

# JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S CONVICTION CONCERNING THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST

—Excerpts from his book *Emile*—

I also admit that the majesty of the scriptures amazes me, and that the holiness of the Gospel speaks to my heart. Look at the books of the philosophers with all their pomp. How petty they are next to this one! Can it be that a book at the same time so sublime and so simple is the work of men? Can it be that he whose history it presents is only a man himself? Is his the tone of an enthusiast or an ambitious sectarian? What gentleness, what purity in his morals! What touching grace in his teachings! What elevation in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his speeches! What presence of mind, what finesse, and what exactness in his responses! What a dominion over his passions! What man, what sage can live, suffer, and die without weakness and without ostentation?

When Plato depicts his imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobrium of crime and worthy of all the rewards of virtue, he depicts Jesus Christ feature for feature. The resemblance is so striking that all the Fathers have sensed it, and there can be no doubt about it. What prejudices, what blindness one must have to dare to compare the son of Sophronisca to the son of Mary? What a distance between the two! Socrates, dying without pain and without ignominy, easily sticks to his character to the end; and if this easy death had not honored his life, one would doubt whether Socrates, with all his intellect, were anything but a sophist. It is said that he invented morality. Others before him, however, put it into practice; all he did was to say what they had done; all he did was to draw the lesson from their examples. Aristides was just before Socrates defined justice. Leonidas died for his country before Socrates declared it a duty to love the fatherland. Sparta was sober before Socrates had praised sobriety. Before he had defined virtue, Greece abounded in virtuous men. But where did Jesus find among his own people that elevated and pure morality of which he alone gave both the lessons and the example? From the womb of the most furious fanaticism was heard the highest wisdom, and the simplicity of the most heroic virtues lent honor to the vilest of all peoples. The death of Socrates,

philosophizing tranquilly with his friends, is the sweetest one could desire; that of Jesus, expiring in torment, insulted, jeered at, cursed by a whole people, is the most horrible one could fear. Socrates, taking the poisoned cup, blesses the man who gives it to him and who is crying. Jesus, in the midst of a frightful torture, prays for his cruel murderers. **Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a wise man, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God!**

Shall we say that the Gospel story is the work of the imagination? My friend, such things are not imagined. The facts about Socrates, which no one doubts, are less well attested than those of Jesus Christ. At best, you only push the difficulty aside without doing away with it. It would be more incredible that many men in agreement had fabricated this book than that a single one provided its subject. Never would Jewish authors have found either this tone or this morality; and the Gospel has characteristics of truth that are so great, so striking, so perfectly inimitable that their invention would be more astonishing than their hero. With all that, this same Gospel is full of incredible things, things incompatible with reason and impossible for any sensible man to conceive or to accept! What is to be done amidst all these contradictions? One ought always to be modest and circumspect, my child—to respect in silence what one can neither reject nor understand, and to humble oneself before the Divine Being who alone knows the truth.