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The Potential Convergence of Religious and Secular Interests in Voltaire's *Traité sur la tolérance*

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When the Toulouse parliament condemned Jean Calas to death on March 9, 1762, and had him executed on the following day, Voltaire took up his pen to denounce what he saw as a brutal act of intolerance against a Protestant. Although Henry IV had signed the Edict of Nantes in 1598, guaranteeing freedom of conscience for all religions, Louis XIV revoked this edict in 1685 and claimed Catholicism as the one official religion of France. Already well known for his anticlericalism, Voltaire questioned a number of religious practices. But in his *Traité sur la tolérance* he does not reject religion so much as he presents an idealized form of it that converges with the secular notion of justice he is trying to protect. The question, as he poses it in the *Traité sur la tolérance*, is to "examiner si la religion doit être charitable ou barbare" (examine whether the true religious spirit is more consistent with charity or with cruelty). Voltaire's answer to this question reveals his own form of religion. By examining both tendencies

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inherent in religion, Voltaire presents a choice between justice and injustice, humanity and inhumanity that, through his ironic treatment of the subject, is largely determined in advance.

Voltaire believed that religion could tend toward barbarity by excessive passions, beliefs, and actions. Passions, hatred, and fanaticism combined in a particularly pernicious way in the *affaire Calas*, as it came to be known. Voltaire criticizes the brotherhood of white penitents for being behind much of the irrational public fervor, as he does all religious brotherhoods when they give themselves over to their worst passions:

Elles semblent instituées par le zèle qui anime en Languedoc les catholiques contre ceux que nous nommons huguenots. On dirait qu'on a fait voeu de haïr ses frères, car nous avons assez de religion pour haïr et persécuter, et nous n'en avons pas assez pour aimer et pour secourir.

(Their very foundations appear to be built upon that extremism, which in Languedoc, so manifestly excites Catholics against those whom we call Huguenots. You would think they had made a vow to hate their fellow man, for though we have in our country sufficient religious feeling to revile and persecute, it is not yet strong enough to love and to cherish.)

The frenzy of hatred spreads quickly from the religious orders and the people to the judges of Toulouse, who

entraînés par le fanatisme de la populace, ont fait rouer un père de famille innocent.

(led astray by the fanaticism of the populace, have caused an innocent man to perish on the wheel.)

Fanaticism can have disastrous results not only for others but also for one's own group. In Roman times, Christians themselves could endanger the lives of their fellow believers through their excessive zeal, which

2. Traité, 41 (*Treatise*, 12).
Voltaire sees as the probable source of all their persecutions. People’s errors should be punished as crimes only when they inspire fanaticism.

As with excessive passions, superstitious and dogmatic beliefs can also dehumanize religion. Voltaire views the worst kind of superstition as a form of hatred:

Mais de toutes les superstitions, la plus dangereuse, n'est-ce pas celle de haïr son frère pour ses opinions?

(Yet of all superstitions is not the most dangerous that which demands we hate our neighbour on account of his opinion?)

Like his confrères the philosophes, Voltaire fostered diversity of opinion in all matters, secular and religious. Conformity of views, he feared, could lead not just to intellectual stagnation but actual persecution of others. He was all too aware of

cette sombre superstition qui porte les âmes faibles à imputer des crimes à quiconque ne pense pas comme elles.

(that grim superstition which persuades the weak-minded to impute a criminal character to whoever does not think as they do.)

Voltaire devotes all of chapter XX to the question of superstition: “S'il est utile d'entretenir le peuple dans la superstition” (Whether it is useful to hold the people in superstition). He seems to acquiesce to some superstition in the early stages of a society but believed it becomes useless as the society evolves. Ironically, Voltaire adopts a kind of relativism about superstitions; some are much more harmful than others:

Et n'est-il pas évident qu'il serait encore plus raisonnable d'adorer le saint nombril, le saint prépuce, le lait et la robe de la vierge Marie, que de détester et de persécuter son frère?

4. Traité, 70 (Treatise, 37).
5. Traité, 121 (Treatise, 78).
7. Traité, 157 (Treatise, 105).
8. Traité, 129 (Treatise, 83).
(Is it not evident that it would be far more in accordance with reason to worship the holy navel, the holy foreskin, the milk and the robe of the Virgin Mary, than to detest and to persecute one's fellow man?)

Not surprisingly for a treatise on tolerance, what determines the unacceptability of a given superstition depends on the degree of intolerance or actual harm involved.

Voltaire links a dogmatic frame of mind in religion to dangerous passions that have ravaged Europe. He writes:

La fureur qu'inspirent l'esprit dogmatique, et l'abus de la religion chrétienne mal entendue a répandu autant de sang, a produit autant de désastres, en Allemagne, en Angleterre, et même en Hollande, qu'en France.

(The fury unleashed by both the dogmatic spirit and the misuse of a poorly understood Christianity has spilt as much blood and caused as many disasters in Germany, in England, and even in Holland, as in France.)

Yet he suggests at the same time that certain dogmas do not necessarily belong in true Christianity. He cites the belief in purgatory and the adoration of relics that heretics did not subscribe to and who, consequently, were cruelly tortured to death. The ambiguity surrounding some dogmas arises from the lack of unequivocal explanations in Jesus's own teachings and universal approval in the church:

On sait que tous nos dogmes n'ont pas toujours été clairement expliqués et universellement reçus dans notre Église. Jésus-Christ ne nous ayant point dit comment procédait le Saint-Esprit, l'Église latine crut longtemps avec la grecque qu'il ne procédait que du Père: enfin elle ajouta au symbole qu'il procédait aussi du Fils. ... Il n'y a pas longtemps que l'immaculée conception est établie: les dominicains n'y croient pas encore.

10. Traité, 48 (Treatise, 19).
11. Traité, 44 (Treatise, 15).
(It is well known that our dogmas have not always been properly explained, nor universally received in our church. As Jesus Christ did not inform us in what manner the Holy Ghost operated, for a long time the Latin Church believed, along with the Greek, that it operated only through God the Father; later, they added that it could also work through God the Son . . . It is not so long ago that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was established; the Dominicans still refuse to believe it.)

Voltaire cannot help concluding toward the end of the *Traité*:

moins de dogmes, moins de disputes; et moins de disputes, moins de malheurs: si cela n'est pas vrai, j'ai tort.

(The fewer dogmas one has to deal with, the fewer the disputes over them; and the fewer the disputes, the less the risk of calamity. If this is not true, then I am much mistaken.)

Dogmatic thinking leads to disputes, which in turn lead to human misery.

When Voltaire considers the misery arising from religious intolerance, he thinks not only in terms of the emotional suffering it causes but also in terms of the physical suffering or the actions by which people are persecuted. These actions vary in their degree of intensity from the unjust to the absurd to the violent. Like numerous other acts of intolerance, the *affaire Calas* follows to some extent this progression. Sieur David, the municipal magistrate of Toulouse in charge of the case had the whole Calas family imprisoned in chains without adhering to the standard operating procedures in such cases, thereby flouting the rules of justice, law, and order. At best, the system of justice in eighteenth-century France lacked a number of protections and rights for the accused, who could not argue their cases in public. The system safeguarded the secrecy of court proceedings and, in many cases, the arbitrariness of the court’s decisions, as Jean-François Perrin has pointed out.

son Marc-Antoine had probably committed suicide, but the father is wrongly accused of having hanged his own son, supposedly to keep him from converting to Catholicism. Jean Calas’s wife and his other son, Pierre, are also implicated as accomplices, as are a friend of the family named Lavaisse and a woman servant. The subsequent series of events takes on absurd theatrical qualities that Voltaire is quick to point out:

Jamais aucune Église ne célébra la fête d’un martyr véritable avec plus de pompe; mais cette pompe fut terrible. On avait élevé au-dessus d’un magnifique catafalque un squelette qu’on faisait mouvoir, et qui représentait Marc-Antoine Calas, tenant d’une main une palme et de l’autre la plume dont il devait signer l’abjuration de l’hérésie, et qui écrivait en effet l’arrêt de mort de son père.

(Never had any church celebrated the feast of a martyr with greater display. Yet there was something dreadful about this ceremony. Above a magnificent catafalque they placed a skeleton, which they contrived to move and jerk. It bore in one hand a palm, and in the other a quill. The skeleton represented Marc-Antoine Calas, the quill the instrument of his supposed recantation; except that it signed instead the death warrant of his father.)

The events draw to a grisly end with the violent and awful death of Jean Calas on the wheel. Despite the painful blows to his limbs that his executioners presumably break one by one, as was the custom with this type of punishment, Jean Calas continues to profess his innocence before he dies.

Although merely one event, Jean Calas’s painful death typifies for Voltaire the long history of religious intolerance. The city of Toulouse itself still celebrates a feast day for having “égorgé, il y a deux cents ans, quatre mille des ses concitoyens” (massacred, two hundred years ago, four thousand of the city’s inhabitants), marking the victory of Catholics

the injustices of the legal system and structured the arguments in his Dialogues accordingly to counter these deficiencies.

15. Traité, 34 (Treatise, 6).
over Protestants during the religious wars of the Renaissance. Some religious practices, when not merely absurd, can be horribly violent. Voltaire does not have to look far in France's history to find examples of religious bloodletting. The Reformation furnishes ample proof, as Voltaire enumerates the cases in chapter III: the annihilation of six thousand Vaudois (or Waldenses), nine civil wars, the assassinations of Henri III and IV by the Catholic League, and, of course, the infamous Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. Ironically, by the late 1750s, shortly before the Calas case, the Protestant problem was beginning to find sympathetic supporters "among liberal Catholic theologians and lawyers." But serious problems clearly remained.

Given the excesses to which religions can go in their barbarity, one wonders with Voltaire whether there remains any hope of a charitable form of religion. In his Traité, Voltaire presents, however, not just the barbaric side of religion but also a human side that takes on secular characteristics. When properly practiced, religion shares political, social, intellectual, and emotional or behavioral goals with the secular order that Voltaire was promoting. In the political realm, freedom constitutes just as important an objective for religious leaders as it does for secular ones. Voltaire cites a number of sources as authorities for the connection he makes between religion and freedom:

C'est une impiété d'ôter, en matière de religion, la liberté aux hommes, d'empêcher qu'ils ne fassent choix d'une divinité: aucun homme, aucun dieu, ne voudrait d'un service forcé.

(In matters of religion, it is impious to rob men of their liberty, to prevent them from choosing their deity. No man, and no god, would wish for an enforced adherence.)

Si on usait de violence pour la défense de la foi, les évêques s'y opposeraient. (Saint HILAIRE, liv. Ier)

(If violence were employed to defend the faith, the bishops would oppose it.)\textsuperscript{19}

La religion forcée n'est plus religion: il faut persuader, et non contraindre. La religion ne se commande point. (LACTANCE, liv. III)

(Enforced religion is no religion at all; the essence is to persuade, not compel. Religion cannot be adopted on command.)\textsuperscript{20}

Voltaire reasserts the freedom of conscience that allows men and women to choose the religion they desire to practice without fear of persecution. Partisans of tolerance at the time advocated freedom of conscience to seek truth in matters of religion and spirituality, whereas those on the side of intolerance used their self-proclaimed duty of protecting a more absolute, dogmatic notion of truth to justify the persecution of others.\textsuperscript{21} The depiction of human beings as free agents here foreshadows what will come at the end of the century in the \textit{Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen)}. The right to choose freely in all matters, including religion, should be a universal right. Intolerance, Voltaire suggests, infringes on that right by the use of force, violence, or both.

The social goals of progress, civilization, law, and fraternity also apply to religious and secular worlds. Voltaire believed society had made great strides and France had shown the way to a better world. He writes of the enormous progress achieved under Louis XIV in his \textit{Essai sur les moeurs} and \textit{Le Siècle de Louis XIV}.\textsuperscript{22} He was also aware that he himself was living in times of tremendous change and in his \textit{Traité} calls attention to it:

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Treatise}, 70: St. Hilarius, book I.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Traité}, 109. Although Voltaire presents all the quotations in chapter XV as "Témoignages contre l'intolérance" (or "Authorities against persecution"), they also clearly point to the innate freedom in humans. \textit{Treatise}, 70: Lactantius, book III.
et ne nous apercevons-nous pas que presque toute l’Europe a changé de face depuis environ cinquante années?

(and have we not noticed that practically the whole face of Europe has changed over the last fifty years or so?)

Using the interrogative form for his observation, Voltaire realizes, however, that much still remains to be done. But his question does not eclipse the fact that

la douceur de la société [a] pénétré chez ceux qui conduisent l'esprit de ces peuples.

(gentle manners [have] reached to the men who instruct the minds of these people.)

In writing his Traité, Voltaire looks both to the immediate future for a positive outcome for the Calas family’s case and to posterity for a wholly transformed society:

Je sème un grain qui pourra un jour produire une moisson. Attendons tout du temps.

(I have tried to sow a seed from which one day there might be gathered a harvest. For the rest, we depend upon the fullness of time.)

Voltaire frequently associates progress with “civilized manners” (my translation) or, as he puts it in the Traité, “la douceur des moeurs.” Yet he cannot help pointing out the cruel irony of the Toulouse bicentennial celebration of the 1562 massacre of Protestants with its overheated speeches at the same time as “cent académies écrivent pour inspirer la douceur des moeurs!” (a hundred academies have devoted their energies to the promotion of decency and gentleness in public affairs!). However much religion can stoke humans’ passions, it has also in the middle of a war “adoucissait quelquefois leurs fureurs” (acted . . . occasionally

24. Traité, 47 (Treatise, 18).
25. Traité, 151 (Treatise, 100).
26. Traité, 35 (Treatise, 6).
[as] a mollifying stay upon their ferocity). Religion can contribute to what Norbert Elias has called "the civilizing process," or what the period itself called *politesse*. Voltaire's own religion, as professed in the *Traité*, consists in "l'unique dessein de rendre les hommes plus compatissants et plus doux" (the sole desire of making mankind more compassionate and charitable [read "gentle," which corresponds more to the tenor of Voltaire's writings here]). In making humans more compassionate and gentle, Voltaire recognizes the appropriate connection between religion and humanity. In fact, he points out the hypocrisy of the abbé Malvaux's title *Accord de la religion et de l'humanité*, which should read "l'inhumanité" (*Inhumanity*), Voltaire says, and he presents it as diametrically opposed to his own goal.

A substantial section of the *Traité*, chapters XII-XIII, studies the correlation between divine law and tolerance. Voltaire examines first Judaism, then Christianity to determine if these religions condone or even command intolerance. No great admirer of the Jewish religion and at times bordering on the anti-Semitic, even Voltaire must conclude that Judaism cannot be accused of intolerance:

> En un mot, si l'on veut examiner de près le judaïsme, on sera étonné de trouver la plus grande tolérance au milieu des horreurs les plus barbares. C'est une contradiction, il est vrai; presque tous les peuples se sont gouvernés par des contradictions. Heureuse celle qui amène des moeurs douces quand on a des lois de sang!

(In a word, if one is prepared to examine Judaism closely, one will be surprised to find, in the midst of barbaric horrors, the most extraordinary spirit of tolerance. Yes, it is a paradox, but then nearly all people have been governed by some measure of

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30. Ibid.
contradiction; happy are those whose society is gentle though their laws be bloody!)\textsuperscript{31}

As for Christianity, Voltaire finds few passages in the Gospels that might legitimize intolerance.\textsuperscript{32} For the most part he considers Christianity a tolerant religion and places Jesus Christ on the side of the persecuted rather than on that of the persecutors:

Je demande à présent si c’est la tolérance ou l’intolérance qui est de droit divin? Si vous voulez ressembler à Jesus-Christ, soyez martyrs, et non pas bourreaux.

(I will now enquire whether it is tolerance which is divinely ordained, or intolerance. If you want to be like Jesus Christ, better be a martyr than a hangman.)\textsuperscript{33}

Although hardly going so far as to advocate religious laws for the secular state he ultimately desires, Voltaire more or less favorably compares divine laws from the two major Western religions with the shambles of civil laws he sees around him. Whereas divine laws usually, if not always, reinforce tolerance, the laws meting out justice in Voltaire’s day are at best insufficient, arbitrary, or confusing.\textsuperscript{34} At worst, they bring about gross injustices, as in the \textit{affaire Calas}. Lacking justification either in divine law or human law, intolerance has no “base rationnelle,” as Stéphane Pujol has observed.\textsuperscript{35}

In addition to the social goals of progress, civilization, and law, Voltaire also envisions a possible shared sense of social solidarity or fraternity between religion and the state. In his prayer to God, the subject of chapter XXIII, Voltaire prays for a great many things, but he ends his prayer with a powerful plea for fraternity: “Puissent tous les hommes se souvenir qu’ils sont frères!” (May all men remember that they are

\textsuperscript{31} Traité, 99 (Treatise, 63).
\textsuperscript{32} Traité, 101 (Treatise, 64).
\textsuperscript{33} Traité, 107 (Treatise, 69).
\textsuperscript{34} Traité, 36, 152 (Treatise, 7, 100).
brothers!). The religious notion of fraternity has particular resonance in the *Traité* because it rejoins the related notion of humanity that Voltaire emphasizes throughout this work and which he largely associates with tolerance. Voltaire suggests in his prayer that, in our intolerance and the persecution of our fellow human beings that it inevitably entails, we can lose sight of any sense of our sameness and equality in the eyes of God, for whom differences in clothing, language, customs, laws, opinions, and social classes mean nothing. Rather than use our hearts and our hands to hate or hurt others, we should, Voltaire prays,

> nous nous aidions mutuellement à supporter le fardeau d’une vie pénible et passagère.

(help one another to bear the burden of a difficult and transient life.)

The church and state have common ground not just in political and social values but also in intellectual ones, such as truth, reason, and philosophy. But the church would have to be one much more closely aligned with its original form that, according to David Diop, derived from natural religion. Or, as Sébastien Charles suggests, the best solution would be one in which civil religion, which could help reinforce social order—always a priority for Voltaire—is not allowed to degenerate into theological religion and its fanaticism. It may seem odd that Voltaire, whose quick

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37. See, for example, the passage on the banishment of the Jesuits from Japan, which Voltaire considers “un exemple de tolérance et d’humanité” (*Traité*, 51), translated “a supreme example of tolerance and humanity” (*Treatise*, 22).
40. In referring to chapter XXV, Diop states, “Voltaire lays out his concept of natural religion [here] by playing on the etymology of the word church, which not only designates the assembly of the first Christians but also the edifice where they assembled. A clever way to suggest that Christian religion was built on the ruins of natural religion” (my translation). David Diop, “La rhétorique de la crédulité dans le *Traité sur la tolérance*: de la lecture à l’écriture de l’allégorie”; *Revue de littératures Françaises et Comparées* 13 (1999): 119.
eye was often drawn to outrageous errors—the fables of history or the superstitions of religion—could find any truth in religion. Like many philosophes, he saw it as his duty to root out error.  

But in the Traité, he aims not only to expose error but to untangle truth from the web of lies fabricated by historians of secular and religious history:

Le mensonge en a trop longtemps imposé aux hommes, il est temps qu'on connaisse le peu de vérités qu'on peut démêler à travers ces nuages de fables qui couvrent l'histoire romaine depuis Tacite et Suetone, et qui ont presque toujours enveloppé les annales des autres nations anciennes.

(Falsehood has for too long held sway over the minds of men. It is time we sought to discover the few truths which we may discern through the vast clouds of fable which cover Roman history from the time of Tacitus and Suetonius, and which have nearly always smothered the annals of other nations in the ancient world.)

The same rigor he uses for ancient history he applies to religion. Voltaire in fact distinguishes between true and false religion, a pure form from God and one to which humans have added numerous unnecessary, and sometimes corrupt, accretions. Many people, weary of the “fraudes pieuses et de toutes les superstitions” (pious fraud and superstition), may even turn away from true religion:

Tous ces faux miracles par lesquels vous ébranlez la foi qu'on doit aux véritables, toutes ces légendes absurdes que vous ajoutez aux vérités de l'Évangile, éteignent la religion dans les coeurs.

(All these false miracles by which you unsettle the confidence due to true ones, and all these absurd legends with which you clutter the truth of the Gospels, stifle religion in the hearts of men.)

43. Traité, 77 (Treatise, 44).
44. Traité, 81; “pious fraud and superstition” (Treatise, 48).
45. Traité, 81 (Treatise, 48).
Paradoxically for religion more so than for secular history, Voltaire's method for uncovering errors consists in the judicious use of reason and of philosophy, which informs it. Voltaire reunites the two traditions of philosophy and religion that are, on his account, too often opposed. They can indeed work together to accomplish much good for both religious and secular worlds:

La philosophie, la seule philosophie, cette soeur de la religion, a désarmé des mains que la superstition avait si longtemps ensanglantées; et l'esprit humain, au réveil de son ivresse, s'est étonné des excès où l'avait emporté le fanatisme.

(Philosophy, that is the only true philosophy, the sister of Religion, has now disarmed hands so long bloodied by superstition, and the human spirit, as it recovers from its toxic madness, stands astonished at the excesses to which bigotry once brought it.)

Like reason, philosophy is making progress in Voltaire's times and is necessary for continued progress. Moreover, the march of reason, advanced considerably by the enlightened thinking of Pascal, Descartes, Bayle, and Fontenelle, among others, cannot be stopped:

Chaque jour la raison pénètre en France, dans les boutiques des marchands comme dans les hôtels des seigneurs. Il faut donc cultiver les fruits de cette raison, d'autant plus qu'il est impossible de les empêcher d'éclorer.

(With each day that passes, the power of reason is seeping as much into the houses of tradesmen as into the grand mansions of the nobility. We must needs harvest the fruits of this reason, particularly since it is impossible to prevent their blossoming.)

The link between reason and religion becomes especially clear in Voltaire's analysis of the emotional or behavioral goals of religion and society. Some of these, such as love (and, to some extent, charity) and

46. Traité, 49 (Treatise, 20).
47. Traité, 35, 47 (Treatise, 6, 18).
48. Traité, 131; (Treatise, 85).
gentleness, echo the social calls for fraternity and civilization, whereas others, such as forgiveness and pity, complement the general purpose of cultivating all of these emotions, namely, tolerance. Revealingly, Voltaire does not speak much of love or charity in the Traité. More often and more conservatively, as the following passage and passages quoted in the first part of this study underline, he enjoins human beings not to hate or detest one another:

ne nous haïssons pas, ne nous déchirons pas les uns les autres dans le sein de la paix.

(let us at least not hate one another or tear each other apart in the midst of peace.)

Voltaire avoids the stronger expression of love because, faced with the carnage of intolerance, he keeps minimal expectations. If humans can merely tolerate one another—love being practically too much to ask—they will have made enormous progress. In one of the rare references to the Christian human emotion of love, Voltaire reminds the followers of a merciful God of the words from the Gospel of Luke: “Aimez Dieu et votre prochain” (Love thy God and thy neighbour), as they have “surchargé cette loi pure et sainte de sophismes et de disputes incompréhensibles” (smothered that pure and holy doctrine with sophistries and unfathomable controversies). All too often humans separate the objects of love in this divine commandment by loving God but not their fellow human beings. Again, Voltaire underscores the purity of the original religious message that humans have corrupted.

Likewise, charity proves somewhat problematic for Voltaire. He does indeed ask the fundamental question in the Traité about religion’s barbaric or charitable tendencies. In its adjectival form, the word

49. The only two occurrences of the word amour are in a secular context: “l'amour de l'équité” or “love of equity,” referring to the judges' sense of this in the appeal (Traité, 149; Treatise, 98) and “l'amour de la nation” or “love of the nation” (Traité, 156; Treatise, 105).

50. Traité, 142; (Treatise, 93).

51. Traité, 139; (Treatise, 91).

52. The other occurrences of the verb aimer (to love)—loving more unequivocally with God than with humans as the object—bear out such a distinction. See Traité, 41 (Treatise, 12, also in note 2); Traité, 141 (Treatise, 92); and Traité, 143 (Treatise, 94).
charitable appears to maintain its positive connotation. When describing the general emotions and the tears shed over Madame Calas and her daughters, who have joined her in prison at the time, the appeal seems finally to be moving in her favor, however, Voltaire carefully avoids using the word *charité*:

L'humanité, la générosité, leur prodiguaient des secours. Ce qu'on appelle la *charité* ne leur en donnait aucun. La charité, qui d'ailleurs est si souvent mesquine et insultante, est le partage des dévots, et les dévots tenaient encore contre les Calas.

(Humanity and nobility of heart lavished assistance upon the women; 'charity' gave them none. Charity, which is besides often mean and insulting, belonged to those of a religious disposition, and they were still very much against the Calas family.)

Voltaire discerns a certain hypocrisy in the so-called charity of those who supposedly practice their religion devoutly. Instead of speaking in terms of love and charity, Voltaire prefers to characterize the desired emotions or behaviors that promote tolerance as gentleness, forgiveness ("indulgence" in French according to Masters's translation), and pity. The goals of religion reinforce those of the ideal society Voltaire has in mind in the *Traité*. In the Gospel's parables, "Jésus-Christ prêche la douceur, la patience, l'indulgence" (Christ exhorts patience, gentleness and forgiveness ). Voltaire's own goal in the *Traité*, as mentioned previously, consists in making humans more compassionate and gentle. Voltaire reflects in part here the seventeenth-century moralists' view of the passions, which one should moderate as much as possible. A passion such as hate, for instance, could be regulated by the positive quality of generosity, as Descartes suggests in his *Passions de l'âme*. In the case of Voltaire, gentleness, forgiveness, and pity would all presumably serve to attenuate the passion

53. See *Traité*, 40 (Treatise, 11); *Traité*, 69 (Treatise, 36); and *Traité*, 104 (Treatise, 66).
55. *Traité*, 104 (Treatise, 66).
56. *Traité*, 143 (Treatise, 94).
of hatred, which poses one of the greatest threats to true tolerance. For Voltaire, forgiveness represents a “devoir sacré” (sacred duty), by which he valorizes not only the importance of forgiveness for a just and tolerant society, but also for a religious one. Moreover, forgiveness comes to play an integral part in our happiness, which religion guides for this world and the next:

La religion est instituée pour nous rendre heureux dans cette vie et dans l'autre. Que faut-il pour être heureux dans la vie à venir? être juste. Pour être heureux dans celle-ci, autant que le permet la misère de notre nature, que faut-il? être indulgent.

(Religion is instituted in order to make us happy in this life and in the next. What is necessary to be happy in the life to come? That we be just. And to be happy in this life, in so far as our perverse nature will allow, what is necessary? That we be tolerant and merciful.)

By being forgiving, we not only follow Jesus’ preaching and gain in our spirituality according to Christianity but also accomplish the secular goals of improving our lot and the lot of others on this earth. Finally, pity or commiseration, as Voltaire sometimes refers to it, can also lead to tolerance. Voltaire seems to concur with Rousseau in his view of pity as a sign of our humanity. Voltaire speaks of commiseration in the same breath as tolerance and forgiveness, and, as would Rousseau, calls it “l'apanage de la nature” (the natural prerogative of Humanity). According to Voltaire, Paris and all of Europe are moved to pity by the affaire Calas. Voltaire implies that one would have to be devoid of any humanity—a beast or a barbarian—not to pity the Calas family.

58. Traité, 111 (Treatise, 71).
59. Traité, 133 (Treatise, 87).
62. Traité, 39 (Treatise, 10).
The political, social, intellectual, and emotional or behavioral goals that Voltaire illustrates as potentially shared ideals for religion and the state may lead one to question Voltaire's own secularism. But Voltaire endeavors to reorient the status quo in the eighteenth century that had the state serving a corrupt form of religion. In the new world he imagines in the *Traité*, Voltaire believes either that a purified religion would actually serve the purposes of the state or that the two would work hand in hand. It is not clear from the *Traité* which of these two scenarios prevails. Voltaire begins to conclude the *Traité* on a pious, religious note with a prayer to God in chapter XXIII. But the last two chapters of the 1763 edition focus less on God or religion than on humanity. In chapter XXIV, he implies that he does a better job than the abbé Malvaux of showing the connection between religion and humanity, and is therefore the best spokesman for humanity. The final chapter includes Voltaire's revealing response to a letter he received from someone in the Languedoc region. In his reply, which Voltaire practically reproduces in full and which represents his final word in the 1763 *Traité*, Voltaire has nature, not God, speak. More remarkable, Voltaire personifies nature, which speaks at some length in the first person: “La nature dit à tous les hommes: Je vous ai tous fait naitre faibles et ignorants” (Nature tells us all, ‘You have been born weak and ignorant’). Nature goes on to give men commandments: “Secourez-vous . . . éclairez-vous et supportez-vous” (You must look after one another . . . you must educate each other). It is also nature, in Voltaire’s response to his Languedoc correspondent, that has given us a “germe” (seed) of reason that we are commanded not to snuff out or corrupt, as it is “divin” (divine). With the word *divin* Voltaire seems to pay respect to God or a Supreme Being. But a series of “moi seule” (“I alone”), all referring to nature, reestablish the authority of this secular voice:

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63. The 1765 edition adds yet another chapter that recapitulates the final and favorable verdict in the appeal of the Calas case. It is in this additional chapter that Voltaire bitterly calls attention to the lack of charity among supposedly devout people.
64. *Traité*, 151 (*Treatise*, 100).
65. Ibid.
C’est moi seule qui vous unis encore malgré vous par vos besoins mutuels. . . . C’est moi seule qui, dans une nation, arrête les suites funestes de la division interminable. . . . Moi seule je conserve l’équité dans les tribunaux. . . . Seule je peux inspirer la justice.

(I alone bind you still further to one another, despite yourselves, by your mutual needs. . . . I alone can put a stop to the disastrous consequences of those interminable divisions. . . . I alone preserve fairness in the law-courts. . . . I alone can inspire true justice.)

This shift to a secular tone at the very end of the Traité makes of Voltaire ultimately not so much a defender of the faith as a defender of humanity. So, too, does it illustrate the occasionally troubled relation between Christianity and enlightenment for the period. In any event, Voltaire’s form of religion remains problematic in the Traité and in his oeuvre as a whole. Religion does not have to be barbaric; Voltaire knows enough about its original, essential qualities to see how it can fill for the state a truly charitable function, which for him consists in putting people back in touch with their humanity. At the end of the Calas appeal, Voltaire

67. Traité, 152; (Treatise, 100).
68. For René Pomeau, the sincerity of Voltaire’s prayer in chapter XXIII is obvious. See the introduction to his edition of the Traité, 25. Current eighteenth-century research is exploring the nexus between Christianity and enlightenment, and is proposing new terms such as humanisme chrétien or “Christian humanism” (my translation), which might possibly apply—I would suggest—to certain passages of Voltaire’s Traité. See Sylviane Albertan-Coppola, “Présentation et état des recherches,” in “Christianisme et Lumière,” ed. Sylviane Albertan-Coppola and Antony McKenna, Dix-Huitième Siècle 34 (2002): 8.
69. According to René Pomeau, Voltaire, obsessed as he was both with the idea of a fearsome God and of cruel priests, was greatly influenced by English philosophy’s notion of a lenient God, and he adhered ultimately and most consistently in his life to deism as a religion. See his La Religion de Voltaire (Paris: Nizet, 1969), 463–64. Related, of course, to deism is natural religion—devoid of any identification with existing religions—which is what Raymond Trousson finds in the Traité. Raymond Trousson, “Voltaire et la liberté de pensée: le Traité sur la tolérance,” Revue de Littératures Françaises et Comparées 13 (1999): 150–51. Both Pomeau and Trousson, however, point out Voltaire’s strong aversion to atheism, which might allow the powerful to “justify their crimes” (my translation). See Raymond Trousson, “Tolérance et fanatisme selon Voltaire et Rousseau,” in Rousseau and l’Infâme: Religion, Toleration, and Fanaticism in the Age of Enlightenment, ed. Ourida Mostefai and John T. Scott (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 39.
celebrates the renewed reign of “l'humanité et de la justice chez les hommes” (justice and humanity . . . in the breasts of men!). Tolerance prevails, Voltaire believed, when men and women recognize they are human, and Voltaire strove admirably throughout his life to remind us of our fundamental humanity.

70. Traité, 149; (Treatise, 100).