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Eng 202: Global Lit

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2. How is Molière's text a prelude to Enlightenment thought regarding Christianity?

There are a few ways that Tartuffe expresses some of the enlightenment's sentiment towards Christianity which we can observe. The Enlightenment began to consider inquiry and reason in nature, and to enlist man's innate capacity in reason to find answers, rather than simply being content with tradition and faith. Tartuffe presents as a religious man with pure intentions, and gifted with rhetoric and charm who comes upon the Orgon household. What the household members (and the audience) know, but are powerless to prevent Tartuffe's influence over the patriarch Orgon, despite their appeals. The enlightenment movement saw themselves as powerless to prevent the churches crimes against citizens, but like the audience in the play, are forced to watch as Tartuffe takes more and more from the household.

A message of this play is also a warning against gullibility and in this case religious gullibility. This is personified in Orgon, who signs over the deed for the house to Tartuffe, and can't see through Tartuffe's game. This reflects the sentiment of the Enlightenment that believed that it was gullible to simply forego reason as a way of learning about the nature of life. The sexual pursuit of Tartuffe of Orgon's wife represents the sentiment of Enlightenment thinking that the Church was grossly extending itself over people, politically and religiously. Also, the fact that Tartuffe is depicted as a hypocrite is a way of saying that proponents of Enlightenment thought would not relate to the Church that obliged them to be warm towards the church.

The Church as one might expect was not happy with Molière's play and threatened to excommunicate people for watching it. This must have been taken by Enlightenment-minded people with a grudge against the Church as a confirmation of their belief that the Church was too rigid to withstand criticism and to consider the ideals of their movement. When the king in the play intervenes to restore Orgon's status and fortune it foreshadows the people's recourse to secular authority to correct and restore what it lost to the Church's abuse of power.