

# Toleration

conventionally known as “A Letter about Toleration”

John Locke

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—Locke wrote this in Latin; there was a contemporary English translation, and the question of how much Locke knew or affected it is controversial. It is fairly accurate, though very wordy; the present version has some debts to it, but the Latin has been consulted at every stage.—The section-breaks and -titles are all added in this version.—About the title: the work was originally published (not by Locke) in the form of a letter, but that was a scam. In his edition of the work (Nijhoff, 1963) Mario Montuori presents the scholarly case for this; and anyone who reads the thing with an intelligent eye will see that Montuori is right: it *obviously* wasn't written as a letter. See the note on page 4.

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## 1: The insincerity of the zealots

I have been asked what I think about the mutual toleration of Christians in their different professions of religion; I have to answer freely that I regard such toleration as the chief identifying mark of the true Church. When some people boast of •the antiquity of places and names, or of the pomp of their outward worship; others of •the reformation of their discipline; everyone of •the orthodoxy of their faith (for everyone is orthodox to himself!), this conduct and other behaviour of the same kind are marks of men striving for power and domination over one another *much* more than marks of the Church of Christ. Even if someone has an absolutely true claim to all these things, if he lacks charity, meekness, and good-will in general towards all mankind, even to those who are not Christians, he certainly falls 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.’ [Luke 22:25] True religion is something different: it exists not to create

- external pomp, or
- ecclesiastical dominance, or
- force of any kind,

but rather to create virtuous and pious lives. Anyone who wants to enlist in Christ’s Church must above all declare war on his own lusts and vices. No-one will do himself any good by calling himself a Christian unless his life is holy, his conduct pure, and his spirit kind and gentle. . . . I would find it hard to believe that someone who is careless about his own salvation is concerned for mine. It’s not possible for someone who hasn’t really embraced the Christian religion in his own heart to try with all his strength to make other people Christians. According to the Gospel and the apostles, no-one

can be a Christian unless he has •charity and •the faith that works through love, not through force. Now, I appeal to the consciences of those who persecute, wound, torture, and kill other men on the excuse of ‘religion’, whether they do this in a spirit of friendship and kindness. What would it take to convince me that they do? I would need to see those fiery zealots

- correcting *in the same way* their friends and members of their own household for their open sins against the Gospel’s teachings;
- persecuting with fire and sword their own parishioners who are tainted with enormous vices and at risk of eternal damnation if they don’t change, expressing their love and desire for the salvation of their souls by all sorts of cruelties and tortures.

The zealots claim that they are acting out of love and care for men’s souls when they take their estates, maim them with whips, starve and torture them in stinking prisons, and finally kill them. If that is right—if all this is done merely to make men Christians and save their souls—then why don’t these zealots also go after the prostitution, fraud, malice, and so on. . . .that are so conspicuous among their flocks? These and their like are certainly more contrary to God’s glory, to the Church’s purity, and to the salvation of souls, than •any conscientious dissent from ecclesiastical decisions, or •not going to church but leading an innocent life. Why does this zeal for God, for the Church, and for the salvation of souls—zeal that goes all the way to burning people to death—•let pass without criticism moral vices and wickednesses that everyone thinks are flatly contrary to Christian belief, yet •stretch itself to the introducing of

ceremonies or establishing of opinions that are mostly about fine-grained and intricate matters that ordinary folk can't understand? In these controversies which side is in the right and which guilty of schism or heresy? That will finally be decided when the cause of their separation comes to be judged. [Perhaps Locke meant '...judged by God on Judgment Day'; but 'finally' could instead point to the last chapter in the present work, where 'heresy' and 'schism' are defined in ways that make the 'which is guilty?' question fairly easy for us to answer.] Anyone who follows Christ, accepts His doctrine, and bears His yoke is not a heretic—even if he cuts himself off from his father and mother or anyone else, and from the public assemblies and ceremonies of his country or anything else.

Sectarian divisions within Christianity may be enormously harmful to the salvation of souls; but concerning such 'works of the flesh' as

adultery,  
fornication,  
personal dirtiness,  
sexual misconduct, and  
idol-worship

the apostle [Paul] has clearly said that 'they who do them shall not inherit the kingdom of God' [*Galatians* 5:19-21]. So anyone who really cares about enlarging God's kingdom ought to work just as hard and carefully on rooting out of these immoralities as on wiping out sects. And someone who doesn't do this—someone who is cruel and implacable towards those who differ from him in doctrine, but is indulgent towards vices and immoralities that are just as much at odds with the label 'Christian'—well, let him talk as much as he likes about the Church, his actions prove that he is concerned not with God's kingdom but with something else [or the Latin may mean: '...but with some other kingdom']. Someone who intensely desires that another man

be saved acts on that desire by having the other man die in agony, still unconverted—that seems very strange to me and I think it would seem strange to anyone else; and surely no-one will ever believe that such behaviour can come from love, from benevolence, from charity. If someone

- holds that men should be compelled by fire and sword to profess certain doctrines and conform one kind of exterior worship, and pays no attention to their morals;

—if someone

- tries to convert people to 'the faith' by forcing them to profess things that they don't believe and allowing them to behave in ways that the Gospel does not permit—

it's clear that he wants his own group to have as many members as possible; but he thinks the group is a Christian church?—no-one will believe that! No wonder these people use weapons that don't belong in the Christian armoury: they aren't fighting for true religion and the Christian Church. If they sincerely wanted the good of souls, as the Captain of our salvation did, they would follow the perfect example of that Prince of peace, who sent out His troops—to subdue the nations and pull them into His Church—armed not with swords or other weapons but with the Gospel of peace and with the holiness of what they had to say. This was actually a more efficient way of going about it, with armies of heavenly legions, than could be achieved in the other way by any son of the Church, however powerful, with all his battalions.

Tolerating those who differ from us in matters of religion is so fitting to the Gospel and to reason that it seems monstrous for men to fail to see this clearly. I don't want here to go on about the pride and ambition of some, the intemperate passion and uncharitable zeal of others; those are faults that may be inevitable in any human affairs, though no-one will

outright admit to them. . . . But I do want to help putting an end to the activities of **(1)** people who plead a concern for 'the public good and obedience to the laws of the land' as an excuse for their persecution and unchristian cruelty, and of **(2)** those who expect to get away with libertinism and licentiousness on grounds of 'religion'; that is, in short, stopping anyone from imposing on himself or others by the claim that he is **(1)** loyal and obedient to the monarch or **(2)**

sincere in his worship of God. To achieve this, it is utterly necessary that we draw a precise boundary-line between **(1)** the affairs of civil government and **(2)** the affairs of religion. If we don't, there will be no end to the controversies arising between those who have (or at least pretend to have) **(2)** a concern for men's souls and those who have (or at least pretend to have) **(1)** a care for the commonwealth.

## 2: The role of the civil magistrate

[The word 'magistrate' [Latin *magistratus*] will be used here, in a sense that was common in early modern times, to stand for whoever it is that makes and enforces a state's laws. That includes magistrates in our sense of the word, but also high court judges, legislators, monarchs, and so on. In a given case the magistrate might be a committee, or a system; Latin doesn't distinguish 'he' from 'it'; but 'he' will be used throughout this version. ]

The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the purpose of preserving and promoting the public good.

By 'the public good' I mean: life, liberty, freedom from bodily illness and pain, and the possession of *things* such as money, land, ·houses·, furniture, and so on.

The civil magistrate's job is. . . .to secure, for the people in general and for each one in particular, the just possession of these worldly things. If anyone tries to violate the laws governing this, he should be deterred by the fear of punishment, consisting of the lessening or outright loss of the goods

that he otherwise might and ought to enjoy. Because no-one willingly allows himself to be punished by the loss of any of his goods, let alone his liberty or his life, the magistrate in punishing those who violate any other man's rights is armed with the force and strength of all his subjects.

I shall now present some arguments which seem to me to show conclusively that •the magistrate's jurisdiction doesn't extend beyond these civic concerns, •that all civil power, law and dominion is restricted to the protection of the public goods I have listed, and that • it can't and oughtn't to be extended to the salvation of souls.

**(1)** The care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate any more than it is to other men. It isn't committed to him by **God**, because it seems that God hasn't ever given *any* man the authority to compel someone else to join his religion. And such a power can't be given to the magistrate by **the people**, because no-one can be so unconcerned about his own salvation that he blindly leaves it to someone

else—whether monarch or subject—to tell him what faith or worship to embrace. And anyway •the life and power of true religion consists in faith, •faith involves believing, and •no-one *can* just believe what someone else tells him to believe, even if he wants to. Whatever we •audibly• *say*, whatever outward worship we conform to, if we aren't fully convinced that what we say is true and how we worship is pleasing to God, . . . we'll merely have set up obstacles to our salvation. . . .by adding •hypocrisy and •contempt of God's majesty to our catalogue of sins.

(2) It can't be up to the magistrate to take care of souls, because his power consists only in outward force, whereas true and saving religion consists in the inward faith of the soul, without which nothing can be acceptable to God, and which the nature of the human mind won't allow to be compelled by any outward force. Confiscation of goods, imprisonment, torture—nothing like that can make men change their inward judgments about things.

[Locke's next few words might suggest that this work was written as a letter to the person who claimed to have been its recipient; but here and elsewhere Locke uses 'You say:' to introduce thoughts that he knew *that* man would not have had. These are addressed simply to the reader, whoever he or she may be. On page 27 he uses 'you say' and the like in addressing a heretic.]

But you say: 'The magistrate can use arguments that will draw the heterodox to the truth, and effect their salvation.' So he can, but so can anyone else. In teaching, instructing, and correcting error by reason, he can certainly do what any good man can fittingly do; being a magistrate doesn't stop him from still being human and Christian. But it is one

thing to persuade, another to command; one thing to press with arguments, another with judicial rulings. . . . The civil power should not •try to• establish any articles of faith or doctrine, or any forms of worship, by the force of its laws. Laws without penalties have no force, and in our present context penalties are just silly, because they have no power to change anyone's mind. . . . The only way to change men's opinions is through *light*, and you can't produce light •in someone's mind• by torturing him.

(3) It can't be the civil magistrate's job to care for the salvation of men's souls, because even if laws and penalties *could* change men's minds, that would do nothing for the salvation of their souls. Even if there were only one truth, one road to the heavenly home, what hope is there that more men would be led into it if they had to •walk out on the light of their own reason, •oppose the dictates of their own consciences, and •blindly submit to the will of their governors and worship God in the way that was established by law in the countries where they were born? In the variety of opinions in religion, the narrow way into heaven would be narrow indeed! It would be open only to those from one geographical region; whether a man received eternal happiness or eternal misery would depend on where he was born—which is utterly absurd and not worthy of God.

I could have presented other considerations leading to the same conclusion; but the ones I have given seem to me sufficient to show that the civil government's power relates only to the public good, attending only to the care of the things of this world and having nothing to do with the world to come.

### 3: What is a church?

Let us now consider what a church is. A church seems to me to be a free society of men who voluntarily come together to worship God in a way that they think is acceptable to Him and effective in saving their souls.

I repeat: a 'free' society that men join 'voluntarily'. No-one is *born* a member of a church; otherwise the religion of parents and grandparents would be inherited by the children in the same way that they inherit wealth and land—and you can't imagine anything more absurd than that. So there it is: No-one is by nature bound to any particular church or sect; everyone voluntarily joins the society in which he thinks he has found the creed and mode of worship that is truly acceptable to God. He joined that communion in the hope of salvation, and that hope is the only reason he can have for staying there. If later on he discovers something erroneous in the doctrine or unsuitable in the worship, he should be just as free to leave that society as he was to join it in the first place. He can't be held by any bonds except what come from the certain expectation of eternal life. A church, then, is a society of members voluntarily uniting for that purpose.

What we have to consider now is what power this church has and what laws it is subject to.

No society, however free it is, and however slight the basis is for its existing—whether it is a society

- of scholars for doing philosophy,
- of merchants for transacting business, or
- of men of leisure for conversation and the exchange of ideas,

—can survive and not fall to pieces unless it is regulated by some laws; and the same holds for any church. Place and time of meeting must be agreed on; conditions for

membership and for exclusion must be established; and so on. . . . But since the members of this society ·or church· joined it freely and without coercion, as I have shown, it follows that the right of making its laws must belong to the society itself—or anyway to those whom the society has by common consent authorised to do this.

But you say: 'No society can be a true *church* unless it has a bishop or presbyter with ruling authority derived—through an uninterrupted succession—from the apostles themselves.' ·I have three things to say in reply to that.·

**(1)** Show me the edict by which Christ imposed that law on His Church—I mean one that says this clearly and explicitly. I have a point in demanding this, namely that Christ seemed to imply the opposite, when he promised us that 'whosoever two or three are gathered together' in His name He will be in the midst of them [*Matthew* 18:20]. Think about it: does an assembly that has Christ in the midst of them lack anything needed to make it a true church? It certainly doesn't lack anything needed for the salvation of souls, and that is all that matters.

**(2)** Consider those who lay so much stress on a continuous succession of church rulers coming down from Christ's founding of the Church: look at how greatly they have disagreed among themselves! These disagreements ·over which of them is 'the true Church'· puts us in a position to *think* about it and to *choose* the church of our preference.

**(3)** I'll admit that your church has a ruler established by as long a succession as you like, if you'll admit that I am free to join the society that I believe contains what I need for the salvation of my soul. . . .

It is fair to ask those who are so solicitous about ‘the true Church’ the following question. Consider these two:

- The conditions for belonging to the Church consist purely in things that the Holy Spirit has in the Scriptures explicitly declared to be necessary to salvation;
- Men may impose their own inventions and interpretations on others as if they were of divine authority, and may establish by ecclesiastical laws—as absolutely necessary to the profession of Christianity—things that the Holy Scriptures don’t mention or anyway don’t explicitly command.

My question is this: Which of those is more agreeable to the Church of Christ? Someone who requires for ecclesiastical communion things that Christ doesn’t require for eternal life may go ahead and create a society that fits his opinion and his purposes; but a society based on laws that are not Christ’s, which excludes from its membership people whom He will one day receive into the Kingdom of Heaven—how can that be called a church of Christ?... The Gospel often declares that the true disciples of Christ must suffer persecution; but I can’t find anywhere in the New Testament that the Church of Christ is to persecute others, and force others by fire and sword to embrace her faith and doctrine.

The purpose of a religious society (I repeat) is the public worship of God and through that the acquisition of eternal life. That should set the limits •to discipline within such a society and •to all ecclesiastical laws. Nothing should or could be transacted in this society relating to public goods or the possession of land; no force is to be used here on any occasion whatsoever, for force belongs wholly to the civil magistrate, and the ownership of external goods is under his jurisdiction.

You say: ‘Then what sanction can ecclesiastical laws have if they can’t be backed up by force?’ I answer:... The ‘arms’—the ‘force’—by which the members of this society are kept in line consist in exhortations, warnings, and advice. If these don’t succeed in correcting the delinquents and redirecting those who stray, the only thing the society can do with these stubborn and obstinate people for whom there is no hope of reformation is to throw them out. This is the last and utmost ‘force’ of ecclesiastical authority. In such a punishment the *whole* effect of the punishment is that the offender stops being a member of that church; nothing more.

Having settled these things, let us turn now to the question of the limits on official toleration.



## 4: The limits on toleration

### ·BETWEEN A CHURCH AND ITS MEMBERS·

No church is obliged as a matter of toleration to retain as a member anyone who, after warnings, continues obstinately to offend against the society's laws. The laws are what hold the society together; if members could break them with impunity, the society would collapse. Still, care should be taken that the process of excommunication—what is said and what is done—doesn't involve anything by which the person in question is physically or financially harmed. For all force (I repeat) belongs only to the magistrate; no private persons should ever use force except in self-defence. Excommunication doesn't and can't deprive the excommunicated person of any civil goods that he formerly possessed: all those things are matters for the civil government and are under the magistrate's protection. The whole force of excommunication consists in the society's declaration that

one of its members is being separated from the main body—amputated, as it were—and with the ending of that connection there is also an end to that person's participating in certain activities that the society allows to its members.

These are activities that no-one has a civil right to engage in; a person doesn't suffer a civil injury if a church minister refuses him the bread and wine (in celebrating the Lord's Supper) which was bought with someone else's money.

### ·BETWEEN PRIVATE PERSONS·

No private person has any right to encroach in any way on another person's civil goods because he declares his allegiance to another church or religion. Anything that a man has as a matter of human rights or civil rights is to remain inviolably *his*. These are none of religion's business.

Whether the man is Christian or pagan, he is to be kept safe from violence and injury. Indeed, we should go beyond mere justice, adding benevolence and charity; the Gospel commands this, reason urges it, and it is favoured by the natural fellowship we are born into. [That is our fellowship merely as human beings; our •natural membership of that group stands in contrast with our •voluntary membership of a church or other society.] If someone strays from the right path, that is his misfortune, not yours; and your belief that he will be miserable in the after-life is not a reason for you to give him a bad time in his present life.

### ·BETWEEN CHURCH AND CHURCH·

What I say about toleration between private persons who differ in religion applies also to particular churches; they relate to one another pretty much as private persons do, with none of them—even ones to which the civil magistrate belongs—having any kind of jurisdiction over any other. The civil government can't give a church any new rights, any more than a church can do that for the civil government. A church starts as a free and voluntary society, and it retains that status whether or not a magistrate joins it or leaves it. The magistrate's joining doesn't give a church the power of the sword, and his leaving doesn't deprive it of its right to instruct and to excommunicate. This is the basic unchangeable situation of a spontaneous society: it has the power to remove any of its members who break its rules; and it can't, through the acquisition of new members, come to have jurisdiction over anyone who doesn't belong to it. So there should be, between churches as between private persons, equity and friendship with no claims of superiority or jurisdiction.

For an example that may help to clarify this, let us suppose that the city of Constantinople [today's Istanbul] contains two churches, one of Calvinists and the other of Arminians [= roughly 'Dutch protestant anti-Calvinists']. Will anyone say that one of these churches has a right to confiscate the goods of the members of the other (we see this happening in some places) or to exile or execute them, just because they differ in some doctrines and ceremonies, while the Turks stand around laughing at how cruelly Christians rage against Christians? If one of these churches does have this power of ill-treating the other, •which of them is it? and •why? No doubt someone will answer that it's the orthodox church that has authority over the erroneous or heretical one. This is an inflated way of saying *nothing*. Every church is orthodox to itself and erroneous or heretical to the others; . . . so that the controversy between these churches about the truth of their doctrines and the correctness of their worship is a stand-off; and no judicial authority, in Constantinople or anywhere else, can give a judgment that settles it. That decision is to be made only by the Supreme Judge of all men. To Him alone belongs the punishment of those who are in error. . . .

And even if we did know for sure which of these two quarreling churches was in the right, that wouldn't give to that church the right to destroy the other. Churches have no jurisdiction in worldly matters, and anyway fire and sword are not proper instruments for correcting men's errors and informing them of the truth. Suppose, however, that the civil magistrate is inclined to favour one of the churches and to give them his sword with permission to use it to chastise the dissenters as they pleased. Will anyone say that a Christian church can get jurisdiction over its brethren from a Turkish emperor? [See note on 'magistrate' on page 3.] An unbeliever who doesn't himself have any authority to punish Christians for the articles of their faith can't confer such an

authority on any society of Christians, giving them a right that he doesn't have himself. And the reason why that is so in Constantinople is equally a reason in any Christian kingdom. The civil power is the same everywhere; the civil power that a Christian prince can give to a church is the same as what a heathen prince can give—namely *nothing*.

It is worthwhile to notice that the most hostile of these defenders of truth, these opposers of error, these protestors against schism, hardly ever let fly with their burning zeal for God unless they have the civil magistrate on their side. But when the magistrate gives them the upper hand, the peace and charity that they have been maintaining are immediately laid aside. When their civil power isn't adequate for the task of suppressing rival churches, they can bear most patiently and harmlessly the otherwise frightening epidemic of idolatry, superstition, and heresy in their neighbourhood. They don't freely and vigorously •argue against errors that are in favour with the magistracy. Yet the only way to propagate truth is through reasoning and •argument, combined with gentleness and benevolence.

In short: no individual or church or commonwealth has a right to attack the civil rights and worldly goods of anyone on pretence of religion. If you disagree, think about what a pernicious a seed of discord and war, what a powerful provocation to endless hatreds, rapines, and slaughters you—or anyway your opinion—is offering to mankind. No peace and security among mankind—let alone common *friendship*—can ever exist as long as people think that governments get their authority from God and that religion is to be propagated by force of arms.

•BETWEEN CLERICS AND OTHERS•

Let us see what the duty of toleration requires from those who are distinguished from the rest of mankind ('the laity', as they like to call us) by some ecclesiastical character and

office—bishops, priests, presbyters, ministers, and so on. This isn't the place to explore the origins of the clergy's power and dignity. I'll just say this: wherever their authority comes from, its source is ecclesiastical; so it should be kept within the bounds of the Church and not extended to civil affairs, because the Church is absolutely separate and distinct from the commonwealth. The boundaries of each are settled and immovable. •Mixing together these two societies which are utterly distinct in

- how they originated,
- what they are for, and
- what they do

is tantamount to jumbling together heaven and earth—and two things can't be more distinct than those! So no church official, whatever his rank may be, can deprive another man of liberty or of any part of his worldly goods on the grounds that there is a religious difference between them. What isn't lawful for the whole Church can't be lawful for any of its members.

It's not enough for an ecclesiastic to abstain from violence, plunder and all sorts of persecution. Someone who claims to be a successor of the apostles, and takes on the role of teacher, ought to impress on his hearers the duties of peace and goodwill towards all men, heretical and orthodox. . . . He should urge all his flock—private persons and any magistrates there may be there—to charity, meekness, and toleration, and try to cool down all the heat and unreasonable hostility towards dissenters that a man may be led into •by his own fiery zeal for his own sect or •by the crafty manipulations of others. I won't go into details about how—and how much—Church and state would profit if pulpits everywhere proclaimed this doctrine of peace and toleration; if I did, I might seem to be coming down too hard on men whose dignity I don't want to be diminished by myself or anyone

else. I'll just say that *that is how it ought to be*; and if anyone purporting to be a minister of God's word and a preacher of the gospel of peace teaches otherwise, either he doesn't understand his duties or he neglects them, and •either way he will be answerable to the Prince of peace for this. If Christians are to be told—and they certainly *are*—not to retaliate even if someone inflicts on them 'seventy times seven' injuries [*Matthew 18:22*], how could it be right for them to 'retaliate' against people who haven't done them any harm? I mean people who are merely minding their own business, and merely want—whatever common opinion may think—to worship God in a way that they think is acceptable to Him and to cling to the religion that gives them their best chance of eternal salvation. In issues of bodily health in private life, everyone suits his own convenience, and follows the course that *he* likes best. No-one complains that his neighbour is managing his affairs badly. No-one is angry with someone else for an error committed in sowing his crops or choosing a husband for his daughter. No-one scolds a spendthrift for wasting his money on drink. . . . But if any man •doesn't regularly go to church, or •doesn't, in church, exactly follow the established ceremonies, or •doesn't bring his children to be initiated in the rites of some church or other, this immediately causes an uproar. Everyone is ready to avenge this great crime, and the zealots can hardly restrain themselves from punishing the man in advance of his being formally tried and convicted and *then* condemned to the loss of liberty, goods, or life. If only the ecclesiastical orators in all the sects would put their energies into •arguments that would correct the errors of dissenters rather than into •punishing the dissenters themselves. They shouldn't make up for their lack of reasons by using the instruments of force, which are unseemly in a Churchman's hands. They shouldn't reinforce their eloquence or learning

with an appeal to the magistrate's authority; if they do, they'll create a suspicion that despite their front as lovers of the truth they are really using fire and sword in the pursuit of worldly dominance. It won't be easy to convince intelligent

men that that someone who—dry-eyed and content with himself—delivers his brother to the executioner to be burned to death is acting purely from a strong desire to save that brother from the flames of hell in the world to come.

## 5: The magistrate's role in all this

Let us now consider magistrate's role in this matter of toleration; it is certainly a big one.

I have shown that the care of souls is not the magistrate's business, . . . which consists in prescribing laws and enforcing them through a penal system; whereas charitable care, which consists in teaching, warning and persuading, is something that any man is free to do. [Locke writes that sentence with two made-up-Latin words *authoritativa* and *charitativa*—as it were 'authoritocracy' and 'charitocracy'. Neither word occurs again in this work.] So the responsibility for each man's soul is *his*; it is to be left to him. You say: 'What if he neglects the care of his soul?' Well, what if he neglects the care of his health? or of his estate? They are nearer to the magistrate's jurisdiction than the man's soul is; so is it all right for the magistrate to set up a law explicitly forbidding people to become poor or sick? Laws try to secure that a person's goods and health are not harmed by fraud or violence on the part of others; but they don't try to secure them against negligence bad management by the person himself. . . . •Suppose a prince wanted to force his subjects to accumulate riches: is he to make a law requiring them to become merchants or musicians? Or to force everyone to become a shopkeeper

or metal-worker, because some people thrive and grow rich in these occupations? •Or suppose he wants to make his subjects preserve the health and strength of their bodies. Will he forbid them by law to consult any but •Roman physicians and require them to live according to •their prescriptions? No medicine or chicken soup that wasn't prepared in the Vatican or in a Geneva shop—*really*?

You say: 'There are a thousand ways to wealth, but only one way to heaven.' Well said! And especially by people who want to force men to take this or that way; for if there were several ways to heaven, there would be no shadow of a case to be made for compulsion.

Well, now: suppose that I am marching vigorously along the road which, according to the sacred geography, leads straight to Jerusalem; why do people beat and harass me? •They *say* that it is• because

- I am wearing the wrong kind of boots; or
- my hair isn't cut in the right way; or
- I haven't been washed clean [= 'baptised']; or
- I eat meat as I walk (or some other food that I eat for the sake of my stomach); or

- I avoid certain detours that seem to me to lead to brambles or precipices; or
- I choose, amongst several paths leading the same way, the one that looks straightest and cleanest; or
- I avoid the company of travellers who are more jolly than they ought to be; or
- I avoid the company of travellers who are more gloomy than they ought to be; or
- I follow a guide who is clothed in white or crowned with a mitre; or
- I follow a guide who is not clothed in white or is not crowned with a mitre.

Only superstition or hypocrisy could connect •such frivolities with religion or the salvation of souls; but if we *think straight* about the matter we'll see that •they are the sorts of things that make enemies of Christian brethren who agree on the substantial and truly fundamental part of religion.

Suppose we grant to these zealots who condemn all dissent from their ways of doing things that these differences of detail—what I have listed as 'frivolities'—lead people to follow different roads. What use can we make of that? Only one road truly leads to eternal happiness—but which one? We aren't sure! I can studiously search for my own answer to this; and that will give me as good a chance of finding the way to heaven as I could get by letting the question be answered by the laws of the land. •Suppose that• I have a weak body, sunk under a wasting disease for which (I think) there is one only remedy, but I don't know what it is. Should the magistrate prescribe a remedy for me, just because there's only one and we don't know what it is? If there is only one way for me to escape death, does that make it safe for me to do whatever the magistrate ordains? These are things that everyone ought to inquire into for himself, earnestly and thoughtfully trying to get the answers by his

own endeavours, not treating this knowledge as the special possession of some kind of men. Monarchs are born with more power than other men, but in nature they are equal. The right to rule, and practised skill in ruling, don't bring with them secure knowledge of other things, least of all of true religion. . . . But suppose that •the way to eternal life probably *is* better known by a monarch than by his subjects, or at least that •in the prevailing uncertainty we'll do best by obeying his dictates. You say: 'If he ordered you to earn your living as a merchant, would you beg off because you doubted if you could succeed in that trade?' I answer: I would become a merchant on the monarch's command, because if I failed at that he is well able to make up for my loss in some other way. If he really does (as he says) want me to thrive and grow rich, he can set me up again when unsuccessful •trading• voyages have broken me. But that's not how things stand with the life to come. If I take the wrong road with regard to *that*, I am undone, and the magistrate *can't* repair my loss or ease my suffering. . . . What security can be given for the kingdom of Heaven?

You may say: 'The secure judgment about the affairs of religion comes not from the civil magistrate but from the Church. What the civil magistrate does is to order us to follow the Church's decisions in our actions and our beliefs—to ensure by his authority that no-one acts or believes in the business of religion otherwise than the Church teaches. The Church is the source of judgment about religious matters, and the magistrate makes obedience to the Church's judgments a matter of law which everyone—the magistrate included—is required to obey.' I reply: Anyone can see that the label 'the Church', which was venerable in the time of the apostles, has often been used in more recent times to throw dust in people's eyes. In our present context, it does nothing for us. The one narrow road to heaven isn't

better known to the magistrate than to private persons; so I can't safely be guided by him, who probably knows as little about the way to heaven as I do, and who certainly isn't as concerned for my salvation as I am. Ever so many kings of the Jews led the blindly following Israelites into idolatry and thereby into destruction. [Re 'king' and 'magistrate', see note on page 3.] Yet you tell me to cheer up and accept that everything is now safe and secure, because what the magistrate is enforcing are not his religious decrees but those of the Church! Of what church? Certainly the one he likes best. 'He who compels me by laws and penalties to join some church isn't bringing his own judgment into this'—a likely story! What's the difference between his leading me himself and his delivering me over to be led by others? I depend on his will either way; he determines my eternal state either way. . . . If the religion of any church becomes true and saving because it is lavishly praised by its own prelates and priests and hangers-on, what religion will ever be regarded as erroneous, false, and destructive? I am doubtful concerning the doctrine of the Socinians; I am suspicious of both the Papist and Lutheran forms of worship; will it be ever safer for me to join one of those churches on the magistrate's command, because in religion his commands are all based on the authority and advice of the doctors of that church?

The fact is that a church (if a convention of clergymen making decrees must be called by that name) is usually more apt to be influenced by the ·royal· court than the court is to be influenced by a church. How the church fared under orthodox and Arian emperors is very well known.

And if you want something more recent, look to the recent English examples of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth: see how easily and smoothly the clergy adapted their decrees—articles of faith, form of worship, *everything*—to the inclinations of those kings and queens. But those kings and queens had such different views in religion, and ordered such different religious conduct, that no sane man (I almost said 'except an atheist') will say that a sincere and upright worshipper of God could—without offence to his conscience or his veneration for God—obey all of them. What more is there to say? A king lays down the law for another man's religion on the basis of •his own judgment or •the ecclesiastical authority and advice of others—it's the same thing! . . .

But the crucial point that absolutely settles this controversy is this: even if the magistrate's opinion in religion is sound, and the road he tells me to follow really is the one endorsed by the Gospel, if I am not thoroughly convinced of that in my own mind I won't reach salvation by following it. No road that I travel along against the dictates of my conscience will ever bring me to the home of the blessed. I can grow rich by the use of skills that give me no pleasure; I can be cured of a disease by remedies that I have no faith in; but I can't be saved by a religion that I distrust or a worship that I dislike. It's pointless for an unbeliever to put on a performance; what God cares about is faith and inner sincerity. . . . Amid all the aspects of religion that may be doubtful, one thing is certain: a religion that I don't believe to be true can't be true for me or useful for me. . . .

## 6: Church and state: forms of worship

Now that we have freed men from in any way dominating one another in matters of religion, what are they now to do? Everyone knows and acknowledges that God ought to be publicly worshipped; otherwise why the pressure to attend ·religious· assemblies? So men. . . .should enter into a religious society in which they meet

- to instruct and improve one another,
- to declare to the world that they worship God and offer him such service as they aren't ashamed of and as they think worthy of Him and acceptable to Him,
- by the purity of doctrine, holiness of life, and decent form of worship to draw others to the love of the true religion, and
- to perform other religious things that can't be done by each private man on his own.

I call religious societies *churches*. The magistrate, I say, ought to tolerate them, because what they are doing is something that it is lawful for any individual to do, namely to take care of the salvation of his soul. And this holds equally for a national church and for independent congregations.

There are two main aspects to any church—**(1)** outward form and rites of worship and **(2)** doctrines; and these must be dealt with separately if the whole matter of toleration is to be clearly understood. ·**(1)** will be the topic of this chapter and the next; **(2)** will be taken up in chapter 8 on page 17·.

**(1a)** The magistrate has no power to enforce by civil law—in any church, even his own—the use of any rites or ceremonies in the worship of God; not only because these churches are free societies, but also because no form of divine worship is justifiable unless those who practise it think it is acceptable to God. Anything that is not done in

good faith is wrong in itself and not acceptable to God. It is self-contradictory to •allow a religion the purpose of which is to please God and •command its members to behave in ways that will displease God.

[The rest of this chapter says a lot about 'things that are indifferent' (Latin *indifferens*). The term has a very general meaning of 'neither to one side or the other' of some polarity. In our present context *res indifferentes* apparently has to mean 'actions that aren't *in themselves* either morally required or morally forbidden. But then why should Locke and his imagined critic both imply that perhaps the civil law can only concern actions that are 'indifferent'? The preparer of this version has no suggestions to offer.]

You say: 'Are you denying that the magistrate has any power regarding indifferent things? If he isn't allowed that, there is nothing for law-making to do.' No, I readily grant that indifferent things, and perhaps only they, are subject to legislative power. But it doesn't follow that with respect to something indifferent the magistrate may ordain anything he likes. The rule and standard for all law-making is the public good. If something isn't useful to the commonwealth then it may not be required by law, however indifferent it is.

**(b)** Also, things that are utterly indifferent in their own nature are taken out of the magistrate's reach when they are brought into a church and used in the worship of God, because in that use they have nothing to do with civil affairs. The church's only concern is the salvation of souls, and it is none of the commonwealth's business what ceremonies it uses for this purpose. The use or non-use of a ceremony by a religious assembly makes no difference at all to the life, liberty, or estate of any man. [Locke gives an example: a magistrate may require the washing of children because

he thinks it helps to prevent disease, but it doesn't follow from this that he is entitled to require churches to baptise children. Then he adapts the baptism example to a different slant on the argument:] Let us apply the last case to the child of a Jew, and the thing speaks for itself. A Christian magistrate may well have subjects who are Jews; if we accept that it's wrong to harm a Jew by compelling him against his conscience to do in his religion something that is in its nature indifferent, how can it be all right to do this to a Christian?

(c) Things that are in their own nature indifferent can't by any human authority be made any part of the worship of God. Why not? Precisely because they are indifferent! Indifferent things don't have in themselves any power to propitiate the Deity, so no human power or authority can give them enough dignity and excellency to be able to do that. In the common affairs of life the use of indifferent things that God hasn't forbidden is free and lawful, and therefore in those things human authority has a place. But it's not like that with religion. Indifferent things are lawful in the worship of God only if God Himself has instituted them and by some positive command ordered that they be a part of the worship that he will accept from poor sinful men. And when God angrily asks us 'Who required this?', He won't be satisfied with the answer 'The magistrate commanded it!' If civil jurisdiction goes that far, what *can't* be lawfully be introduced into religion? What hodgepodge of ceremonies, what superstitious inventions, might not be imposed on worshippers against their consciences but on the magistrate's authority? For most of these ceremonies and superstitions would consist in the religious use of things that are in their own nature indifferent; there's nothing wrong with them except that God isn't their author. The sprinkling of water and the use of bread and wine are, in their own nature and in everyday life, entirely indifferent; could they

have been introduced into religion and made a part of divine worship except by divine institution? If any human authority or civil power could have done this, couldn't it also command the eating of fish and drinking of ale in the holy banquet as a part of divine worship? Why not the sprinkling of animals' blood, purifications by water or fire, and countless other such things? Although these things are indifferent in common uses, when they are brought into divine worship without divine authority they are as abominable to God as the sacrifice of a dog. . . . So indifferent things are under the power of the civil magistrate, but that doesn't allow them to be imposed on religious assemblies, because in the worship of God they cease to be indifferent. . . .

You say: 'If no aspect of divine worship is to be left to human discretion, how is it that churches themselves have the power to order when and where etc. worship is to be conducted?' My answer to that involves distinguishing •the parts of worship from •the circumstances of worship. Something is a part of the worship if it is believed to be appointed by God and to be pleasing to Him, which makes it necessary. Circumstances are not in this way necessary. Of course worship must occur at some time in some place; but *which* time and place is left open, so they are indifferent. . . . Note that the part/circumstance distinction depends on *what is believed to be* pleasing to God. For example: among the Jews the time and place of worship and the clothing of those who officiated in it were not mere circumstances, but a part of the worship itself; if any of those were varied in any way, they had—•they thought—no chance of its being acceptable to God; whereas to Christians. . . .these are mere circumstances of worship which each church can vary as it sees fit. [Locke adds a qualification: the institution of the sabbath as a day to be set apart for worship is a part and not a circumstance of Christian worship.]



(d) Just as the magistrate has no power to •impose by his laws the use of any rites and ceremonies in any church, so also he has no power to •forbid the use of any rites and ceremonies that are already accepted, approved, and practised by a church; because doing that would destroy the church itself as an institution whose sole purpose is to worship God freely in its own way.

You say: ‘So if some congregations chose to •sacrifice infants, or (as the primitive Christians were falsely accused) •to engage in promiscuous sexual intercourse, or •to do any other such dreadful thing, the magistrate would be obliged to tolerate these actions because they are committed in a religious assembly?’ I answer: those things are not lawful in everyday life or in private homes, so they aren’t lawful in the worship of God either. But if people who had gathered for religious purposes wanted to sacrifice a calf, I deny that that should be prohibited by a law. The calf’s owner can lawfully kill his calf at home and burn any part of it he likes; for this does no harm to anyone; and for the same reason he may kill his calf also in a religious meeting. Whether doing this is pleasing to God is for the calf-killers to think about. The magistrate’s only role is to

ensure that the commonwealth isn’t harmed and that no individual suffers personal or financial harm. If the interests of the commonwealth required all slaughter of beasts to be suspended for a while, so as to rebuild stocks that had been destroyed by some extraordinary epidemic, it’s obvious that in that case the magistrate can forbid all his subjects to kill any calves for any purpose. But that law would be made about a political matter, not a religious one; what it prohibits is not •sacrificing calves but •killing them.

This shows us how a church differs from the commonwealth. Something that is lawful in the commonwealth can’t be prohibited by the magistrate in the church. . . . If any man can lawfully take bread or wine. . . in his own house, the law oughtn’t to deprive him of that same liberty in his religious worship; though in the church the use of bread and wine is very different because there it is applied to the mysteries of faith and rites of Divine worship. But things that are forbidden by law because in their ordinary use they are harmful to the public ought not to be permitted to churches in their sacred rites. But the magistrate should be very careful not to misuse his authority by oppressing some church, on the pretext of securing the public good.

## 7: Idolatry

You say: ‘What if a church is idolatrous—is that also to be tolerated by the magistrate?’ I answer: What power could the magistrate have to suppress an •idolatrous church that couldn’t somewhere somewhen be used to ruin an •orthodox

one? Don’t forget that the civil power is the same everywhere, and that the religion of every monarch is orthodox *to him*. If the civil magistrate in Geneva, for instance, is given a power that would enable him to wipe out by violence and

blood the religion [he means the Roman Catholic church] that is there wrongly regarded as idolatrous, by the same rule another magistrate, in some neighbouring country, may oppress the orthodox religion [he means the Reformed Church centred in Geneva], and in India the magistrate may oppress the Christian religion. Either the civil power can change •everything in religion, according to the monarch's pleasure, or it can change •nothing. If it is once allowed to use laws and penalties to introduce •something into religion, there will be no way of setting limits ·to such interference·: it will be lawful to alter anything according to the rule of truth—i.e. what the magistrate fancies to be the truth. So no man is to be deprived, on account of his religion, of anything that he values. Not even ·native· Americans, who are subjects of a Christian monarch, are to be punished in any way for not accepting our faith and worship. If they think that by observing the rites of their own country they are pleasing God and securing happiness, we should leave this to God and to them.

I'll tell you how this situation came about, starting at the beginning. A small weak group of Christians with no possessions arrive in a pagan country; they beg the inhabitants—appealing to their common humanity—to help them with the necessities of life; those necessities are supplied, habitations are granted, and Christians and pagans come together as one body of people. The Christian religion takes root in that country, and spreads, but isn't yet stronger ·than the pagan religion·. At that time peace, friendship, faith, and equal justice are preserved amongst them. After a while the Christian party does become more powerful ·than the other·, because the magistrate becomes a Christian. Then immediately all compacts are to be broken and all civil rights violated, so that idolatry may be wiped out; and unless these innocent pagans—

- strict observers of the rules of equity and the law of nature, who

- in no way offend against the laws of the society

—give up their ancient religion and accept 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. And so we see •what can be done by zeal for the church combined with the desire for control, and •how easily greed, theft and ambition are cloaked in the pretext of religion and of the care of souls.

If you think that idolatry should be rooted out by laws, punishments, fire, and sword, the above story applies to you, with only the names changed. Neither pagans in America or dissenting Christians here in Europe can rightly be deprived of their worldly goods on religious grounds.

You say: 'But idolatry shouldn't be tolerated, because it is a sin.' If you said 'Idolatry should be avoided, because it is a sin', that would be right. But its being a sin doesn't imply that it should be punished by the magistrate. It's not for the magistrate to wield his sword in punishing everything that he thinks is a sin against God. Covetousness, uncharitableness, idleness, and many other things are generally agreed to be sins, but no-one has ever said that they should be punished by the magistrate. That is because they don't interfere with other people's rights, and don't disturb the public peace. Even the sins of lying and perjury are nowhere punishable by laws, except in special cases; and even in those the operative feature is not •the behaviour's real wickedness or its offence against God but rather •the injury done to the offender's neighbours and to the commonwealth. And what if in another country a Moslem or a pagan monarch sees the Christian religion as false and offensive to God; is it all right for him to wipe out the Christians for that reason and in that way?

You say: ‘By the law of Moses, idolaters were to be rooted out.’ True; but the law of Moses is not obligatory to us Christians. Nobody claims that everything generally enjoined by the law of Moses ought to be practised by Christians. . . . A promulgated law is binding only on those to whom it is given. ‘Hear, O Israel’ sufficiently limits the obligations of the law of Moses to that people. This is answer enough to those who urge the authority of the law of Moses for inflicting capital punishment on idolaters. But I will go into this matter in a bit more detail.

[Locke completes this chapter with a couple of pages of biblical scholarship, making two points. **(a)** The Jewish commonwealth to which the laws of Moses were issued was an absolute theocracy, in which the magistrate—the

chief legislator—was God. So there was there no distinction between religious law and civil law; there could be capital punishment for religious offences because the latter were also civil offences. This doesn’t hold for any Christian commonwealth. **(b)** The Mosaic law against idolatry was aimed only at Israelites, Locke says: ‘In the very place where it is ordered that *an Israelite idolater should be put to death* it is provided that *foreigners should not be oppressed (Exodus 22:20,21)*.’ He goes through some further historical ins and outs, which don’t contribute to the general discussion of toleration. Then:]

So much for **(1)** outward worship. Let us now turn to **(2)** faith. [See the numbering of items on page 13.]

## 8: Church and state: articles of faith

[The next paragraph speaks of ‘practical’ and ‘speculative’ doctrines. Here ‘practical’ = ‘having to do with morality’, and ‘speculative’ = ‘having to do with non-moral matters of fact’. We can’t say ‘speculative’ = ‘factual’ because, as you’ll see in a moment, Locke holds that there are moral facts, i.e. that practical propositions are *true*. In **(4)** on page 21 Locke smudges the speculative/practical line by implying that ‘There is no God’ is a practical proposition.]

**(2)** Some religious doctrines are practical and some speculative. Both consist in the knowledge of truth, but they differ in how they relate to the human condition: speculative propositions terminate simply in the understanding, while practical ones relate to the will and to conduct.

·SPECULATIVE ARTICLES OF FAITH·

So speculative opinions—so-called articles of faith—can’t be imposed on any church by the law of the land. Why not? Because •they are matters of *belief*; •what we believe doesn’t depend on our will; and •a law requiring people to do something they can’t do would be absurd. But I’ve said enough about this already. ‘Well, let men at least *say* that they believe’—i.e. save their souls by lying to men and to God. What a lovely religion that is! The only reason the magistrate could have for imposing such a law is that he thinks this is a way to save men’s souls; but if *that* is what he thinks, he shows how little he understands the road to salvation.

Another reason why the magistrate oughtn't to forbid the professing or teaching of any speculative opinions in any church is that such opinions haven't the slightest relevance to the civil rights of the subjects. If a Roman Catholic believes that something that another man calls bread is really the body of Christ, this isn't harming the other man. If a Jew believes that the New Testament is not the word of God, this belief has no effect on anyone's civil rights. If a pagan has that belief about both Testaments, that shouldn't expose him to punishment as a pernicious citizen, because it makes no difference to the magistrate's power or the people's welfare. I readily grant that these opinions are false and absurd; but the civil law is concerned not with the truth of opinions but with the safety and security of the commonwealth and with each individual's goods and person. And there's nothing wrong with that. The truth will do well enough if it is left to its own devices. . . . It isn't taught by laws, and has no need of force to get an entrance into men's minds—unlike errors, which profit from outside help! . . . So much for speculative opinions; now let us turn to practical ones.

PRACTICAL ARTICLES OF FAITH

Whereas speculative religious opinions have nothing to do with the civil law, the same is not true of speculative religious opinions. *Living well*—by which I mean living in a way that is morally good—is a considerable part of religion and true piety and is also the business of the civil government; it is crucial to the safety of men's souls and of the commonwealth. So moral actions belong to the jurisdiction of both

- the outward and inward courts;
- the civil and domestic governors;
- the magistrate and the conscience.

So we have to be on guard lest one of these jurisdictions infringes on the other, creating discord between the keeper of the public peace and the overseer of the soul. But there

won't be any difficulty about this if we remember what I have said about the limits of these two governments.

Every man has an immortal soul that is capable of eternal happiness or misery. Its happiness depends on his believing and doing the things that he needs to believe and do if he is to obtain God's favour—the things that are prescribed by God for that purpose. Two things follow from this. **(1)** Having these beliefs and performing these actions are mankind's chief obligations, and we should work as hard and carefully as we can to find out what they are and to perform them, because nothing in this world outweighs what is at stake in eternity—there's just no comparison. **(2)** Because one man doesn't violate the rights of another by his false beliefs and improper manner of worship, and one man's perdition does no harm to another man's affairs, the care of each man's salvation belongs only to himself. I don't mean this to condemn all charitable warnings and attempts to steer men away from error, which are indeed a Christian's greatest duty. Anyone may try to promote another man's salvation by using as many urgings and arguments as he pleases, but not by any use of force and compulsion, any attempt to dominate. In these matters, no-one is obliged obey someone else's warnings or advice further than he himself is convinced. . . .

But besides his immortal soul, a man also has his temporal life here on earth; this is fragile and of uncertain duration, and therefore he needs support for it that he can't get and keep without working hard: the things we need if we are to live well and cheerfully are not spontaneously produced by nature, so that's something else we have to work at in addition to the things that bear on the salvation of our souls. But men are so dishonest that most of them would rather steal the products of other men's labours than take the trouble to provide for themselves; so there is a need for some way of letting men keep what they have

acquired through honest work, and also of •preserving their liberty and strength so that they can continue such work; and this has required men to enter into society with one another so that by mutual assistance and joint force they may make each of them secure in his possession of the things that contribute to comfort and happiness in this life—*while leaving to each man the care of his own eternal happiness*. [Locke adds that civil societies are formed also for defence against attacks from outside, and explains that all of this works only if there is ‘the magistrate’ who has

power to punish. This account of society, he says, explains how magistracy began, what it is used for, and what its limits are; he repeats that in all of this there is nothing about beliefs or actions that are needed for the salvation of souls; and he sums up:]

With regard to eternal salvation, everyone should do what he in his conscience thinks is acceptable to the Almighty, on whose good pleasure and acceptance depends his eternal happiness. Obedience is due *first* to God and *then* to the laws of the land.

## 9: Individual conscience

But you say: ‘What if the magistrate officially commands something that seems to the conscience of some private person to be wrong?’ I answer: if government is faithfully administered and the magistrate really is concerned for the public good, this won’t often happen. But if it ever *does* happen, I say, that such a private person should refuse to perform the action that his conscience condemns, and should submit to the punishment for this if it isn’t morally wrong for him to undergo it. When a law intended for the public good is privately judged by someone to be wicked, that doesn’t invalidate the law or create an excuse. But if the law really does concern things that lie outside the magistrate’s authority (e.g. commanding people to accept a strange religion. . . .), then men are not obliged to obey that law against their consciences. Political society is instituted purely to secure each man’s possession of the things of

this life. Each man’s soul and other heavenly matters don’t belong to the commonwealth and can’t be subjected to it; they are left entirely to the man himself. . . .

But you say: ‘What if the magistrate believes that some law about those matters is for the public good?’ I answer: Just as the private erroneous judgment of any particular person doesn’t exempt him obeying the law, so also the private judgment (for that’s what it is) of the magistrate doesn’t give him any new right of imposing laws on his subjects—a right that wasn’t conferred on him in the constitution of the government, and wasn’t ever in the power of the people to grant—and this holds with extra strength if the magistrate is trying to enrich and advance his followers and co-religionists with goods stolen from others. Another question: ‘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 shall judge between them?' I answer: 'God alone—there's no earthly judge to decide between the supreme earthly magistrate and the people. On the last day—the Day of Judgment—God will treat everyone according to his deserts, i.e. according to his sincerity and uprightness in trying to promote piety, and the public welfare and peace of mankind'. You say: 'What's to be done in the meantime?' I answer: 'Each person's chief concern should be for his own soul, and after that for public peace; though there aren't many people who, viewing the wilderness of the contemporary world, will think they are looking at peace. [Locke is here echoing a famous line by the historian

Tacitus, who imagines a British warrior saying about the Romans *Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*—where they create a wilderness they call it 'peace'.]

There are two sorts of contests amongst men, one managed by law and the other by force; and their nature is such that whenever law stops, force begins. But the magistrate's power in the various different kinds of nations is not part of my present concern. I only know what *usually* happens when controversies arise without a judge to settle them. You say: 'So the magistrate, being the stronger, will prevail.' No doubt you right; but our present question concerns what ought to happen, not what probably will happen.

## 10. What should not be tolerated

To get down to details now, I have four main things to say.

**(1)** The magistrate should not tolerate any doctrines that are contrary to human society or to the moral rules that are needed for civil society to survive. But there are very few such doctrines in any church; because it would be hard for a sect to become so lunatic as to teach, as a matter of religious doctrine, things that clearly undermine the foundations of society and are therefore condemned by the judgment of all mankind; because that would endanger their own interests, their peace, their reputation, everything.

**(2)** An evil that is less visible but more dangerous to the commonwealth occurs when men claim for themselves and their co-religionists some special prerogative that does in fact conflict with the civil right of the community but is covered

over with a glittery show of deceitful words. For example: no sect teaches explicitly and openly

- (a)** that men aren't obliged to keep their promises;
- (b)** that monarchs may be dethroned by those who differ from them in religion; or
- (c)** that they alone have dominion of all things.

For if these were proposed thus nakedly and plainly, they would soon attract the attention of the magistrate and arouse the commonwealth to be on its guard against the spreading of such a dangerous evil. Yet these things *are* said, though in other words. **(a)** Those who teach that promises to heretics needn't be kept mean that the privilege of breaking promises belongs only to themselves, because they do—easily could when they found it convenient—declare that

everyone who doesn't belong to their sect is a heretic. **(b)** What can they mean when they say that kings who are excommunicated forfeit their crowns and kingdoms? They are obviously claiming for themselves the power to depose kings, because they claim that their hierarchy has the sole right to excommunicate anyone. **(c)** Those who maintain that *dominion is founded in grace* are in effect claiming the possession of all things; for they . . . believe themselves to be the truly pious and faithful. People like these—

who attribute to those who are faithful, religious, and orthodox—i.e. to *themselves*—any special privilege or power in civil matters; or who on pretence of religion claim any sort of authority over people who aren't members of their ecclesiastical communion

—have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate. Nor do those who refuse to accept and teach the duty of tolerating all men in matters of religion. What doctrines like these signify is that these people are ready on any occasion to seize the government and take possession of the estates and fortunes of their fellow subjects, and that all they want from the magistrate is to be tolerated until they have enough power to carry this out.

**(3)** A church can't have any right to be tolerated by the magistrate if it is constituted on a basis such that anyone who joins it is thereby giving himself over to the protection and service of a different monarch. For this would establish a foreign jurisdiction in his own country; the magistrate would be allowing enemy soldiers to be enlisted from among his own people.

[If you aren't to be needlessly puzzled by what comes next, you need to know that Locke is thinking of a situation in which the magistrate *allows* a church whose members owe allegiance to a foreign power because he

himself *belongs* to such a church. This was written in 1685, when the Roman Catholic James II was on the English throne, and there were fears that he might bring into England some of France's notably brutal ways of suppressing Protestants. This text was first published in 1689, the year after James II was bloodlessly driven into exile.]

The frivolous and fallacious distinction between the Court and the church is no help here [He must mean that that distinction *would be* frivolous if . . . etc.], especially when both Court and church are equally subject to the absolute authority of the same person, who not only has power to *persuade* the members of his church to do whatever he likes—either as purely religious, or as contributing to the good of religion—but can also *order* them to do it on pain of eternal fire. It would be absurd for anyone to claim to be a Moslem only in his religion and in everything else a faithful subject of a Christian magistrate, if he admits that he is bound to give blind obedience to the Mufti of Constantinople, who himself •is entirely obedient to the Ottoman Emperor and •invents the 'oracles' of that religion to suit himself. And this Moslem living among Christians would renounce their government even more openly if he acknowledged the supreme magistrate in the state to be also the head of his church.

**(4)** No-one should be tolerated who denies the existence of God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold on an atheist: this all dissolves in the presence of the thought that there is no God. And atheists can't claim *on religious grounds* that they should be tolerated! As for other practical opinions, including ones that have some error in them, there's no reason why they shouldn't be tolerated as long as they don't tend to establish domination over others or claim civil impunity for the church in which they are taught,

## 11: Gatherings

It remains for me to say something about the *assemblies* that are thought to present a challenge to this doctrine of toleration because they commonly are thought to be hotbeds of sedition and dissent. Perhaps some of them have been—not because of anything special about assemblies as such but rather because of special features of those assemblies in particular, e.g. troubles relating to oppression and lack of freedom. These accusations would stop if the law of toleration were so settled that all churches had to •declare toleration as the basis for their own liberty, and •teach that. . . nobody ought to be compelled in matters of religion either by law or force. Establishing this one thing would take away the basis for all the anger and disturbances on grounds of conscience, leaving these assemblies as calm and peaceful as any other gatherings. But let us look in more detail into the accusations against assemblies.

You say: ‘Assemblies and meetings endanger the public peace and threaten the commonwealth.’ I answer: If that is right, then why are there so many meetings every day in markets and law-courts and town squares?

You say: ‘Those are *civil* assemblies. What I am objecting to are ecclesiastical ones.’ I answer: You seem to think that assemblies that are altogether remote from civil affairs are the ones that are most apt to make trouble for them!

You say: ‘The members of civil assemblies differ from one another in matters of religion, whereas these ecclesiastical meetings are groups of people who all have the same ·religious· opinion.’ I reply: Do you really think that agreement in matters of religion amounts to a conspiracy against the commonwealth? or that denying men the freedom to

assemble would make them *less* likely to agree in religious matters?

You say: ‘Civil assemblies are open and free for anyone to enter into, whereas religious gatherings provide a better setting for the hatching of secret plots.’ I reply: On the contrary, many civil assemblies are not *open* to everyone, e.g. meetings of guilds and the like. And if some religious meetings are private, whose fault is that? those who want them to be public or those who forbid it?

You say: ‘Religious togetherness brings men’s minds extremely close together, which is a reason to fear them.’ I reply: Then why isn’t the magistrate afraid of his own church? why doesn’t he forbid their assemblies as things dangerous to his government?

You say: ‘Because he himself is a part of them, the head of them.’ I reply: You seem to forget that he is also a part of the commonwealth, and the head of the whole people!

This is how things stand. The magistrate is afraid of other churches, but not of his own, because he is kind and favourable to his church but severe and harsh toward the others. He is indulgent towards his coreligionists, allowing them almost any liberty; members of other churches he uses as slaves and, however blamelessly they live, he rewards them with galleys, prisons, confiscations, and death. He cherishes and defends the members of his own church and continually scourges and oppresses the members of the others. Let the tables be turned; or let those dissenters merely enjoy the same privileges in civil affairs as his other subjects, ·his coreligionists·, and he will quickly find that these religious meetings need not be feared: if men enter into



seditionous conspiracies, they are led to it not by religion in their meetings but their sufferings and oppression. Just and moderate governments are everywhere quiet, everywhere safe; injustice and tyranny are always resisted. I know that seditions are often raised on religious pretexts; but it's also true that often people are ill-treated and made to live miserably on religious pretexts. Believe me, the troubles that arise don't come from •any special features of this or that church or religious society, but from •something that all mankind have in common. namely that when they are groaning under a heavy burden they try to get out from under the yoke that hurts their necks.

Try this thought-experiment. Suppose that religion is set aside and that men are classified on the basis of physical features, and that those who have (say) black hair or grey eyes don't enjoy the same privileges as other citizens; that

- they aren't allowed to buy or sell, or live by their trades;
- as parents they don't have control of their children's education;
- they are all either excluded from the benefit of the laws, or meet with biased judges;

do you doubt that these people—marked off from others by the colour of their hair and eyes, and drawn together by one common persecution—would be as dangerous to the magistrate as any others who had come together on religious grounds? People come together for trade and profit, for idly drinking together, for being with neighbours, for being with coreligionists; but there's only one thing that brings people together to plan sedition, and that is oppression.

You say: 'Are you really willing to have people meet for divine service against the magistrate's will?' I answer: Why 'against his will'? Their coming together is lawful and necessary. 'Against his will', you say: that's what I am complaining

about; it is the root of all the mischief. Why are assemblies in a church more frowned on than ones in a theatre or a market? Those who meet in a church are not more wicked or more trouble-making than those who meet elsewhere. . . . Take away the legal discrimination against them, by changing the laws take away the penalties they are subjected to, and everything will become safe and peaceable. . . . And all the various dissident churches, as guardians of the public peace, will watch one another so that nothing may be changed in the form of the government, because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy—that is, equality with their fellow-subjects under a just and moderate government. [‘magistrate’—‘monarch’—see note on page 3.] Now if the church to which the monarch belongs is regarded as the chief support of any civil government simply because the monarch is kind and the laws are favourable to it, the government will be even more secure when all good subjects, whatever church they belong to, enjoy the same favour of the monarch and the same benefit of the laws, because they will all become the common support and guard of it. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

To sum up the position I have been urging: let every man enjoy the same rights as every other. Is it permitted to worship God in the Roman manner? Then let it be permitted to worship in the Geneva form also. Is it permitted to speak Latin in the market-place? Then let those who want to speak it also in the church. Is it lawful for any man in his own house to kneel, stand, sit, or take any other position? to clothe himself in white or black, in short or in long garments? Let it be lawful to eat bread, drink wine, or wash with water in the church. Anything that is left free by law in everyday life situations, let it be free also in divine worship in a church.

Let no man's life, or body, or house, or estate, suffer any kind of harm on these accounts. . . .

If anything happens in a religious meeting that is seditious and contrary to the public peace, it should be punished in exactly the same way as if it had happened in a public square. These meetings ought not to be sanctuaries for trouble-makers and rogues. . . . No-one at such a meeting ought to be blamed for the presence there of a law-breaker. Everyone should 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. ought to be punished and suppressed, whatever church they belong to—even if it's the magistrate's church. But those whose doctrine is peaceable and whose manners are pure and blameless ought to be on equal terms with their fellow-subjects.

If people of one religious persuasion are allowed to come together for religious ceremonies, celebrations of feast days, listening to speeches and public worship, the same permission should also be given to Arminians, Calvinists, Lutherans, Anabaptists, and Socinians. Let me tell you the truth about this, openly, man to man: **neither pagan nor Moslem nor Jew should be shut out from the republic because of his religion.** •The gospel commands no such thing. •It isn't wanted by the Church, which 'judgeth not those who are without' (1 *Corinthians* 5:12). And •it isn't demanded by the commonwealth, which takes in everyone who is honest, peaceable, and hard-working. Shall we allow a pagan to deal and trade with us yet not allow him to worship God? If we allow Jews to have private houses amongst us, why shouldn't we permit them to have synagogues? Is their doctrine more false, their worship more abominable, or civil peace more endangered by their meeting in public than in their private houses? But if these things can be granted to

Jews and pagans, should any Christians be worse off than they are in a Christian commonwealth?

You say: 'Yes, they should be, because they are more given to factions, tumults, and civil wars.' I answer: Is this the fault of the Christian religion? If it is, then the Christian religion is the worst of all religions and oughtn't to be •professed by you or •tolerated by any commonwealth. . . . But this *isn't* what Christianity is like; it is indeed more strongly opposed to covetousness, ambition, discord, property-disputes etc. than any other religion that has ever existed—and it is the most modest and peaceable. So we must look elsewhere for the cause of the evils that are blamed on religion; and if we think straight about the matter we'll find that the entire cause has to do with my present topic, •toleration. What has produced all the religious quarrels and wars that have occurred in the Christian world is not •the (inevitable) diversity of opinions but rather •the (avoidable) denial of toleration to those who are of different opinions. The •heads of the church, driven by greed and an insatiable hunger for control, have exploited the magistrates' ambition (often out of control) and the (always stupid) superstition of the multitude, arousing the populace 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 should be deprived of their possessions and wiped out. In this they have mixed together two things that are really utterly different, the church and the commonwealth.

When men are stripped of the goods they have acquired by honest work, industry, and, contrary to all the laws of equity, human and divine, are exposed to other men's violence and robbery, it is very difficult for them to put up with this patiently. Especially when they are otherwise entirely blameless, and the 'reason' for this treatment lies

right outside the magistrate's jurisdiction and is a matter for the individual's conscience and the salvation of his soul, for which he is accountable only to God.

When these men, growing weary of the evils under which they labour, eventually come to 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, what else could we expect? To learn that this has in the past been the ordinary course of things, study history; to know that it will continue in the future, think! It is bound to be like that as long as the principle of religious persecution goes on prevailing with the magistrate and the people, and as long as those who ought to preach peace and harmony go on deploying all their skill and strength to arouse men to arms and sound the trumpet of war. It would be astonishing that magistrates should allow these incendiaries and disturbers of the public peace if we couldn't see that they have been invited by them to a share of the spoils, and have been led to make use of their covetousness and pride as means to increasing their own power. [In that difficult sentence, Locke evidently means that the magistrate allows the disturber to make trouble because the magistrate has been invited by the disturber to share in the spoils of the trouble; so that the disturber is using the magistrate's greed and pride as a means to the disturber's increasing his own power. Clearly the disturbers of the peace in question are not •the restless and rebellious oppressed people with which this

paragraph began, but •their oppressors—the leaders of the favoured church who disturb the peace by preaching intolerance against other churches.] For who does not see that these *good men*—these disturbers of the peace—are ministers not so much of the gospel as of the government, and that by flattering the ambition and supporting the dominion of monarchs and men in authority they are doing their best to promote in the commonwealth the tyranny that they couldn't in any other way have established in the church? That's how church and state come to work together. If each of them would stay within its own bounds—one attending to the worldly welfare of the commonwealth, the other to the salvation of souls—there couldn't possibly be any discord between them. . . .

I beg God Almighty to bring it about **(1)** that the gospel of peace comes to be preached; **(2)** that civil magistrates—trying harder to make their own consciences fit God's law, and less hard to bind other men's consciences by human laws—direct all their counsels and endeavours in a fatherly way to promote the worldly good of all their children, except ones who are arrogant, ungovernable, and injurious to their brethren; and **(3)** that all ecclesiastics who pronounce themselves to be the successors of the Apostles—walking peacefully and modestly in the Apostles' steps, and not getting mixed in with state affairs—apply themselves wholly to promoting the salvation of souls.

## 12: Heresy and schism

It may be worthwhile to say a little about heresy and schism. A Moslem isn't and can't be either a heretic or a schismatic to a Christian; and if anyone leaves the Christian faith and joins Islam, that doesn't make him a heretic or a schismatic—it makes him an apostate and an infidel. This is entirely uncontroversial; and it shows that men of different religions can't be heretics or schismatics relative to one another.

What we have to look into, then, is how the concepts of heresy and schism work in relation to men who are of the same religion. It's clear those who have the very same rule of faith and worship have the same religion, and those whose faith and worship are different belong to different religions. That is because everything that belongs to that religion is contained in that rule, so that those who have the same rule belong to one and the same religion, and those who haven't don't. Thus Moslems and Christians are of different religions because Christians take the Holy Scriptures as the rule of their religion, and Moslems take the Koran. And by that criterion there can be different religions amongst Christians. Papists and Lutherans, though both profess faith in Christ and are therefore called 'Christians' are not of the same religion, because Lutherans acknowledge only the Holy Scriptures as the rule and foundation of their religion, while Papists have as their rule not only the Holy Scriptures but also traditions and the decrees of Popes. . . .

·WHAT HERESY IS·

From this it follows •that heresy is a split in ecclesiastical communion between men who have the same religion but differ on some doctrine that isn't contained in the rule that defines the religion; and •that among those who recognize only the Holy Scriptures as their rule of faith, heresy is a

split in their Christian communion concerning doctrines that aren't explicitly contained in Scripture. This split among Christians can happen in either of two ways.

**(1)** It happens when the greater part of the church—or the stronger part (thanks to the magistrate's patronage)—separates itself from the rest, excluding them from the church's communion because they refuse to declare their belief in certain opinions that aren't explicitly stated in Scripture. What makes a group heretical is not the smallness of their numbers or the authority of the magistrate; someone is a heretic if (and only if) is it he who on the basis of such opinions divides the church into parts, introduces names and marks of distinction, deliberately creates a split because of those opinions. [Locke is saying, then, that in the situation described at the start of this paragraph it is the bigger or stronger faction that is heretical, not the remainder.]

**(2)** Heresy occurs when someone separates himself from the communion of a church because the church doesn't publicly profess certain opinions that the Holy Scriptures don't clearly teach.

Both these—the group and the individual—are heretics because they are wrong about fundamentals, and obstinately go against prudence and knowledge. When they specified that the Holy Scriptures were to be the only foundation of faith, they also gave a fundamental status to certain propositions that are not in Scripture, and because others won't accept these additional opinions of theirs as necessary and fundamental, they create a split in the church either **(2)** by withdrawing from it or **(1)** by expelling others from it. It doesn't help their position to say that their favoured opinions *fit* with Scripture and with the analogy of faith. If they are

drawn up in the words of Scripture, there can be no question about them, because all Christians acknowledge those things as being divinely inspired and therefore fundamental. But if you (·I'm speaking to a heretic now·) say ·only· that the items you want to be professed are *consequences* of what is in Scripture, I say

believing and professing things that seem to you agreeable to the rule of faith—well done!

but

trying to force those things down the throats of people who don't see them as indubitable Scriptural doctrines—not well done!

To create a split because of things like these, which aren't and can't be fundamental, is to be a heretic. I don't think that any man is so lunatic as to dare to hawk his consequences and interpretations of Scripture as 'divine inspirations' and to put •the articles of faith that he has constructed on a par with •the authority of Scripture. I know some propositions are so evidently agreeable to Scripture that they can't be denied to be consequences of it; and there can't be any difference of opinion about those. ·And just for that reason, they aren't relevant to our present topic of heresy, where by definition there always *is* a difference of opinion. Returning now to that topic (and again I am addressing the heretic):· However clearly it seems to you that something-or-other follows from Scripture, you shouldn't force it on others because *you* believe it to be agreeable to the rule of faith—or not unless you think it would be fair enough for other doctrines to be imposed on you in the same way. That would involve you in having to accept and profess all the different and contradictory opinions of Lutherans, Calvinists,

Arminians, Anabaptists, and so on—opinions which the manufacturers of symbols, systems and confessions pass out to their followers as genuine and necessary deductions from the Holy Scripture. I'm amazed at the rash arrogance of men who think that *they* can explain things necessary to salvation more clearly than the Holy Ghost, the eternal and infinite wisdom of God.

·WHAT SCHISM IS·

So much for •heresy, a word that in common usage is applied only to the doctrinal part of religion. Let us now consider •schism. This is a crime *like* heresy, for both these words seem to me to signify an ill-grounded split in an ecclesiastical communion, arising from things that are not necessary ·to the faith·. But ordinary usage, which determines what is correct in language, has determined that •heresy relates to errors in faith and •schism to errors in worship or discipline; so I am following that distinction.

Schism, then. . . is a split made in the communion of a church because of something in divine worship or ecclesiastical discipline that is not a necessary part of the faith. Nothing in worship or church discipline can be necessary to Christian communion apart from what was commanded, in so many words, by Christ our legislator or by the Apostles ·speaking· under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

What I say is this: Someone who doesn't deny anything that the Holy Scriptures teach explicitly, and doesn't create a split because of something that isn't clearly contained in the sacred text—whatever label any sect of Christians slap on him, and however many of them say that there's nothing Christian about him—cannot be either a heretic or a schismatic.