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JOHN TOLAND'S ARGUMENT FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERATION
IN *NAZARENUS* (1718)*

INTRODUCTION

The Irish-born freethinker and republican John Toland (1670–1722) became famous, or rather notorious, with the publication of *Christianity Not Mysteriorious* in 1696. This book played a major role in the deist controversy in Enlightenment England and was even burnt by the public hangman in Dublin in 1697. In *Christianity Not Mysteriorious*, Toland denied mysteries and things “above reason” in religion, thereby reducing revelation to merely a “means of information” about matters comprehensible to natural reason. Later, in *Letters to Serena* (1704), he combined an elucidation of his pantheistic philosophy, which describes motion as inherent to matter, with a naturalistic account of positive religion, focusing particularly on the origins of religious prejudices, belief in the soul’s immortality, and idolatry. Whereas *Christianity Not Mysteriorious* and *Letters to Serena* are Toland’s best-known books, he wrote and published various other essays on natural philosophy, political history and theory, and the history of religions. In several writings on religion, such as the aforesaid *Letters to Serena*, *Hodegus* (written in 1708–9 but published in 1720 in a collection of essays titled *Tetradymus*), and

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Origines Judaicae (written in Latin and published along with *Adeisidaemon* in 1709), he provided a secular, naturalistic, historicist account of the origins of religious ceremonies, theological doctrines, and ecclesiastical institutions, with a focus on Mosaic Judaism, its roots, and its impact on the subsequent development of monotheism. The western monotheistic tradition is also the subject of another important treatise by Toland, *Nazarenus: Or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*, written in 1709–10 but published in 1718.¹ In this book, Toland described Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as the three phases or manifestations of the same monotheistic tradition, which is based on the law of nature and hence is, at its core, a moral tradition, opposing the imposition of uniformity in doctrine and worship and endorsing religious toleration.

Toland's argument for toleration in *Nazarenus* has been defined as a "historical argument."² Toland indeed referred to canonical as well as noncanonical sources to provide a heterodox account of the origins and development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which he reinterpreted as the three phases of the same religious and moral tradition and, thus, as being in agreement about the essential tenets of religion. However, I contend that Toland's argument for toleration in *Nazarenus*, although supported by his historical research on Mosaic Judaism, primitive Christianity, and early Islam, is, in essence, a *deistic* argument, in that it is grounded in Toland's humanistic attitude and in his notion of "true Christianity" or "true religion" as equivalent to natural religion. Toland's humanistic attitude informs not only his political essays, such as *Anglia Libera* (1701), *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland* (1714), and *The State-Anatomy of Great Britain* (1717), but also his writings on religion. This attitude is rooted in his deistic notion of "true religion" as consisting essentially in natural morality. Toland is widely regarded as one of the foremost deists of the Age of Enlightenment, although his deism is a form of pantheism even more radical than Spinoza's system. In *Letters to Serena*, Toland indeed blamed Spinoza for distinguishing thought from matter and for denying that motion is intrinsic

¹ John TOLAND, *Nazarenus: Or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity* (London, 1718). A second, revised edition was also published in London in 1718. When citing *Nazarenus* in this essay, I refer to the following edition: John TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, ed. Justin Champion (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999). A transcription of the preface and the first "letter" of *Nazarenus* is also in F. Stanley JONES, ed., *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity: From Toland to Baur* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 167–242.

² F. Stanley JONES, "The Genesis, Purpose, and Significance of John Toland's *Nazarenus*," in JONES, *Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity*, 96.

sic to matter.³ Accordingly, he formulated a sort of monism revolving around the concept of an intrinsically active matter.⁴ This has led some interpreters, such as Margaret Jacob, Chiara Giuntini, and Robert Evans, to present Toland's natural philosophy as a sort of pantheistic materialism, while others, such as David Berman and Gianluca Mori, have contended that Toland was actually an atheist and a materialist *tout court*.⁵ On the other hand, scholars such as Robert Sullivan, Wayne Hudson, Jeffrey Wigelsworth, and Jonathan Marko, to name a few, have described Toland as an author whose works, although heterodox and hostile to dogmatism, denote a fundamentally theological outlook, since he still employed theological conceptual categories in his writings on natural philosophy, and since he wrote in positive terms about Mosaic Judaism, primitive Christianity, early Islam, and "ancient wisdom."⁶ Hudson has also portrayed Toland and other English deists as "constellational writers," who adopted "multiple personae" depending on the issues they discussed and on the audiences they addressed.⁷ Other students of Toland, such as Stephen Daniel and Justin Champion, have called attention to the multiplicity of his philosophical, historical, and political interests, epistemological and hermeneutical methodologies, and rhetorical strategies—a multiplicity that makes it difficult to classify Toland in accordance with standard categories such as deist, pantheist, or atheist, as Champion has observed:

³ John TOLAND, *Letters to Serena* (London, 1704), 131–62.

⁴ TOLAND, 163–239.

⁵ Margaret C. JACOB, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1976), 201–50; Chiara GIUNTINI, *Panteismo e ideologia repubblicana: John Toland (1670–1722)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979); Robert R. EVANS, *Pantheisticon: The Career of John Toland* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991); David BERMAN, "Disclaimers as Offence Mechanisms in Charles Blount and John Toland," in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 255–72; Gianluca MORI, *L'ateismo dei moderni. Filosofia e negazione di Dio da Spinoza a d'Holbach* (Rome: Carocci, 2016), 147–61.

⁶ Robert E. SULLIVAN, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Wayne HUDSON, *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 79–98; Jeffrey R. WIGELSWORTH, *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology, Politics, and Newtonian Public Science* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 75–82; Jonathan S. MARKO, *Measuring the Distance between Locke and Toland: Reason, Revelation, and Rejection during the Locke-Stillingsfleet Debate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 123–73.

⁷ HUDSON, *English Deists*, 18–21. It is worth noting that the terms "English deism" and "English deists" denote not the national origin of deist authors in Enlightenment Britain, but the fact that their works were written in English. This is why Toland, although born in Ireland, is traditionally numbered among the "English deists."

He communicated simultaneously with a variety of audiences, a bespoke powerful elite and a semi-anonymous public, tuning his ideas and writings to the demands of these communities.... It is difficult to penetrate the membrane of Toland's personal identity.⁸

At any rate, and regardless of the specificities of Toland's own religious (or irreligious) convictions, his writings on religion, and particularly *Nazarenus*, emphasize the rational and moral elements of natural religion and of the original versions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which he described as based on the universal and eternal law of nature. According to Toland, the world's three major monotheistic religions, at first, did not differ from natural religion, at least in their essential tenets, before being contaminated by dogmatism, superstition, and idolatrous beliefs and practices produced by priestcraft and power politics. Toland strengthened his account of the fundamental principles of the western monotheistic tradition, which he considered to be in agreement with natural reason and morality, by appropriating the foundational texts and concepts of the three major monotheistic religions to his philosophical and political agenda. In *Nazarenus*, he described the western monotheistic tradition as rooted in natural morality and, thus, as promoting sociability and toleration of all those who respect the Noachic precepts, which he deemed consistent with the law of nature. On the other hand, he depicted religious intolerance as resulting from the distortions of "true religion" that had occurred over the centuries, particularly among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Therefore, Toland's advocacy of religious toleration in *Nazarenus* can be characterized as *deistic*, in that his argument for toleration in this book is grounded in a *deistic* view of the western monotheistic tradition and its relation to "true religion." He indeed regarded Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as rooted in natural religion, which has at its core a set of moral principles accessible to natural reason and binding all human beings, regardless of particular revelations, theological dogmas, and ecclesiastical institutions.

In order to demonstrate that Toland's argument for toleration in *Nazarenus* is deistic in nature, this essay first examines, briefly, Toland's position on natural religion and positive religion, with a focus on Judaism and Christianity, in his writings predating *Nazarenus*—especially in *Christianity Not*

⁸ Justin CHAMPION, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 8. See also Stephen H. DANIEL, *John Toland: His Methods, Manners, and Mind*, Kingston, ON–Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984.

Mysterious, Letters to Serena, Hodegus, and Origines Judaicae. In doing so, this paper highlights the main elements of Toland's reinterpretation of the origins and development of positive religion. The paper then provides an analysis of the main themes of *Nazarenus*, covering, also, its composition history and the sources Toland drew upon when working on this treatise. Finally, the essay spells out Toland's argument for religious toleration in *Nazarenus*, expounding the historical-critical strategy that supports his stance on this matter and explaining that his argument for toleration is deistic in nature, since he described "true Christianity" as demanding toleration of all believers in "true religion," which he equated to natural religion.

TOLAND ON NATURAL RELIGION AND POSITIVE RELIGION IN HIS WRITINGS PREDATING NAZARENUS

Toland shared with other English deists and freethinkers, such as Anthony Collins and Matthew Tindal, the opinion that true religion and natural reason are one and the same thing. Far from being relativists or pluralists in philosophical and religious matters, those deists and freethinkers called for a new social and political order that would promote the use of reason, rather than compliance with traditional beliefs, values, and norms:

Civil society needed a didactic institution that could educate individual reason into a perception of true rationality. Reason was enshrined, for the radicals, not simply because it endowed each individual with a potential political and ethical autonomy, but because to be rational was to have achieved the highest state of human existence.⁹

Those deists' and freethinkers' confidence in the powers of natural reason led them to advocate religious toleration and endorse freedom of conscience against intolerance and fanaticism, which they saw as resulting from the distortion of true religion into systems of belief and power:

[The English deists] believed that humankind could, and should, exercise reason in order to achieve perfect morality and knowledge of the natural laws. But this could not happen if the use of reason was limited by a system of cultural and political power that hindered the free search for truth. Thus, they advocated exten-

⁹ Justin CHAMPION, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 230.

sive religious toleration with the aim of facilitating the unrestrained development of rationality. And they substantiated their tolerationist ideas by appropriating and reinterpreting texts and concepts that were commonly considered foundational of the *de jure divino* system which they tried to debunk.¹⁰

Toland's oeuvre provides several examples of the deistic appropriation of the foundational texts and concepts of the western monotheistic tradition. In *Christianity Not Mysterious*, he described the New Testament as simply restoring the natural moral law accessible to natural reason, as he argued that "all the Doctrines and Precepts of the New Testament (if it be indeed Divine) must ... agree with *Natural Reason*, and our own ordinary Ideas."¹¹ Accordingly, he talked of revelation as merely a "means of information" about contents consistent with our "common Notions."¹² He drew on John Locke's way of ideas, as he maintained that knowledge must be based on clear and distinct ideas, and he concurred with Locke that only natural reason can determine the divine origin of a revelation. However, while Locke described faith as assent to revealed things "above reason," Toland stated that "there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above it," and that "an implicate Assent to any thing above Reason ... contradicts the Ends of Religion, the Nature of Man, and the Goodness and Wisdom of God."¹³ Accordingly, he described the "Subject of Faith" as intelligible and built upon "very strict Reasoning from Experience."¹⁴ Briefly, Toland, unlike Locke, regarded faith as a mode of knowledge and, thus, he conflated natural reason and divine revelation.¹⁵ The debate on whether *Christianity Not Mysterious* is a Lockean, anti-Trinitarian, or Spinozist book is still open. Several critics and scholars, from the Bishop of Worcester and renowned philosopher Edward Stillingfleet in the 1690s to various historians in relatively recent years, have highlighted the debt of *Christianity Not Mysterious* to Locke's epistemology

¹⁰ Diego LUCCI, "Deism, Freethinking, and Toleration in Enlightenment England," *History of European Ideas* 43 (2017): 346.

¹¹ John TOLAND, *Christianity Not Mysterious* (London, 1696), 46.

¹² TOLAND, 40–41, 31, 79, 128.

¹³ TOLAND, 77, 139.

¹⁴ TOLAND, 137.

¹⁵ See James A. T. LANCASTER, "From Matters of Faith to Matters of Fact: The Problem of Priestcraft in Early Modern England," *Intellectual History Review* 28 (2018): 156–58; Jonathan S. MARKO, *John Locke's Theology: An Ecumenical, Irenic, and Controversial Project* (New York: OUP, 2023), 250–56.

and to anti-Trinitarian theological traditions.¹⁶ Conversely, other interpreters have called attention to the Spinozist elements of Toland's reading of the Christian Scriptures in *Christianity Not Mysterious*, since this book denies any special hermeneutical status to the Bible, thereby providing a naturalistic treatment of religious ceremonies, a demystifying analysis of miracles, and an attack on the political use of mysteries.¹⁷ At any rate, in *Christianity Not Mysterious* and his other writings on religion, Toland employed, combined, and modified different hermeneutical methodologies to debunk scriptural revelation and, thus, to present the biblical texts as historically significant accounts of the origins of the Judeo-Christian tradition and, at the same time, as reaffirming natural philosophical, moral, and political principles.

Toland further refined his historicist hermeneutical approach to the biblical texts in his analysis of the history of the ancient Hebrews in *Letters to Serena, Hodegus, and Origines Judaicae*.¹⁸ Denying the cultural primacy of Jews among ancient peoples, Toland wrote in *Letters to Serena* that it is "manifest from the Pentateuch and the Series of other History, that many Nations had their several Religions and Governments long before the Law was deliver'd to the Israelites."¹⁹ Referring to the Old Testament as merely a historical record, he argued that Judaism derived from Egyptian culture, which in turn originated from a sort of "ancient wisdom" later corrupted by superstition and idolatry.²⁰ A few years later, in *Hodegus*, he followed Spino-

¹⁶ Edward STILLINGFLEET, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1697), 230–92; SULLIVAN, *John Toland*; MARKO, *Measuring the Distance*, 123–73; MARKO, *John Locke's Theology*, 250–56.

¹⁷ Ian LEASK, "The Undivulged Event in Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*," in *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650–1800*, ed. Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, and Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 63–80. See also Rosalie L. COLIE, "Spinoza and the Early English Deists," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 23–46; Jonathan I. ISRAEL, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 609–14.

¹⁸ On Toland and other deists' views on Judaism, see Max WEINER, "John Toland and Judaism," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 16 (1941): 215–42; Shmuel ETTINGER, "Jews and Judaism in the Eyes of the English Deists of the Eighteenth Century" [in Hebrew], *Zion* 29 (1964): 182–207; Diego LUCCI, "John Toland e la cultura ebraica," *Atti dell'Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche* 112 (2001): 157–72; Adam SUTCLIFFE, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 197–206; Diego LUCCI, "Judaism and the Jews in the British Deists' Attacks on Revealed Religion," *Hebraic Political Studies* 3 (2008): 177–214; Diego LUCCI, "The Law of Nature, Mosaic Judaism, and Primitive Christianity in John Locke and the English Deists," *Entangled Religions: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Religious Contact and Transfer* 8 (2019), <https://er.ceres.rub.de/index.php/ER/article/view/8354>.

¹⁹ TOLAND, *Letters to Serena*, 20.

²⁰ TOLAND, 33.

za in arguing that belief in the alleged miracles narrated in the Old Testament originated in misinterpretations of the biblical accounts of natural events, because the authors of the Scriptures frequently omitted details crucial to understand the biblical texts correctly in modern times, but superfluous in antiquity.²¹ Thus, as Adam Sutcliffe has observed, Toland tried to “deprivilege the Jewish past, by providing a purely secular, historicist reading of the Old Testament.”²² On the other hand, he appropriated Mosaic Judaism to his philosophical and political agenda, in that he conceived of Moses as a pantheist and a republican lawgiver. He thus provided an account of Judaism that served his own purposes:

Although Toland sets out ... to secularise Jewish history, Judaism persistently eludes a fixed rational analysis, and remains in his texts powerfully charged with mythic significance. While he demystifies Judaism in order to undermine the historical authority of Christianity, he simultaneously remystifies it in new terms, as an originary source of natural religion and as a model of utopian politics.²³

In *Origines Judaicae*, Toland rejected the view of Moses as the *vir archetypus*, or, in other words, as the model of various mythical heroes and pagan deities, thereby refuting the theory that Judaism was the source of all other religions—a theory maintained, in particular, by the French Catholic churchman Pierre-Daniel Huet in *Demonstratio Evangelica* (1679).²⁴ Toland described Moses as an Egyptian priest and governor who opposed polytheism, believed in the unique God (consisting of the eternal and infinite universe), and never talked of the afterlife. According to Toland, Moses left Egypt to establish a republican government, in which the spheres of religion and politics were separate and religious toleration was practiced. However, when Moses’ successors took over religious power, they became first superstitious and then tyrannical.²⁵ The hypothesis of an Egyptian origin of Jewish culture was widespread in early Enlightenment England, having been championed by historians and Hebraists such as John Marsham and John Spencer.²⁶ But Toland went far beyond those scholars’ speculations about the

²¹ John TOLAND, *Tetradyms* (London, 1720), 1–60.

²² SUTCLIFFE, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 198.

²³ SUTCLIFFE, 204.

²⁴ John TOLAND, *Adeisidaemon [...] annexae sunt [...] Origines Judaicae* (The Hague: Johnson, 1709), 99–199.

²⁵ TOLAND, 148–57.

²⁶ John MARSHAM, *Chronicus Canon Aegyptiacus, Ebraicus, Graecus, et disquisitiones* (London, 1672); John SPENCER, *De Legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus, et earum rationibus* (Cambridge,

Egyptian roots of Judaism, since he portrayed Moses as a pantheist whose worldview largely aligned with his own monistic philosophy. Moreover, concerning the “Hebrew Republic,” Toland drew on the works of seventeenth-century English republicans he knew well, such as John Selden, John Milton, and James Harrington, who argued that the state established by God through Moses was a republic. Based on this biblical exemplar, those republican authors concluded that republics are the only legitimate political regimes, while monarchy is a sin equivalent to idolatry.²⁷ However, while those mid-seventeenth-century republicans portrayed Moses as a tool in God’s hands, Toland talked of him as a wise legislator, who had devised a tolerant political society regulated by rational laws. He also shared with those republican writers the opinion that the merging of religion and politics had led to the corruption and decline of the ancient Israelites’ commonwealth. But, according to Toland, the corruption of Judaism after Moses did not invalidate its rational foundations, which he further emphasized in *Nazarenus*.

THE COMPOSITION, SOURCES, AND MAIN THEMES
OF *NAZARENUS*

Nazarenus: Or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity consists of two “letters” concerning, respectively, the manuscript of a “Gospel of the Mahometans,” which Toland examined in Amsterdam in 1709–10, and an Irish manuscript of the four canonical gospels, which includes a “Summary of the ancient Irish Christianity, before the Papal Corruptions and Usurpations.”²⁸ The first “letter,” which is the more original and discussed of the two “letters” comprising *Nazarenus*, affirms a sort of Christian primitivism that Toland shared with Socinians, Unitarians, Arians, and other anti-Trinitarian Christians who advocated a return to a radically monotheistic version of Christianity—a version built on Jewish foundations and devoid of pagan contaminations. Some eminent examples of the Christian primitivism promulgated in early Enlightenment England are Stephen Nye’s and other English Unitarians’ tracts, published during the Trinitarian controversy of the late

1685). See Dmitri LEVITIN, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science: Histories of Philosophy in England, c. 1640–1700* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 113–229.

²⁷ See Eric NELSON, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

²⁸ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 194.

1680s and 1690s, and the Newtonian scholar and Arian theologian William Whiston's five-volume treatise, *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd* (1711–12).²⁹ Toland, like most contemporary anti-Trinitarian writers, believed that post-apostolic theological doctrines, rituals, and ecclesiastical traditions resulted from abstruse misinterpretations of the Gospel message, from pagan and idolatrous corruptions of monotheism, and from priestly frauds. However, Toland diverged from anti-Trinitarian Christians in that he denied “any special hermeneutical status to Scripture and insist[ed] that it be treated exactly as any other text.”³⁰ His exegetical approach to Scripture was largely influenced by Spinoza's hermeneutics and, also, by the Catholic priest Richard Simon's research on the inconsistencies, obscurities, and interpolations in the biblical texts.³¹ Simon called attention to the defects of the biblical texts in order to question the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, according to which the Bible, containing all that is necessary for salvation, is the sole rule of faith. Thus, he reaffirmed the Catholic rule of faith, according to which the biblical texts need to be interpreted in the context of sacred tradition. Toland drew upon Simon's method and findings, but his aim was different from Simon's pious intentions. In fact, he pointed to the discrepancies and corruptions in the biblical texts, and he consequently highlighted the role of human agency in the composition and transmission of the Scriptures, in order to debunk biblical authority. In *Nazarenus* and other works, particularly in *Amyntor: Or, A Defence of Milton's Life* (1699), he even talked of the biblical canon as resulting from merely historical dynamics, and he portrayed post-apostolic traditions as unreliable. He went so far as to insert in

²⁹ On the Trinitarian controversy of the late seventeenth century, see Philip DIXON, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 98–137; Brent S. SIROTA, “The Trinitarian Crisis in Church and State: Religious Controversy and the Making of the Post-Revolutionary Church of England, 1687–1702,” *Journal of British Studies* 52 (2013): 26–54; Christopher J. WALKER, *Reason and Religion in Late Seventeenth-Century England: The Politics and Theology of Radical Dissent* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 147–237. On Whiston's Christian primitivism, see James E. FORCE, *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 90–120; Maurice WILES, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 93–110.

³⁰ LEASK, “Undivulged Event,” 65.

³¹ On Toland's biblical criticism, see Diego LUCCI, *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-Century British Deists* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 65–133; Luisa SIMONUTTI, “Deism, Biblical Hermeneutics and Philology,” in HUDSON, LUCCI, and WIGELSWORTH, *Atheism and Deism Revalued*, 45–62. On Richard Simon's biblical hermeneutics and its impact in England, see Justin CHAMPION, “Père Richard Simon and English Biblical Criticism, 1680–1700,” in *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin: Essays in His Honor*, ed. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 37–61.

Amyntor a catalog of early Christian writings in which he listed both canonical and apocryphal texts, thereby eliciting a harsh debate and leading the English Parliament to investigate *Amyntor* along with *Christianity Not Mysteious* in 1701.³² Moreover, in *Nazarenus*, he presented the (alleged) revelations contained in the sacred texts of the western monotheistic tradition as compatible with natural reason and morality. Thus, his account of Mosaic Judaism, primitive Christianity, and early Islam as the three phases or manifestations of the same religious and moral tradition—a tradition rooted in natural religion—enabled him to reach politically significant conclusions, concerning, in particular, his republicanism and his advocacy of religious toleration.

Toland planned to provide a description of the similarities and common origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam already in 1698.³³ At that time, during the heated debate on *Christianity Not Mysteious*, the Church of England clergyman Robert South labeled Toland a “Mahometan Christian.”³⁴ In response to this accusation, Toland embarked on composing an account of “Mahometan Christianity,” but he only wrote a short manuscript note in which he defended himself from South’s criticism.³⁵ The reason why Toland did not proceed to write and publish a treatise on this topic in the late 1690s and early 1700s is, most probably, that he was busy with the publication of other works and with the controversies these works provoked (as was the case with *Amyntor*) and he was later involved, for around a decade, in active political work in the service of Robert Harley.³⁶ However, he returned to this subject in 1709–10, when he was in the Netherlands, and when the German diplomat and anti-Trinitarian scholar Johann Friedrich Cramer showed him a manuscript that was believed to be an Italian translation of the “Gospel of the Mahometans.” Toland described this manuscript with the following words:

The book is written on Turkish paper delicately gumm’d and polish’d, and also bound after the Turkish manner. The ink is incomparably fine; and the orthography, as well as the character, plainly show it to be at least three hundred years old.³⁷

³² John TOLAND, *Amyntor: Or, A Defence of Milton’s Life* (London, 1699), 20–41.

³³ Justin CHAMPION, introduction to TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 57–58; JONES, “Genesis, Purpose, and Significance,” 92–93.

³⁴ Robert SOUTH, *Twelve Sermons upon Several Subjects and Occasions. The Third Volume* (London, 1698), dedication.

³⁵ This manuscript note, which is now in the British Library, has been transcribed by Justin Champion in TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 301.

³⁶ JONES, “Genesis, Purpose, and Significance,” 93–94.

³⁷ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 143–44.

He concluded that that “Gospel of the Mahometans” (which was as long as the four canonical gospels combined) was the apocryphal “Gospel of Barnabas,” and he argued that this gospel related the beliefs and customs of the first Christians, also known as Nazarenes or Ebionites. Toland had learnt about these early Christian sects (which he regarded as one community) from Friedrich Spanheim and Jean Leclerc. Toland’s reading of Leclerc’s reedition of Jean-Baptiste Cotelier’s collection of Pseudo-Clementine texts led him to identify the Nazarenes and Ebionites with the first Christians, thereby diverging from the traditional, dismissive view of these sects as later heretical groups—a view upheld by Spanheim, too.³⁸ This is a point in common between Toland and contemporary Unitarian writers. Before Toland, late seventeenth-century anti-Trinitarian authors such as Stephen Nye and Thomas Smalbroke had written of the “Nazarenes” as the first Christians, and had described them as Jews who followed Jesus’ teaching and who regarded Jesus as a mere man.³⁹ The famous clergyman Edward Stillingfleet rejected the Unitarians’ view of the Nazarenes or Ebionites as the first Christians in *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1697), a book in which he also criticized Locke’s epistemology for having enabled Toland to reject the Trinity and other mysteries in *Christianity Not Mystrious*.⁴⁰ Since Toland knew Nye’s works and was well-acquainted with the Trinitarian disputes of the day, it is likely that he also knew of those anti-Trinitarian authors’ thesis that the Nazarenes were the first Christians.

As regards the Italian manuscript that Toland read in Amsterdam, and that is now in the Austrian National Library after being acquired by Prince Eugene of Savoy through Cramer, whether its content is actually a translation of the Gospel of Barnabas is still a subject for discussion. Besides this Italian manuscript, another late medieval or early modern manuscript, in Spanish, was cited in the early eighteenth century as containing a translation of the Gospel of Barnabas. The first published reference to the alleged Gospel of Barnabas rediscovered in modern times was in *Menagiana* (1715) by the

³⁸ Jean LECLERC, ed., *Ss. Patrum qui temporibus Apostolicis floruerunt* (Antwerp, 1698); Frederick SPANHEIM, *Ecclesiastical Annals*, trans. George Wright (Cambridge, 1829), 216–17. See JONES, “Genesis, Purpose, and Significance,” 95–96.

³⁹ Stephen NYE, *A Brief History of the Unitarians, Called also Socinians* (n.p., 1687), 26; Thomas SMALBROKE, *The Judgment of the Fathers concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1695), 35, 41. See Matti MYLLYKOSKI, “‘Christian Jews’ and ‘Jewish Christians’: The Jewish Origins of Christianity in English Literature from Elizabeth I to Toland’s *Nazarenes*,” in JONES, *Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity*, 27–30.

⁴⁰ STILLINGFLEET, *Discourse in Vindication*, 19–22, 230–92. On Stillingfleet’s attacks on Locke and Toland in this book, see MARKO, *Measuring the Distance*.

French poet and lawyer Bernard de La Monnoye, who had seen the Italian manuscript in Amsterdam thanks to the Baron de Hohendorf. Toland also referred to La Monnoye's account of this manuscript in the preface to *Nazarenus*, published in 1718. Two years after the publication of La Monnoye's *Menagiana*, the Dutch Orientalist Adriaan Reland mentioned the Spanish version of this gospel in the second, expanded edition of his *De Religione Mohammedica* (1717). The Spanish version, along with the Italian manuscript, was also mentioned by the English Orientalist George Sale in *The Koran: A Preliminary Discourse* (1734). In this book, Sale gave a detailed description of the Spanish manuscript, which its owner, the Church of England clergyman George Holme, had shown him. At present, a copy of the manuscript examined by Sale is in the possession of the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney, having been discovered in 1976 among the books of the nineteenth-century English-Australian politician Charles Nicholson. Despite some discrepancies between the Italian and Spanish texts of this gospel, and despite the fact that the surviving copy of the Spanish manuscript is incomplete, the contents of these two manuscripts are extremely similar and present several parallels with a series of sixteenth-century Morisco forgeries known as *The Lead Books of Sacromonte*. The two manuscripts also endorse various Islamic beliefs, such as the denial of the crucifixion of Jesus (in whose place, according to this alleged gospel, Judas was crucified), the prediction of Muhammad's coming, and a radically monotheistic and non-Trinitarian notion of the Godhead. This, along with many factual errors and anachronisms, has led most scholars in the field to conclude that this supposed gospel is, most probably, a late medieval or early modern Morisco forgery.⁴¹ Nevertheless, historians Luigi Cirillo and Michel Frémaux have argued that, beyond the medieval and early modern accretions, the core of this text is most probably a much older gospel narrative, which was later complemented by canonical material and Judeo-Christian and Islamic apoc-

⁴¹ On the debate about the Gospel of Barnabas, and particularly on the manuscript examined by Toland in Amsterdam, see Lonsdale RAGG and Laura RAGG, eds., *The Gospel of Barnabas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907); Luigi CIRILLO, "Un nuovo vangelo apocrifo: il vangelo di Barnaba," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 11 (1975): 391–412; Luigi CIRILLO and Michel FRÉMAUX, *Evangile de Barnabé: recherches sur la composition et l'origine* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977); David SOX, *The Gospel of Barnabas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984); Philip JENKINS, "Gospel of Barnabas," in *Early New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. J. Christopher Edwards (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 38–57. On the Spanish text, see Luis Fernando Bernabé PONS, *El texto morisco del Evangelio de San Bernabé* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 1998).

ryphal traditions.⁴² At any rate, the Italian manuscript that Toland read in Amsterdam is important to us because it encouraged him to write a heterodox account of early Christianity and of its connections with Judaism and Islam. Based on that manuscript, Toland provided a novel interpretation of these three monotheistic religions and their common features, which he identified with moral principles consistent with the law of nature and promoting religious toleration.⁴³

Upon examining the Italian text that Cramer had shown him, Toland promptly wrote a manuscript in French describing that alleged gospel and titled “Christianisme Judaique et Mahometan.” He donated two copies of this French essay to his friends, Prince Eugene of Savoy and the Baron de Hohendorf. But he refrained from publishing this essay because in it he adopted a historical-critical, non-confessional, non-theological attitude to the Christian religion, its origins, and its essence. And this could expose him to serious risks, as Justin Champion has observed:

[In “Christianisme Judaique et Mahometan”] the most obvious difference with much of Toland’s public writing is the lack of professed Christian sincerity. Although Toland argues strenuously that current accounts of primitive Christian institutions and doctrine were wrong, he does not attempt to support his critique with the venter of pious *renovatio*. While the thrust of “Christianisme Judaique et Mahometan” is to promote the Ebionite interpretation of the continuity of the first Christian church with the practices of Judaism, this is advanced as historically accurate rather than soteriologically necessary. The Ebionite model is true, not because it is divine, but because it is historically authentic.⁴⁴

Toland, however, decided to write another text on the gospel he believed to have discovered. This text, which he wrote for publication, is *Nazarenus*. He was ready to publish this treatise in 1713, but its publication was de-

⁴² CIRILLO and FRÉMAUX, *Evangile de Barnabe*, 182–83.

⁴³ On Toland’s views on early Christianity, see also his essay *The Primitive Constitution of the Christian Church*, first published in John TOLAND, *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Toland*, ed. Pierre Desmaizeaux, 2 vols. (London, 1726), 2:120–200. This essay was republished in 2003 in John TOLAND, *La Constitution primitive de l’Église chrétienne – The Primitive Constitution of the Christian Church*, ed. Laurent Jaffro (Paris: Champion, 2003). On this essay, see Laurent JAFFRO, “Toland: la constitution primitive de l’Église philosophique,” in *Figures du théologico-politique*, ed. Emmanuel Cattin, Laurent Jaffro, and Alain Petit (Paris: Vrin, 1999), 149–74.

⁴⁴ CHAMPION, introduction to TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 69. Both copies of Toland’s French manuscript are in the possession of the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Justin Champion has transcribed and published this manuscript in TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 247–86.

layed, probably because of Richard Bentley's, Francis Hare's, and others' attacks on the freethinkers after the publication of Anthony Collins's *Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713).⁴⁵ While providing a novel, heterodox account of primitive Christianity, *Nazarenus*, which was eventually published in 1718, differs from "Christianisme Judaique et Mahometan" in a significant respect: in *Nazarenus*, Toland engaged in theological lying out of prudence, in order to avoid exposing himself to the risk of prosecution by the authorities. Thus, he described his account of the "Gospel of Barnabas" as tending to promote the restoration of "original Christianity." Nonetheless, while expressing this pious intention, he portrayed original Christianity as a moral doctrine that reaffirmed the main principles of Jewish ethics, was followed by Islam, and was compatible with the Noachic precepts, which he viewed as consistent with the universal, necessary, and sufficient law of nature. Therefore, his heterodox description of Christianity as merely a phase or element in the development of the western monotheistic tradition questioned the Christocentric view of history. Moreover, while basing his account of primitive Christianity mainly on the Italian manuscript shown to him in Amsterdam, Toland buttressed his analysis with references to various canonical texts—particularly the General Epistles, which he preferred to the Pauline Epistles. He also drew on early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr, Origen, and Eusebius of Caesarea, whose views on the Godhead diverged from the Trinitarianism approved at the Council of Nicea (325 CE), and whose writings played an important role in the Trinitarian disputes of seventeenth-century England.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he used various modern works, such as John Selden's writings on the Jewish Law and on its impact on the beliefs and practices of the early Christians, Johann Albert Fabricius's *Codex apocryphus Novi Testamenti* (1703), and the essays of Adriaan Reland and other experts in Middle-Eastern cultures and religions.⁴⁷ He referred to these and other modern sources with the purpose of stressing the continuity be-

⁴⁵ JONES, "Genesis, Purpose, and Significance," 94. On Collins's *Discourse of Free-Thinking* and the debate it elicited, see James O'HIGGINS, *Anthony Collins: The Man and His Works* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970), 77–95.

⁴⁶ See Paul C. H. LIM, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2012); LEVITIN, *Ancient Wisdom*, 447–541; Diego LUCCI, "Ante-Nicene Authority and the Trinity in Seventeenth-Century England," *Intellectual History Review* 28 (2018): 101–24.

⁴⁷ Selden's major works (which Toland knew) on the law of nature, the Jewish Law, and the latter's impact on early Christianity are John SELDEN, *De iure naturali et gentium, iuxta disciplinam Ebraeorum, libri septem* (London, 1640); John SELDEN, *De Synedriis et Praefecturis iuridicis veterum Ebraeorum*, 3 vols. (London, 1650–55). On Toland's debt to Selden, see MYLLY-KOSKI, "'Christian Jews' and 'Jewish Christians,'" 30–36.

tween the fundamental theological beliefs, religious practices, and moral principles of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—a continuity that he emphasized expressly:

The Mahometans may not improperly be reckon'd and call'd a sort or sect of Christians, as Christianity was at first esteem'd a branch of Judaism.... Jesus did not, as tis universally believ'd, abolish the Law of Moses, neither in whole nor in part, nor in the letter no more than in the spirit: with other uncommon particulars, concerning the true and original Christianity.... You'll discover some of the fundamental doctrines of Mahometanism to have their rise ... from the earliest monuments of the Christian religion.⁴⁸

Toland described all three monotheistic religions as consonant with, and actually grounded in, the law of nature, although presenting ceremonial and ritual elements originally devised and adopted for practical purposes. His description of the ancient Israelites' consideration of their Law exemplifies his position on this matter, which is strongly influenced by Selden's account of the Jewish Law:

This Law they look'd upon to be no less national and political than religious and sacred: that is to say, expressive of the history of their peculiar nation, essential to the being of their Theocracy or Republic, and aptly commemorating whatever befell their ancestors or their state; which, not regarding other people, they did not think them bound by the same, however indispensably subject to the Law of Nature.⁴⁹

Toland described religious toleration as one of the main features of the ancient Israelites' "Republic" in a section of the appendix to *Nazarenus* titled "Two Problems, Historical, Political and Theological concerning the Jewish Nation and Religion."⁵⁰ This appendix echoes *Origines Judaicae* in its description of the "Respublica Mosaica, or the Commonwealth of Moses, which," Toland wrote, "I admire infinitely, above all the forms of Government, that ever yet existed."⁵¹ In this appendix, he depicted Moses as a wise legislator, who had established a republican government granting religious toleration and having laws based on the law of nature. Following Selden,

⁴⁸ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 135.

⁴⁹ TOLAND, 160.

⁵⁰ TOLAND, 235–40.

⁵¹ TOLAND, 235.

Milton, and Harrington, he described the ancient Israelites' commonwealth as a republican and tolerant polity. However, whereas those republican authors regarded the Hebrew Bible as a political constitution designed by God, Toland refrained from attributing the excellence of the "Commonwealth of Moses" to God's will and action. Instead, he simply praised the rationality and effectiveness of the ancient Israelites' republican regime and its agreement with the law of nature. He made the same point in *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland*, written and published in 1714, shortly after the Hanoverian accession to the British throne. This pamphlet presents eudemonistic, utilitarian, populationist, and mercantilist arguments in favor of Jewish naturalization, as well as a refutation of various anti-Jewish prejudices and stereotypes. However, Toland's advocacy of Jewish naturalization is informed by his positive attitude to the Jewish religion and the ancient Hebrew commonwealth. In *Reasons*, borrowing also from the Venetian Rabbi Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei* (1638), Toland portrayed the Mosaic republic as a model of tolerant polity governed by rational laws. In this regard, Justin Champion has observed that both Luzzatto and Toland expressed a heterodox view of Moses as a political legislator rather than a religious patriarch, thereby presenting the Mosaic Law and the Hebrew republic as grounded in the law of nature:

This Mosaic foundation was calculated to promote a religion that was importantly both rational, and therefore anti-superstitious, and also politically convenient.... Judaism as conceived by Moses was a powerful civic theology effective at protecting the interests of nation and state.⁵²

Accordingly, in *Reasons*, Toland depicted Judaism as a rational political religion consistent with natural religion in its essential, moral elements, although Jews were also bound to practice rites and ceremonies calculated for civil objectives:

⁵² Justin CHAMPION, "Toleration and Citizenship in Enlightenment England: John Toland and the Naturalization of the Jews, 1714–1753," in *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. Ole P. Grell and Roy Porter (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 148. See, also, Simone LUZZATTO, *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei, et in particolare dimoranti nell'inclita Città di Venetia* (Venice, 1638), 46–73. On Luzzatto's *Discorso*, see Benjamin RAVID, *Economics and Toleration in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Background and Context of the "Discorso" of Simone Luzzatto* (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1978); Simone LUZZATTO, *Discourse on the State of the Jews: Bilingual Edition*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Anna Lissa (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

Their religion, consider'd as it is *Jewish, or distinct from the Law of Nature*, was solely calculated for their own Nation and Republic; so they were never commanded to instruct others in their peculiar rites and ceremonies, tho they are every where enjoin'd to magnify to all the world the divine goodness, wisdom, and power, with those duties of men, and other attributes of God, which constitute Natural Religion.⁵³

In *Nazarenus*, too, Toland repeatedly described the moral principles of Judaism as consistent with the law of nature. Furthermore, based on his reading of the Italian manuscript found in the Netherlands, which significantly conditioned his interpretation of canonical texts, and adopting Selden's theory that Christianity was a sort of "reformed Judaism," he argued that Jesus had merely reformed the Jewish Law by restoring the law of nature, on which the Jewish religion was originally built. Thus, he talked of the first Christians as Jews who followed Jesus' moral teaching and who regarded Jesus as "a mere man."⁵⁴ According to Toland, those "Jewish Christians" kept practicing the Mosaic rituals, besides pursuing the moral renovation preached by Jesus. The thesis that the early converts to Christianity were Jews who kept respecting the Jewish Law in its entirety, including the rituals the Law prescribed, was widely accepted in England from the Elizabethan Era to the early Enlightenment. It appeared in the writings of prominent Church of England clergymen such as Richard Hooker in the sixteenth century and the Arminian-leaning divines Henry Hammond and Jeremy Taylor in the mid-seventeenth century. It also appeared in the works of various Puritan theologians, such as Robert Abbot and William Gouge. However, in early modern England, "Christian Jews" or "Jewish Christians" were widely regarded as people who still followed the Jewish Law in its entirety because they had a weak faith. Some authors, such as Hooker and Hammond, even wrote that Christian Jews deemed the gentile converts to Christianity bound

⁵³ John TOLAND, *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1714), 50–51. On this text, see Paolo BERNARDINI, introduction to *Ragioni per naturalizzare gli ebrei in Gran Bretagna e Irlanda (1714)*, by John TOLAND, ed. Paolo Bernardini (Florence: Giuntina, 1998), 25–104; Pierre LURBE, introduction to *Raisons de naturaliser les Juifs en Grande-Bretagne et en Irlande*, by John TOLAND, ed. Pierre Lurbe (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 1–94; Pierre LURBE, "John Toland and the Naturalization of the Jews," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 14 (1999): 37–48; CHAMPION, "Toleration and Citizenship," 133–56; Jonathan KARP, "The Mosaic Republic in Augustan Politics: John Toland's *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews*," *Hebraic Political Studies* 1 (2006): 462–92; Paolo BERNARDINI and Diego LUCCI, *The Jews, Instructions for Use: Four Eighteenth-Century Projects for the Emancipation of European Jews* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 35–88.

⁵⁴ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 153.

to observe the Mosaic rituals.⁵⁵ Conversely, Toland, having reduced the Jewish Law with its rituals to a “national law” calculated for civil objectives, argued that the “Jewish Christians” welcomed gentile converts to their community while not expecting them to respect the “national law” of the Jewish people. In the early Christian community, gentile converts were required to follow only the Noachic precepts rooted in the universal law of nature:

The Jewish Christians were ever bound to observe the Law of Moses, and the Gentile Christians, who liv'd among them, only the Noachic precepts of abstinence from blood and things offer'd to Idols: for the Moral Law was both then, and before, and ever will be, of indispensable obligation to all men, it being the grossest absurdity and impiety to assert the contrary; since sound Reason or the light of common sense, is a catholic and eternal rule, without which mankind cou'd not subsist in peace or happiness one hour.⁵⁶

Briefly, Toland argued that the ancient Israelites and, later, the early Christians tolerated all those who obeyed the Noachic precepts. He blamed Paul and the gentile converts for provoking the intolerance that eventually came to condition the doctrines and practices of the early Christian church and, later, of most Christian confessions. He combined his reading of the Pauline Epistles with considerations on primitive Christianity that he drew mainly from Origen, Eusebius, and modern anti-Trinitarian authors, particularly Nye. According to Toland, Paul was an ambitious man who regarded other apostles, such as James and Peter, as rivals. Therefore, in order to defeat other apostles' competition, Paul substituted “his own pretended Revelations to the doctrines of those with whom Christ had convers'd, and to whom he actually communicated his will.”⁵⁷ Toland saw Paul as guilty of corrupting “the original plan of Christianity,” in that Paul had disapproved of the Jewish Christians' obedience to the Jewish Law, and had thus attempted to impose uniformity in doctrine and worship among the early Christians. Furthermore, Toland criticized Paul and his followers for regarding Jesus no more as a mere man, but as a deity, and for consequently enabling the gentile converts to “introduce into Christianity their former polytheism and deifying

⁵⁵ Richard HOOKER, *Of the Lavves of Ecclesiasticall Politie* (London, 1604), 188–96; Henry HAMMOND, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament* (London, 1659). On the terms “Christian Jews” and “Jewish Christians” in England before Toland, see MYLLYKOSKI, “‘Christian Jews’ and ‘Jewish Christians,’” 3–41.

⁵⁶ TOLAND, *Nazarenes*, 179.

⁵⁷ TOLAND, 153.

of dead men.”⁵⁸ These distortions of Jesus’ message and nature led to the end of “true Christianity”:

The true Christianity of the Jews was over born and destroy’d by the more numerous Gentiles, who, not enduring the reasonableness and simplicity of the same, brought into it by degrees the peculiar expressions and mysteries of Hea-thenism, the abstruse doctrines and distinctions of their Philosophers, an insup-portable pontifical Hyerarchy and even the altars, offerings, the sacred rites and ceremonies of their Priests, tho they wou’d not so much as tolerate those of the Jews, and yet owning them to be divinely instituted.⁵⁹

Toland thought that, because of the contamination of “true Christianity” with ecclesiastical hierarchies and systems of divinity based on pagan philosophies, another prophet, announced by the Gospel of Barnabas, was needed to restore the law of nature and, thus, the true spirit of monotheism. This prophet was Muhammad, who, according to Toland, reaffirmed the moral principles that were at the core of Judaism and Christianity, thereby restoring natural religion and morality. Toland argued that Islam was originally based on Jewish and Christian texts, and particularly on the Gospel of Barnabas, although “the excessive veneration of the Mahometans for the *Alcoran*, made them suffer their *Gospel* to perish by neglect.”⁶⁰ Accordingly, he judged Islam to be in agreement with the fundamental tenets of Judaism and Christianity, which he deemed rooted in the law of nature. He maintained that Islam, too, originally manifested the same tolerant attitude as Mosaic Judaism and primitive Christianity towards all those abiding by the Noachic precepts. He also emphasized Muslims’ rejection of pagan beliefs, their strong opposition to any form of idolatry, and their notion of Jesus as a mere man. It is no accident that one of the critics of *Nazarenus*, James Paterson, stated that Toland had “traverse[d] a Labyrinth of Amusements to blend *Christianity* with *Mahometism*, and [had] industriously pretend[ed] to prove that *Mahometans* are *Christians*.”⁶¹ This was not the first time Toland was accused of

⁵⁸ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 187.

⁵⁹ TOLAND, 186–87.

⁶⁰ TOLAND, 142.

⁶¹ James PATERSON, *Anti Nazarenus* (London, 1718), dedication. Other critical responses to *Nazarenus* include: Thomas BRETT, *Tradition Necessary to Explain and Interpret the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1718); Thomas MANGEY, *Remarks upon Nazarenus* (London, 1718); Jeremiah JONES, *A New and Full Method of Settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament* (London, 1726). While Paterson, Brett, and Mangey limited themselves to denouncing Toland’s impiety and questioning the authenticity of the Gospel of Barnabas, Jones’s book remained the

sympathizing with Islam or being a covert Muslim. As I have noted above, such accusations had already reached him shortly after the publication of *Christianity Not Mysterious*, due to his rejection of mysteries, including the Trinity, in a time when the Trinitarian controversy was still ongoing, and when the charge of aligning with Islam was commonly levied against Unitarian polemicists in order to question their piety.⁶² In late seventeenth-century England, Islam was indeed disparaged as an “imposture” by Anglican apologists such as Lancelot Addison and Humphrey Prideaux.⁶³ However, Toland’s *Nazarenus* was not the first essay sympathetic to Islam in Enlightenment England. Toland’s notion of Islam, which he saw as a tolerant religion rooted in the law of nature, was actually influenced by the polymath Henry Stubbe’s *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism*, written in 1671 and published only in 1911, but enjoying “an extensive covert circulation in the early decades of the eighteenth century.”⁶⁴ Stubbe made a parallel between Islam and Ebionite or Nazarene Christianity, in that he described Muhammad as a tolerant lawgiver who had rediscovered and restored primitive Christianity. Moreover, Stubbe followed Selden’s suggestion that Christianity was a

standard account of the canon of the New Testament well into the nineteenth century, at least in Britain. Toland also wrote a vindication of *Nazarenus* entitled *Mangoneutes: Being a Defence of Nazarenus*, and published in 1720 in the aforesaid collection *Tetradymus*: TOLAND, *Tetradymus*, 137–226. Concerning the debate on *Nazarenus* in the aftermath of its publication, see CHAMPION, introduction to TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 89–96.

⁶² Upon the publication of *Christianity Not Mysterious* in 1696, Toland was accused of inclining towards Islam in Peter BROWNE, *A Letter in Answer to a Book Entitled, Christianity Not Mysterious* (Dublin, 1697), 196; SOUTH, *Twelve Sermons [...] Third Volume*, dedication.

⁶³ See Lancelot ADDISON, *The Life and Death of Mahumed* (London, 1679); Humphrey PRIDEAUX, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display’d in the Life of Mahomet* (London, 1697). On English views of Islam in the early modern period, see CHAMPION, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 99–132; Nabil MATAR, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); Humberto GARCIA, *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

⁶⁴ CHAMPION, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 120–21. See Henry STUBBE, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism*, ed. Hafiz Mahmud Khan Shairani (London: Luzac, 1911). On Stubbe and his manuscript on Islam, see Nabil MATAR, *Henry Stubbe and the Beginnings of Islam: The Originall & Progress of Mahometanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), which contains a transcription of the manuscript at pp. 65–212. On Stubbe’s influence on Toland, see CHAMPION, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 120–32; Justin CHAMPION, “Legislators, Impostors, and the Politic Origins of Religion: English Theories of ‘Imposture’ from Stubbe to Toland,” in *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe: Studies on the Traité des trois imposteurs*, ed. Silvia Berti, Françoise Charles-Daubert, and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Springer, 1996), 333–56; CHAMPION, introduction to TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 86; Diego LUCCI, “Cristianesimo e Islam secondo John Toland. Cristianesimo originale, concezioni islamiche e tolleranza religiosa nel *Nazarenus* (1718),” *Atti dell’Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche* 116 (2005): 349–70.

sort of “reformed Judaism.” It is therefore no accident that one of Toland’s critics, Thomas Mangey, accused him of having drawn not only on Reland’s work and Unitarian writings, but also on Stubbe’s manuscript, which, as Justin Champion has noted, actually had an impact on Toland’s favorable attitude to Islam and on his anti-Paulinism.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, neither Stubbe’s manuscript on Islam, nor Selden’s essays on the Jewish Law, nor Nye’s anti-Trinitarian tracts, nor any other modern text was the original inspiration for Toland’s work. The main stimulus to write *Nazarenus* came from the discovery, in Amsterdam, of that Italian manuscript that Toland believed to be a translation of the Gospel of Barnabas. However, in *Nazarenus*, he did much more than merely describing the contents of that alleged gospel, and providing a novel account of primitive Christianity on the basis of that manuscript and other ancient sources. In this book, he actually offered an original argument for religious toleration.

A DEISTIC ARGUMENT FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

While *Nazarenus* is not devoted specifically to discussing the issue of religious toleration, it presents an argument for toleration that needs to be spelled out in its essential elements. Stanley Jones has argued that “the purpose of *Nazarenus* was ... to present a historical argument for toleration.”⁶⁶ In *Nazarenus*, Toland indeed referred to the Pentateuch, the canonical gospels, the General Epistles, the alleged Gospel of Barnabas, other apocryphal writings, the ante-Nicene Fathers’ works, the Quran, and various other texts, which he described not as soteriologically necessary but as historically relevant. Toland’s use of canonical as well as noncanonical texts, along with his thesis that Christianity was originally “Jewish Christianity” (a term he coined by leaning on pre-existing terms such as “Christian Jews” and “Jewish Christians”),⁶⁷ is significant for the history of scholarship on primitive Christianity. Toland’s historical-critical approach to the genesis of the Christian faith—an approach questioning the demarcation line between canonical and apocryphal literature—acted as “the catalyst behind modern critical study of the New Testament and Christian origins,” thanks to his “insistence

⁶⁵ MANGEY, *Remarks upon Nazarenus*, 43–44; CHAMPION, “Legislators, Impostors,” 351–54.

⁶⁶ JONES, “Genesis, Purpose, and Significance,” 96.

⁶⁷ MYLLYKOSKI, “‘Christian Jews’ and ‘Jewish Christians,’” 35–36; Matt JACKSON-MCCABE, “The Invention of Jewish Christianity in John Toland’s *Nazarenus*,” in JONES, *Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity*, 81.

that the modern scholar of early Christianity use not only the New Testament but also *all* documents from the period including the noncanonical writings—on a par with the canonical.”⁶⁸ For Toland, only by critically analysing early Christian tradition can the historian distinguish original or apostolic Christianity from subsequent developments and corruptions.

However, the significance of Toland's use of ancient documents in *Nazarenus* is not only historical but also political, since Toland drew an argument for toleration from his novel account of the origins and early developments of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—an account that can be characterized as *deistic* for three reasons. First of all, Toland described Mosaic Judaism, primitive Christianity, and early Islam as grounded in the law of nature and, hence, as consistent with natural religion and morality, while he portrayed particular rituals and ceremonies as originally devised for civil objectives. Secondly, he maintained that pagan corruptions, idolatry, priestcraft, power politics, and dogmatism had perverted all three religions, thereby leading to reciprocal enmity, intolerance, and persecution. Thus, he expressed a typically deistic view of history as a process of corruption of “ancient wisdom” or “true religion.” Thirdly and lastly, his portrayal of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as valuing and promoting religious toleration, within the limits of the Noachic precepts, results from his account of these three religions as being, originally, mere restorations of the law of nature. And given that, according to Toland, obedience to the law of nature is the core element of true religion, his historical and, at the same time, deistic argument for toleration was relevant to the state of things in England in the early eighteenth century, when Jews and Muslims were not tolerated officially, anti-Trinitarian Christians and Roman Catholics were denied toleration by the misnamed Toleration Act of 1689, and Protestant Dissenters were still subject to political and civil disabilities.

Based on his reading of canonical and noncanonical texts, Toland came to the conclusion that “true Christianity,” or more generally “true religion,” consists in obedience to the rational, universal, and eternal “Moral Law,” which, in a typically deistic fashion, he described as “the fundamental bond of all society, where there is or there is not a reveal'd religion: and tis the onely thing that's aprov'd by the most opposite Revelations, or by any sort of parties and divisions in each other.”⁶⁹ Thus, while not rejecting particular

⁶⁸ JONES, “Genesis, Purpose, and Significance,” 99. On Toland's historical-critical analysis of early Christian texts in *Nazarenus*, see also LUCCHI, *Scripture and Deism*, 112–33.

⁶⁹ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 179.

revelations altogether, Toland reduced revelation to a secondary (and superfluous) role in comparison with the law of nature, which is accessible to natural reason and universally binding. This account of the relation between reason and revelation echoes *Christianity Not Mysterious* (in which revelation is described as a “means of information” about matters comprehensible to reason), besides employing a strategy later adopted, in the 1730s, by deists such as Matthew Tindal, Thomas Chubb, and Thomas Morgan, all of whom reduced revealed religion to a “republication” of the eternal, universal, and sufficient religion of nature.⁷⁰ Toland himself, in *Nazarenus*, maintained that “one main design of Christianity was to improve and perfect the knowledge of the Law of nature, as well as to facilitate and enforce the observations of the same.”⁷¹ Besides identifying “true Christianity” with natural religion, Toland shared with other English deists (from Herbert of Cherbury to Tindal, and beyond) the idea that religious rites and ceremonies were merely human products, originally calculated for civil objectives—for instance, for a more effective enforcement of the law of nature and for avoiding idolatry and superstition. Therefore, for Toland, these “civil and national rites” are “less religion than politics.”⁷² However, cunning priests made use of these social institutions to strengthen their own power over the populace:

The little effect of religion procedes in most places from the too great influences of the Clergy, who make that to pass for Religion which is none, or quite the reverse, as they make Piety often inconsistent with Probity; and this they do to serve their own private ends, which in such places are ever opposite to the public good of the people.... The ultimate designs of such men are to procure to themselves Riches and consequently Power and Authority; as, in order to secure both, they train up their hearers in Ignorance and consequently in Superstition and Bigotry.⁷³

Priestcraft and power politics eventually led to the replacement of true religion with dogmas and mysteries. This happened among the ancient Israelites:

⁷⁰ See, for instance, the title and subtitle of Matthew Tindal’s masterpiece, also known as “the Bible of deism”: Matthew TINDAL, *Christianity as Old as the Creation: Or, The Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (London, 1730). On the similarities between Tindal’s, Chubb’s, and Morgan’s positions on natural and revealed religion, see LUCCI, *Scripture and Deism*, 169–205.

⁷¹ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 180.

⁷² JACKSON-MCCABE, “Invention of Jewish Christianity,” 85.

⁷³ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 124–25.

Something else besides the Legal Ordinances, most of 'em political, was necessary to render a Jew religious: even that Faith, which is an internal participation of the divine nature, irradiating the soul; and externally appearing in beneficence, justice, sanctity, and those other virtues by which we resemble God, who is himself all Goodness. But the Jews generally mistook the means for the end: ... thus confounding political with religious performances.⁷⁴

The same process of corruption took place among Christians, starting with Paul's and the gentile converts' hostility to the Jewish Christians' observance of the Mosaic rituals, which the gentile Christians mistakenly regarded as the essence of the Jewish religion. Misinterpreting (and opposing) the Mosaic rituals as the core of Judaism, the gentile converts to Christianity manifested their misunderstanding of true religion. Accordingly, they misinterpreted Jesus and his apostles' stance on the continued observance of the Jews' "national law" among Jewish Christians, but not among gentile Christians:

Without this Faith and Regeneration (as a change from vice to virtue was properly called even by the Heathens) the ever so punctual performance of Ceremonies cou'd not justify a Jew or render him a good man, agreeable and well-pleasing to God: but Jesus and his Apostles made it manifest that the Gentile, who believ'd one God and the necessity of Regeneration, might, contrary to the notions of the degenerate Jews (who then plac'd all religion in outward practices) be justify'd by such his Faith, without being oblig'd to exercise the ceremonies of the Law, being things no way regarding him, either as to national origin or civil government; while the Jew, on the other hand, must, to the outward observance of his country Law by eternal covenant, add this inward Regeneration and the Faith of the *Gospel*, or the Levitical Law wou'd avail him nothing tho ever so strictly observ'd.⁷⁵

Having mistaken outward performances of worship as the essence of religion, the gentile converts first opposed the Jewish Christians' respect of their national law, and then corrupted Christianity with pagan rituals, mysteries, and abstruse doctrines, which they misrepresented as the core of Christianity. As a result, they discarded "the original plan of Christianity," according to which Christians of different sorts—in that case, Jewish Christians and gentile Christians—although worshipping in different ways, "were to be for ever after united in one body or fellowship, and in that part of Christianity particularly, which ... requires the sanctification of the spirit, or

⁷⁴ TOLAND, *Nazarenes*, 117–18.

⁷⁵ TOLAND, 178.

the renovation of the inward man.”⁷⁶ For Toland, “this fellowship in Piety and Virtue,... this Union without Uniformity ... is the admirable Economy of the Gospel,” which “consists not in words but in virtue,” because “true religion is inward life and spirit.”⁷⁷

The concept of “Union without Uniformity” as inherent to “the original plan of Christianity” plays a crucial role in Toland’s historical as well as deistic argument for toleration. According to Toland, true Christianity is neither the product of a particular revelation, nor the system of doctrines and practices of a specific church. True Christianity, or true religion, is the eternal and universal “Moral Law of Nature,”⁷⁸ accessible to natural reason and affirmed by Moses, restored by Jesus, and revived by Muhammad. This means that all those who follow what Toland called “true Christianity” ought to be tolerated, regardless of their particular theological beliefs and rituals. *Nazarenus* repeatedly describes this model of religious toleration as “a duty of the Gospel” and as “self-evident according to the Law of Nature.”⁷⁹ Consequently, “they who persecute others in their reputations, rights, properties, or persons, for merely speculative opinions, or for things in their own nature indifferent, are so far equally divested both of Humanity and Christianity.”⁸⁰ Toland even accused all the intolerant priests and divines of his time of being anti-Christian, and he deprecated the imposition of uniformity on penalty of exclusion from political and civil rights.⁸¹ Accordingly, he openly called for toleration of Christian “sectaries” (that is, Nonconformists) and even of “Mahometans,” given that “Mahometanism is nothing else but a Christian Heresy,” as the sixteenth-century Reformed theologian Peter Martyr Vermigli had maintained in *Loci communes* (1576, posth.).⁸² Intolerance of Christian “sectaries” and “heretics” was indeed incompatible with the aforesaid “original plan of Christianity.” Toland’s plea for toleration of Muslims also extended to Unitarian Christians, whose anti-Trinitarianism did not differ significantly from Islamic monotheism and, more importantly, from the beliefs of the early Christians—namely, the Ebionites or Nazarenes. Ac-

⁷⁶ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 117.

⁷⁷ TOLAND, 117. On Toland’s notion of “the original plan of Christianity” and his hostility to uniformity, see Pierre LURBE, “John Toland’s *Nazarenus* and the Original Plan of Christianity,” in JONES, *Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity*, 45–66; JACKSON-MCCABE, “Invention of Jewish Christianity.”

⁷⁸ TOLAND, *Nazarenus*, 180.

⁷⁹ TOLAND, 161.

⁸⁰ TOLAND, 161.

⁸¹ TOLAND, 172, 182, 185–87.

⁸² TOLAND, 175–76.

According to Toland, Unitarian ideas were actually in agreement with the religion of the first Christians, who regarded Jesus as a mere man, although anti-Trinitarian Christians were expressly excluded from toleration by the misnamed Toleration Act of 1689. Furthermore, Toland's notion of the Jewish Law as perpetual in its entirety tacitly supported toleration of Jews and of the Judaizing Christians of his time, such as the Baptist Sabbatarians, besides opposing supersessionism (according to which the New Covenant through Jesus replaced the Mosaic Covenant).⁸³ Last but not least, Toland's view that true religion consists in obedience to the universal and eternal law of nature, and is thus equivalent to natural religion, implicitly extends toleration to all those who respect this moral law. And this is a markedly deistic point, although Toland buttressed it with a consideration of various historical contexts, such as the Mosaic commonwealth, primitive Christianity, and early Islam, which he reinterpreted by appropriating several canonical and non-canonical writings, along with various contemporary sources, to his philosophical and political agenda.

CONCLUSION

Toland's historical-critical analysis of ancient texts in *Nazarenus* is not devoid of shortcomings. His conclusion that the Italian manuscript found in Amsterdam was a translation of the Gospel of Barnabas, anciently worshipped by the first Christians and then by Muslims, was a mere assumption, which he made by observing some similarities between Ebionite and Nazarene beliefs, Islamic concepts, and the contents of that manuscript. He did not consider the possibility that that manuscript could be a forgery. Moreover, his use of canonical and noncanonical writings was far from unbiased, since he used those sources for his own purposes—that is, to question the New Testament canon, to support his republican ideals with a biblical exemplar, and to make a point about religious toleration. Nevertheless, his attempt at a historical-critical investigation of primitive Christianity through an analysis of not only New Testament texts, but also apocryphal writings and other primary sources is historically significant, because it offered new stimuli to historical research on the first Christians, and it encouraged historians of early Christianity to consider not only canonical texts but all docu-

⁸³ On Toland's familiarity with the Baptist Sabbatarians of his time, see JONES, "Genesis, Purpose, and Significance," 98.

ments from the period. While reaching different conclusions on the Ebionites and the Nazarenes and on their role in primitive Christianity, and while pursuing a more rigorous approach to the study of Christian origins, German scholars such as Johann Salomo Semler in the eighteenth century and Karl August Credner, Johan Karl Ludwig Gieseler, Albert Schweigler, and, above all, Ferdinand Christian Baur in the nineteenth century followed Toland's example in various respects. These scholars indeed focused their attention on those early Christian sects, and they examined canonical as well as noncanonical texts in studying the competing views, tensions, and conflicts that contributed to the making of Christian doctrine in the early period of Christianity.⁸⁴

However, Toland's accomplishment in historical research is particularly important because of the political significance that he assigned to this achievement. In *Mangoneutes: Being a Defence of Nazarenus* (published in the collection *Tetradymus* in 1720), Toland himself admitted that providing an argument for toleration was one of the main objectives of *Nazarenus*: "Civil Liberty and Religious Toleration as the most desirable things in this World, the most conducing to peace, plenty, knowledge, and every kind of happiness, have been the two main objects of all my writings."⁸⁵ Adding that toleration is not "indifference," he declared to prefer "the Religion taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles (but not as since corrupted by the subtractions, additions, or other alterations of any particular man or company of men) ... before all others."⁸⁶ And by "Religion taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles," Toland meant a religion "no less plain and pure, than useful and instructive, ... equally understood by every body."⁸⁷ Thus, he distinguished the religion preached by Jesus and his apostles from dogmatic distortions and hierarchical structures produced mainly by priestcraft:

Requiring people to believe what they cannot understand, is ordering 'em to make bricks without straw. Hence in great part proceed the divisions of Christians, tho this be not the onely cause: whereas nothing is wiser, plainer, truer, and consequently more divine, than what Christ and his Apostles have propos'd about the means of reconciling God to sinners, of purifying the mind, of regulating manners, of directing conscience, of illuminating the understanding, of stat-

⁸⁴ On the impact of Toland's *Nazarenus* on subsequent scholarship on early Christianity, particularly in Germany, see F. Stanley JONES, "From Toland to Baur: Tracks of the History of Research into Jewish Christianity," in JONES, *Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity*, 123–36.

⁸⁵ TOLAND, *Tetradymus*, 223.

⁸⁶ TOLAND, 223.

⁸⁷ TOLAND, 223.

ing particular duties, of fixing the hope of rewards to the good, of planting the fear of punishment in the wicked, of propagating mutual love, forbearance, and peace among all mankind, of improving, conducting, and supporting civil society. This is not the Religion of those, . . . who have turn'd Christianity into a plan of dominion, a system of gain, and a school of contention.⁸⁸

Briefly, far from being a system of theological doctrines and mysteries supported by oppressive ecclesiastical institutions, the “true Christianity” taught by Jesus and his apostles was a rational moral religion, perfectly accessible to natural reason. And the view that “Jesus Christ [was] nothing but the Restorer and Preacher of pure Natural Religion”—a view that John Locke deplored in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695)—was one of the leitmotifs of deism, from the start of the deist controversy in late seventeenth-century England to the publication of the works of later deists such as Matthew Tindal, Thomas Chubb, Thomas Morgan, and Peter Annet in the eighteenth century.⁸⁹ Whether Toland's natural philosophy can be called “deistic,” and whether his monism leads to atheism or is theological in nature, is a subject for discussion. What matters here, however, is that his advocacy of toleration in *Nazarenus*, although supported by his research on Mosaic Judaism, primitive Christianity, and early Islam, is rooted in a deistic notion of “true religion.” Toland indeed described “true Christianity” or “true religion” as equivalent to natural religion (which is essentially a moral religion) and hence as eternal, universal, sufficient, accessible to natural reason, and restored by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. And he called for toleration of all those who respect the inherently rational, universally binding, and eternally valid moral law that is at the core of true religion. Therefore, his argument for religious toleration in *Nazarenus* is, in essence, a deistic argument.

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⁸⁸ TOLAND, *Tetradymus*, 225.

⁸⁹ JOHN LOCKE, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 5. On Locke's hostility to deism, see Diego LUCCI, *John Locke's Christianity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2021), 16–25. On Locke's and the English deists' different views on Jesus' nature and message, see LUCCI, “Law of Nature.”

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JOHN TOLAND'S ARGUMENT FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERATION
IN *NAZARENUS* (1718)

Summary

In *Nazarenus: Or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*, written in 1709–10 but published in 1718, the Irish-born freethinker and republican John Toland (1670–1722) provided a novel, heterodox account of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which he described as the three phases or manifestations of the same monotheistic tradition. Toland wrote *Nazarenus* after examining, in Amsterdam, an Italian manuscript that was believed to be a translation of a "Gospel of the Mahometans." Identifying this text with the apocryphal Gospel of Barnabas, Toland argued that this gospel contained the beliefs of the Ebionites or Nazarenes, whom he regarded as the first Christians. Drawing on this manuscript and on several canonical and noncanonical sources, as well as the works of modern Hebraists, Orientalists, and biblical scholars, Toland described Mosaic Judaism, primitive Christianity, and early Islam as grounded in the law of nature. Accordingly, he maintained that the core of these three religions, and of "true religion" in general, was natural morality, which he considered to be universal, eternal, accessible to natural reason, and restored by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Thus, he added that the ancient Israelites, the first Christians, and the early Muslims practiced toleration of all those who respected the Noachic precepts, which he deemed consistent with the law of nature. Toland's argument for religious toleration in *Nazarenus* has been defined as a "historical argument." Toland indeed buttressed his stance on toleration with his reinterpretation of canonical material and Judeo-Christian and Islamic apocryphal sources, which he appropriated to his philosophical and political agenda. However, Toland's argument for toleration in *Nazarenus* is essentially a deistic argument, because it is

based on a deistic view of "true religion" as natural religion, which is fundamentally a moral religion and which, according to Toland, is at the origin and core of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Keywords: Christianity; deism; Gospel of Barnabas; Islam; John Toland; Judaism; law of nature; natural religion; religious toleration; republicanism

ARGUMENTACJA JOHNA TOLANDA NA RZECZ TOLERANCJI RELIGIJNEJ
W *NAZARENUS* (1718)

Streszczenie

W dziele *Nazarenus: Or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*, napisanym w latach 1709–1710, ale opublikowanym w 1718 r., urodzony w Irlandii wolnomyśliciel i republikanin John Toland (1670–1722) przedstawił nowatorski, heterodoksyjny opis judaizmu, chrześcijaństwa i islamu, które potraktował jako trzy fazy lub przejawy tej samej tradycji monoteistycznej. Toland napisał *Nazarenus* po zapoznaniu się w Amsterdamie z włoskim rękopisem, który uważano za tłumaczenie *Ewangelii Mahometan*. Identyfikując ten tekst z apokryficzną Ewangelią Barnaby, Toland argumentował, że ewangelia ta zawierała wierzenia Ebionitów lub Nazarejczyków, których uważał za pierwszych chrześcijan. Opierając się na tym rękopisie oraz na kilku kanonicznych i niekanonicznych źródłach, a także na pracach współczesnych hebraistów, orientalistów i biblistów, Toland opisał judaizm mojżeszowy, pierwotne chrześcijaństwo i wczesny islam jako oparte na prawie natury. W związku z tym utrzymywał, że rdzeniem tych trzech religii i ogólnie „prawdziwej religii” była naturalna moralność, którą uważał za uniwersalną, wieczną, dostępną dla naturalnego rozumu i przywróconą przez Mojżesza, Jezusa i Mahometa. Dodał więc, że starożytni Izraelici, pierwsi chrześcijanie i pierwsi muzułmanie praktykowali tolerancję wobec wszystkich, którzy przestrzegali nakazów noachickich, co uznał za zgodne z prawem natury. Argument Tolanda za tolerancją religijną w *Nazarenus* został zdefiniowany jako „argument historyczny”. Toland rzeczywiście poparł swoje stanowisko w sprawie tolerancji reinterpretacją materiałów kanonicznych oraz judeochrześcijańskich i islamskich źródeł apokryficznych, które włączył do swojego programu filozoficznego i politycznego. Jednak argument Tolanda za tolerancją jest zasadniczo argumentem deistycznym, ponieważ opiera się na deistycznym poglądzie na „prawdziwą religię” jako religię naturalną, która jest zasadniczo religią moralną i która, według Tolanda, stanowi źródło i rdzeń judaizmu, chrześcijaństwa i islamu.

Słowa kluczowe: chrześcijaństwo; deizm; Ewangelia Barnaby; islam; John Toland; judaizm; prawo natury; religia naturalna; tolerancja religijna; republikanizm