscience dictates. But you are not entitled to compare my actions, which I intended to be highly moral, with the blatant immorality that characterizes life in our host's country today.

I should, in fact, like to return to that subject for a moment. I believe it is instructive—in analyzing social experiments of any kind—to see what effect these experiments have on the children of a given community.

PLATO: You are very wise in that regard, Martin! For it is during our early years that our characters are formed, our habits solidified, and, for the most part, our fates dictated.

LUTHER: True. Now if a given culture produced children healthy in spirit, mind, and body, I for one would find it very difficult to criticize that culture.

I do not wish to seem a rude or thoughtless guest, so I shall say no more to our American hosts on this subject. My conclusion or observations, in any event, will not be as important as your own. I urge you, therefore, to form your own opinions on this point. What is the fate of children in your society today? What percentage of them is being brought up in love and moral conviction? What percentage is given no moral training whatever and precious little love?

Now there are always some unfortunate children whose early experiences are so oppressive as to lead, with reasonable certainty, to tragedy in their later lives. But you Americans should ask yourselves today whether the percentage of such children is not growing dangerously large!

VOLTAIRE: On this point, my friend, you and I at last have grounds for agreement.

LUTHER: Thank God for small favors!

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PLATO: *(He joins the laughter.)* And so you see, Luther, you are among friends at last.

NIGHTINGALE: I quite agree.

STEVE: Well, I must say this is the first time one of our discussions has ended on a totally friendly note.

VOLTAIRE: We have no more time?

STEVE: I'm afraid not.

NIGHTINGALE: Oh, what a pity.

STEVE: It is indeed. We thank you all wholeheartedly for having given us a fascinating afternoon of your time.

(To audience.) And we thank you for the same.