

A Letter Concerning Toleration

by John Locke

1689

Translated by William Popple

*Formatted, modernized, and annotated by
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Locke's letter was originally written in 1685, while he was in exile in Holland; it was later published without his consent. It is as much an argument for the separation of church and state, as for toleration between religious factions.

The Toleration Act of Parliament was passed May 24, 1689, granting freedom of worship to Nonconformists (i.e., dissenting Protestants such as Baptists and Congregationalists). It was one of a series of measures that firmly established the Glorious Revolution (1688–89) in England.

The Toleration Act demonstrated that the idea of a “comprehensive” Church of England had been abandoned, and that hope lay only in toleration of division. It allowed Nonconformists their own places of worship and their own teachers and preachers, subject to acceptance of certain oaths of allegiance. Social and political disabilities remained, however, and Nonconformists were still denied political office (as were Roman Catholics). That led to the practice of “occasional conformity,”

The intellectual and educational power of dissent, had made an important contribution to education by the founding of “dissenting academies.” Between 1663 and 1688, more than 20 academies had been founded; more than 30 more were started during 1690–1750. Established for the training of Nonconformist ministers to whom the universities were closed, the academies became centres of learning, offering a more liberal education than the universities then provided, including business, science, and sociology as well as theology and the classics. The act did not apply to Roman Catholics and Unitarians. (Adapted from the online [Encycl. Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/topic/toleration-act), ‘Toleration Act’ — accessed 7/29/2026)

Honoured Sir,

Since you are pleased to inquire what are my thoughts about the mutual toleration of Christians in their different professions of religion, I must answer you freely that I esteem that toleration to be the chief characteristic of the true Church. For whatever some people boast about the antiquity of places and names, or of the pomp of their outward worship, others of the reformation of their discipline, or the orthodoxy of their faith — for everyone is orthodox to himself — all these things, and all others of this nature, are much rather marks of men striving for power and empire over one another, than of the Church of Christ. Let anyone have ever so true a claim to all these things, yet if he is destitute of charity, meekness, and good-will in general towards all mankind, even to those who are not Christians, he is certainly still short of being a true Christian himself. “The kings of the Gentiles exercise leadership over them,” said our Saviour to his disciples, “but you shall not be so.”¹ The business of true religion is quite another thing. It is not instituted in order to erect an external pomp, nor to obtain ecclesiastical dominion, nor to exercise compulsive force, but to regulate men's lives according to the rules of virtue and piety. Whoever lists

¹ Luk 22.25.

himself under the banner of Christ must, in the first place and above all things, make war upon his own lusts and vices. It is in vain for any man to usurp the name of *Christian*, without holiness of life, purity of manners, benignity and meekness of spirit. “Let everyone who names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.” ²“You, when you have turned back, strengthen your brethren,” said our Lord to Peter.³ It would, indeed, be very hard for someone who appears careless about his own salvation, to persuade me that he was extremely concerned for mine. For it is impossible that those would sincerely and heartily apply themselves to make other people Christians, who have not really embraced the Christian religion in their own hearts. If the Gospel and the apostles may be credited, no man can be a Christian without charity and without that faith which works, not by force, but by love. Now, I appeal to the consciences of those who persecute, torment, destroy, and kill other men upon a pretence of religion, whether they do it out of friendship and kindness towards them or not? And I will then indeed, and not until then, believe they do so, when I see those fiery zealots correcting their friends and familiar acquaintance in the same manner, for the manifest sins they commit against the precepts of the Gospel; when I see them persecute with fire and sword the members of their own communion who are tainted with enormous vices and without amendment are in danger of eternal perdition; and when I see them thus express their love and desire for the salvation of their souls by the infliction of torments and the exercise of all manner of cruelties. For if it is out of a principle of charity, as they pretend, and love toward men’s souls that they deprive them of their estates, maim them with corporal punishments, starve and torment them in noisome prisons, and in the end even take away their lives — I say, if all this is done merely to make men Christians and procure their salvation, why then do they allow whoredom, fraud, malice, and such-like enormities which (according to the apostle) ⁴ manifestly relish of heathenish corruption, to predominate so much and abound among their flocks and people? These and like things are certainly more contrary to the glory of God, to the purity of the Church, and to the salvation of souls, than any conscientious dissent from ecclesiastical decisions, or separation from public worship, while accompanied with innocence of life. Why, then, does this burning zeal for God, for the Church, and for the salvation of souls — burning I say, *literally* with fire and faggot (kindling) — pass by those moral vices and wickednesses, without any chastisement, which are acknowledged by all men to be diametrically opposite to the profession of Christianity, and bend all its nerves either to introducing ceremonies, or to establishing opinions, which for the most part are about fine and intricate matters that exceed the capacity of ordinary understandings? Which of the parties contending about these things is in the right? Which of them who is alleged guilty of schism or heresy — whether those who domineer or those who suffer — will at last be manifest when the causes of their separation come to be judged by the one, certainly, who follows Christ, embraces His doctrine, and bears His yoke? Even if he forsakes both father and mother, separates from the public assemblies and ceremonies of his country, or whomever or whatever else he relinquishes, who will not then be judged a heretic?

² 2Tim 2.19.

³ Luk 22.32.

⁴ Rom 1.

Now, though the divisions that are among sects should be admitted to be ever so obstructive of the salvation of souls, nevertheless, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, and such-like things, cannot be denied to be works of the flesh, concerning which the apostle has expressly declared that “those who do them shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”⁵ Whosoever, therefore, is sincerely solicitous about the kingdom of God, and thinks it his duty to endeavour the enlargement of it among men, ought to apply himself with no less care and industry to the rooting out of these immoralities, than to the extirpation of sects. But if anyone does otherwise, and while he is cruel and implacable towards those who differ from him in opinion, he is indulgent to such iniquities and immoralities as are unbecoming the name of a Christian, let such a one never talk so much of the Church, for he plainly demonstrates by his actions, that it is another kingdom he aims at and not the advancement of the kingdom of God.

That any man should think fit to cause another man — whose salvation he heartily desires — to expire in torments, and do that even in an unconverted state, would, I confess, seem very strange to me, and I think to any other also. But nobody, surely, will ever believe that such a carriage can proceed from charity, love, or goodwill. If anyone maintains that men ought to be compelled by fire and sword to profess certain doctrines, and conform to this or that exterior worship, without any regard had to their morals — if anyone endeavours to convert to the faith those who are erroneous, by forcing them to profess things that they do not believe, and allowing them to practise things that the Gospel does not permit, it cannot be doubted, indeed, but that such a one is desirous to have a numerous assembly joined in the same profession with himself. But it is altogether incredible that he principally intends by those means to compose a truly Christian Church. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at if those who do not really contend for the advancement of the true religion, and of the Church of Christ, make use of arms that do not belong to Christian warfare. If, like the Captain of our salvation, they sincerely desired the good of souls, they would tread in the steps and follow the perfect example of that Prince of Peace, who sent out His soldiers to subdue the nations, and gather them into His Church — not armed with the sword or other instruments of force, but prepared with the Gospel of peace, and with the exemplary holiness of their conversation. This was His method. Though if infidels were to be converted by force, if those who are either blind or obstinate were to be drawn away from their errors by armed soldiers, we know very well that it was much easier for Him to do it with armies of heavenly legions, than for any son of the Church, however potent, with all his dragoons.

The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light. I will not here tax the pride and ambition of some, nor the passion and uncharitable zeal of others. These are faults from which human affairs can perhaps scarcely ever be perfectly freed; yet, such as nobody will bear the plain imputation of them, without covering them with some specious colour, and so pretend to commendation, while they are carried away by their own irregular passions. However, that some may not colour their spirit of persecution

⁵ Gal 5.

and unchristian cruelty with a pretence of care of the public weal and observation of the laws; and that others, under a pretence of religion, may not seek impunity for their libertinism and licentiousness — in a word, that none may impose either upon himself or others, by the pretences of loyalty and obedience to the prince, or of tenderness and sincerity in the worship of God — I esteem it necessary above all things, to distinguish exactly the business of *civil government* from that of *religion*, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this is not done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will always arise between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a concern for the interest of men's souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth.

The **COMMONWEALTH** seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests. Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolence of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.

It is the duty of the civil magistrate, by the impartial execution of equal laws, to secure for all the people in general, and to every one of his subjects in particular, the just possession of these things belonging to this life. If anyone presumes to violate the laws of public justice and equity, established for the preservation of those things, his presumption is to be checked by the fear of punishment, consisting of the deprivation or diminution of those civil interests or goods which otherwise he might and ought to enjoy. But seeing that no man willingly suffers himself to be punished by the deprivation of any part of his goods, and much less of his liberty or life, the magistrate is therefore armed with the force and strength of all his subjects, in order to punish those who violate any other man's rights.

Now, the following considerations seem to me to abundantly demonstrate,

- that the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to these civil concerns;
- that all civil power, right, and dominion is bounded and confined to the sole care of promoting these things; and
- that it neither can nor should in any manner be extended to the salvation of souls.

1. First, *because the care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate, any more than to other men.* It is not committed to him, I say, by God; because it does not appear that God has ever given any such authority to one man over another as to compel anyone to his religion. Nor can any such power be vested in the magistrate by the consent of the people, because no man can so far abandon the care of his own salvation as to blindly leave to the choice of any other, whether prince or subject, to prescribe to him what faith or worship he shall embrace. For no man can, if he would, conform his faith to the dictates of another. All the life and power of true religion consist in the inward and full persuasion of the mind; and faith is not faith without *believing*. Whatever profession we make, to whatever outward worship we conform, if we are not fully satisfied in our own mind that the one is true and the other is well-pleasing to God, such profession and such practice, far from being any furtherance to our salvation, are indeed great obstacles. For in this manner, instead of expiating other sins by the exercise of religion, I say, in offering thus to God Almighty such a

worship as we esteem to be displeasing to Him, we also add to the number of our other sins those of hypocrisy and contempt of His Divine Majesty.

2. In the second place, *the care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force.* But true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. And such is the nature of the understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force. Confiscation of estate, imprisonment, torments — nothing of that nature can have any such efficacy as to make men change the inward judgement that they have framed of things.

It may indeed be alleged that the magistrate may make use of arguments, and thereby draw the heterodox into the way of truth, and procure their salvation. I grant it; but this is common to him with other men. In teaching, instructing, and redressing the erroneous by reason, he may certainly do what it becomes any good man to do. Magistracy does not oblige him to put off either humanity or Christianity. Rather, it is one thing to *persuade*, and another to *command* — one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties. This civil power alone has a right to do; to the other, goodwill is authority enough. Every man has a commission to admonish, exhort, and convince another of error, and by reasoning, to draw him into truth. But to give laws, receive obedience, and compel with the sword, belongs to none but the magistrate. And upon this ground, I affirm that the magistrate's power does not extend to establish of any articles of faith, or forms of worship, by the force of his laws. For laws are of no force at all without penalties; and penalties in this case are absolutely impertinent, because they are not proper to convince the mind. Neither the profession of any articles of faith, nor the conformity to any outward form of worship (as has been said already), can be available to the salvation of souls, unless the truth of the one and the acceptableness of the other to God is thoroughly believed by those who so profess and practise. But penalties are in no way capable of producing such belief. It is only light and evidence that can work a change in men's opinions — which light can in no manner proceed from corporal sufferings, or any other outward penalties.

3. In the third place, *the care of the salvation of men's souls cannot belong to the magistrate because, even if the rigour of laws and the force of penalties were capable of convincing and changing men's minds, that would not help at all to the salvation of their souls.* For there being but one truth, one way to heaven, what hope is there that more men would be led into it if they had no rule but the religion of the court, and were put under the necessity to quit the light of their own reason, and oppose the dictates of their own consciences, and blindly resign themselves up to the will of their governors and to the religion which either ignorance, ambition, or superstition had chanced to establish in the countries where they were born? In the variety and contradiction of opinions in religion, in which the princes of the world are as much divided as in their secular interests, the narrow way would be much straitened. One country alone would be in the right, and all the rest of the world would be put under an obligation to follow their princes in the ways that lead to destruction. And what heightens the absurdity, and very badly suits the notion of a Deity, is that men would owe their eternal happiness or misery to the places of their nativity.

These considerations, to omit many others that might have been urged to the same purpose, seem to me sufficient to conclude that all the power of *civil government* relates only to men's *civil interests*, is confined to the care of the *things of this world*, and has nothing to do with the world to come.

Let us now consider what a **CHURCH** is. A church, then, I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order for the public worshipping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls.

I say it is a free and voluntary society. Nobody is born a member of any church. Otherwise, the religion of parents would descend to children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates, and everyone would hold his faith by the same tenure he does his lands. Nothing can be imagined more absurd than this. Thus that matter stands therefore.

No man by nature is bound to any particular church or sect, but everyone joins himself voluntarily to that society in which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God. The hope of salvation, as it was the only cause of his entrance into that communion, so it can be the only reason for his stay there. For if afterwards he discover anything either erroneous in the doctrine or incongruous in the worship of that society to which he has joined himself, why should it not be as free for him to go out as it was to enter? No member of a religious society can be tied with any other bonds, but what proceed from the certain expectation of eternal life. A church, then, is a society of members voluntarily uniting to that end.

It follows now that we consider what is the power of this church, and to what laws it is subject.

Forasmuch as no society, however free, or instituted upon whatever slight occasion — whether of philosophers for learning, of merchants for commerce, or of men of leisure for mutual conversation and discourse — no church or company, I say, can in the least subsist and hold together, that will not presently dissolve and break in pieces unless it is regulated by some laws, and the members all consent to observe some order. Place and time of meeting must be agreed on; rules for admitting and excluding members must be established; distinction of officers, and putting things into a regular course, and such like, cannot be omitted. But since the joining together of several members into this church-society, as already demonstrated, is absolutely free and spontaneous, it necessarily follows that the right of making its laws can belong to none but the society itself; or at least (which is the same thing) to those whom the society by common consent has so authorised.

Some, perhaps, may object that no such society can be said to be a true church unless it has in it a bishop or presbyter, with ruling authority derived from the very apostles, and continued down to the present times by an uninterrupted succession.

To these I answer:

1. In the first place, let them show me the edict by which Christ has imposed that law upon His Church. And do not let any man think me impertinent if in a thing of this consequence I

require that the terms of that edict be very express and positive. For the promise He has made us, that “wherever two or three are gathered together” in His name,⁶ He will be in the midst of them, seems to imply the contrary. Whether such an assembly lacks anything necessary to a true church, I pray you consider. I am certain that nothing can be wanting there to the salvation of souls, which is sufficient to our purpose.

2. Next, I ask you to observe how great the divisions have always been among even those who lay so much stress upon the Divine institution and continued succession of a certain order of rulers in the Church. Now, their very dissension unavoidably puts us upon a necessity of deliberating; and consequently, it allows a liberty to choose that which we prefer upon consideration.

3. And in the last place, I will consent that these men have a ruler in their church, established by such a long series of succession as they judge necessary, provided that I may have liberty at the same time to join myself to that society in which I am persuaded those things are to be found which are necessary to the salvation of my soul. In this manner, ecclesiastical liberty will be preserved on all sides, and no man will have a legislator imposed upon him, but one whom he has chosen himself.

But since men are so solicitous about the true church, I would only ask them here, by the way, if it is not more agreeable to the Church of Christ to make the conditions of her communion consist in such things, and such things only, as the Holy Spirit has declared in the Holy Scriptures, in express words, to be necessary to salvation. I ask, I say, whether this is not more agreeable to the Church of Christ than for men to impose their own inventions and interpretations upon others, as if they were of Divine authority; and to establish by ecclesiastical laws, as absolutely necessary to the profession of Christianity, such things as the Holy Scriptures either does not mention, or at least does not expressly command? Whoever requires those things in order to have ecclesiastical communion, which Christ does not require in order to have eternal life, he may, perhaps, indeed constitute a society accommodated to his own opinion and his own advantage. But how that can be called the *Church of Christ*, which is established upon laws that are not His, and which excludes such persons from its communion as He will one day receive into the Kingdom of Heaven, I do not understand. But this not being a proper place to inquire into the marks of the true church, I will only mind those who contend so earnestly for the decrees of their own society, and that cry out continually, “The Church! the Church!” with as much noise, and perhaps upon the same principle, as the Ephesian silversmiths did for their Diana.⁷ This, I say, I desire to remind them of, that the Gospel frequently declares that the true disciples of Christ must suffer persecution. But that the Church of Christ should persecute *others*, and force *others* by fire and sword to embrace her faith and doctrine, I could never yet find in any of the books of the New Testament.

The end of a religious society (as has been said already) is the public worship of God, and by means of this, the acquisition of eternal life. All discipline should therefore tend to that end, and all ecclesiastical laws should be confined to that. Nothing should nor can be transacted

⁶ Mat 18.20.

⁷ Act 19.34.

in this religious society, relating to the possession of civil and worldly goods. No force is to be made use of here on any occasion whatsoever. For force belongs wholly to the civil magistrate, and the possession of all outward goods is subject to his jurisdiction.

But, it may be asked, by what means then shall ecclesiastical laws be established, if they must thus be destitute of all compulsive power? I answer: They must be established by means suitable to the nature of such things, of which the external profession and observation — if not proceeding from a thorough conviction and approbation of the mind — is altogether useless and unprofitable. The arms by which the members of this society are to be kept within their duty are exhortations, admonitions, and advices. If by these means the offenders will not be reclaimed, and the erroneous convinced, there remains nothing further to be done but that such stubborn and obstinate persons, who give no ground to hope for their reformation, should be cast out and separated from the society. This is the last and utmost force of ecclesiastical authority. No other punishment can thereby be inflicted than that, the relation ceasing between the body and the member which is cut off. The person so condemned ceases to be a part of that church.

These things being thus determined, let us inquire in the next place: *How far the duty of toleration extends, and what is required from everyone by it?*

1. And *first*, I hold that no church is bound by the duty of toleration, to retain any such person in her bosom that, after admonition, obstinately continues to offend against the laws of the society. For these being the condition of communion and the bond of the society, if the breach of them were permitted without any animadversion,⁸ the society would thereby be immediately dissolved. But nevertheless, in all such cases care is to be taken that the sentence of excommunication, and the execution of it, carry with it no rough usage of word or action by which the ejected person may in any way be damnified in body or estate. For all force (as has often been said) belongs only to the *magistrate*; nor should any private persons at any time use force, unless it is in self-defence against unjust violence. Excommunication neither does, nor can, deprive the excommunicated person of any of those civil goods that he formerly possessed. All those things belong to the *civil government* and are under the *magistrate's* protection. The whole force of *excommunication* consists only in this: that the resolution of the society in that respect being declared, the union that was between the body and some member thereby comes to be dissolved. And that relation ceasing, the participation of some certain things which the society communicated to its members, and to which no man has any *civil* right, also comes to cease. For there is no civil injury done to the excommunicated person by the church minister's refusing him that bread and wine, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which was not bought with *his* but with *other* men's money.

2. *Secondly*, no private person has any right in any manner to prejudice another person in his *civil* enjoyments because he is of another church or religion. All the rights and franchises that belong to him as a man, or as a denizen,⁹ are inviolably to be preserved to him. *These*

⁸ *Animadversion*: Harsh criticism or disapproval.

⁹ *Denizen*: A person who inhabits a particular place (a permanent resident).

are not the business of religion. No violence or injury is to be offered him, whether he is Christian or Pagan. No indeed, we must not content ourselves with the narrow measures of bare justice; charity, bounty, and liberality must be added to it. This the Gospel enjoins, this reason directs, and this that natural fellowship we are born into requires of us. If any man errs from the right way, it is his own misfortune; it is no injury to you. Nor therefore are you to punish him in the things of this life because you suppose he will be miserable in that life which is to come.

What I say concerning the mutual toleration of private persons differing from one another in religion, I also understand of particular churches which stand, as it were, in the same relation to each other as private persons among themselves; nor any one of them have any manner of jurisdiction over any other. No, not even when the civil magistrate (as sometimes happens) comes to be of this or the other communion. For the civil government can give no new right to the church, nor can the church give any to the civil government. So that, whether the magistrate joins himself to any church, or separates from it, the church always remains as it was before — a free and voluntary society. It neither requires the power of the sword by the magistrate's coming to it, nor does it lose the right of instruction and excommunication by his going from it. This is the fundamental and immutable right of a spontaneous society: that it has power to remove any of its members who transgress the rules of its institution. But it cannot, by the accession of any new members, acquire any right of jurisdiction over those who are not joined with it. And therefore, peace, equity, and friendship are always to be mutually observed by particular churches, in the same manner as by private persons, without any pretence of superiority or jurisdiction over one another.

That the thing may be made clearer by an example, let us suppose two churches — the one of Arminians, the other of Calvinists — residing in the city of Constantinople. Will anyone say that either of these churches has the right to deprive the members of the other of their estates and liberty (as we see practised elsewhere) because of their differing from it in some doctrines and ceremonies — while the Turks meanwhile silently stand by and laugh to see with what inhuman cruelty Christians thus rage against Christians? But if one of these churches has this power of treating the other poorly, I ask which of them it is to whom that power belongs, and by what right? It will undoubtedly be answered that it is the *orthodox* church which has the right of authority over the *erroneous* or *heretical*. This is, in great and specious words, to say just nothing at all. For every church is orthodox to itself; to others, it is erroneous or heretical. For whatever any church believes, it believes to be true, and the contrary to those things it pronounces to be error. So that the controversy between these churches about the truth of their doctrines, and the purity of their worship, is equal on both sides. Nor is there any judge, either at Constantinople or elsewhere on earth, by whose sentence it can be determined. The decision of that question belongs only to the Supreme judge of all men, to whom also solely belongs the punishment of the erroneous. In the meanwhile, let those men consider how heinously they sin, who adding injustice, if not to their error, yet certainly to their pride, rashly and arrogantly take it upon themselves to misuse the servants of another master,¹⁰ who are not at all accountable to them.

¹⁰ Rom 14.4.

No indeed, further, if it could be manifest which of these two dissenting churches were in the right, there would not accrue thereby to the orthodox any right to destroy the other. For churches have neither any jurisdiction in worldly matters, nor are fire and sword any proper instruments with which to convince men's minds of error and inform them of the truth. Let us suppose, nevertheless, that the civil magistrate is inclined to favour one of them and to put his sword into their hands, so that (by his consent) they might chastise the dissenters as they pleased. Will any man say that any right can be derived to a Christian church over its brethren, from a *Turkish* emperor? An infidel who himself has no authority to punish Christians for the articles of their faith, cannot confer such an authority upon any society of Christians, nor give them a right which he does not have himself. This would be the case at Constantinople; and the reason of this thing is the same in any Christian kingdom. The civil power is the same in every place. Nor can that power, in the hands of a Christian prince, confer any greater authority upon the Church than in the hands of a heathen — which is to say, just none at all.

Nevertheless, it is worthy to be observed and lamented that the most violent of these defenders of the truth, the opposers of errors, the exclaimers against schism, hardly ever let loose this zeal of theirs for God, with which they are so warmed and inflamed, unless it is where they have the civil magistrate on their side. But as soon as court favour has ever given them the better end of the staff, and they begin to feel themselves stronger, then presently peace and charity are to be laid aside. Otherwise, they are to be religiously observed. Where they do not have the power to carry on persecution and to become masters, there they desire to live on fair terms and preach toleration. When they are not strengthened with the civil power, then they can bear most patiently and unmovedly the contagion of idolatry, superstition, and heresy in their neighbourhood — of which, on other occasions, the interest of religion makes them extremely apprehensive. They do not forwardly attack those errors which are in fashion at court, or are countenanced by the government. Here they can be content to spare their arguments. Yet this (with their leave) is the only right method of propagating truth, which has no such way of prevailing as when strong arguments and good reason are joined with the softness of civility and good usage.

Therefore, in fine,¹¹ *nobody* — neither single persons nor churches, nor even commonwealths — has any just title to invade the civil rights and worldly goods of each other upon pretence of religion. Those who are of another opinion would do well to consider with themselves how pernicious a seed of discord and war, how powerful a provocation to endless hatreds, rapines, and slaughters they thereby furnish to mankind. No peace and security, no, not so much as common friendship, can ever be established or preserved among men so long as this opinion prevails: that dominion is founded in *grace*, and that religion is to be propagated by *force of arms*.

3. In the *third* place, let us see what the duty of toleration requires from those who are distinguished from the rest of mankind (from the “laity,” as they please to call us) by some ecclesiastical character and office — whether they be bishops, priests, presbyters, ministers, or however else dignified or distinguished. It is not my business to inquire here into the

¹¹ *In fine*: in final, i.e. in summary, or in brief.

origin of the power or dignity of the clergy. I say only this: that from wherever their authority is sprung, since it is *ecclesiastical*, it ought to be confined within the bounds of the Church. Nor can it in any manner be extended to civil affairs, because the Church itself is absolutely separate and distinct from the commonwealth. The boundaries on both sides are fixed and immovable. Whoever jumbles heaven and earth together, things that are most remote and opposite, mixes these two societies which are perfectly distinct and infinitely different from each other in their origin, end, business, and in everything else. No man, therefore, with whatever ecclesiastical office he is dignified, can deprive another man who is not of his church and faith, either of liberty or of any part of his worldly goods on account of that difference between them in religion. For whatever is not lawful to the *whole Church*, cannot by any ecclesiastical right become lawful to any of its *members*.

But this is not all. It is not enough that ecclesiastical men abstain from violence and rapine and all manner of persecution. Whoever pretends to be a successor of the apostles, and takes upon himself the office of teaching, is also obliged to admonish his hearers of the duties of peace and goodwill towards all men, towards the *erroneous* as well as the *orthodox*; towards those who differ from them in faith and worship, as well as towards those who agree with them in this. And he should industriously exhort all men, whether private persons or magistrates (if there are any such in his church), to charity, meekness, and toleration, and diligently endeavour to allay and temper all that heat and unreasonable averseness of mind which either any man's fiery zeal for his own sect, or the craft of others, has kindled against dissenters. I will not undertake to represent how happy and how great would be the fruit, both in Church and State, if the pulpits everywhere sounded with this doctrine of peace and toleration, lest I seem to reflect too severely upon those men whose dignity I do not desire to detract from; nor would I have it diminished either by others or themselves. But this I say, that thus it ought to be. And if anyone who professes himself to be a minister of the Word of God, a preacher of the gospel of peace, teaches otherwise, then he either does not understand, or else he neglects the business of his calling, and he shall one day give account for it to the Prince of Peace. If Christians are to be admonished that they must abstain from all manner of revenge, even after repeated provocations and multiplied injuries, then how much more should those who have suffered nothing, who have had no harm done them, forbear violence and abstain from all manner of ill-usage towards those from whom they have received none! They should certainly use this caution and temper towards those who mind only their own business, and (whatever men think of them) who are solicitous for nothing but this: that they may worship God in that manner which they are persuaded is acceptable to Him, and in which they have the strongest hopes of eternal salvation. In private domestic affairs, in the management of estates, in the conservation of bodily health, every man may consider what suits his own convenience and follow whatever course he likes best.

No man complains of his neighbour's ill-management of his own affairs. No man is angry with another for an error committed in sowing his land, or in marrying his daughter. Nobody corrects a spendthrift for consuming his substance in taverns. Let any man pull down, or build up, or incur whatever expenses he pleases, nobody murmurs, nobody controls him; he has his liberty. But if any man does not frequent the church, if he does not conform his behaviour exactly to the accustomed ceremonies there, or if he does not bring

his children to be initiated in the sacred mysteries of this or the other congregation, this immediately causes an uproar. The neighbourhood is filled with noise and clamour. Everyone is ready to be the avenger of so great a crime. And the zealots hardly have the patience to refrain from violence and rapine until the cause is heard and the poor man is, according to form, condemned to the loss of liberty, goods, or life. Oh, that our ecclesiastical orators of every sect would apply themselves with all the strength of arguments that they are able to gather, to confounding men's errors! But let them spare their persons. Let them not supply their lack of reasons with the instruments of force which belong to another jurisdiction, and ill-become a Churchman's hands. Let them not call in the magistrate's authority to the aid of their eloquence or learning, lest perhaps, while they pretend only love for the truth, this intemperate zeal of theirs, breathing nothing but fire and sword, betrays their ambition and shows that what they desire is temporal dominion. For it will be very difficult to persuade men of sense, that the one who with dry eyes and satisfaction of mind can deliver his brother to the executioner to be burnt alive, sincerely and heartily concerns himself to save that brother from the flames of hell in the world to come.

4. In the last place, let us now consider *what is the magistrate's duty in the business of toleration*, which certainly is very considerable.

We have already proved that the *care of souls does not belong to the magistrate*. I mean, it is not a *magisterial care* (if I may so call it), which consists in *prescribing by laws and compelling by punishments*. But a *charitable care*, which consists in teaching, admonishing, and persuading, cannot be denied to any man. The care, therefore, of every man's soul belongs to himself and is to be left to himself. *But what if he neglects the care of his soul?* I answer, what if he neglects the care of his health or of his estate, which things are more nearly related to the government of the magistrate than the other? Will the magistrate provide by an express law that such a person shall not become poor or sick? Laws provide, as much as is possible, that the goods and health of subjects are not injured by the fraud and violence of *others*; they do not guard them from the negligence or ill-husbandry of the possessors *themselves*. No man can be forced to be rich or healthful whether he will or not. No, God Himself will not save men against their wills. Let us suppose, however, that some prince was desirous to force his subjects to accumulate riches, or to preserve the health and strength of their bodies. Shall it be provided by law that they must consult none but Roman physicians, and everyone be bound to live according to their prescriptions? What, shall no potion or broth be taken but what is prepared either in the Vatican (suppose), or in a Geneva shop? Or to make these subjects rich, shall they all be obliged by law to become merchants or musicians? Or shall everyone turn grocer, or smith, because there are some who maintain their families plentifully and grow rich in those professions?

But it may be said, *there are a thousand ways to wealth, but only one way to heaven*. It is well said, indeed, especially by those who plead for compelling men into this or the other way. For if there were *several* ways that led there, there would not be so much as a pretence left for compulsion. But now, if I am marching on with my utmost vigour in that way which, according to the sacred geography, leads straight to Jerusalem, then why am I beaten and

ill-used by others because, perhaps, I do not wear buskins;¹² because my hair is not the right cut; because, perhaps, I have not been dipped in the right fashion; because I eat flesh upon the road, or some other food which agrees with my stomach; because I avoid certain by-ways which seem to me to lead into briars or precipices; because, among the several paths that are in the same road, I choose to walk in that path which seems to be the straightest and cleanest; because I avoid keeping company with some travellers who are less grave and others that are more sour than they ought to be — or in fine, because I follow a guide that either is, or is not, clothed in white, or crowned with a mitre? Certainly, if we consider right, we will find for the most part, that they are such frivolous things as these that (without any prejudice to religion or the salvation of souls, if not accompanied with superstition or hypocrisy) might either be observed or omitted. I say they are things such as these which breed implacable enmities among Christian brethren who are all agreed in the substantial and truly fundamental part of religion.

But let us grant to these zealots who condemn all things that are not of their mode, that from these circumstances are different ends. What shall we conclude from this? There is only one of these which is the true way to eternal happiness; but in this great variety of ways that men follow, it is still doubted which is the right one. Now, neither the care of the commonwealth, nor the right enacting of laws, reveals this way that leads to heaven more certainly to the magistrate, than every private man's search and study reveals it to himself. I have a weak body, sunk under a languishing disease, for which (I suppose) there is one only remedy, but that unknown. Does it therefore belong to the magistrate to prescribe me a remedy, because there is but one, and because it is unknown? Because there is but one way for me to escape death, will it therefore be safe for me to do whatever the magistrate ordains? Those things that every man ought sincerely to inquire himself, and by meditation, study, research, and his own endeavours, attain the knowledge of, cannot be looked upon as the peculiar possession of any sort of men. Princes, indeed, are born superior to other men in *power*, but equal in *nature*. Neither the right nor the art of ruling necessarily carries along with it the certain knowledge of other things, and least of all of true religion. For if it were so, how could it come to pass that the lords of the earth should differ so vastly as they do in religious matters? But let us grant that it is probable the way to eternal life may be better known by a prince than by his subjects, or at least that in this incertitude of things the safest and most commodious way for private persons is to follow his dictates. You will ask, "What then?" If he should bid you to follow merchandise for your livelihood, would you decline that course for fear it might not succeed? I answer, I would become a merchant upon the prince's command because, in case I were to have ill-success in trade, he is abundantly able to make up my loss some other way. If it is true, as he pretends, that he desires I should thrive and grow rich, then he can set me up again when unsuccessful voyages have broken me. But this is not the case in the things that regard the life to come. If there I take a wrong course, if in that respect I am once undone, it is not in the magistrate's power to repair my loss, to ease my suffering, nor to restore me in any measure, much less entirely, to a good estate. What security can be given for the Kingdom of Heaven?

¹² *Buskin*: A boot reaching halfway up to the knee.

Perhaps some will say that they do not suppose this infallible judgement, that all men are bound to follow in the affairs of religion, is in the civil *magistrate*, but in the *Church*. What the Church has determined, *that* is what the civil magistrate orders to be observed; and he provides by his authority that nobody shall either act or believe in the business of religion otherwise than the Church teaches. So that the judgement of those things is *in the Church*; the magistrate himself yields obedience to it and requires the like obedience from others. *I answer*: Who does not see how frequently the name of the Church, which was venerable in time of the apostles, has been made use of to throw dust in the people's eyes in the following ages? But, however, in the present case it does not help us. The only narrow way which leads to heaven is not better known to the magistrate than to private persons. And therefore, I cannot safely take him for my guide, who may probably be as ignorant of the way as myself, and who certainly is less concerned for my salvation than I myself am. Among so many kings of the Jews, how many of them were there whom any Israelite, thus blindly following, had not fallen into idolatry and thereby into destruction? Yet nevertheless, you bid me to be of good courage, and tell me that all is now safe and secure, because the magistrate does not now enjoin the observance of *his own decrees* in matters of religion, but only *the decrees of the Church*. Of *what* Church, I beseech you? Of that, certainly, which likes him best — as if the one who compels me by laws and penalties to enter into this or the other Church, did not interpose his own judgement in the matter. What difference is there whether he leads me himself, or delivers me over to be led by others? I depend in both ways upon his will, and it is *he* that determines both ways of my eternal state.

Would an Israelite who had worshipped Baal upon the command of his king have been in any better condition because somebody had told him that the king ordered nothing in religion upon his own head,¹³ nor commanded anything to be done by his subjects in divine worship, except what was approved by the counsel of priests, and declared to be of divine right by the doctors of their Church? If the religion of any Church therefore becomes *true and saving* because the head of that sect, the prelates and priests, and those of that tribe, all of them, with all their might, extol and praise it, what religion can ever be accounted erroneous, false, and destructive? I am doubtful concerning the doctrine of the Socinians;¹⁴ I am suspicious of the way of worship practised by the Papists, or Lutherans. Will it ever be a jot safer for me to join one or the other of those Churches upon the magistrate's command, because he commands nothing in religion except by the authority and counsel of the doctors of that Church?

But to speak the truth, we must acknowledge that the Church (if a convention of clergymen, making canons, must be called by that name) is for the most part more apt to be influenced by the Court, than the Court by the Church. How the Church was under the vicissitude of orthodox and Arian emperors is very well known. Or if those things are too remote, our modern English history affords us fresh examples in the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth — how easily and smoothly the clergy changed their decrees, their articles of faith, their form of worship, everything according to the inclination of those kings

¹³ *Upon his own head*: that is, upon his own volition or determination.

¹⁴ Socinius rejected the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and original sin.

and queens. Yet those kings and queens were of such different minds in point of religion, and thereupon enjoined such different things, that no man in his wits (I almost said none but an atheist) will presume to say that any sincere and upright worshipper of God could, with a safe conscience, obey their several decrees.

To conclude, it is the same thing whether a king that prescribes laws to another man's religion pretends to do it by his own judgement, or by the ecclesiastical authority and advice of others. The decisions of churchmen, whose differences and disputes are sufficiently known, cannot be any sounder or safer than his; nor can all their suffrages joined together add a new strength to the civil power. Though this also must be taken notice of — that princes seldom have any regard to the suffrages of ecclesiastics who are not favourers of their own faith and way of worship.

But after all, the principal consideration, and which absolutely determines this controversy, is this: Even if the magistrate's opinion in religion is sound, and the way that he appoints is truly Evangelical, yet if I am not thoroughly persuaded of it in my own mind, there will be no safety for me in following it. No way whatsoever that I walk in against the dictates of my conscience will ever bring me to the mansions of the blessed. I may grow rich by an art that I do not take delight in; I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have no faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust, and by a worship that I abhor. It is in vain for an unbeliever to take up the outward show of another man's profession. Faith alone and inward sincerity are the things that procure acceptance with God. The most likely and most approved remedy can have no effect upon the patient if his stomach rejects it as soon as it is taken; and you will in vain cram a medicine down a sick man's throat, which his particular constitution will be sure to turn into poison. In a word, whatever else may be doubtful in religion, yet this at least is certain: that no religion which I do not believe to be true can be either true or profitable to me. In vain, therefore, princes compel their subjects to come into their Church communion under the pretence of saving their souls. If their subjects believe, they will come of their own accord; and if they do not believe, their coming will avail them nothing. However great, in fine, may be the pretence of good-will and charity, and concern for the salvation of men's souls, men cannot be forced to be saved whether they will or not. And therefore, when all is done, they must be left to their own consciences.

Having thus at length freed men from all dominion over one another in matters of religion, let us now consider *What they are to do*. All men know and acknowledge that God ought to be publicly worshipped; otherwise, why do they compel one another to attend the public assemblies? Therefore, men constituted in this liberty, are to enter into some religious society so that they meet together, not only for mutual edification, but to own to the world that they worship God and offer to His Divine Majesty such service as they themselves are not ashamed of, and such as they think not unworthy of Him, nor unacceptable to Him — and finally, that by the purity of doctrine, holiness of life, and decent form of worship, they may draw others to the love of the true religion, and perform such other things in religion as cannot be done by each private man apart.

These religious societies I call *Churches*. And these, I say, the magistrate ought to tolerate, for the business of these assemblies of the people is nothing but what is lawful for every man

in particular to take care of — I mean the salvation of their souls. Nor in this case is there any difference between the National Church and other separated congregations.

But as in every Church there are two things especially to be considered — the *outward form and rites of worship*, and the *doctrines and articles* of things. Each must be handled distinctly, so that the whole matter of toleration may be more clearly understood.

1. Concerning *outward worship*, I say in the first place, that the magistrate has no power to enforce by law, either in his own Church, or much less in another, the use of any rites or ceremonies whatsoever in the worship of God. And this is not only because these Churches are free societies, but because whatever is practised in the worship of God is only so far justifiable as it is believed by those who practise it, to be acceptable to Him. Whatever is not done with that assurance of faith is neither good in itself, nor can it be acceptable to God. To impose such things, therefore, upon any people, contrary to their own judgment, is in effect to command them to offend God, which appears to be absurd beyond expression, considering that the end of all religion is to please Him, and that liberty is essentially necessary to that end.

But perhaps it may be concluded from this, that I deny to the magistrate all manner of power about indifferent things, which if it is not granted, the whole subject-matter of law-making is taken away. No, I readily grant that indifferent things, and perhaps none but such, are subject to the legislative power. But it does not therefore follow that the magistrate may ordain whatever he pleases concerning anything that is indifferent. The public good is the rule and measure of all law-making. If a thing is not useful to the commonwealth, even if it is ever so indifferent, it may not presently be established by law.

And further, things that are ever so indifferent in their own nature, when they are brought into the Church and worship of God, they are removed out of the reach of the magistrate's jurisdiction, because in that use, they have no connection at all with civil affairs. The only business of the Church is the salvation of souls; and it in no way concerns the commonwealth, or any member of it, that this or the other ceremony is made use of there. Neither the use nor the omission of any ceremonies in those religious assemblies either advantages or prejudices the life, liberty, or estate of any man. For example, let it be granted that the washing of an infant with water is in itself an indifferent thing; let it also be granted that the magistrate understands such washing to be profitable to the curing or preventing of any disease the children are subject to, and esteems the matter weighty enough to be taken care of by a law. In that case he may order it to be done. But will anyone therefore say that a magistrate has the same right to ordain by law that all children shall be baptised by priests, in the sacred font, in order to purify their souls? The extreme difference between these two cases is visible to everyone at first sight. Or let us apply the last case to the child of a Jew, and the thing speaks for itself. For what hinders that a Christian magistrate may have subjects who are Jews? Now, if we acknowledge that an injury may not be done to a *Jew* so as to compel him against his own opinion, to practise in his religion a thing that is indifferent in its nature, then how can we maintain that anything of this kind may be done to a *Christian*?

Again, things indifferent in their own nature cannot, by any human authority, be made any part of the worship of God, for this very reason: *because* they are indifferent. For since indifferent things are not capable, by any virtue of their own, to propitiate (appease) the Deity, no human power or authority can confer on them so much dignity and excellency as to enable them to do it. In the common affairs of life, that use of indifferent things which God has not forbidden, is free and lawful; and therefore, human authority has its place in those things. But it is not so in matters of religion. Things indifferent are not lawful in the worship of God otherwise than as they are instituted by God Himself, and as He, by some positive command, has ordained them to be made a part of that worship which He will grant to accept at the hands of poor sinful men.¹⁵ When an incensed Deity asks us, “Who has required these, or such-like things at your hands?” it will not be enough to answer Him that the magistrate commanded them. If civil jurisdiction extended thus far, what might not lawfully be introduced into religion? What hodgepodge of ceremonies, what superstitious inventions built upon the magistrate’s authority, might not (against conscience) be imposed upon the worshippers of God? For the greatest part of these ceremonies and superstitions consists in the religious use of such things as are indifferent in their own nature; nor are they sinful upon any other account than because God is not the author of them. The sprinkling of water, and the use of bread and wine, are altogether indifferent, both in their own nature and in the ordinary occasions of life. Will any man therefore say that these things could have been introduced into religion and made a part of divine worship if not by divine institution? If any human authority or civil power could have done this, why might it not also enjoin the eating of fish and drinking of ale in the holy banquet as a part of divine worship? Why not the sprinkling of the blood of beasts in churches, and expiations by water or fire, and abundantly more of this kind? But these things, however indifferent they are in common uses, when they come to be annexed to divine worship, *without* divine authority, they are as abominable to God as the sacrifice of a dog. And why is a dog so abominable? What difference is there between a dog and a goat, in respect to the divine nature, equally and infinitely distant from all affinity with matter, unless it is that God required the use of one in His worship, and not of the other? We see, therefore, that indifferent things, however much they are under the power of the civil magistrate, yet they cannot, upon that pretence, be introduced into religion and imposed upon religious assemblies, because in the worship of God, they wholly cease to be indifferent. Whoever worships God does it with the design to please Him and procure His favour. But that cannot be done by someone who, upon the command of another, offers to God that which he knows will be displeasing to Him, because it was not commanded by Himself. This is not to please God, or appease his wrath, but instead, to provoke Him willingly and knowingly by a manifest contempt, which is a thing absolutely repugnant to the nature and end of worship.

But here it will be asked: “If nothing belonging to divine worship is left to human discretion, how is it then that Churches themselves have the power to order anything about the time and place of worship and the like?” To this I answer that in religious worship we must distinguish between what is part of the *worship itself*, and what is but a *circumstance*. That is a part of the worship which is believed to be appointed by God and to be well-pleasing to

¹⁵ This is called the “regulative principle” — things not commanded by God in worship, are forbidden.

Him, and therefore that is necessary. Circumstances are such things which, though in general they cannot be separated from worship, yet the particular instances or modifications of them are not determined, and therefore they are indifferent. Of this sort are the time and place of worship, or the habit and posture of the person who worships. These are circumstances, and they are perfectly indifferent where God has not given any express command about them. For example, among the Jews the time and place of their worship and the habits of those that officiated in it were not mere circumstances, but a part of the worship itself. If anything were defective in this, or different from the institution, they could not hope that it would be accepted by God.¹⁶ But to Christians under the liberty of the Gospel, these are mere circumstances of worship, which the prudence of every Church may bring into such use as will be judged most subservient to the end of order, decency, and edification. But even under the Gospel, those who believe that the first, or the seventh day, were set apart by God, and are still consecrated to His worship — to *them*, that portion of time is not a simple circumstance, but a real part of Divine worship, which can neither be changed nor neglected.

In the *next place*, just as the magistrate has no power to impose by his laws the use of any rites and ceremonies in any Church, so neither does he have any power to forbid the use of such rites and ceremonies as are already received, approved, and practised by any Church — because if he did so, he would destroy the Church itself, the end of whose institution is only to worship God with freedom following its own manner.

You will say that by this rule, if some congregations had a mind to sacrifice infants, or (as the primitive Christians were falsely accused) lustfully pollute themselves in promiscuous uncleanness, or practise any other such heinous enormities, is the magistrate obliged to tolerate them, because they are committed in a religious assembly? I answer: No. These things are not lawful in the ordinary course of life, nor in any private house; and therefore, neither are they lawful in the worship of God, or in any religious meeting. But indeed, if any people congregated upon account of religion should be desirous to sacrifice a calf, I deny that it ought to be prohibited by a law. Meliboeus,¹⁷ whose calf it is, may lawfully kill his calf at home, and burn any part of it that he thinks fit. For no injury is thereby done to anyone, nor prejudice to another man's goods. And for the same reason, he may also kill his calf in a religious meeting. Whether doing so is well-pleasing to God or not, is for those to consider, who do it. The part of the magistrate is only to take care that the commonwealth receives no prejudice, and that no injury is done to any man, either in life or estate. And thus, what may be spent on a *feast* may be spent on a *sacrifice*. But if perhaps such were the state of things, that the interest of the commonwealth required that all slaughter of beasts should be forborne for some while in order to increase the stock of cattle that had been destroyed by some extraordinary murrain, who does not see that the magistrate, in such a case, may forbid all his subjects to kill any calves for any use whatsoever? Only it is to be observed that

¹⁶ These were part of the ceremonial law, which ended with Christ, for they were only shadows of Him (Col 2.17).

¹⁷ *Meliboeus* is a traditional character in classical Latin pastoral poetry, most notably appearing as a dispossessed shepherd in Virgil's first *Eclogue*.

in this case, the law is not made about a *religious*, but a *political* matter; nor is the sacrifice thereby prohibited, but only the slaughter of calves.

By this we see what difference there is between the *Church* and the *Commonwealth*. Whatever is lawful in the Commonwealth cannot be prohibited by the magistrate in the Church. Whatever is permitted to any of his subjects for their ordinary use, neither can nor ought to be forbidden by him to any sect of people for their religious uses. If any man may lawfully take bread or wine, either sitting or kneeling in his own house, then the law should not abridge him of the same liberty in his religious worship. Though in the Church the use of bread and wine is very different, and there they are applied to the mysteries of faith and rites of Divine worship. But those things that are prejudicial to the commonweal of a people in their ordinary use, and are therefore forbidden by laws, those things ought not to be permitted to Churches in their sacred rites. Only, the magistrate should always be very careful that he does not misuse his authority to the oppression of any Church, under the pretence of public good.

It may be asked: “What if a Church is idolatrous; is that also to be tolerated by the magistrate?” I answer: What power can be given to the magistrate for the suppression of an idolatrous Church, which may not in time and place be made use of to the ruin of an orthodox one? For it must be remembered that the civil power is the same everywhere, and the religion of every prince is orthodox to himself. If therefore, such a power is granted unto the civil magistrate in spirituals, such as that at Geneva, for example, he may extirpate by violence and blood, the religion which is reputed idolatrous there, by the same rule another magistrate, in some neighbouring country, may oppress the reformed religion, and in India, the Christian. The civil power can either change everything in religion according to the prince’s pleasure, or it can change nothing. If it is once permitted to introduce anything into religion by the means of laws and penalties, there can be no bounds put to it; but it will in the same manner be lawful to alter everything, according to that rule of truth which the magistrate has framed for himself. No man whatsoever should therefore be deprived of his terrestrial enjoyments on account of his religion. Not even Americans, subjected to a Christian prince, are to be punished either in body or goods for not embracing our faith and worship. If they are persuaded that they please God in observing the rites of their own country, and that they shall obtain happiness by that means, then they are to be left to God and themselves.

Let us trace this matter to the bottom. Thus, it is an inconsiderable and weak number of Christians, destitute of everything, arrive in a Pagan country; these foreigners beseech the inhabitants, by the bowels of humanity, that they would succour them with the necessities of life; those necessities are given them, habitations are granted, and they all join together, and grow up into one body of people. The Christian religion by this means takes root in that country and spreads itself, but it does not suddenly grow the strongest. While things are in this condition, peace, friendship, faith, and equal justice are preserved among them. At length the magistrate becomes a Christian, and by that means their party becomes the most powerful. Then immediately all compacts are to be broken, all civil rights are to be violated, so that idolatry may be extirpated. And unless these innocent Pagans, strict observers of the rules of equity and the law of Nature, and in no way offending against the laws of the society

— I am saying that unless they will forsake their ancient religion and embrace a new and strange one — they are to be turned out of the lands and possessions of their forefathers, and perhaps deprived of life itself. Then, at last, it appears what “zeal for the Church,” joined with the *desire for dominion*, is capable of producing, and how easily the *pretence* of religion and of the care of souls, serves for a cloak to covetousness, rapine, and ambition.

Now, whoever maintains that idolatry is to be rooted out of any place by laws, punishments, fire, and sword, may apply this story to himself. For the reason for the thing is equal, both in America and Europe. And neither Pagans there, nor any dissenting Christians here, can with any right be deprived of their worldly goods by the predominating faction of a court-church. Nor are any civil rights to be either changed or violated on account of religion in one place more than another.

But idolatry, say some, is a sin and therefore not to be tolerated. If they said it was therefore to be avoided, the inference were good. But it does not follow that because it is a sin, it therefore ought to be punished by the magistrate. For it does not belong to the magistrate to make use of his sword in punishing everything, indifferently, that he takes to be a sin against God. Covetousness, uncharitableness, idleness, and many other things are sins by the consent of men, which yet no man ever said were to be punished by the magistrate. The reason is because they are not prejudicial to other men’s rights, nor do they break the public peace of societies. No, even the sins of lying and perjury are nowhere punishable by laws — except in certain cases in which the real turpitude of the thing, and the offence against God, are not considered, but only the injury done to men’s neighbours and to the commonwealth. And what if in another country, to a Mahometan ¹⁸ or a Pagan prince, the Christian religion seems false and offensive to God. May not the Christians for the same reason, and in the same manner, be extirpated there?

But it may be urged further that, by the law of Moses, idolaters were to be rooted out. True, indeed, by the *law of Moses*; but that is not obligatory to us Christians. Nobody pretends that everything generally enjoined by the law of Moses ought to be practised by Christians. But there is nothing more frivolous than that common distinction between moral, judicial (civil), and ceremonial law, which men ordinarily make use of. For no positive law whatsoever can oblige any people but those to whom it is given. “Hear, O *Israel*,” sufficiently restrains the obligations of the law of Moses only to that people. And this consideration alone is answer enough to those who urge the authority of the law of Moses for inflicting capital punishment upon idolaters. But, however, I will examine this argument a little more particularly.

The case of idolaters, in respect to the Jewish commonwealth, falls under a double consideration.

The *first* consideration is of those who, being initiated in the Mosaic rites, and made citizens of that commonwealth, afterwards apostatised from the worship of the God of Israel. These were proceeded against as traitors and rebels, guilty of no less than high treason. For the commonwealth of the Jews, different from all others, in that it was an absolute *theocracy*.

¹⁸ Mahometan: a follower of Mahomet (or Mohammed); i.e., a Muslim.

Nor was there, or could there be, any difference between that commonwealth, and the Church. The laws established there concerning the worship of One Invisible Deity were the civil laws of that people and a part of their political government, in which God Himself was the legislator. Now, if anyone can show me where there is a commonwealth at this time constituted on that foundation, I will acknowledge that the ecclesiastical laws there unavoidably become a part of the civil, and that the subjects of that government both may and ought to be kept in strict conformity with that Church by the civil power. But there is absolutely no such thing under the Gospel as a Christian commonwealth. There are, indeed, many cities and kingdoms that have embraced the faith of Christ, but they have retained their ancient form of government with which the law of Christ has not at all meddled. Indeed, He has taught men how they may obtain eternal life by faith and good works; but He instituted no commonwealth.¹⁹ He prescribed to His followers no new and peculiar form of government, nor did He put the sword into any magistrate's hand, with a commission to make use of it in forcing men to forsake their former religion and receive His.

Secondly, foreigners and those who were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel were not compelled by force to observe the rites of the Mosaic law; but on the contrary, in the very same place where it is ordered that an Israelite that was an idolater should be put to death,²⁰ there it is provided that strangers should not be vexed nor oppressed. I confess that the seven nations that possessed the land which was promised to the Israelites were to be utterly cut off; but this was not singly because they were idolaters. For if that had been the reason, why were the Moabites and other nations to be spared? No, the reason is this: God being in a peculiar manner the King of the Jews, He could not suffer the adoration of any other deity (which was properly an act of high treason against Himself) in the land of Canaan, which was His kingdom. For such a manifest revolt could in no way consist with His dominion, which was perfectly political in that country. All idolatry was, therefore, to be rooted out of the bounds of His kingdom because it was an acknowledgment of another god; that is say, another king, against the laws of Empire. The inhabitants were also to be driven out, so that the entire possession of the land might be given to the Israelites.

And for the like reason, the Emims and the Horims were driven out of their countries by the children of Esau and Lot; and their lands, upon the same grounds, were given by God to the invaders.²¹ But though all idolatry was thus rooted out of the land of Canaan, yet every idolater was not brought to execution. The whole family of Rahab, the whole nation of the Gibeonites, covenanted with Joshua, and were allowed by treaty; and there were many captives among the Jews who were idolaters. David and Solomon subdued many countries outside the confines of the Land of Promise, and carried their conquests as far as Euphrates. Among so many captives taken, so many nations reduced under their obedience, we do not find one man forced into the Jewish religion and the worship of the true God, and punished for idolatry, though all of them were certainly guilty of it. If anyone, indeed, becoming a

¹⁹ "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Luk 20:25) "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (Joh 18:36)

²⁰ Exo 22, 20, 21.

²¹ Deu 2.

proselyte, desired to be made a denizen of their commonwealth, he was obliged to submit to their laws; that is, to embrace their religion. But he did this willingly, of his own accord, not by constraint. He did not unwillingly submit to show his *obedience*, but he sought and solicited for it as a *privilege*. And as soon as he was admitted, he became subject to the laws of the commonwealth, by which all idolatry was forbidden within the borders of the land of Canaan. But that law (as I have said) did not reach to any of those regions, however subjected to the Jews, that were situated outside those bounds.

2. Thus far concerning *outward worship*. Let us now consider *articles of faith*.

Some articles of religion are *practical*, and some are *speculative*. Now, though both sorts consist in the knowledge of truth, yet these terminate simply in the understanding; those influence the will and manners.

a. *Speculative opinions*, therefore, and *articles of faith* (as they are called) which are required only to be *believed*, cannot be imposed on any Church by the law of the land. For it is absurd that things should be enjoined by laws, which are not in men's power to perform. And to believe this or that to be true, does not depend upon our will. Enough has been said about this already. "But," some will say, "let men at least *profess* that they believe." It is a sweet religion, indeed, that obliges men to dissemble and tell lies, both to God and man, for the salvation of their souls! If the magistrate thinks to save men thus, he seems to understand little of the way of salvation. And if he does it not in order to save them, then why is he so solicitous about the articles of *faith*, as to enact them by a *law*?

Further, the magistrate ought not to forbid the preaching or professing of any *speculative opinions* in any Church, because they have no manner of relation to the *civil rights* of the subjects. If a Roman Catholic believes that to be really the body of Christ which another man calls bread, he does no injury thereby to his neighbour. If a Jew does not believe the New Testament to be the Word of God, he does not thereby alter anything in men's civil rights. If a heathen doubts both Testaments, he is not therefore to be punished as a pernicious *citizen*. The power of the magistrate and the estates of the people may be equally secure whether any man believes these things or not. I readily grant that these opinions are false and absurd. But the business of laws is not to provide for the truth of opinions, but for the safety and security of the commonwealth, and of every particular man's goods and person. And so it ought to be. For the truth certainly would do well enough if she were once left to shift for herself. She seldom has received and, I fear, never will receive much assistance from the power of great men, to whom she is but rarely known, and more rarely welcome. She is not taught by laws, nor has she any need of force to procure her entrance into the minds of men. Errors, indeed, prevail by the assistance of foreign and borrowed succours. But if Truth does not make her way into the understanding by her own light, she will be but the weaker for any borrowed force that violence can add to her.

Thus much for *speculative opinions*. Let us now proceed to *practical ones*.

b. A good life, in which consist not the least part of religion and true piety, also concerns the civil government; and in it lies the safety both of men's souls, and of the commonwealth. Moral actions, therefore, belong to the jurisdiction both of the outward and inward court; both of the civil and domestic governor — I mean both of the *magistrate* and the *conscience*.

Here is great danger, therefore, lest one of these jurisdictions entrench upon the other, and discord arises between the keeper of the public peace, and the overseers of souls. But if what has already been said concerning the limits of both these governments is rightly considered, it will easily remove all difficulty in this matter.

Every man has an immortal soul, capable of eternal happiness or misery. His happiness depends upon his believing and doing those things in this life which are necessary to obtaining God's favour and are prescribed by God to that end. It follows from this,

First, that the observance of these things is the highest obligation that lies upon mankind, and that our utmost care, application, and diligence ought to be exercised in the search for and performance of them — because there is nothing in this world that is of any consideration in comparison with eternity.

Secondly, that seeing one man does not violate the right of another by his erroneous opinions and undue manner of worship, nor is his perdition any prejudice to another man's affairs, therefore the care of each man's salvation belongs only to himself. But I would not have this understood as if I meant hereby to condemn all charitable admonitions and affectionate endeavours to reduce men from errors; these are indeed the greatest duty of a Christian. Anyone may employ as many exhortations and arguments as he pleases towards the promoting of another man's salvation. But all *force* and compulsion are to be forborne. Nothing is to be done imperiously. Nobody is obliged in that matter to yield obedience to the admonitions or injunctions of another, further than he himself is *persuaded* by them. Every man in that, has the supreme and absolute authority of judging for himself. And the reason is because nobody else is concerned in it, nor can anyone receive any prejudice from his conduct in this.

But besides their souls, which are *immortal*, men have also their *temporal* lives here upon earth; the state of which being frail and fleeting, and the duration uncertain, they need several outward conveniences to the support of it, which are to be procured or preserved by pains and industry. For those things that are necessary to the comfortable support of our lives are not the spontaneous products of nature, nor do they offer themselves fit and prepared for our use. This part, therefore, draws on another care, and necessarily gives another employment. But the depravity of mankind being such that they would rather injuriously prey upon the fruits of other men's labours than take pains to provide for themselves, the necessity of preserving men in the possession of what honest industry has already acquired, and also of preserving their liberty and strength whereby they may acquire what they further want, obliges men to enter into society with one another. Thus, by mutual assistance and joint force, they may secure to each other their properties in the things that contribute to the comfort and happiness of this life.

In the meanwhile, it leaves to every man the care of his own eternal happiness, the attainment of which can neither be facilitated by another man's industry, nor can the loss of it turn to another man's prejudice, nor the hope of it be forced from him by any external violence. But because men thus entering into societies, grounded upon their mutual compacts of assistance for the defence of their temporal goods, may nevertheless be deprived of them — either by the rapine and fraud of their fellow citizens, or by the hostile violence of foreigners — the remedy for this evil consists in arms, riches, and a multitude of

citizens. The remedy for the *other* is in laws. And the care of all things relating both to one and the other is committed by the society to the civil magistrate.

This is the origin, this is the use, and these are the bounds of the *legislative* (which is the supreme) power in every commonwealth. I mean that provision may be made for the security of each man's private possessions; for the peace, riches, and public commodities of the whole people; and as much as possible, for the increase of their inward strength against foreign invasions.

These things being thus explained, it is easy to understand to what end the legislative power ought to be directed, and by what measures it ought to be regulated — and that is the temporal good and outward prosperity of the society, which is the sole reason for men's entering into society, and the only thing they seek and aim at in it. And it is also evident what liberty remains to men in reference to their eternal salvation; and that is that everyone should do what he in his conscience is persuaded to be acceptable to the Almighty, on whose good pleasure and acceptance their eternal happiness depends. For obedience is due in the first place to God, and afterwards to the laws.

But some may ask: "What if the magistrate should enjoin anything by his authority, that appears unlawful to the conscience of a private person?" I answer that if government is faithfully administered, and the counsels of the magistrates are indeed directed to the public good, this will seldom happen. But if, perhaps, it so falls out, I say that such a private person is to abstain from the action that he judges unlawful, and he is to undergo the punishment which it is not unlawful for him to bear. For the private judgement of any person concerning a law enacted in political matters, for the public good, does not take away the obligation of that law, nor does it deserve a dispensation. But if the law indeed concerns things that do not lie within the verge of the magistrate's authority (as for example, that the people, or any party among them, should be compelled to embrace a strange religion, and join in the worship and ceremonies of another Church), then men are not in these cases obliged by that law, *against their consciences*. For the political society is instituted for no other end than to secure every man's possession of the things of this life. The care of each man's soul, and of the things of heaven, which neither belongs to the commonwealth nor can it be subjected to it, is left entirely to every man's self. Thus, the safeguard of men's lives and of the things that belong to this life is the business of the commonwealth, and the preserving of those things for their owners, is the duty of the magistrate. And therefore the magistrate cannot take away these worldly things from this man or party, and give them to that one; nor can he change propriety among fellow subjects (no not even by a law), for a cause that has no relation to the end of civil government — I mean for their *religion*, which whether it is true or false does no prejudice to the worldly concerns of their fellow subjects, which are the things that solely belong to the care of the commonwealth.

But what if the magistrate believes such a law as this, is for the public good? I answer: Just as the private judgement of any particular person, if erroneous, does not exempt him from the obligation of law, so the private judgement (as I may call it) of the magistrate does not give him any new right of imposing laws upon his subjects, which was neither granted him in the constitution of the government, nor was ever in the power of the people to grant —

much less if he makes it his business to enrich and advance his followers and fellow-sectaries with the spoils of others.

But what if the magistrate believes that he has a right to make such laws, and that they are for the public good, and his subjects believe the contrary? Who will be judge between them? I answer: *God alone*. For there is no judge on earth between the supreme magistrate and the people. God, I say, is the only judge in this case, who will retribute to every one at the last day according to his deserts — that is, according to his sincerity and uprightness in endeavouring to promote piety, and the public weal, and the peace of mankind.

But what shall be done in the meanwhile? I answer: The principal and chief care of everyone ought to be of his own soul first, and in the next place, of the public peace — though there are very few who will think it is peace where they see all is laid waste.

There are two sorts of contests among men. The one is managed by *law*, the other by *force*; and these are of such a nature that where the one ends, the other always begins. But it is not my business to inquire into the power of the magistrate in the different constitutions of nations. I only know what usually happens where controversies arise without a judge to determine them. You will say, then, the magistrate being the stronger, he will have his will and carry his point. Without doubt; but the question here does not concern the doubtfulness of the event, but the rule of right.

But to come to particulars, I say first, no opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society, are to be tolerated by the magistrate. But indeed, examples of these in any Church are rare. For no sect can easily arrive at such a degree of madness that it should think fit to teach as doctrines of religion, such things as manifestly undermine the foundations of society, and are therefore condemned by the judgement of all mankind. This is because their own interest, peace, reputation — *everything* — would thereby be endangered.

Another more secret evil, but more dangerous to the commonwealth, is when men arrogate to themselves and to those of their own sect, some peculiar prerogative covered over with a specious show of deceitful words, but in effect opposite to the civil right of the community. For example, we cannot find any sect that teaches expressly and openly, that men are not obliged to keep their promise; that princes may be dethroned by those who differ from them in religion; or that the dominion of all things belongs only to themselves. For these things, proposed so nakedly and plainly, would soon draw upon them the eye and hand of the magistrate, and awaken all the care of the commonwealth to a watchfulness against the spread of so dangerous an evil. But nevertheless, we find those who say the same things but in other words. What else do they mean who teach that faith is not to be kept with heretics? Their meaning, truly, is that the privilege of breaking faith belongs to *themselves*; for they declare all who are not of their communion to be heretics, or at least they may declare them so, whenever they think fit.

What can be the meaning of their assertion that excommunicated kings forfeit their crowns and kingdoms? It is evident that they thereby arrogate to themselves the power of deposing kings, because they claim the power of excommunication as the peculiar right of their

hierarchy. That dominion is founded in grace; it is also an assertion by which those who maintain it, plainly lay claim to the possession of all things. For they are not so wanting to themselves as not to believe, or at least not to *profess* themselves to be the truly pious and faithful. Therefore, these and the like, who attribute to the faithful, religious, and orthodox (in plain terms, to *themselves*) any peculiar privilege or power above other mortals in civil concerns — or who upon the pretence of religion, challenge any manner of authority over those who are not associated with them in their ecclesiastical communion — I say these have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate; nor do those who will not own and teach the duty of tolerating all men in matters of mere religion. For what do all these and the like doctrines signify, but that they may and are ready on any occasion to seize the government and possess themselves of the estates and fortunes of their fellow subjects — and that they only ask leave to be tolerated by the magistrate for so long, until they find themselves strong enough to effect it?

Again, that Church which is constituted on such a bottom that all those who enter into it thereby *ipso facto* deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince, can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate. For by this means the magistrate would give way to a foreign jurisdiction settling in his own country, and allow his own people to be enlisted, as it were, as soldiers against his own Government. Nor does the frivolous and fallacious distinction between the *Court* and the *Church* afford any remedy to this inconvenience — especially when both the one and the other are equally subject to the absolute authority of the same person, who not only has power to persuade the members of his Church to whatever he wishes, either as purely religious or in line with that, but he can also enjoin it on them upon pain of eternal fire. It is ridiculous for anyone to profess himself to be a Mahometan only in his religion, but in everything else to be a faithful subject to a Christian magistrate, while at the same time he acknowledges himself bound to yield blind obedience to the Mufti of Constantinople — who himself is entirely obedient to the Ottoman Emperor, and frames the feigned oracles of that religion according to his pleasure. But this Mahometan living among Christians would yet more apparently renounce their government if he acknowledged the same person to be head of his Church, who is the supreme magistrate in the state.

Lastly, those who deny the being of a God are not to be tolerated at all. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all. Besides also, those who by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion, can have no pretence of religion upon which to challenge the privilege of a toleration. As for other practical opinions, though not absolutely free from all error, if they do not tend to establish domination over others, or civil impunity to the Church in which they are taught, there can be no reason why they should not be tolerated.

It remains that I say something concerning those assemblies which are thought to afford against this doctrine of toleration, being vulgarly *called* and perhaps having sometimes *been* conventicles and nurseries of factions and seditions. But this has not happened by anything peculiar to the genius of such assemblies, but by the unhappy circumstances of an oppressed

or ill-settled liberty. These accusations would soon cease if the law of toleration were once so settled that all Churches were obliged to lay down toleration as the foundation of their own liberty, and teach that *liberty of conscience* is every man's natural right belonging equally to dissenters as to themselves; and that nobody ought to be compelled either by law or force in matters of religion. The establishment of this one thing would take away all ground of complaints and tumults on account of conscience. And once these causes of discontents and animosities are removed, there would remain nothing in these assemblies that would not be more peaceable and less apt to produce disturbance of state than in any other meetings whatsoever. But let us examine particularly the heads of these accusations.

You will say that *assemblies and meetings endanger the public peace and threaten the commonwealth*. I answer: If this is so, why are there daily such numerous meetings in markets and Courts of Judicature? Why are crowds on the Exchange and a concourse of people in cities suffered? You will reply: "Those are *civil* assemblies, but these we object against are *ecclesiastical*." I answer: It is a likely thing, indeed, that such assemblies as are altogether remote from civil affairs should be most apt to embroil them. Oh, but civil assemblies are composed of men who differ from one another in matters of religion, but these ecclesiastical meetings are of persons who are all of one opinion. It is as if an agreement in matters of religion was in effect a conspiracy against the commonwealth; or as if men would not be so warmly unanimous in religion, the less liberty they had to assemble. But it will still be urged that *civil assemblies* are open and free for anyone to enter into, whereas *religious conventicles* are more private, and thereby they give opportunity to clandestine machinations. I answer that this is not strictly true, for many civil assemblies are not open to everyone. And if some religious meetings are private, who are they (I beseech you) who are to be blamed for it? Those who desire, or those who forbid their being public!

Again, you will say that religious communion exceedingly unites men's minds and affections toward one another, and therefore it is more dangerous. But if this is so, then why is the magistrate not afraid of his own Church; and why does he not forbid their assemblies as being dangerous to his government? You will say because he himself is a part and even the head of them — as if he were not also a part of the commonwealth, and the head of the whole people! Let us therefore deal plainly.

The magistrate is afraid of other Churches, but not of his own, because he is kind and favourable to the one, but severe and cruel to the other. *These* he treats like children, and he indulges them even to wantonness. *Those* he uses as slaves, and however blamelessly they demean themselves, he recompenses them in no other way than by galleys, prisons, confiscations, and death. *These* he cherishes and defends; *those* he continually scourges and oppresses. Let him turn the tables. Or let those dissenters enjoy but the same privileges in civil matters as his other subjects, and he will quickly find that these religious meetings will no longer be dangerous. For if men enter into seditious conspiracies, it is not religion that inspires them to it in their meetings, but their sufferings and oppressions that make them willing to ease themselves. Just and moderate governments are everywhere quiet, everywhere safe; but oppression raises ferments and makes men struggle to cast off an uneasy and tyrannical yoke. I know that seditions are very frequently raised on the pretence

of religion, but it is just as true that for religion, subjects are frequently ill-treated and live miserably. Believe me, the stirs that are made do not proceed from any peculiar temper of this or that Church or religious society, but from the common disposition of all mankind, who when they groan under any heavy burden, endeavour naturally to shake off the yoke that galls their necks. Suppose this business of religion were left alone, and that some other distinction were made between men on account of their different complexions, shapes, and features. So that those who have black hair (for example), or grey eyes, would not enjoy the same privileges as other citizens; they would not be permitted either to buy or sell, or live by their callings; parents would not have the government and education of their own children; all would either be excluded from the benefit of the laws, or meet with biased judges. Can it be doubted that these persons, thus distinguished from others by the colour of their hair and eyes, and united together by one common persecution, would be as dangerous to the magistrate, as any others who had associated themselves merely on the account of religion? Some enter into company for trade and profit, others for desire of business have their clubs for claret wine. Neighbourhood joins some, and religion joins others. But there is only one thing which gathers people into seditious commotions, and that is *oppression*.

You will say “What, would you have people meet at divine service against the magistrate’s will?” I answer: Why, I pray, *against his will*? Is it not both lawful and necessary that they should meet? *Against his will*, you say? *That* is what I complain of; *that* is the very root of all the mischief. Why are assemblies less sufferable in a church than in a theatre or market? Those who meet there are neither more vicious nor more turbulent than those who meet elsewhere. The objection is that they are ill-used, and therefore they are not to be suffered. Take away the partiality that is used towards them in matters of common right; change the laws; take away the penalties to which they are subjected; and then all things will immediately become safe and peaceable. Indeed, those who are averse to the religion of the magistrate will think themselves so much the more bound to maintain the peace of the commonwealth, as their condition is better in that place than elsewhere. And all the several separate congregations, like so many guardians of the public peace, will watch one another, so that nothing may be innovated or changed in the form of the government, because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy — that is, *an equal condition with their fellow-subjects under a just and moderate government*.

Now, if that Church which agrees in religion with the prince, is esteemed to be the chief support of any civil government, and that is for no other reason (as has already been shown) than because the prince is kind, and the laws are favourable to it, then how much greater will the security of the government be, where all good subjects, of whatever Church they are, without any distinction on account of religion, enjoying the same favour of the prince and the same benefit of the laws, will become the common support and guard of it; and where none will have any occasion to fear the severity of the laws but those who do injuries to their neighbours, and offend against the civil peace?

So that we may draw towards a conclusion, the sum of all we drive at is that every man may enjoy the same rights that are granted to others. Is it permitted to worship God in the Roman manner? Let it be permitted to do it in the Geneva form also. Is it permitted to speak

Latin in the marketplace? Let those who have a mind to it also be permitted to do it in the Church. Is it lawful for any man in his own house to kneel, stand, sit, or use any other posture; and to clothe himself in white or black, in short or in long garments? Let it not be made unlawful to eat bread, drink wine, or wash with water in the church. In a word, whatever things are left free by law in the common occasions of life, let them remain free to every Church in divine worship. Let no man's life, or body, or house, or estate, suffer any manner of prejudice on these accounts. Can you allow of the Presbyterian discipline? Why should not the Episcopal also have what they like? *Ecclesiastical authority*, whether it is administered by the hands of a single person or many, is the same everywhere. And neither does it have any jurisdiction in *civil things*, nor any manner of power of compulsion, nor anything at all to do with riches and revenues.

Ecclesiastical assemblies and sermons are justified by daily experience and public allowance. These are allowed to people of some one persuasion, so why not to all? If anything seditious and contrary to the public peace passes in a religious meeting, it is to be punished in the same manner and not otherwise than as if it had happened in a fair or market. These meetings should not be sanctuaries for factious and flagitious fellows.²² Nor should it be less lawful for men to meet in churches than in halls; nor is one part of the subjects to be esteemed more blamable for their meeting together than others. Everyone is to be accountable for his own actions, and no man is to be laid under a suspicion or odium for the fault of another. Those who are seditious, murderers, thieves, robbers, adulterers, slanderers, etc., of whatever Church, whether national or not, ought to be punished and suppressed. But those whose doctrine is peaceable and whose manners are pure and blameless ought to be on equal terms with their fellow subjects. Thus, if solemn assemblies, observations of festivals, or public worship is permitted to any one sort of professors, all these things should be permitted to the Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, Arminians, Quakers, and others, with the same liberty.

Indeed, if we may openly say the truth, as becomes one man to another, neither Pagan nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion. The Gospel commands no such thing. The Church which "does not judge those who are outside"²³ does not want it. And the commonwealth, which embraces indifferently all men who are honest, peaceable, and industrious, does not require it. Shall we suffer a Pagan to deal and trade with us, and shall we not suffer him to pray to and worship God? If we allow the Jews to have private houses and dwellings among us, why should we not allow them to have synagogues? Is their doctrine more false, their worship more abominable, or is the civil peace more endangered by their meeting in public than in their private houses? But if these things may be granted to Jews and Pagans, surely the condition of any Christians should not be worse than theirs in a Christian commonwealth.

You will perhaps say, "Yes, it ought to be different; because they are more inclinable to factions, tumults, and civil wars." I answer: *Is this the fault of the Christian religion?* If it is so, then truly the Christian religion is the worst of all religions and should neither be

²² *Flagitious*: extremely wicked, deeply criminal.

²³ 1Cor 5.12-13.

embraced by any particular person, nor tolerated by any commonwealth. For if this is the genius, if this is the nature of the Christian *religion* — to be turbulent and destructive to the civil peace — then that *Church* itself which the magistrate indulges, will not always be innocent. But far be it from us to say any such thing about that religion which carries the greatest opposition to covetousness, ambition, discord, contention, and all manner of inordinate desires, and is the most modest and peaceable religion that ever was. We must, therefore, seek another cause of those evils that are charged against religion. And if we consider rightly, we will find it to consist wholly in the subject of which I am treating. It is not the *diversity of opinions* (which cannot be avoided), but the *refusal of toleration* to those that are of different opinions (which might have been granted), that has produced all the bustles and wars that have been in the Christian world on account of religion. The heads and leaders of the Church, moved by avarice and an insatiable desire for dominion, making use of the immoderate ambition of magistrates and the credulous superstition of the giddy multitude, have incensed and animated them against those who dissent from themselves, by preaching to them, contrary to the laws of the Gospel and to the precepts of charity, that schismatics and heretics are to be outed of their possessions and destroyed. And thus they have mixed together and confounded two things that are in themselves most different: the *Church* and the *commonwealth*.

Now, just as it is very difficult for men to patiently suffer themselves to be stripped of the goods which they have gotten by their honest industry, and contrary to all the laws of equity, both human and divine, to be delivered up for a prey to other men's violence and rapine — especially when they are otherwise altogether blameless, and the occasion for which they are thus treated does not belong at all to the jurisdiction of the magistrate, but entirely to the conscience of every particular man for the conduct of which he is accountable to God alone — what else can be expected but that these men, growing weary of the evils under which they labour, should in the end think it lawful for them to resist force with force, and to defend their natural rights (which are not forfeitable on account of religion) with arms as well as they can?

That this has been the ordinary course of things up to now, is abundantly evident in history, and that it will continue to be so hereafter is only too apparent in reason. It cannot indeed be otherwise, so long as the principle of persecution for religion prevails as it has done up to now, with magistrate and people, and so long as those who ought to be the preachers of peace and concord continue with all their art and strength to excite men to arms and sound the trumpet of war. But it might justly be wondered at, that magistrates should thus suffer these incendiaries and disturbers of the public peace, if it did not appear that they have been invited by them to participate in the spoil, and have therefore thought fit to make use of their covetousness and pride as a means by which to increase their own power. For who does not see that these good men are, indeed, more ministers of the *government* than ministers of the *Gospel*, and that by flattering the ambition and favouring the dominion of princes and men in authority, they endeavour with all their might to promote that tyranny in the commonwealth which otherwise they would not be able to establish in the Church?

This is the unhappy agreement that we see between the Church and State. Whereas if each of them would contain itself within its own bounds — the one attending to the worldly

welfare of the commonwealth, and the other to the salvation of souls — it is impossible that any discord would ever have happened between them. *Sed pudet haec opprobria.* etc.²⁴ God Almighty grant, I beseech Him, that the gospel of peace may at length be preached, and that civil magistrates, growing more careful to conform their own consciences to the law of God, and less solicitous about binding other men's consciences by human laws, may like fathers of their country, direct all their counsels and endeavours to promote universally the civil welfare of all their children, except those who are arrogant, ungovernable, and injurious to their brethren — and that all ecclesiastical men, who boast of being the successors of the Apostles, walking peaceably and modestly in the Apostles' steps, without intermeddling with State Affairs, may apply themselves wholly to promote the salvation of souls.

FAREWELL.

Perhaps it may not be amiss to add a few things concerning *heresy* and *schism*. A Turk is not, nor can he be, either a heretic or a schismatic to a Christian; and if any man falls away from the Christian faith to Mahometism, he does not thereby become a heretic or a schismatic, but an apostate and an infidel. This nobody doubts; and by this it appears that men of different religions cannot be heretics or schismatics to one another.

We are to inquire, therefore, what men of the same religion are. Concerning which, it is manifest that those who have one and the same rule of faith and worship are of the same religion; and those who do not have the same rule of faith and worship are of different religions. For since all things that belong to that religion are contained in that rule, it follows necessarily that those who agree in one rule are of one and the same religion, and vice versa. Thus, Christians and Turks are of different religions, because Christians take the Holy Scriptures to be the rule of their religion, and Turks take the Alcoran.²⁵ And for the same reason, there may also be different religions even among Christians. The Papists and the Lutherans, though both of them profess faith in Christ, and are therefore called *Christians*, they are not both of the same religion, because Lutherans acknowledge nothing but the Holy Scriptures to be the rule and foundation of their religion; but Papists also include the traditions and the decrees of Popes — and these together make the rule of their religion. Thus, the Christians of St. John (as they are called),²⁶ and the Christians of Geneva, are of different religions, because those of Geneva also take only the Scriptures for their rule, and those of St. John take, I know not what traditions for the rule of their religion.

This being settled, it follows, *first*, that **HERESY** is a separation made in ecclesiastical communion between men of the *same* religion for some opinions in no way contained in the rule itself; and *secondly*, that among those who acknowledge nothing but the Holy Scriptures to be their rule of faith, heresy is a separation made in their Christian

²⁴ This is the opening of a line from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book 1, lines 759–760): “Pudet haec opprobria nobis et dici potuisse et non potuisse refelli.” In English, “It shames us that these insults could have been said, and yet could not have been refuted.”

²⁵ That is, the Koran, or Qur'an.

²⁶ Christians of St John: In the middle of the 17th century, certain Carmelite missionaries discovered a sect residing in the neighborhood of Basrah and Susa, calling themselves Nazoreans or Mendaeanes, also known as Sabians.

communion for opinions not contained in the express words of Scripture. Now this separation may be made in a twofold manner:

1. When the *greater* part, or by the magistrate's patronage, the *stronger* part of the Church separates itself from others by excluding them out of her communion because they will not profess their belief of certain opinions which are not the express words of the Scripture. For it is not the paucity of those who are separated, nor the authority of the magistrate, that can make any man guilty of heresy, but he alone is a heretic who divides the Church into parts, introduces names and marks of distinction, and voluntarily makes a separation because of such opinions.
2. When anyone separates himself from the communion of a Church because that Church does not publicly profess some certain opinions which the Holy Scriptures do not expressly teach.

Both these are heretics because they err in fundamentals, and they err obstinately against knowledge. For when they have determined the Holy Scriptures to be the only foundation of faith, they nevertheless lay down certain propositions as fundamental which are not in the Scripture. And because others will not acknowledge these additional opinions of theirs, nor build upon them as if they were necessary and fundamental, they therefore make a separation in the Church, either by withdrawing themselves from others, or by expelling the others from them. Nor does it signify anything for them to say that their confessions and symbols are agreeable to Scripture and to the analogy of faith.²⁷ For if they are conceived in the express words of Scripture, there can be no question about them, because those things are acknowledged by all Christians to be of divine inspiration, and therefore fundamental. But if they say that the articles which they require to be professed are consequences *deduced* from the Scripture, then it is undoubtedly well done by those who believe and profess such things as seem to them so agreeable to the rule of faith. But it would be very ill-done to obtrude (impose) those things on others to whom they do *not* seem to be the indubitable doctrines of the Scripture. And to make a separation for such things as these, which neither are nor can be fundamental, is to become a heretic. For I do not think there is any man who has arrived at such a degree of madness, that he dares give out his consequences and interpretations of Scripture as divine inspirations, and compare the articles of faith that he has framed according to his own fancy, with the authority of Scripture.

I know there are some propositions so evidently agreeable to Scripture that nobody can deny them to be drawn from there;²⁸ and about those, therefore, there can be no difference. I say only this — that however clearly we may think this or the other doctrine is deduced from Scripture, we should not therefore impose it on others as a necessary *article* of faith, because we believe it to be agreeable to the *rule* of faith, unless we would also be content that other doctrines should be imposed on us in the same manner — and that we should be compelled to receive and profess all the different and contradictory opinions of Lutherans, Calvinists, Remonstrants, Anabaptists, and other sects which the contrivers of symbols,

²⁷ *Analogy of faith*: the theological principle that individual passages of Scripture should be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the entire body of revealed truth, and with the established doctrines of the Christian faith.

²⁸ For example, the Trinity.

systems, and confessions are accustomed to deliver to their followers as genuine and necessary deductions from the Holy Scripture. I cannot but wonder at the extravagant arrogance of those men who think that they themselves can explain things necessary to salvation more clearly than the Holy Ghost, the eternal and infinite wisdom of God.

Thus much concerning *heresy*, which word in common use is applied only to the *doctrinal* part of religion.

Let us now consider **SCHISM**, which is a crime near akin to it. For both these words seem to me to signify an ill-grounded separation in ecclesiastical communion made about things that are not necessary. But since *use*, which is the supreme law in matter of language, has determined that **heresy** relates to *errors in faith*, and **schism** relates to errors in *worship* or *discipline*, we must consider them under that distinction.

Schism, then, for the same reasons that have already been alleged, is nothing else but a separation made in the communion of the Church on account of something in divine worship or ecclesiastical discipline that is not a necessary part of it. Now, nothing in worship or discipline can be necessary to Christian communion except what Christ our legislator, or the Apostles by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have commanded in express words.

In a word, whoever does not deny anything that the Holy Scriptures teach in express words, and does not make a separation on occasion of anything that is not manifestly contained in the sacred text — however he may be nicknamed by any sect of Christians, and declared by some or all of them to be utterly devoid of true Christianity — yet in deed and in truth this man *cannot* be either a heretic or schismatic.

These things might have been explained more largely and more advantageously, but it is enough to have thus briefly hinted at them to a person of your parts.