

Treatise on Tolerance

Voltaire

1763

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type. —It may be worth mentioning that this work uses *tolérance* dozens of times and *tolération* not once.

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Glossary

annate: ‘The first year’s revenue of a see or benefice, paid to the Pope’ (OED).

apology for: Here it means ‘defence of’.

condition: As used on page 46 and perhaps elsewhere, it means something like ‘socio-economic status’.

convulsionaries: ‘A sect of Jansenist fanatics who repeatedly threw themselves into convulsions on the tomb of Deacon Pâris in the cemetery of St. Medard’ (translated from the Petit Robert dictionary).

enthusiasm: Like what we call ‘enthusiasm’ except tending towards fanaticism. Always used disapprovingly.

Gallican Church: The Catholic Church in France through most of the 18th century. It claimed a good deal of independence from Rome, a claim that the Roman Church never accepted.

indulgence: (as a count-noun) A certificate supposedly ensuring the owner of freedom from punishment.

Jansenist: Jansenism was a movement within the Roman Catholic Church, heavily influenced by the thought of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, and regarded by much of the Church—especially the Jesuits—as heretical.

League: The Catholic League of France, founded in 1576, was dedicated to the eradication of Protestants from France and to driving Henry III from the throne.

moeurs: Someone’s *moeurs* includes his morality, basic customs, attitudes and expectations about how people will behave, ideas about what is decent. . . and so on. This word—rhyming approximately with ‘worse’—is left untranslated

because there’s no good English equivalent to it. The Oxford *English* dictionary includes it for the same reason it has for including *Schadenfreude*.

Molinist: Follower of Luis de Molina (1535-1600), who wrote influential works trying to reconcile the reality of human free will with various theological doctrines about predestination. In item (7) on page 39 Molinists are envisaged as taking communion along with Jansenists, but in general the two groups were not friends.

Nantes: The Edict of Nantes was a French royal decree (1598) granting limited freedom of worship and legal equality for Protestants. It was revoked by Louis XIV (1685).

parlement: ‘A sovereign court of justice formed by a group of specialists who are not connected with the royal court’ [translated from the Petit Robert dictionary].

St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre: Starting in Paris on that one day in 1572, but spreading across much of France over two weeks, a massacre of about 10,000 Huguenots.

Turk(ish): Used to translate *Turc* and *Turque*; but actually in the French of Voltaire’s day these words were a kind of code for ‘Moslem’.

Waldensians: A sect, starting around 1180, within the Roman Catholic Church, but regarded first as unorthodox and before long as downright heretical. With their emphasis on voluntary poverty, lay preaching, and reliance on the Bible, the Waldensians have been regarded as precursors of the Protestants.

wheel: Breaking someone on the wheel was a method of slowly torturing him to death.

1. Short account of Jean Calas's death

The murder of Calas, perpetrated with the sword of justice at Toulouse on 9.iii.1762, is one of the most singular events that deserve the attention of our own and of later ages. We quickly forget the multitude of dead who have perished in countless battles, not only because death is the inevitable fate of war, but also because those who die by the sword could also have inflicted death on their enemies, and did not die without the means of defending themselves. When the risk and the advantage are equal, the death is no longer a shock and even pity is lessened. But

- when an innocent father is delivered into the hands of error, of passion, or of fanaticism,
- when the accused has no defence but his virtue,
- when those who make the decision can slaughter him without risking anything but making a mistake,
- when they can slay with impunity by an order from the bench,

then the voice of the public is heard, and each fears for himself. They see that no man's life is safe before a court that was set up to guard the lives of citizens, and all the voices join in a demand for vengeance.

This strange affair involved religion, suicide and parricide. The question was whether •a father and mother had strangled their son to please God, •a brother had strangled his brother, •a friend had strangled his friend; and whether the judges were open to criticism for making an innocent father die on the wheel [see Glossary] or for sparing a guilty mother, brother, and friend.

Jean Calas, 68 years old, had been a merchant in Toulouse for more than forty years, and was recognised as a good father by all who shared his life. He was a Protestant, as were his wife and all his offspring except

one son, who had abjured the heresy and received a small allowance from his father. He seemed to be so far from the absurd fanaticism that is breaking the bonds of society that he approved the conversion of his son Louis Calas, and for thirty years employed a zealous Catholic woman, who had reared all his children.

One of the sons of Jean Calas, named Marc Antoine, was a man of letters; and was regarded as restless, sombre, and violent. This young man, failing to enter the commercial world (for which he was unfitted) or the legal world (because he did not have the necessary documents certifying him as a Catholic), determined to end his life, and informed a friend of his intention. His resolve to do this was strengthened by reading everything that has ever been written about suicide.

Having one day lost his money in gambling, he determined to carry out his plan on that very day. A personal friend and friend of the family named Lavoisier, a 19-year-old well known for his candid and kindly *moeurs* [see Glossary], son of a distinguished Toulouse lawyer, had come from Bordeaux on the previous day. He happened to dine with the Calas family—the father, mother, Marc Antoine (the elder son) and Pierre (the second son). After the meal they withdrew to a small room. Marc Antoine disappeared. Eventually, when young Lavoisier was ready to leave, he and Pierre Calas went downstairs and found, near the shop, Marc Antoine in his shirt, hanging from a door, his coat folded on the counter. His shirt was not so much as ruffled, his hair was neatly combed; there was no wound or sign of violence on the body.

I'll omit the details the lawyers gave in court; I shan't describe the grief and despair of the father and mother, whose cries were heard by the neighbours. Lavoisier and Pierre, beside themselves, ran for surgeons and the police.

While they were doing this, and the father and mother sobbed and wept, the Toulouse populace gathered around the house. This populace is superstitious and impulsive; it regards brothers who don't share one's religion as monsters. It was at Toulouse that God was ceremonially thanked for the death of Henry III, and that an oath was taken to cut the throat of the first man who proposed to recognise the great and good Henry IV. This city still annually celebrates—with a procession and fireworks—the day two centuries ago when it massacred 4,000 heretical [here = 'Protestant'] citizens. The Council has repeatedly forbidden this odious affair; the Toulousians celebrate it still like a floral festival.

Some fanatic in the crowd cried out that Jean Calas had hanged his son Marc Antoine. In a moment everyone was saying it. Some added that the dead man was to have recanted on the following day, and that the family and young Lavoisier had strangled him out of hatred for the Catholic religion. In a moment all doubt had disappeared. The whole town was convinced that for the Protestants a father and mother had a religious duty to kill their child when he wanted to change his faith.

When passions are aroused, they do not stop. It was imagined that the Protestants of Languedoc had held a meeting the previous day; that they had, by a majority of votes, chosen an executioner for the sect, the choice falling on young Lavoisier; and that in the ensuing twenty-four hours this young man had received the news of his appointment, and had come from Bordeaux to help Jean Calas, his wife, and their son Pierre to strangle a friend, a son, a brother.

The chief magistrate of Toulouse, Sieur David, aroused by these rumours and wanting to get credit for acting swiftly, did something that conflicts with the laws and regulations. He put the Calas family, the Catholic servant, and Lavoisier in irons.

A report was published—it was at least as vicious as this procedure. It went further: Marc Antoine Calas had died a Calvinist, and if he had committed suicide his body was supposed to be dragged on a hurdle; instead of which he was buried with great pomp in the church of St. Stephen, though the priest protested against this profanation.

There are in Languedoc four brotherhoods of penitents—the white, the blue, the grey, and the black. Their members wear a long hood, with a cloth mask, pierced with two holes to see through. They tried to get the Duke of Fitzjames, the Governor of the Province, to join them, but he refused. The white friars held a solemn service over Marc Antoine Calas, as over a martyr. No church ever celebrated the feast of a true martyr with more pomp; but *this* ceremony had something terrible about it. They had raised above a magnificent bier a skeleton, which was made to move its bones. It represented Marc Antoine Calas holding a palm in one hand, and in the other the pen with which he was to sign his renunciation of heresy, and which in fact wrote his father's death-sentence.

Nothing remained for the poor suicide but canonisation. The whole populace regarded him as a saint:

- some invoked him,
- others went to pray at his tomb,
- others asked him for miracles,
- others related the miracles he had performed.

A monk extracted some of his teeth, to have permanent relics of him. A pious woman who was rather deaf told how she had heard the sound of bells. An apoplectic priest was cured after taking an emetic. Official reports of these prodigies were drawn up. The present writer has in his possession an affidavit saying that a young man of Toulouse went mad because he had prayed for several nights at the tomb of the new saint, and could not get the miracle he begged for.

Some of the magistrates belonged to the brotherhood of white penitents, which made the death of Jean Calas seem inevitable.

What contributed most to his fate was the approach of that strange festival that the Toulousians hold every year in memory of the massacre of 4000 Huguenots. The year 1762 was the bicentenary of the event. The city was decorated with all the trappings of the ceremony, which stirred up the heated imagination of the people still further. It was openly said that the chief ornament of the festival would be the scaffold on which the Calas family would be broken on the wheel. It was said that Providence itself provided these victims to be sacrificed for our holy religion. A score of people heard these statements and others that were even more violent. And this in our days! at a time when philosophy has made so much progress! and when a hundred academies are writing for the improvement of our *moeurs*! It seems that fanaticism, indignant over reason's recent successes, struggles under it even more angrily.

Thirteen judges met daily to bring the trial to a close. There was not, and could not be, any evidence against the family; but deluded religion took the place of proof. Six of the judges long persisted in condemning Jean Calas, his son, and Lavoisier to the wheel, and the wife of Jean Calas to the stake. The other seven, more moderate, wanted at least to make an inquiry. The debates were laboured and long. One of the judges, convinced that the accused were innocent and the crime impossible, spoke vigorously on their behalf. Against zeal for severity he brought zeal for humanity; he became the public pleader for the Calas family in every household in Toulouse, where the incessant cries of deceived religion demanded the blood of these unfortunate folk. Another judge, known for his violent temper, spoke in the town with so much passion against the Calas family

that the former judge felt called on to defend them. The uproar finally became so great that they both had to recuse themselves, and retired to the country.

But by a singular misfortune the judge who was favourable to the Calas family had the decency to persist in his recusal, while the other returned to condemn those whom he could not judge. His voice settled the condemnation to the wheel, for there were now eight votes to five, as one of the six opposing judges had finally switched—after much debate—to the harsher side.

It seems that in a case of parricide, when a father is to be condemned to the most frightful death, the verdict ought to be unanimous, as the evidence for such an unheard-of crime ought to be such as to convince everybody; the slightest doubt in such a case should intimidate a judge who is to sign the death-sentence. The weakness of our reason and the inadequacy of our laws are shown daily; but what could show their wretchedness better than a situation where a one-vote majority gets a citizen condemned to the wheel? In ancient Athens there had to be a majority plus 50 votes to secure a sentence of death; which shows us—not that it does us any good—that the Greeks were wiser and more humane than we are.

It seemed impossible that Jean Calas, a 68-year-old man whose limbs had long been swollen and weak, had been able to strangle and hang a young man in his 28th year and above average in strength. He *must* have been helped in this execution by his wife, by his son, by Lavoisier, and by the maidservant. They had not left each other's company for an instant on the evening of the fatal event. But this supposition was just as absurd as the other. How could a zealous Catholic servant allow Huguenots to kill a young man, reared by herself, to punish him for embracing her own religion? How could Lavoisier have come expressly from

Bordeaux to strangle his friend, whose supposed conversion was unknown to him? How could a tender mother lay hands on her son? How could they jointly strangle a young man who was stronger than all of them, without a long and violent struggle, without screams that would have aroused the neighbours, without repeated blows, without wounds, without torn garments?

It was obvious that if the murder had been committed, all the accused must be equally guilty, as they had never left each other for a moment; it was obvious that they were not all guilty; it was obvious that the father alone could not be guilty; yet he alone was condemned to die on the wheel.

The reasoning behind the sentence was as inconceivable as all the rest. The judges who were bent on executing Jean Calas persuaded the others that the weak old man could not endure the torture, and would on the scaffold confess his crime and accuse his accomplices. They were abashed when this old man, dying on the wheel, called God to witness his innocence and asked him to pardon his judges.

They had to pass a second sentence in contradiction of the first, setting free the mother, the son Pierre, the young Lavaisse, and the servant. But one of the councillors pointed out that this verdict gave the lie to the other, that they were condemning themselves, and that as the accused were all together at the supposed hour of the crime the acquittal of the survivors necessarily proved the innocence of the father they had executed. They accordingly took the course of *banishing* Pierre Calas. This banishment seemed as illogical and absurd as all the rest: Pierre Calas was either guilty of parricide or innocent; if he was guilty, he should be broken on the wheel like his father; if he was innocent, he should not be banished. But the judges, disturbed by the execution of the father and the touching piety of his death, thought they were saving their honour by letting it be believed that they

were showing mercy to the son, as if 'mercy' for him were not a further lie; and they thought that the banishment of this poor and helpless young man was only a small injustice after the large one they had already had the misfortune to commit.

They began by threatening Pierre Calas, in his dungeon, that he would suffer like his father if he did not renounce his religion. The young man attests this on oath: 'A Dominican monk came to my cell and threatened me with the same kind of death if I did not give up my religion.'

When leaving the city Pierre Calas met a priest, a specialist in conversions, who made him return to Toulouse. He was confined in a Dominican convent, where he was forced to perform all the functions of the Catholic faith. This was the price of his father's blood, and religion seemed to be avenged.

The daughters were taken from the mother and shut up in a convent. The mother, almost drenched in the blood of her husband, who had held her eldest son dead in her arms and seen her other son exiled, deprived of her daughters and all her property, was alone in the world, without bread, without hope, dying from the excess of her misery. Certain persons, having soberly examined all the details of this horrible affair, were so struck by it that they urged Madame Calas to emerge from her solitude, go boldly to the feet of the throne, and ask for justice. She couldn't bear it at that time; she was fading away; and also—being English by birth and having been transplanted into a French province in early youth—she was terrified by the very name of Paris. She imagined that the capital of the kingdom must be even more barbaric than the capital of Languedoc [Toulouse]. At length the duty of clearing the memory of her husband prevailed over her weakness. She reached Paris almost at the point of death. She was astonished to find there welcome, help, and tears.

In Paris reason dominates fanaticism, however powerful it be; in the provinces fanaticism almost always wins.

M. de Beaumont, the famous advocate of the *Parlement* [see Glossary] of Paris, undertook to defend her right away, and drew up a legal opinion signed by fifteen other advocates. M. Loiseau, no less eloquent, wrote a memoir on behalf of the family. M. Mariette, an advocate of the Council, drew up a judicial petition which brought conviction to every mind.

These three generous defenders of the laws, and of innocence, gave to the widow the profit on the sale of their speeches.¹ Paris and the whole of Europe were moved with pity, and joined the unfortunate woman in demanding justice. The verdict was given by the public long before it could be signed by the Council.

The spirit of pity penetrated the ministry [here = 'the government'], despite the torrent of business that so often shuts out pity, and despite that daily sight of misery that does even more to harden the heart. The daughters were restored to their mother; dressed in mourning and bathed in tears, the three of them were seen to evoke tears from their judges.

This family still had enemies, however, because religion was involved. Many of those people who are known in France as *dévots*² said loudly that it was much better to let an innocent old Calvinist be broken on the wheel than to compel eight Councillors of Languedoc to admit that they were wrong; they even said 'There are more magistrates than Calases', the implication being that the Calas family ought to be sacrificed to the honour of the magistrates. The *dévots* did not reflect that the honour of judges, like that of other men, consists in repairing their blunders. The Pope is believed in

France to be infallible, even with the aid of his cardinals; so perhaps eight judges of Toulouse are not infallible either! All other people, more reasonable and disinterested, said that the Toulouse verdict would be quashed all over Europe, even if special considerations prevented it from being quashed by the Council.

That is the state this astonishing course of events had reached when it moved certain persons—impartial but not without feelings—to submit to the public a few reflections on the subject of tolerance, leniency and pity. . . .

Either the judges of Toulouse, swept away by the fanaticism of the populace, had an innocent father broken on the wheel, which is without parallel; or the father and his wife strangled their elder son, aided in this parricide by another son and a friend, which is unnatural. Each account implies that the abuse of the most holy religion has led to a great crime. So a question that concerns us all is: Ought religion to be barbaric, or should it rather be charitable?

2. Results of the execution of Jean Calas

If the white penitents were the cause of the execution of an innocent man, the utter ruin and dispersal of a family, and the humiliation that ought to go only with wicked behaviour but in fact goes also with execution; if the white penitents' haste to commemorate as a saint one who 'according to the standard treatment of suicides in Toulouse' should have been dragged on a hurdle led to the death on the wheel of a virtuous father; this calamity should make them genuinely

¹ They were pirated in several towns, and Madame Calas did not get the benefit of this generosity.

² From the Latin word *devotus*. The *devoti* of ancient Rome were those who sacrificed themselves for the good of the Republic. [In France the word came to signify passionate dedication to religious faith; Voltaire is using it perjoratively.]

penitent for the rest of their lives: they and the judges should weep, but not wearing a long white robe, and with no face-mask to hide their tears.

The religious brotherhoods are all respected for their contributions to piety; but whatever good they may do the State, can it outweigh this appalling evil that they have done? They seem to be based on the zeal which in Languedoc arouses the Catholics against those we call Huguenots. One might say that they had taken vows to hate their brothers; for we have enough religion to hate and persecute, but not enough to love and support. What would happen if these brotherhoods were controlled by fanatics, as were once the Congregation of Artisans and the Congregation of *Messieurs*, among whom, as one of our most eloquent and learned magistrates said, the seeing of visions was reduced to a fine art and life-style? What would happen if these brotherhoods set up those dark so-called 'meditation rooms', on which were painted devils armed with horns and claws, gulfs of flame, crosses and daggers, with the holy name of Jesus surmounting the picture? What a spectacle for eyes that are already dazzled and imaginations that are as inflamed against 'heretics' as they are submissive to their confessors!

There have been times when, as we know only too well, brotherhoods were dangerous. The Fratelli and the Flagellants caused disturbances. The League [see Glossary] began with associations of that kind. Why should they distinguish themselves thus from other citizens? Did they think themselves more perfect? The very claim is an insult to the rest of the nation. Did they wish all Christians to enter their brotherhood? What a sight it would be to have all Europe in hoods and masks, with two little round holes in front of the eyes! Do they seriously think that God prefers this costume to a plain jerkin? Further, this garment is the uniform of controversialists, warning opponents to arm

themselves. It can excite a kind of civil war among minds, and would perhaps end in fatal excesses if the king and his ministers were not as wise as the fanatics are demented.

We know well enough what the price has been ever since Christians began to dispute about dogmas. Blood has flowed, on scaffolds and in battles, from the fourth century to our own days. Let us confine ourselves here to the wars and horrors that the Reformation struggle caused, and see what their source was in France. Possibly a short and faithful account of those calamities will open the eyes of the uninformed and touch the hearts of the humane.

3. The idea of the Reformation

When the renaissance of letters began to spread enlightenment, there was a general complaint about abuses; everybody agrees that the complaint was just.

Pope Alexander VI had openly bought the papal crown, and his five bastards shared its advantages. His son the Cardinal the Duke of Borgia joined his father in making an end of the Vitelli, Urbino, Gravina and Oliveretto families, and the families of a hundred other nobles, in order to seize their lands. Pope Julius II, . . . helmet on head and cuirass on back, spread fire and blood over part of Italy. Pope Leo X, to pay for his pleasures, sold indulgences [see Glossary] as snacks are sold in the open market. Those who spoke up against this brigandage were not wrong from the moral point of view, at least. Let us see whether they did us any harm from a political point of view.

The reformers said that since JESUS-CHRIST had never exacted annates [see Glossary] or hold-backs, or sold pardons for this world or indulgences for the next, one need not pay a foreign prince the price of all these things. If the annates,

the legal costs of the Court of Rome, and the dispensations that we still buy, cost us no more than 500,000 francs a year, it is clear that in the 250 years since the time of Francis I we would have paid 125,000,000 francs; which is about twice that in today's money. One may, therefore, without blasphemy, admit that the heretics in proposing to abolish these singular taxes that will astonish posterity did not do great harm to the kingdom, and were good financiers rather than bad subjects. Also: they alone knew Greek, and were acquainted with antiquity. Let us not disguise the fact that despite their errors we owe to them the development of the human mind, so long buried in the densest barbarism.

But as they denied the existence of Purgatory, which it is not permitted to doubt and which brought a considerable income to the monks; as they did not venerate relics, which ought to be venerated and are a source of even greater profit; and, finally, as they attacked much-respected dogmas,¹ the only answer to them at first was to have them burned. The king, who protected and subsidised them in Germany, walked at the head of a procession in Paris, after which a number of these wretches were executed. [He gives details of how, concluding:] It was the most long-drawn-out and hideous execution that barbarism had ever invented.

Shortly before the death of Francis I, certain members of the *Parlement* of Provence, incited by their clergy against the inhabitants of Mérindol and Cabrières, asked the king for troops to support the execution of nineteen persons of that

district whom they had condemned. They had six thousand of them slaughtered, without regard to sex or old age or infancy, and they reduced thirty towns to ashes. These people, who had not hitherto been heard of, were doubtless in the wrong to have been born Waldensians [see Glossary]; but that was their only crime. They had been settled for three centuries in deserts and on mountains which they had, with incredible labour, made fertile. Their quiet, pastoral life repeated the innocence attributed to the first ages of the world. They knew the neighbouring towns only by selling produce to them; they knew nothing of law-courts or of war; they did not defend themselves. They were slain as one slays rounded-up animals, in a pen.²

After the death of Francis I—a monarch better known for his amours and misfortunes than for his cruelties—the execution of a thousand heretics. . . . caused the persecuted sect to take to arms. Their faction had grown by the light of the flames around the stake and under the sword of the executioner, and their patience gave way to fury. They imitated the cruelties of their enemies: nine civil wars filled France with carnage; and a peace more deadly than war led to the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day [see Glossary]. . . .

The League assassinated Henry III through a Dominican monk and Henry IV through a monstrous former Cistercian monk. Some claim that humanity, indulgence, and liberty of conscience are horrible things; but could they have produced calamities such as these?

¹ They revived Bérenger's view about the Eucharist; they maintained that not even omnipotence can cause a body to be in a hundred thousand different places at once; they denied that attributes can exist without a subject for them to be attributes of; they thought it was absolutely impossible for something that eyes, palate and stomach experienced as bread and wine to go suddenly out of existence. . . .

² Madame de Cental, who owned some of the ravaged land, now littered with the corpses of its inhabitants, appealed to Henry II for justice. He referred her to the *Parlement* of Paris. The Attorney-General of Provence, named Guerin, was the principal author of the massacres and the only one to lose his head. According to de Thou, of all those who were guilty he alone was punished because he had no friends at court.

4. Whether tolerance is dangerous. The peoples that practise it

Some have said that if we treated with paternal indulgence those erring brethren who pray to God in bad French, we would be putting weapons in their hands, and would once more witness the battles of Jarnac, Moncontour, Coutras, Dreux, and St. Denis. I don't know, because I am not a prophet; but it seems to me an illogical piece of reasoning to say: 'These men rebelled when I treated them badly, therefore they will rebel when I treat them well.'

I would venture to take the liberty of inviting those who are at the head of the government, and those who are destined for high office, to reflect maturely on •whether there is a risk of kindness leading to the same revolts that cruelty gave rise to; •whether what happened in certain circumstances are bound to happen in other circumstances; •whether times, public opinion and *moeurs* never change.

The Huguenots *have* indeed been drunk with fanaticism and stained with blood, as we have; but is their present generation as barbaric as their fathers? Haven't the intellectual leaders of these people been affected by •time, •the progress of reason, •good books and •the humanising influence of society? And aren't we aware that within the last fifty years or so most of Europe has come to look quite different?

Government is stronger everywhere, and *moeurs* have become gentler. The ordinary machinery of public safety, supported by numerous standing armies, saves us from having to fear a return to those anarchic times when Calvinist peasants fought Catholic peasants, hastily enrolled between

the sowing and the harvest.

Other times, other concerns. It would be absurd to decimate the Sorbonne *today* because at earlier times it •presented a demand for the burning of the Maid of Orleans, •declared that Henry III had forfeited his right to reign, •excommunicated him, and •proscribed the great Henry IV. We shan't, of course, inquire into the other bodies in the kingdom that committed the same excesses in those frenzied days. It would not only be unjust, but would be as stupid as to purge all the inhabitants of Marseilles because they had the plague in 1720.

Shall we set about sacking Rome (as did Charles V's troops) because in 1585 Pope Sixtus V granted a nine-year indulgence [see Glossary] to any Frenchman who would take up arms against his sovereign? Is it not enough to prevent Rome for ever from reverting to such excesses?

The rage inspired by the dogmatic spirit and the abuse of the Christian religion when it is wrongly conceived has shed as much blood and led to as many disasters in Germany, England and even Holland as in France; yet religious differences cause no trouble today in those States. The Jew, the Catholic, the Greek, the Lutheran, the Calvinist, the Anabaptist, the Socinian, the Memnonist, the Moravian, and ever so many others live as brothers in these regions and contribute alike to the good of the society.

In Holland they no longer fear that disputes of a Gomar¹ about predestination will lead to the death of the chief of government. In London they no longer fear that quarrels of Presbyterians and Episcopalians about liturgies and surplices will spread a king's blood on the scaffold.

¹ François Gomar was a Protestant Theologian; he maintained—against his colleague Arminius—that God has from all eternity destined most men to burn eternally; this hellish doctrine was upheld, as it had to be, by persecution. The Grand Pensionary of Holland, Barneveldt, who disagreed with Gomar about this, was decapitated at the age of 72 in 1619 for having 'done his best to sadden the Church of God'.

·START OF END-NOTE·

An orator in *Apology* [see Glossary] *for the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* said, of England: ‘A false religion was bound to produce such fruits. There was only one still to ripen: these islanders gathered it; it is the contempt of the nations.’ This author picks a bad time at which to say that the English are despicable and despised by all the earth. When a nation shows its courage and generosity, when it is victorious all over the world—what a fine time to say that it is despicable and despised! This remarkable passage is found in a chapter on intolerance; it is what would be expected from someone preaching intolerance. That abominable book. . . . is the work of a man without a mission; for what priest would write like that? Its frenzy goes so far as to justify the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre [see Glossary]. One might have expected a book full of such frightful paradoxes to be on everyone’s bookshelves, if only because of its singularity; but in fact it is hardly known.

·END OF END-NOTE·

A populous and wealthy Ireland will no longer see its Catholic citizens spending two months sacrificing its Protestant citizens to God. [He goes into gruesome details of how this was done, concluding:] Such is the account given by Rapin Thoyras, an officer in Ireland and almost a contemporary; it’s what is reported in all the annals and histories of England, and will surely never be repeated. Philosophy—mere philosophy, that sister of religion—has taken the weapons from the hands so long drenched in blood by superstition; and the human mind, awakening from its intoxication, is amazed at the excesses fanaticism had led it into.

We have in France a rich province where the Lutherans outnumber the Catholics. The University of Alsace is in the hands of Lutherans; they occupy some of the municipal

offices; yet not the least religious quarrel has disturbed this province since it came into the possession of our kings. Why? Because no-one has been persecuted there. Seek not to vex men’s hearts and the hearts are all yours.

I do not say that all who are not of the same religion as the prince should share the **positions and honours** of those who are of the prevailing religion. In England the Catholics, who are regarded as attached to the party of the Pretender, are not admitted to office; they even pay double taxes; but apart from that they have all the **rights** of citizens.

Some of the French bishops have been suspected of holding that it is neither honourable nor profitable to have Calvinists in their dioceses; and this is said to be one of the greatest obstacles to tolerance. I cannot believe it. The episcopal body in France is composed of well-born gentlemen who think and act with a nobility that befits their birth. They are charitable and generous—we should grant them that much. They must surely reflect that exiled Calvinists will not be converted ·to Catholicism· in foreign countries, and that when they return to their pastors ·in France· they could be enlightened by their instructions and touched by their example. There would be honour in converting them, and it wouldn’t *cost* anything: the more citizens there were, the larger the income from the prelate’s estates.

A Polish bishop had an **a** Anabaptist to handle his finances and a **b** Socinian as his steward. He was urged to discharge and prosecute **b** one because he did not believe in consubstantiality—·i.e. that the three persons of the Trinity are one substance·—and **a** the other because he did not baptise his child until it was 15 years old. He replied that they would be damned for ever in the next world, but that they were necessary to him in this.

Let us leave our little corner and study the rest of our globe. The Sultan governs peacefully twenty peoples with

different religions; 200,000 Greeks live safely in Constantinople; the Mufti himself nominates the Greek patriarch and presents him to the emperor; and a Latin patriarch is also allowed there. The Sultan nominates Latin bishops for some of the Greek islands, using the following formula: 'I command him to go and reside as bishop in the island of Chios, according to their ancient usage and their vain ceremonies.' That empire is full of Jacobites, Nestorians, and Monothelites; it contains Copts, Christians of St. John, Jews, and Zoroastrians. The Turkish [see Glossary] annals do not record any revolt instigated by any of these religions.

Go to India, Persia, Tartary, and you will find the same tolerance and tranquillity. Peter the Great patronised all the cults in his vast empire. Commerce and agriculture profited by this, and the body politic never suffered from it.

The government of China has not, during the four thousand years of its known history, had any cult but the simple worship of one God. Nevertheless, it tolerates the superstitions of Buddha and a multitude of Buddhist priests, who would be dangerous if the wisdom of the law-courts hadn't always restrained them.

It is true that the great Emperor Yung-Chin, perhaps the wisest and most magnanimous emperor that China ever had, expelled the Jesuits. But it was not because *he* was intolerant; it was because *they* were. They themselves report. . . the words of this good monarch to them: 'I know that your religion is intolerant; I know what you have done in Manila and Japan. You deceived my father; don't think you can deceive me in the same way.' Anyone who reads the whole of the speech he graciously made to them will find him to be the wisest and most clement of men. How could he retain European physicians who, under pretence of showing thermometers and wind-pumps at court, had kidnapped a royal prince? And what would this Emperor have said if he

had read our history and was acquainted with the days of our League [see Glossary] and of the gunpowder plot?

It was enough for him to be informed of the indecent quarrels of the Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, and secular priests sent into his domains from the ends of the earth. They came to preach the truth, and fell to cursing one another. So the Emperor had to expel the foreign disturbers. But how kindly he dismissed them! What paternal care he devoted to their journey, and to protecting them from insult on the way! Their very banishment was a lesson in tolerance and humanity.

The Japanese were the most tolerant of all men: twelve peaceful religions were established in their empire. The Jesuits came with a thirteenth, but soon showed that they would not tolerate any of the others, and we know what came of that: the country was desolated by a civil war even more frightful than those of the Catholic League. In the end the Christian religion was drowned in torrents of blood; the Japanese closed their empire off from the rest of the world, and regarded us only as wild beasts, like the ones the English have cleared out of their island. The minister Colbert—knowing how we need the Japanese, who have no need of us—tried in vain to reopen trade-links with their empire. He found them inflexible.

Thus the whole of our continent shows us that we must neither preach nor practise intolerance.

Turn your eyes to the other hemisphere. Study Carolina, of which the wise philosopher John Locke was the legislator [through his employer the first Earl of Shaftesbury]. Any father of a family who had seven people in his household could establish there a religion of his choice, provided that those seven agreed with him about it. This liberty gave rise to no disorder. God save us from using this example to encourage having a separate cult for each household! I cite it only to show that

the greatest possible excess of tolerance was not followed by the slightest dissension.

What shall we say of the peaceful primitives who have been derisively called ‘Quakers’, who—with customs that are perhaps ridiculous—have been so virtuous and have unsuccessfully preached *peace* to the rest of mankind? There are 100,000 of them in Pennsylvania. Discord and controversy are unknown in the happy homeland they have made for themselves; and the very name of their town Philadelphia, which constantly reminds them that men are brothers, is an example and a shame to nations that have yet to learn tolerance.

In short: **a** tolerance never led to civil war; **b** intolerance has covered the earth with carnage. Choose, then, between these rivals—between **b** the mother who would have her son slain and **a** the mother who yields him provided his life is spared.

I speak here only of the interest of nations. While having a proper respect for theology, I am attending here only to the physical and moral well-being of society. I beg every impartial reader to weigh these truths, sharpen them, and expand to them. Attentive readers who discuss their thoughts among themselves always get further than the author.

5. How tolerance may be admitted

I venture to think that some enlightened and magnanimous minister, some humane and wise prelate, some monarch who knows that his interest consists in the number of his subjects and his glory consists in their welfare, may deign to glance at this badly structured and defective paper. He will improve it by his own insights, and say to himself: ‘What would I risk in seeing my land cultivated and enriched by a

larger number of industrious workers, the revenue increased, the State more flourishing?’

Germany would be a desert strewn with the bones of Catholics, Evangelicals, Calvinists and Anabaptists, slain by each other, if the peace of Westphalia ·in 1648· had not at last brought freedom of conscience.

We have Jews in Bordeaux and Metz and in Alsace; we have Lutherans, Molinists [see Glossary], and Jansenists [see Glossary]; can we not allow and control Calvinists in about the same conditions as Catholics are tolerated at London? The more sects there are, the less dangerous each of them is; multiplicity weakens them; they are all restrained by just laws that forbid disorderly meetings, insults and sedition, and are constantly enforced by the police.

We know that many heads of families who have made large fortunes in foreign lands are ready to return to their homeland. All they ask for is

- the protection of natural law,
- the validity of their marriages,
- security as to the condition of their children,
- the right to inherit from their fathers, and
- their personal freedom.

They do not ask for public chapels, or the right to municipal offices or to dignities, which Catholics do not have in England or in many other countries. It is not a question of giving immense privileges and secure positions to a faction, but of allowing a peaceful people to live, and of moderating the laws that may once have been necessary but are no longer so. It is not for me to tell the ministry what is to be done; I merely plead to it on behalf of the unfortunate.

How many ways there are of making them useful, and of preventing them from ever being dangerous! The prudence of the ministry and the Council, supported by force, will easily discover these ways that are already employed so

successfully by other nations.

There are still fanatics among the Calvinist populace, but there are certainly even more among the convulsionaries [see Glossary]. The dregs of the crazed people at the cemetery of St. Medard count as nothing in the nation, whereas the dregs of the Calvinist prophets are annihilated. The great means to reduce the number of maniacs, if any remain, is to submit their mental disease to the treatment of reason, which slowly but surely enlightens men. Reason

- is gentle,
- is humane,
- inspires leniency,
- eliminates discord,
- strengthens virtue, and
- has more power to make obedience to the laws attractive than force has to compel it.

And shall we take no account of the ridicule that attaches today to the enthusiasm [see Glossary] of these good folk? This ridicule is a strong barrier to the extravagance of all sectarians. The past is as if it had never been. We must always start from the present—from the point nations have already reached.

There was a time when it was thought necessary to issue decrees against those who taught a doctrine at variance with •the categories of Aristotle, •the abhorrence of a vacuum, •the quiddities, •the universal apart from the object. We have in Europe more than a hundred volumes of jurisprudence on sorcery and how to distinguish false sorcerers from real ones. The excommunication of grasshoppers and insects harmful to crops has been much practised, and still survives in certain rituals. But the practice is over; Aristotle and the sorcerers and grasshoppers are left in peace. There are countless instances of these follies, once thought so important; others arise from time to time; but once they

have made themselves felt and people have had their fill, they vanish. If today a man called himself a Carpocratian, a Eutychean, a Monothelite, a Monophysite, a Nestorian or a Manichean or the like, what would happen? He would be laughed at, like a man dressed in the doublet-and-high-collar style of a century ago.

The French nation was beginning to open its eyes when the Jesuits Le Tellier and Doucin put together the bull [= 'papal edict'] *Unigenitus* and sent it to Rome for adoption by the Pope. They thought that they still lived in those ignorant times when the most absurd statements were accepted without inquiry. They went so far as to condemn the proposition, a truth of all times and all places:

The fear of unjust excommunication should not prevent anyone from doing his duty.

They were proscribing reason, the liberties of the Gallican Church [see Glossary], and the foundations of morality. They were saying to men:

God commands you never to do your duty if you fear being treated unjustly for doing so.

Never was common sense more outrageously challenged! The counsellors of Rome were not on their guard. The papal court was persuaded that the bull was necessary, and that the nation desired it; it was signed, sealed, and dispatched. You know the results; if they had been foreseen, the bull would surely have been modified. There were angry quarrels, which the prudence and goodness of the king have settled.

So it is with regard to many of the points that divide the Protestants from us. Some are of no consequence; others are more serious, but even with them the fury of the controversy has abated so far that the Protestants themselves no longer preach about the controversy in any of their churches.

So we can seize on this time of disgust, of satiety, or rather of reason, as an historical benchmark and a guarantee of

public tranquillity. Controversy is an epidemic disease that is near its end, and this plague that we are now cured of requires only gentle treatment. It is in the State's interests that its expatriated sons should return modestly to the home of their father; humanity demands this, reason counsels it, and politicians need not fear it.

6. Whether intolerance a matter of natural law, and of human law

[In this little chapter, 'law' translates *droit*. But this can also mean 'right', and is translated as 'right' in the first paragraph. Perhaps 'right' would be better elsewhere in the chapter, but probably not.] Natural law is the law indicated to all men by nature. You have reared your child; he owes you respect as his father, gratitude as his benefactor. You have a right to the products of the soil that you have cultivated with your own hands. You have given or received a promise; it ought to be kept.

Human law must in every case be based on this natural law; and all over the earth the great principle—the universal principle of both—is: *Do not do to others what you would not want to be done to you*. Now, I don't see how a man guided by this principle could say to another: *Believe what I believe—which you cannot believe—or you will perish*, which is what men say in Portugal, Spain and Goa. In some other countries they are now content to say: *Believe, or I detest you; believe, or I will do you all the harm I can; monster, you don't share my religion so you have no religion; you should be a thing of horror to your neighbours, your city, your province*.

If it were a matter of natural¹ law to behave like that, the Japanese should detest the Chinese, who would abhor the

Siamese; the Siamese in turn would persecute the Tibetans, who would fall upon the Indians; a Mogul would tear out the heart of the first Malabarian he met; the Malabarian could slaughter the Persian, who could massacre the Turk; and all together would fling themselves against the Christians, who have so long devoured each other.

So the 'law of intolerance' is absurd and barbaric; it is the law of tigers; except that it is even more horrible, because tigers tear and mangle only so as to have food, whereas we wipe each other out over paragraphs.

7. Whether intolerance was known to the Greeks

The peoples that history has given us some slight knowledge of all regarded their different religions as links that bound them together; it was an association of the human race. There was a kind of law of hospitality among the gods, as among men. When a stranger reached a town, his first act was to worship the gods of the country; even the gods of enemies were venerated. The Trojans offered prayers to the gods who were fighting for the Greeks.

Alexander went to the deserts of Libya to consult the god Ammon, whom the Greeks called 'Zeus' and the Romans 'Jupiter', though each had their own Zeus or Jupiter back at home. When a town was besieged, sacrifices and prayers were offered to the gods of the town to secure their favour. Thus in the very middle of war, religion united men and sometimes moderated their fury, though at times it commanded them to do things that were inhuman and horrible.

I may be wrong, but it appears to me that not one of the

¹ The original says *humain*; evidently a slip.

ancient civilised nations restricted the freedom of thought. They all had a religion, but it seems to me that they applied it to their gods as they did to men. All of them recognised one supreme god, but they associated with him a prodigious number of lesser divinities. They had only one ·over-arching· cult, but they permitted a host of special systems ·within it·.

The Greeks, for instance, religious though they were, were happy with the Epicureans' denial of Providence and of the existence of the soul. Not to mention other sects which all offended against the idea one ought to have of the creative Being, yet were all tolerated.

Socrates, who came closest to a knowledge of the Creator, is said to have paid for it, and died a martyr to the Deity; he is the only man the Greeks put to death for his opinions. If that was really the cause of his condemnation, however, it is not to the credit of intolerance, since they •punished only the man who alone gave glory to God and •honoured those who had the most unworthy notions of the Divinity. The enemies of tolerance ought not, I think, to cite in their favour the odious example of the judges of Socrates.

Besides, he was evidently the victim of a furious party, angered against him. He had made irreconcilable enemies of the sophists, orators and poets who taught in the schools, and even of all the private tutors in charge of the children of distinguished men. He himself admits, in his discourse reported by Plato, that he went from house to house proving to the tutors that they were simply ignorant—conduct unworthy of one whom an oracle had declared to be the wisest of men. A priest and a councillor of the Five Hundred were put forward to accuse him. I must confess that I do not know what the precise accusation was; I find only vagueness in his apology [see Glossary]; he is reported as saying in a

general way that he was accused of instilling into young men maxims against religion and government. That is how calumniators always go about things, but a court should demand accredited facts and precise, detailed charges, and the trial of Socrates does not provide us with these. We know only that at first there were 220 votes in his favour. So the court of the Five Hundred included 220 philosophers; that is a lot; I doubt if so many could be found anywhere else. The majority at length condemned him to drink the hemlock; but let us remember that when the Athenians returned to their senses they regarded the accusers and the judges with horror; that Melitus, the chief author of the sentence, was condemned to death for this injustice; and that the others were banished, and a temple was erected to Socrates. Never was philosophy so well avenged and so much honoured. The case of Socrates is really the most terrible argument that can be used against tolerance¹. The Athenians had an altar dedicated to foreign gods, to gods they could not know. Is there a stronger proof not only of their indulgence to all nations but also of respect for their cults? . . .

8. Whether the Romans were tolerant

The ancient Romans, from Romulus until the days when the Christians disputed with the priests of the Empire, you don't see a single man persecuted for his views. Cicero doubted everything; Lucretius denied everything; yet they incurred not the least reproach. Licence even went so far that Pliny, the naturalist, began his book by saying that there is no god, or that if there is one it is the sun. Cicero, speaking of the lower regions, says 'No old woman is so stupid as to believe in them' (*Non est anus tam excors quae credat*). Juvenal says:

¹ The original has *intolérance*; surely a slip. See the end of the preceding paragraph.

‘Children do not believe it’ (*Nec pueri credunt*). They sang in the theatre at Rome ‘There is nothing after death, and death itself is nothing’ (*Post mortem nihil est, ipsaque mors nihil*). We should abhor these maxims, or at the most forgive a people whom the light of the gospels had not reached; they are false, they are impious; but we should conclude that the Romans were very tolerant, since the maxims never excited the slightest murmur.

The great principle of the Senate and people of Rome was ‘Offences against the gods are the business of the gods’ (*Deorum injurias diis curae*). This sovereign people thought only of conquering, governing and civilising the world. They were our legislators and our conquerors; and Caesar, who gave us roads, laws, and games, never sought to compel us to abandon our Druids for him, though he was the chief priest of the nation that had conquered us.

The Romans did not profess all cults, or publicly endorse them all, but they permitted them all.¹ Under Numa they had no material object of worship, no pictures or statues; though soon after that they erected statues to ‘the gods of the great nations’, this being something they learned from the Greeks. The law of the Twelve Tables, *Deos peregrinos ne colunto* (Foreign gods shall not be worshipped) means only that *public* worship shall be given only to the superior or inferior divinities approved by the Senate. Isis had a temple at Rome until Tiberius destroyed it. [He reports Josephus’s account of why Tiberius did that, expresses scepticism about it, and continues:] But whether or not that anecdote is true, it is certain that the Egyptian superstition had raised a temple in Rome, with official permission. The Jews engaged

in commerce there since the time of the Punic war, and had synagogues there in the days of Augustus. They kept them almost always, as in modern Rome. Is there a clearer proof that tolerance was regarded by the Romans as the most sacred rule in the law of nations?

We are told that as soon as the Christians appeared they were persecuted by these same Romans—who didn’t persecute anyone. It seems to me that this statement is entirely false, and I need only quote St. Paul himself in disproof of it. In the *Acts of the Apostles* we read that when St. Paul was accused by the Jews of wanting to destroy the Mosaic Law through JESUS-CHRIST, St. James advised St. Paul to have his head shaved and to go to the temple with four Jews to have himself purified, ‘so that all the world will know that everything said about you is false, and that you still keep the Law of Moses’.

Then Paul, a Christian, set out to go through all the Judaic ceremonies over seven days; but before the seven days were over, some Jews from Asia recognised him; and, seeing that he had entered the temple with gentiles as well as with Jews, cried out against this ‘profanation’. He was seized and taken before the Roman Governor Felix; and later on taken before the tribunal of Festus. A crowd of Jews demanded his death; Festus replied to them: ‘It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die before the accused man faces his accusers and is free to defend himself.’ These words are the more remarkable for a Roman magistrate who seems to have had nothing but contempt for Paul. Deceived by the false light of his own reason, he took Paul for a fool, and told him to his face that he was demented, saying *Multae te*

¹ [One edition of this work inserts here something that is too good not to borrow, a quotation from Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* etc.: ‘The various modes of worship that prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, and by the magistrate as equally useful.’]

litterae ad insaniam convertunt ·('Much learning makes you mad'·. Thus, in giving his protection to a stranger for whom he had no esteem, Festus was listening only to the Roman law's idea of fairness.

Thus the Holy Spirit—by inspiring the *Acts of the Apostles*—testifies that the Romans were not persecutors and were just. It was not the Romans who rose up against St. Paul, but the Jews. St. James, the brother of Jesus, was stoned by the order of a Jewish Sadducee, not of a Roman. The Jews alone stoned St. Stephen; and when St. Paul held the cloaks of the executioners, he was certainly not acting as a Roman citizen would.

The first Christians had no reason to quarrel with the Romans; their only enemies were the Jews, from whom they were beginning to separate. We know the implacable hatred that sectarians always have for those who leave their sect. No doubt there was tumult in the synagogues of Rome. Suetonius says in his life of Claudius: *Judaeos impulsore Christo assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit* ·(As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Christ, he expelled them from Rome)·. He was wrong in saying that they were instigated by Christ—he couldn't know the details about a people so much despised at Rome as the Jews were—but he was not wrong about what prompted the quarrels. Suetonius wrote in the reign of Hadrian, in the second century; at that time the Christians were not distinct from the Jews in Roman eyes. That passage from Suetonius shows that the Romans, far from oppressing the first Christians, were controlling the Jews who persecuted them. They wanted the synagogue of Rome to be as accepting of its separated brethren as the Senate was of the synagogue itself. The banished Jews returned soon afterwards, and even attained high honours in spite of the laws that excluded them from any such, as Dion Cassius and Ulpian tell us. Is it

possible that after the ruin of Jerusalem the emperors should lavish honours on the Jews, and persecute Christians, who were regarded as a Jewish sect, hand them over to the executioner or to wild animals?

It is said that Nero persecuted them. Tacitus tells us that they were accused of setting fire to Rome, and were abandoned to the fury of the people. Was that on account of their religious belief? Certainly not. Shall we say that the Chinese who were slain by the Dutch a few years ago in the suburbs of Batavia were sacrificed on account of religion? However much a man may wish to deceive himself, it is impossible to ascribe to intolerance the disaster that befell a few half-Jewish, half-Christian people in Rome under Nero.

·START OF AN END-NOTE ON ROMAN HISTORIANS·

Tacitus says: '... whose dreadful crimes led to their being commonly called "Christians"'. It is hard to believe that the label 'Christian' was already known in Rome; Tacitus wrote during the reigns of Vespasian and Domitian; he referred to Christians in the way they were referred to at *his* time. I would venture to say that the words *odio humani generis convicti* could in Tacitus's style as well mean 'convicted of being hated by mankind' as '... of hating all mankind'.

What did these first missionaries do in Rome? They tried to win a few souls, teaching them the purest morality; they did not rebel against any power; their hearts were humble, like their social status and their situation; they were hardly known, hardly separated from the other Jews. How could mankind, knowing nothing of them, hate them? and how could they be convicted of hating mankind?

When London burned, the Catholics were blamed for it; but this was after the wars of religion, and after the gunpowder plot of which a number of Catholics—unworthy of being Catholics—had been convicted.

The first Christians at the time of Nero were certainly not in that situation. It is very difficult to penetrate the darkness of history. Tacitus gives no reason for the suspicion that Nero himself had arranged to set Rome on fire; there would have been better reason to suspect that Charles II had burned London: he would at least have had an excuse—the blood of his royal father, executed on a scaffold in the sight of a populace demanding his death. But Nero had no excuse or pretext for burning Rome, and had nothing to gain from it. These crazy rumours can be the inheritance of the populace in any country; in our own time we have heard some that are just as stupid and just as unfair.

Tacitus, who was so well acquainted with the nature of princes, must also have known the nature of the people—always vain, always excessive in their fleeting but violent opinions, unable to see anything, and able to say anything, believe anything, forget anything.

Philo says that Sejanus persecuted them [i.e. the Jews] under Tiberius, but that after Sejanus's death the Emperor restored all their rights to them. They had the rights of Roman citizens, despised though they were by the Roman citizens; they shared in the distributions of grain, and once when the distribution was on the Sabbath their part in it was postponed to another day. All this was probably because of the sums of money they had paid to the State; for in every country they have purchased tolerance, and have very quickly arranged to get reimbursed for what it has cost them. . . .

I will add that Philo regards Tiberius as a wise and just monarch. I am sure that he was just only to the extent that justice served his interests; but the good things Philo says about him make me a little sceptical about the horrors that Tacitus and Suetonius accuse him of. It does not seem to me likely that an infirm 70-year-old would retire to the

island of Capri to indulge in elaborate and barely natural debauches that even the most debauched of the Roman youth had not encountered. Neither Tacitus nor Suetonius knew this Emperor; they enjoyed gathering rumours that were running through the people; Octavius, Tiberius, and their successors had been odious because they ruled over a people who should have been free: the historians enjoyed defaming them, and these historians were taken at their word because back then there were no memoirs, diaries, documents. Also, the historians did not *cite* anyone; they could not be contradicted; they chose whom to defame; they decided what the judgment of posterity would be.

It is up to the wise reader to see •the point at which one should distrust the truthfulness of historians; •what credit one should give to what solemn authors, born in an enlightened nation, affirm about public events; and •what limits to one's credulity should be set regarding anecdotes that these same authors pass on without any evidence.

•END OF NOTE ON ROMAN HISTORIANS•

9. The martyrs

There *were* Christian martyrs in later years. It is very hard to learn the precise grounds on which they were condemned; but I venture to think that under the first Caesars none were put to death on purely religious grounds. All religions were tolerated. How could the Romans have sought out and persecuted obscure members of one cult at a time when they permitted all other religions?

Titus, Trajan, the Antonines, and Decius were not barbarians. Can we think that they deprived the Christians alone of a liberty that the whole •known• world enjoyed? Would they have ventured to charge the Christians with having secret

mysteries, when the mysteries of Isis, Mithra and the Syrian goddess—all alien to the Roman cult—were freely permitted? There must have been other reasons for the persecution; what led to the shedding of Christian blood must have been particular animosities supported by reasons of State.

For instance, when St. Lawrence refused to give to the Roman prefect Cornelius Secularis Christian money that he held in safe keeping, the prefect and Emperor would naturally be angry. They did not know that St. Lawrence had distributed the money to the poor, and done a charitable and holy act. They regarded him as a rebel, and had him put to death.

Let us consider the martyrdom of St. Polyeuctes. Was he condemned just because of his religion? He enters the temple where thanks are being ceremonially given to the gods for the victory of the Emperor Decius. He insults the sacrificing priests, and overturns and breaks the altars and statues. In what country in the world would such an attack be pardoned? The Christian who in public tore down the edict of the Emperor Diocletian, and drew the great persecution upon his brethren in the last two years of that monarch's reign, had a zeal that was not guided by knowledge, and had the misfortune to bring disaster to his people. This *unthinking* zeal that often broke out, and was condemned even by some of the Fathers of the Church, was probably the source of all the persecutions.

(I do not, of course, compare the early Protestants with the early Christians; I do not put error alongside truth. But Forel, the predecessor of Calvin, did at Arles the same thing that St. Polyeuctes had done in Armenia. The statue of St. Antony the Hermit was being carried in procession, and Forel and some of his people beat and scattered the monks who carried it, and threw St. Antony in the river. He deserved the death that he escaped because he had time to get away. . . .)

Could the Romans have allowed the infamous Antinous to be raised to the rank of the secondary gods, yet mangled and given to the beasts all those whose had been accused only of quietly worshipping one just God? Could they have recognised a sovereign God, master of all the secondary gods—as we see in their formula *Deus optimus maximus*—yet hunted down those who worshipped one sole God?

It is not credible that under the emperors there was any inquisition against the Christians, i.e. that men were sent among them to interrogate them on their beliefs. That is a topic on which the Romans never troubled either Jew, Syrian, Egyptian, Celtic bards, Druids or philosophers. So the martyrs were men who made an outcry against 'false gods'. It was a very wise and very pious thing to refuse to believe in them; but if, not content with worshipping God in spirit and in truth, they broke out violently against the established cult, however absurd it was, we have to admit that they were themselves intolerant.

Tertullian says in his *Apology* that the Christians were regarded as seditious. The charge was unjust, but it shows that what stimulated the zeal of the magistrates was not only their religion. He says that the Christians refused to decorate their doors with laurel branches in the public rejoicings for the victories of the emperors; this mischievous conduct could easily be seen as a treasonable offence.

The first period of juridical severity against the Christians was under Domitian, but it was generally restricted to banishment for less than a year: *Facile coeptum repressit restitutis quos ipse relegaverat* ('He quickly repressed the work, restoring those whom he had banished'), says Tertullian. Lactantius, whose style is so vehement, agrees that the Church was peaceful and flourishing from Domitian to Decius. This long peace, he says, was broken when 'that execrable animal Decius began to vex the Church'.

I shan't discuss here the learned Dodwell's view about how few martyrs there were; but if the Romans had so greatly persecuted the Christian religion, if the Senate had put to death so many innocents with unheard-of tortures—plunging Christians in boiling oil and exposing totally naked girls to the beasts in the circus—how is it that they left untouched all the earlier bishops of Rome? St. Irenaeus can count among them only one martyr, Telesphorus, in the year 139; and we have no proof that this Telesphorus was put to death. Zepherinus governed the flock at Rome for twenty-eight years, and died peacefully in 219. It is true that nearly all the early popes are inscribed in the ancient martyrologies; but back then the word 'martyr' was given its correct meaning, signifying a witness, not someone put to death.

It is hard to reconcile this persecuting fury with the Christians' being free to hold—according to ecclesiastical writers—fifty-six Councils in the first three centuries.

There were persecutions; but if they were as violent as we are told, it is probable that Tertullian, who wrote so vigorously against the established ·Roman· cult, would not have died in his bed. We know of course that the emperors didn't read his *Apology*; an obscure work, composed in Africa, won't have reached those who were ruling the world. But it must have been known to those who were in touch with the proconsul of Africa; it must have brought plenty of hatred towards its author; yet he did not suffer martyrdom.

Origen taught publicly at Alexandria, and was not put to death. This same Origen, who spoke so freely to both pagans and Christians—announcing Jesus to the former and denying a God in three persons to the latter—says expressly in the third book of his *Against Celsus* that 'there have been very few martyrs, and those at long intervals; although the Christians run about the towns and villages, doing all they can to get everyone to accept their religion.'

This continual running about was certainly wide open to accusations of sedition from hostile priests, yet these missions were tolerated despite the Egyptian people, always turbulent, fractious and cowardly; a people that killed a Roman for slaying a cat, and were always contemptible, whatever the admirers of the pyramids may say.

·START OF AN END-NOTE ABOUT THE EGYPTIANS·

This assertion should be supported. It must be agreed that since fables gave way to history, the Egyptians have been revealed as a people who were as cowardly as they were superstitious. Cambyse took over Egypt by means of a single battle; Alexander governed there without any fighting, without any town taking the risk of waiting for a siege; the Ptolomeys took it over without striking a blow; ·Julius· Caesar and Augustus subjugated it just as easily. Omar took the whole of Egypt in a single campaign; the Mamelukes. . . . were masters of it after Omar; it was they and not the Egyptians who defeated the army of St. Louis and took that king prisoner. Finally, when the Mamelukes had become Egyptians—i.e. soft, cowardly, incompetent, flighty—as is natural for people who live in that climate, it took them only three months to come under the yoke of Selim I, who had their Sultan hanged and annexed Egypt as a province of the Turkish Empire—which it will continue to be· until the time when other barbarians take it over.

[He repeats from Herodotus various absurd fables concerning ancient Egypt, and comments on one of them:] It is as though a king of France were to set out from Touraine to conquer Norway! There's no point in repeating these tales, as they occur in thousands of volumes; that doesn't make them any more probable. . . .

As for the pyramids and other antiquities: all they show is the pride and bad taste of the monarchs of Egypt, and

the slavery of an incompetent people using their arms and shoulders—all they had of value—to satisfy the vulgar ostentation of their masters. The government of this people, at the very time when it is supposed to be so strong, appears to be absurd and tyrannical. It is claimed that all lands belong to the Egyptian monarchs. Fine work for such slaves—conquering the world!

The supposed deep knowledge of the Egyptian priests is yet another of the most enormous absurdities in ancient history—i.e. in fable. Folk who claimed that in the course of 11,000 years the sun twice rose in the west, and twice set in the east, doubtless knew much more than the author of the *Almanach de Liège*! The religion of those priests who governed the state was not comparable with that of the least civilised peoples in America; they are known to have worshipped crocodiles, monkeys, cats, onions; and it may be that over the whole earth today the only cult that is so absurd is that of the grand Lama.

Their arts are not much better than their religion; there is not a single tolerable statue from ancient Egypt. The only good works that have come from Egypt were made in Alexandria, under the Ptolemies and under the Caesars, by artists from Greece. They needed a Greek to teach them geometry.

The illustrious Bossuet in his *Discourse on Universal History* addressed to the son of Louis XIV, rhapsodises over Egyptian merit. He may dazzle a young prince, but the learned world has not been favourable. It is a most eloquent declamation, but an historian should be a philosopher rather than an orator.

I should add that I offer these thoughts about the Egyptians only as a conjecture. What other name could be given to *anything* that is said about antiquity?

·END OF NOTE ABOUT THE EGYPTIANS·

Who could have done more to raise the priests and the government against Origen than his pupil St. Gregory Thaumaturgus? He had seen during the night an old man sent by God, and a woman shining with light; the woman was the Holy Virgin and the old man St. John the Evangelist. John dictated to him a creed, which Gregory went out to preach. On his way to Neocaesarea he passed by a temple where oracles were given, and where he had to shelter from the rain for a night; while there he made many signs of the cross. In the morning the sacrificing priest was astonished that the spirits that had previously responded to him would no longer present him with oracles. When he called, the devils came and said that they would come no more; they told him they could not go on living in the temple because Gregory had spent the night there and made signs of the cross. The priest had Gregory seized, and Gregory said: 'I can expel the spirits from wherever I like, and drive them into wherever I like.' 'Send them back into my temple, then', said the priest. So Gregory tore off a little piece from a book he had in his hand and wrote on it: 'Gregory to Satan : I order you to return to this temple.' The message was placed on the altar, and the demons obeyed and gave the oracles as before; though later on, as is well known, they stopped.

St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us these facts in his *Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*. The priests in charge of the idols must indeed have been incensed against Gregory and wanted in their blindness to denounce him to the authorities; yet their greatest enemy never suffered persecution.

It is said in the history of St. Cyprian that he was the first Bishop of Carthage to be condemned to death. His martyrdom occurred in 258, which means that through a very long period no Bishop of Carthage was killed because of his religion. The history does not tell us what calumnies were launched against St. Cyprian, what enemies he had,

and why the proconsul of Africa was angry with him. St. Cyprian writes to Cornelius, Bishop of Rome: 'A short time ago there was a popular disturbance at Carthage, and the cry was twice raised that I should be thrown to the lions.' It is very probable that the excitement of the fierce populace of Carthage was the cause of Cyprian's death; and it is very certain that the Emperor Gallus did not condemn him on religious grounds from so far away, since he did not lay a hand on Cornelius, who lived under his eyes.

So many hidden causes are woven in with the apparent cause, so many unknown springs drive the persecution of a man, that it is impossible centuries later to disentangle the hidden source of the misfortunes even of distinguished men, let alone of an individual who could not have been known to anyone outside his own party.

Observe that St. Gregory Thaumaturgus and St. Denis, Bishop of Alexandria, who were not put to death, lived at the same time as St. Cyprian. Given that they were at least as well known as that Bishop of Carthage, why were they left in peace? And why was St. Cyprian put to death? Doesn't it look as though *he* fell a victim to personal and powerful enemies, under the pretext of calumny or reasons of state that are often associated with religion, and that *they* were fortunate enough to escape the malice of men?

It is impossible that the mere charge of being a Christian led to the death of St. Ignatius under the clement and just Trajan, since Christians were allowed to accompany and console him during his voyage to Rome. [Voltaire has here a long note giving detailed reasons for rejecting almost everything that has been recorded about St. Ignatius's supposed martyrdom, and also St. Polycarp's. He ends it thus: 'Anyone could be forgiven for finding in these histories more piety than truth.'] Seditions were common at Antioch, always a turbulent city, where Ignatius was the secret bishop of the

Christians. Possibly these seditions, maliciously imputed to the innocent Christians, brought them under the scrutiny of the government—deceived here, as so often!

St. Simeon, for instance, was charged before the Persian king Sapor with being a Roman spy. The story of his martyrdom tells that King Sapor ordered him to worship the sun, but we know that the Persians did not worship the sun; they regarded it as a symbol of the good principle [see Glossary], Oromases, the divine creator whom they did recognise.

However tolerant we may be, we cannot help being indignant with the rhetoricians who accuse Diocletian of persecuting the Christians as soon as he ascended the throne. Let us call as a witness Eusebius of Caesarea, whose testimony cannot be dismissed. Constantine's favourite, his panegyrist, the violent enemy of preceding emperors, should be believed when he says something in defence of them. Here are his words: 'The emperors for a long time gave the Christians proof of their goodwill. They entrusted provinces to them; several Christians lived in the palace; they even married Christian women. Diocletian married Prisca, whose daughter was the wife of Maximianus Galerius' and so on.

Let this decisive testimony teach us to stop throwing libels around; let us consider whether the persecution set afoot by Galerius after 19 years of clement and benevolent reign was due to some intrigue that is unknown to us.

Let us see the utter absurdity of the story of the Theban legion who were all massacred on religious grounds. •It is ridiculous to say that the legion came from Asia by the great St. Bernard Pass; •it is impossible that it should be brought from Asia to quell a sedition in Gaul—a year after the sedition had been repressed; •it is equally impossible that 6,000 infantry and 700 cavalry were slaughtered in a pass in which 200 men could block a whole army. The account

of this supposed butchery begins with an evident imposture: 'When the earth groaned under the tyranny of Diocletian, Heaven was peopled with martyrs.' Well, this episode is supposed to have taken place in 286, a time when Diocletian favoured the Christians most and the empire was at its happiest. Finally—a point that might spare us all this discussion—*there never was a Theban legion!* The Romans had too much pride and common sense to make up a legion of Egyptians, who served in Rome only as slaves; as though there had been a Jewish legion! We have the names of the thirty-two legions that were the chief strength of the Roman Empire, and there is no Theban legion among them. Let us relegate this fable to the same category as the acrostic verses of the Sibyls that foretold the miracles of JESUS-CHRIST, and so many other forgeries that false zeal came up with to dupe the credulous.

10. Danger of false legends. Persecution

Lies have imposed on men for too long; it is time to pick out the few truths we can trace amid the clouds of legends that cover Roman history since Tacitus and Suetonius, and have almost always enveloped the annals of other nations.

How can we believe, for instance, that the Romans—a grave and severe people who gave us our laws—condemned Christian virgins, young women of rank, to prostitution? That story reflects ignorance of the austere dignity of our legislators, who punished so rigorously the frailties of their vestal virgins. The *Sincere Acts* of Ruinart describe these indignities; but should we believe those *Acts* as we do the *Acts of the Apostles*? According to Bolland, the *Sincere Acts* say that there were in the town of Ancyra seven Christian virgins, each about seventy years old; that the governor

Theodectes condemned them to be handed over to the young men of the town; but that when no-one wanted them (not surprisingly) he compelled them to assist, entirely naked, in the mysteries of Diana—which in fact no-one ever came to without wearing a veil. St. Theodotus—who was an inn-keeper, but was not less zealous on that account—prayed ardently to God to let these holy spinsters die, lest they should succumb to temptation. God heard his prayer: the governor had them thrown into a lake, with stones around their necks, and they at once appeared to Theodotus and begged him 'not to allow them to be eaten by fishes'.

The holy publican and his companions went during the night to the shore of the lake, which was guarded by soldiers. A heavenly torch went before them, and when they came to the place where the guards were, a celestial cavalier, heavily armed, chased the guards away with his lance in his hand. St. Theodotus pulled the bodies of the virgins out of the lake. He was brought before the governor—and the celestial cavalier did not save him from being decapitated. I keep repeating that I venerate the real martyrs, but it is not easy to believe this story of Bolland and Ruinart.

Should I report here the story of the young St. Romanus? He was thrown into the fire, says Eusebius, and Jews who were present insulted JESUS-CHRIST for allowing his followers to be burned, whereas God had saved Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace. The Jews had hardly spoken when Romanus emerged in triumph from the flames. The emperor ordered that he should be pardoned, telling the judge that he did not want to get into a quarrel with God. Curious words for Diocletian! [After some ugly stuff about the cutting off of tongues, Voltaire concludes:] If Eusebius really wrote such idiocies, if they are not later additions to his work, how can we base anything on his history?

We are given the martyrdom of St. Felicitas and her seven children, sent to death by the wise and pious Antoninus—so we are told, without being told the source of this story. It is very likely that some writer, more zealous than truthful, tried to imitate the history of the Maccabees. The narrative begins: ‘St. Felicitas was a Roman who lived in the reign of Antoninus’, which makes it clear that the author was not a contemporary of St. Felicitas; he says that the praetor sat to judge them at his tribunal in the Campus Martius; but the tribunal was held at the Capitol, not in the Campus Martius. . . . That alone shows the truth of the supposition that the whole story is spurious.

Again, it is said that after the trial the emperor entrusted the execution of the sentence to various judges; which is quite opposed to all procedure at that time or at any other. . . .

Notice that in these accounts of the martyrs, composed solely by the Christians themselves, it is nearly always reported that crowds of Christians went freely to the prison of the condemned, followed him to the scaffold, received his blood, buried his body, and worked miracles with his relics. If it were the religion alone that was persecuted, would not the authorities have arrested these declared Christians who assisted their condemned brethren and were accused of making spells with the remains of the martyred bodies? Would they not have been treated as *we* treated the Waldensians, the Albigenses, the Hussites, the various sects of Protestants? We slew them and burned them to death in crowds, without distinction of age or sex. In the reliable accounts of the ancient persecutions, is there anything that comes close to our massacre of St. Bartholomew or the Irish massacres? Is there a single one resembling the annual festival that is still held at Toulouse—a cruel festival that

should be abolished—in which a whole populace thanks God and congratulates itself in slaughtering 4,000 of its fellow-citizens two centuries ago?

I say it with a shudder, but it is true; it is we Christians who have been the persecutors, the executioners, the assassins!—and of whom? of our brothers. It is we who have destroyed a hundred towns, the crucifix or Bible in our hands, and have incessantly shed blood and lit flames, from the reign of Constantine to the outrages against the Camisards¹ of the Cévennes region of southern France, outrages which, thank God, no longer continue today.

We still occasionally send to the gibbet a few poor folk of Poitou, Vivarais, Valence, or Montauban. Since 1745 we have hanged eight of the men they call Preachers or Ministers of the Gospel, whose only crime was to have prayed to God for the king in their native dialect and given a drop of wine and a morsel of leavened bread to a few simple-minded peasants. Nothing is known of this in Paris, where pleasure is the only thing that matters, and people are ignorant of what happens in the provinces and abroad. These trials are over in an hour—less time than it takes to try a deserter. If the king were informed about them, he would put an end to them.

Catholic priests are not treated like that in any Protestant country. There are more than a hundred Catholic priests in England and Ireland; they are known, and were unmolested during the late war.

Will we French always be the last to embrace the wholesome opinions of other nations? They have amended their ways; when will we amend ours? •It took us sixty years to accept what Newton had demonstrated; •we are barely starting to save the lives of our children by inoculation; •we have only recently begun to act on sound principles of

¹ The original has *Cannibales*, presumably a slip.

agriculture. When will we begin to act on sound principles of humanity? How can we have the audacity to reproach the pagans with making martyrs, when we have been guilty of the same cruelty in the same circumstances?

Suppose we grant that the Romans put many Christians to death on purely religious grounds. In that case the Romans were very much to blame. Would we want to be similarly unjust? And when we are reproaching them for having persecuted, would we want to be persecutors?

If anyone were so lacking in good faith or so fanatical as to say to me:

‘Why do you come to expose our errors and faults?
Why destroy our false miracles and false legends?
They nourish the piety of many people; some errors
are necessary; do not tear a chronic ulcer out of the
body if that would bring the destruction of the body’,

here is what I would reply to him:

‘All these false miracles by which you shake the trust that should be given to real ones, all these absurd legends that you add to the truths of the Gospel, extinguish religion in men’s hearts. Too many people who want to be instructed and have not the time to instruct themselves adequately, say:

“The heads of my religion have deceived me, therefore there is no religion; it is better to cast oneself into the arms of nature than into those of error; I would rather depend on the law of nature than on the inventions of men.”

Others have the misfortune to go even further. They see that imposture put a curb on them, and they will not have even the curb of truth. They lean to atheism. They become depraved, because others have been false and cruel.’

These, assuredly, are the consequences of all the pious frauds and all the superstitions. Men usually only *half*-reason. It is a very poor argument to say:

- Voragine, the author of the *Golden Legend*, and the Jesuit Ribadeneira, compiler of *Flowers of the Saints*, wrote sheer nonsense; therefore there is no God.
- The Catholics have murdered a certain number of Huguenots, and the Huguenots in turn have murdered a certain number of Catholics; therefore there is no God.
- Men have used confession, communion, and all the other sacraments, to commit the most horrible crimes; therefore there is no God.

I would draw the opposite conclusion: Therefore there *is* a God who, after this transitory life in which we have known him so little, and committed so many crimes in his name, will deign to console us for so many horrible misfortunes. For, considering the wars of religion, the forty papal schisms (nearly all of which were bloody), the impostures that have nearly all been pernicious, the irreconcilable hatreds inflamed by differences of opinion, and seeing all the evils that false zeal has brought upon them, men have for a long time had their hell in this world.

11. Damage done by intolerance

What? Is each citizen to be allowed to trust only his own reason, and to believe whatever this enlightened or deluded reason dictates to him? Yes indeed,¹ provided he does not disturb the public order; for although he cannot choose whether to believe or not, he can choose whether to respect the usages of his country. If you say that it is a crime not to

¹ See Locke’s excellent letter on tolerance.

believe in the dominant religion, you will be condemning the first Christians, your fathers, and making the case for those whom you accuse of delivering them to the executioner.

You reply that there is a great difference; that all other religions are the work of man, and only the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church is the work of God. But, surely, does our religion's being divine imply that it should rule by hatred, fury, exile, the confiscation of goods, imprisonment, torture, murders, and ceremonial thanks to God for those murders? The more divine the Christian religion is, the less is it for man to command it; if God is its author, he will maintain it without your help. You know that intolerance produces only hypocrites or rebels—what a fearful pair of options! It comes down to this: Would you sustain by executioners the religion of a God who died at the hands of executioners, and who preached only gentleness and patience?

Please look at the frightful consequences of legally sanctioned intolerance. If it were allowed to despoil, cast in prison, and put to death a citizen who in a certain place would not profess the religion generally admitted in that place, how could the leaders of the State escape those penalties? Religion equally binds the monarch and the beggar; hence more than fifty doctors or monks have made the monstrous assertion that it was lawful to depose or kill any sovereign who dissented from the dominant religion, and the *parlements* [see Glossary] of our kingdom have repeatedly condemned these abominable judgments of abominable theologians. [Voltaire links this to a longish end-note •saying that the theologians in question have claimed in self-defence that their views were held by St. Thomas Aquinas, •explaining why they were right about that, and •asking rhetorically what sort of reception would have been given to 'the Angelic Doctor, the interpreter of the divine will, those being his titles', if he had talked like that in contemporary France.]

[Then a page concerning the issue in France, shortly after the death of Henry IV, of whether the King was independent of the Pope. Voltaire gives some of the details, but says that he is abbreviating them. He concludes:] I merely join all the citizens in saying that obedience was owed to Henry IV not because he was sanctified by the Pope at Chartres but because of his unchallengeable hereditary **right** to the crown, which he deserved on account of his courage and his goodness.

Let us be allowed to say that every citizen is entitled to inherit his father's property by the same **right**, and that we do not see that he should be deprived of it and dragged to the gibbet because he takes sides with one theologian against another [Voltaire names some, not very accurately].

It is well known that our dogmas were not always clearly explained or universally received in the Church. JESUS-CHRIST not having told us what the source of the Holy Ghost was, the Latin Church long believed with the Greek that it proceeded from the Father only; later on it added in the Creed that it also proceeded from the Son. Tell me: if the day after this decision a citizen preferred to keep to Creed of the previous day, would he have deserved to be put to death? Is it less unjust and cruel to punish today the man who thinks as people thought in former times? . . .

It is not long since the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary began to be generally accepted; the Dominicans still do not believe it. When will these Dominicans start to deserve penalties for heresy in this world and the next?

If we are to learn from anyone how to behave in these interminable disputes, it should certainly be the apostles and evangelists. There were the makings of a violent schism between St. Paul and St. Peter. [Details are given; Paul criticised Peter for smoothing his path among gentiles by hiding the fact that he was a circumcised Jew. Voltaire continues:]

There was matter here for a violent disagreement—the question of whether new Christians should Judaize themselves or not. . . . It is known that the first fifteen Bishops of Jerusalem were circumcised Jews who kept the Sabbath and avoided eating prohibited foods. If any Spanish or Portuguese bishop had had himself circumcised and kept the Sabbath, he would have been burned at the stake. And yet this fundamental issue did not spoil the peace among the apostles or among the first Christians.

If the evangelists had resembled modern writers, they would have had a large battlefield on which to fight one another. St. Matthew counts 28 generations from David to Jesus; St. Luke counts 41; and there is no overlap between the two lists of generations. Yet we find no dissension among their followers over these apparent contradictions, which were effectively reconciled by the fathers of the Church. Charity was not harmed, peace was preserved. What better lesson could there be, to keep us tolerant in our disputes and humble in the face of anything we don't understand?

St. Paul, in his epistle to some Jewish converts to Christianity in Rome, says at the end of the third chapter that faith alone glorifies, and works justify no-one. St. James, on the contrary, in the second chapter of his epistle to 'the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad', keeps saying that one cannot be saved without works. Here is a point that has separated two great sects among us, yet made no division among the apostles.

If the persecution of those with whom we dispute were a holy action, the man who had caused the killing of the most heretics would be the greatest saint in Paradise. The man who had been content to despoil and imprison his brothers, what a poor figure he would cut beside the zealot who had slain hundreds of them on St. Bartholomew's Day! Here is a proof of it.

The successor of St. Peter [i.e. the Pope] and his consistory cannot err; they approved, acclaimed, and consecrated the massacre of St. Bartholomew [see Glossary]; so this deed was holy; so of two equally pious assassins one who had ripped open twenty-four pregnant Huguenot women would have double the glory of the man who had ripped open only a dozen. By the same reasoning the Protestant fanatics of Cévennes should believe that they would be elevated in glory in proportion to the number of priests, monks, and Catholic women they had slain. This is a strange title to glory in Heaven!