

## Outline of John Locke's "A Letter Concerning Toleration"

- **Early, simple way of Christian Church:** The earliest manifestation of a "Christian Church" involved believers of Christ meeting to share information and to worship together (there were many different Jewish sects at that time, and this was just another such group). They had no political power or influence on others outside of their group. However, after Christianity was allowed to function openly in the Roman Empire, and then became the dominant religion after the Edict of Milan in 313 by Emperor Constantine (Agustus; 272-337), and the First Council of Nicea in 325, it became an ever-growing entity that ended up far different than its humble origins. In the earlier times "the Church" was mainly a place:
  - for believers to meet for worship;
  - to share feelings and belief with other like-minded people;
  - to hold the celebration of marriage with the blessings of the group;
  - a way for children to be baptized into the society of the believers.
  - There was much (peaceful) diversity in thinking. A religion of love, in contrast to the fickle, cruel, despotic God of the Old Testament.
  
- **Expanding power of church:** However, over time the *institution* of the Church was able to expand into politics and civil governance, while accumulating a huge amount of wealth in the form of property, gold, art and other precious objects. Thus, what started out as a group of like-mind people worshipping together became something very different:
  - Making a business of selling "indulgences", by which priests and the Church profited by using their influence (with God) to cure people, or obtain things for them on Earth, and especially in the afterlife.
  
  - Being closely related with civil government (magistrates) on every level of society, from the small villages to the courts of kings.
  
  - Being able to influence or even dominate the actions of civil courts involving: property, possessions, disputes among people of the community, punishments for theft, injury to others, and murder.
  
  - Perhaps even worse was introducing civil laws based on religious doctrine, thus making it possible to criminalize differences of opinions from civil doctrine, schisms, heresy, and strange matters involving spirits, demons and witches.

- Horrendous and viscous abuse of these powers reached a terrible crescendo in the 1500s and 1600s, though they had been around for a very long time. (Read the chapter “The Demon-Haunted Word” in a book by the same name to understand the totally sickening and perverted state of affairs that this had become).

▪ **John Locke's response:** John Locke wrote his “A letter Concerning Toleration” as an answer to these abuses and a means of prodding a rectification. Here are the main points that Locke made:

- That toleration should be the chief characteristic of the *true* Church. Not pompous outward worship.
- Anyone lacking charity, meekness and good will in general towards all mankind, even to those not Christian, is certainly short of being Christian. Should exhibit love of others.
- First of all, a person must make war on his own lusts and vices, not condemning others.
- Condemns anyone that persecutes, torments, destroys, steals from and kills other men on pretense of religion. While they themselves are corrupt and filled with fraud and whoredom and malice. Their own faults should be their main attention.
- In reality the Gospel of Jesus Christ advocates toleration to those who differ in religion and opinions.
- There must be a well-established boundary between civil government and matters of religion. The civil dimension involves life, liberty, health as well as outward things such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.
- The jurisdiction of the magistrate (civil servants of civil government) reaches **ONLY** to these civil concerns; it has **NO CONCERN** with the saving of souls.
- Symmetrically, whereas the magistrate’s business is in civil matters, the Church has no business in entering these fields, but should confine itself to helping people find God and enrich their souls.
- A “Church” is a **voluntary society** of men (people) joining themselves together of their own accord in order to carry out the public worshiping of God in such a manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and *effectual to the*

*salvation of their souls. A free and voluntary society. Nobody is born into it.*

- Nobody can be tied to the Church, but is attracted to it for ones salvation.
- Members of a church need to make internal laws of the organization, BUT such laws should not overlap civil matters, and have no right to inflict punishment or seize possessions or properties of members, or torture, or jail, or kill. There is no place in the Bible that suggests that a Church has such rights or powers. Church should deal *ONLY* matters related to the salvation of the soul.
- Excommunication by the Church has no relations with civil rights and liberties, but only the society of the Church. One cannot be deprived of possessions or in any way abused.
- No person can make trouble for another person for having a different religion or belonging to a different Church. This represents the mutual toleration of private persons differing forms one another in matters of religion.
- Civil government can give no new rights to the church, or the church to the civil government.
- Churches have neither any jurisdiction in worldly matters, nor are fire and sword any proper instruments wherewith to convince men's minds of error, and inform them of the truth.
- Nobody, therefore, neither single persons nor churches, nay, nor even commonwealths have just title to invade the civil rights and worldly goods of each other upon pretense of religion.
- No person can inflict problems and pain to others in the name of the teachings of Christ, who advocates tolerance and love and peace.
- The care of the soul does not belong to the magistrate.
- Faith only and inward sincerity are the things that procure acceptance with God.
- In vain, therefore, do princes compel their subjects to come into their Church communion, under the pretence of saving their souls.
- The magistrate has no power to enforce by law, either in his Church, or much less in another, the use of any rites or ceremonies whatsoever in the worship of God.

- A magistrate may order a parent to wash a child with water for health reasons, but not administer holy water to save the soul.
- No magistrate or religious person of the Church has any right to violate the beliefs and customs of non-believer, like in territories visited by Christians, like native American Indians.
- God is the only judge!!!
- Basically, John Locke advocates a strict separation of Church and State; in other words, secular government.
- The writings of John Lock had a profound influence on the establishment of the U.S. constitution and government.