# Truth and Toleration in Early Modern Thought

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Forthcoming in Richard Whatmore and Ian Hunter (eds.), *Natural Law and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Introduction[1]

The issue discussed in this paper is as topical today as it was in the early modern period. The Reformation presented with heightened urgency the question of how to relate the system of beliefs and values regarded as fundamental by an established political community to alternative beliefs and values introduced by new groups and individuals. Through a discussion of the views on toleration advanced by some key early modern thinkers, this paper will revisit different ways of addressing this problem, focusing on the relationship between truth and toleration. The comparison between different proposals in their historical and political contexts, will reveal a variety of understandings of toleration and of models for its promotion. These understandings will be shown to be grounded in different conceptions of religious belief, of its relation to truth, and of human reason's ability to reach it. They will provide a map of possible models for addressing conflict in a pluralist world from which lessons of enduring relevance can be learnt.

The upshot of the paper is that, from a theoretical point of view, the culprit in intolerance is not in itself belief in some objective truth. Some of the common assumptions about the denial of religious truth or the reduction of religious truth to a minimal creed as the best paths to universal toleration will be challenged. Likewise, the narrative centred on England and France which has led to the celebration of the heroes of a supposedly 'universal' toleration that still manages to exclude millions of people will be shown to be in need of significant revision. After discussing approaches based on the rights of the individual

[1] This paper benefitted from participation to a Liberty Fund conference on 'Liberty and Toleration in the Writing of Spinoza and Bayle' organized by Chandran Kukathas in June 2015. My thanks to conference participants, and especially to Chandran Kukathas and Rainer Forst, for thought-provoking exchanges. I am very grateful to Howard Hotson and Ian Hunter for their insightful feedback on a mature draft.

conscience and on the unknowability of religious truths above human reason, the paper will finally investigate whether grounds for a general and principled theory of toleration can be found in religious truth itself and, following the tradition of natural law, in some universal truth discoverable by natural reason.

**The denial of religious truth as a path to toleration**

With the outbreak of the Protestant reformation in the early sixteenth century, the clash between diverse religious communities and their systems of beliefs and values intensified. If the horror of early modern wars and persecutions ultimately resulted from disagreement about the objective truth of some fine points of theology, it is tempting to conclude that one straight-forward way to avoid such disasters in the future would be the elimination of the very notion of religious truth. Such an elimination could be pursued in a number of ways. For instance, once could argue that there is some sort or another of objective truth, just not a *religious* one. Voltaire's witty depiction of religious sects in the *Lettres Philosophiques* (1734) went a long way toward suggesting that the best basis for toleration was a through-going scepticism toward any claim to truth of alleged divine revelations. If there is any religious truth, Voltaire claimed in the article "Foi" (Faith) of his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), this is discovered by reason not by faith:

> It is evident to me that there is a necessary, eternal, supreme, intelligent being. This is not a matter of faith, but of reason. I have no merit in thinking that this eternal, infinite being, who is virtue, goodness itself, wants me to be good and virtuous. Faith consists in believing, not what appears to be true, but what appears to our understanding to be false.[2]

A more radical, and philosophically more original, denial of any pretence of faith to truth had already been proposed by Baruch Spinoza.[3] Spinoza had himself suffered religious

[2] Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. and ed. by T. Besterman (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 208.

[3] In an interesting article comparing Spinoza and Lodewijk Meyer on the issue of toleration, Jacqueline Lagrée argues that Spinoza, qua philosopher, is not especially tolerant since he thinks to know what is true. As a 'theologian', however, he can be tolerant precisely because he firmly separates theology (or faith) and truth. See Jacqueline Lagrée, 'Théologie et Tolérance: Louis Meyer et Spinoza', *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, 134 / 1 (2002), 15-28.

persecution. Born in Amsterdam on 24 November 1632, he belonged to the Portuguese-Jewish community of so-called 'Marranos,' that is, Jews forced to convert to Catholicism who had fled their country to be able to worship in accordance with Judaism. On 27 July 1656, the twenty-three year old Spinoza was "excommunicated and expelled from the people of Israel" by the Sephardic community of Amsterdam. The *Cherem* (or ban) read in the synagogue "cursed and damned" him in the harshest terms for his "evil ways," "abominable heresies," and "monstrous deeds." As a result, no one was to "communicate with him, neither in writing, nor accord him any favour nor stay with him under the same roof nor come within four cubits in his vicinity; nor … read any treatise composed or written by him."[4]

In the event, plenty of people did read the treatise published anonymously by Spinoza in 1670 in Amsterdam under the title of *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Against the backdrop of the developing metaphysical theses of his *Ethica*,[5] Spinoza advocated the most radical separation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy. Truth, he argued, belongs only to philosophy; faith and theology are concerned instead only with obedience and piety:

> between faith and theology on the one side and philosophy on the other there is no relation and no affinity, a point which must now be apparent to everyone who knows the aims and bases of these two faculties, which are as far apart as can be. The aim of philosophy is, quite simply, truth, while the aim of faith, as we have abundantly shown, is nothing other than obedience and piety. Again, philosophy rests on the basis of universally valid axioms, and must be constructed by studying Nature alone, whereas faith is based on history and language, and must be derived only from Scripture and revelation[.][6]

Thus, each person's faith "is to be regarded as pious or impious not in respect of its truth or falsity, but as it is conducive to obedience or obstinacy."[7] Faith was defined "as the holding

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[4] Quoted from Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 120-1.

[5] The *Ethica* appeared posthumously in 1677 in Amsterdam, shortly after the death of Spinoza. Spinoza had been working on it since the early 1660s and the manuscript circulated amongst his friends.

[6] Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, chap. 14 (hereafter *TTP*; quotations from Samuel Shirley's translation in Spinoza, *Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), pp. 385-585, here p. 519).

[7] *TTP*, chap.14 (p. 517).

of certain beliefs about God such that, without these beliefs, there cannot be obedience to God."[8] From this separation followed, for Spinoza, that

> faith allows to every man the utmost freedom to philosophise, and he may hold whatever opinions he pleases on any subjects whatsoever without imputation of evil. It condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who teach such beliefs as promote obstinacy, hatred, strife and anger, while it regards as faithful only those who promote justice and charity to the best of their intellectual powers and capacity.[9]

In brief, provided that religious beliefs led to obedience and piety, it did not matter what one believed since, in any case, such beliefs did not have to do with truth. Nonetheless, Spinoza went on to identify the only dogmas which "a catholic or universal faith" should contain, namely "those dogmas which obedience to God *absolutely demands*, and without which such obedience is *absolutely impossible*."[10] These dogmas

> must all be directed (as evidently follows from what we have demonstrated …) to this one end: that there is a Supreme Being who loves justice and charity, whom all must obey in order to be saved, and must worship by practising justice and charity to their neighbour. From this, all the tenets of faith can readily be determined, and they are simply as follows: 1. God, that is, a Supreme Being, exists, supremely just and merciful […] 2. God is one alone. No one can doubt that this belief is essential for complete devotion […] 3. God is omnipresent […] 4. God has supreme right and dominion over all things … All are required to obey him absolutely … 5. Worship of God and obedience to him consists solely in justice and charity, or love towards one's neighbour. 6. All who obey God by following this way of life, and only those, are saved … 7. God forgives repentant sinners. …[11]

Consistently with the divorce between faith and truth, the chief criterion for the identification of these dogmas was not their truth but their being conducive to obedience. Spinoza's

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[8] *TTP*, chap.14 (p. 516).

[9] *TTP*, chap.14 (p. 519).

[10] *TTP*, chap.14 (p. 517). My emphasis.

[11] *TTP*, chap.14 (pp. 517-8).

philosophical investigation culminating in the *Ethica* made abundantly clear that God is not really a personal being with moral attributes such as justice and mercy. *Belief* in such a being, however, was to be commended since it led those incapable of reaching truth to charity and love of the neighbour, motivated by obedience to a God imagined as just and merciful.

One may wonder, however, to which extent such divorce is in itself conducive to a general and principled theory of toleration. Spinoza clearly thought that there are plenty of truths which reason and philosophy can reach. They include, for instance, the claim that without such dogmas as the unicity of God "obedience is absolutely impossible". It seems, therefore, that polytheist religious beliefs are not acceptable even if it is not their *truth* which is at issue. In other words, whether there is, or there is not, such a thing as religious *truth* is in itself neutral as regards toleration since the matter at hand is not whether some position is, or is not, objectively true, but whether what one *believes* to be true can be tolerated.

In fact, if one turns to Spinoza's actual recommendations for the way in which a government should deal with religion, one finds that they are far from an inclusive policy of toleration of a plurality of religious beliefs and their expressions. According to Spinoza, "it is established both by reason and experience that the divine law is entirely dependent on the decrees of rulers". Therefore, "sovereigns are the interpreters of religion and piety."[12] It is "the duty of the sovereign alone to decide what form piety towards one's neighbour should take, that is, in what way every man is required to obey God. … Therefore no one can practice piety aright nor obey God unless he obeys the decrees of the sovereign in all things".[13] Thus, "whether a man be a citizen or an alien, a person in private station or one holding command over others, if the sovereign condemns him to death or declares him an enemy, no subject is permitted to come to his assistance."[14] As for the view that the sphere of

[12] *TTP*, chap.19 (p. 560). A similar position is supported by Thomas Hobbes, whose work had a seminal influence on Spinoza. According to Hobbes, the sovereign embodies the unity of church and state. The power and authority to withdraw or grant religious toleration rests solely on him. Toleration is not a good in itself but a means to an end, namely, it may be granted when needed for the preservation of peace. Moreover, the sovereign dictates the form of public worship, and has the right to shape the opinions of the citizens through whatever means are deemed necessary. Cf. Rainer Forst, *Toleration in Conflict: Past and Present*, trans. by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 188-96.

[13] *TTP*, chap.19 (p. 561).

[14] *TTP*, chap.19 (p. 561).

competence of religious and civic authorities should be distinguished, Spinoza refused even to discuss the matter.[15]

Moreover, he claimed, "devotion to one's country is the highest form of devotion".[16] Before adopting Spinoza as the standard-bearer of modernity one should carefully consider the danger of transforming this "devotion" into an authoritarian form of secular religion, attested only too often in the past and by no means absent from the present.

To be sure, Spinoza was clear that freedom of thought is inalienable. Hobbes had already drawn attention to the difference between inner faith (*fides*), which cannot be compelled, and external profession, which can (and, for Hobbes, should) be enforced as a merely external act of obedience to the worship prescribed by the sovereign.[17] In a similar way, Spinoza distinguished between "inward worship of God" and "outward forms of religion":

> I speak expressly of acts of piety and the outward forms of religion, not of piety itself and the inward worship of God, or of the means whereby the mind is inwardly led to worship God in sincerity of heart; for inward worship of God and piety itself belong to the sphere of individual right … which cannot be transferred to another.[18]

However, as he would have known from his own Jewish upbringing (and, more specifically, from the Marranos experience), the public and socially shared worship of one's religious beliefs may well be integral to those very religious beliefs. It would not do, therefore, to say that anyone is completely free to believe whatever they wish and *inwardly* worship whichever way they want, if their religious beliefs include the need to worship publically,[19]

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[15] *TTP*, chap.19 (p. 562): "As for the arguments by which my opponents seek to separate religious right from civic right, maintaining that only the latter is vested in the sovereign while the former is vested in the universal church, these are of no account, being so trivial as not even to merit refutation."

[16] *TTP*, chap.19 (p. 560).

[17] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), vol. 3, chap. 42, pp. 782-7.

[18] *TTP*, chap.19 (p. 558).

[19] Cf. John Locke, *A Letter concerning Toleration* (London: Awnsham Churchill, 1689), p. 9: "A Church then I take to be a voluntary Society of Men, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the publick worshipping of God, in such manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the Salvation of their Souls"; p. 12: "The End of a Religious Society … is the Publick Worship of God". Cf. also pp. 27-30.

or if their beliefs require them to refrain from the public worship of false gods, even if prescribed by the sovereign. Likewise, one may believe that "worship of God and obedience to him" *does not* "consists *solely* in justice and charity, or love towards one's neighbour"[20] but also and *essentially* in praying five times per day facing Mecca. Spinoza could reply that "as for other dogmas, every man should embrace those that he, being the best judge of himself, feels will do most to strengthen him in love of justice;"[21] but this does not quite capture the point of view of such believers. For the crux of their disagreement is precisely with the status of *adiaphora* bestowed upon what they believe to be, on the contrary, a practice essential to God's worship – a disagreement entailing the rejection of one of the dogmas of the (allegedly) universal faith according to which "worship of God and obedience to him consists *solely* in justice and charity".

Once again, whether such belief belongs, or does not belong, in the realm of applicability of the notion of truth, seems neutral to the question of whether such belief should be tolerated. Thus, should a sovereign allow, *in principle*, public worship which does not align with the religion of the land? It seems not, according to Spinoza. As for Hobbes, freedom of belief does not entail freedom of worship in which belief finds its expression. The enlightened philosopher who reads the *Ethica* will *know* that it does not matter in the least to engage in external acts of divine worship. The (seemingly largely fictional) followers of the 'universal' faith will *believe* it. The others will either be lucky enough to belong to the official state worship, or will be left with the (at least practical) intolerance of their beliefs. The view that 'truth' is an inapplicable category for any religious belief may even help account for Spinoza's willingness to let government a free hand in curbing and shaping acceptable worship. The fact that the government in question should be, ideally, a democracy does not seem to help either. That is, the fact that the rules of official worship are dictated not by a monarch but a government supported by a majority does not in itself advance the principled toleration of those who, precisely due to their status of minorities, are most in need of it.[22]

Historically, Spinoza's appeal to a drastically pared-down dogmatic content aimed not at truth but at a practical attitude was undoubtedly meant to promote the pacification of religious conflicts. His claim that "religious law" is dependent on the decision of "those who

[20] *TTP*, chap.14 (p. 518).

[21] *TTP*, chap.14 (p. 517).

[22] Cf. Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, pp. 205-6.

hold the sovereign power" as the sole "interpreters of the divine law",[23] was historically aimed at thwarting, through the intervention of political authority, opposing religious factions which were threatening peace. As a universalizable rule, however, it was all too easily convertible into state-led religious repression and persecution.[24] In the Netherlands, the Remostrants (or Arminians) found at their own expenses that Arminius and Grotius's political theories, entrusting the *summa potestas* to the magistrate also in religious matters, did not result in the religious tolerance they were hoping for.[25] In England, the religious intolerance which followed the restoration of the Stuarts eventually convinced Locke to abandon his early view that the *jus circa sacra* falls on the sovereign as *Conservator Pacis* and *Defensor Ecclesiae*.[26] In France, the same kind of absolutistic power of the sovereign advocated by Hobbes and Spinoza was used by Louis XIV to withdraw toleration from the Huguenots in the most notorious act of religious cleansing of the seventeenth century.

For someone prizing state security above all, the view that, in any case, religion does not have anything to do with truth may even provide a comforting thought in a state-led programme of religious homogenization for the greater aim of stability.[27] At any rate, the denial of religious truth does not appear to provide, per se, a general and principled justification of toleration.

A possible way forward would be to argue that Spinoza did not go nearly far enough. One could maintain that, to lay the foundation of a truly tolerant society, he should have denied not only the existence of religious truth but the existence of any *objective* truth. A radically relativist position could take the view that 'truth' is a subjective notion or, at best, a merely social construct.

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[23] *TTP*, chap.19 (pp. 557-8).

[24] Cf. the critical appraisal of Spinoza's position by Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, p. 206: "the price which Spinoza is ultimately willing to pay for the freedom to philosophise is a high one, specifically an absolute sovereign, a reduction of religious faith to ethical, and ultimately political, obedience, and restrictions on freedom of worship and action in general at the sole discretion of the sovereign."

[25] Cf. J. Arminius, *Articuli nonnulli*, 'De Magistratu' in *Opera theologica* (Leyden, 1629), p. 965 and H. Grotius's posthumous *De imperio Summarum Potestatum circa Sacra* (Paris, 1647).

[26] Cf. Locke's *Treatises on Government* of 1660 and 1662.

[27] Cf. Leibniz to Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, 4/14 August 1683 (in G. W. Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. by the Academy of Sciences of Berlin, series I-VIII (Darmstadt - Leipzig - Berlin, 1923 ff.), series I, vol. 3, p. 534 (hereafter A, followed by series, volume, and page).

The denial of *any* objective truth, however, is hard to sustain. Is it, for instance, an objective truth that there is no objective truth? An easier path is to claim, more modestly, that we are unable to know whether there is any objective truth and that we have to settle, therefore, on some socially or politically agreed 'truths'. The sceptical tradition rejuvenated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by authors such as Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Charron, and François de la Mothe Le Vayer could be regarded as a more comprehensive basis for a dismantling of intolerant claims to objective truths.

But how does the status of being 'agreed truths' (as opposed to 'objective truths') advance toleration? Their status as 'agreed' seems in itself neutral in relation to toleration. How would it advance the cause of toleration to hold the socially agreed view (as opposed to its being objectively true) that atheists are incapable of morality and, therefore, cannot be tolerated? In fact, scepticism about rationally discoverable objective truths was not uncommonly paired with fideistic appeals to exclusive trust in revelation – and unmitigated fideism rarely proved to be a natural road to toleration.

**The appeal to the individual conscience as a path to toleration**

A more promising option seems to stress that, whether or not there is some objective truth (and, in particular, some objective *religious* truth), what matters is the sincerity with which one holds what she believes to be the truth. As long as there is sincerity of conscience, there is no culpability, and therefore no ground for punishment, even if the belief which is held is objectively false. Moreover and most importantly, salvation requires sincerity of conscience. Conversely, hypocrisy is a sin. A forced conversion, far from compelling the converted to enter the gates of heaven, could jeopardize her eternal life even if the religion she embraced were the true one. As Locke crisply stated in his *Letter concerning Toleration* published in 1689:

> No way whatsoever that I shall walk in, against the Dictates of my Conscience, will ever bring me to the Mansions of the Blessed. … 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 pretence of saving their Souls. If they believe, they will come of their own accord; if they believe not, their

> coming will nothing avail them. … And therefore, when all is done, they must be left to their own Consciences.[28]

This was a position particularly consonant with the Protestant's stress on the direct relationship of the individual with God, based on the reading of Scripture without the mediation of a church and its doctrinal authority. In Locke's immediate environment, the rights of the individual conscience were forcefully defended by the architects of Anglican Latitudinarianism. William Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* (Oxford 1638) provided a clear and influential statement of the claim of an individual to direct access to the source of religious truth, the Bible, [29] while Benjamin Whichcote (whose sermons at St Lawrence Jewry in London were attended by Locke) preached the "*judicium discretionis*" as "the foundation of Protestancy".[30] During his exile in Holland in 1683-1688, Locke encountered a similar emphasis on the individual conscience in the Remonstrant circles to which his new friend, the theologian Philipp van Limborch, belonged. Simon Episcopius had already stated in the Remostrants's *Confessio* that the only obligation of "the conscience of the faithful" is to the "divine word".[31] Limborch's *Theologia Christiana* (Amsterdam 1686) reiterated the freedom of believers in their reading of Scripture and denounced as "a crime" the attempt to subject the individual conscience to anyone else but Jesus Christ.[32] Against the backdrop of the traditional doctrine of the distinction between the spiritual kingdom and the temporal kingdom,[33] these considerations played a key role in the development of Locke's conception of the church as a "free and voluntary Society," which no one should be forced to enter, or

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[28] Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 26-7. This was a translation by William Popple of the original Latin version which had appeared earlier that year in Holland. Cf. Leibniz's letter of March 1685 to Landgraf Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels (a Catholic convert from Calvinism) (A I, 4, 352): "One should not create hypocrites, since a true Huguenot is incomparably more worthy than a false Catholic and will sooner be saved without any doubt." Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

[29] See pp. 375-6.

[30] Cf. Benjamin Whichcote, *Second Letter* in Samuel Salter (ed.), *Moral and Religious Aphorisms collected from the Manuscript Papers of … Whichcote* (London, 1753), p. 56.

[31] See 'Praefatio' in *Confessio sive Declaratio, Sententiae Pastorum, qui in Foederato Belgio Remonstrantes vocantur*, 1622.

[32] Cf. Limborch, *Theologia Christiana*, Book V, chap. 63, § 25.

[33] For the appropriation of the two-kingdoms doctrine in Luther, see Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, esp. pp. 118-21.

into which no one should be forced to remain.[34] "Liberty remains to Men in reference to their eternal salvation," Locke maintained in the *Letter concerning Toleration*, "and that is, that every one should do what he in his Conscience is perswaded to be acceptable to the Almighty".[35]

From a different point of view, the focus on conscience converged with the traditional Roman Catholic distinction between material and formal heretics. According to this distinction (pressed especially by the Jesuits), those who believe objectively false doctrines in good conscience are merely material heretics and are not excluded from salvation. Only formal heretics, that is, those who consciously reject what they know to be the doctrine of the universal church, are worthy of damnation. As Leibniz pointed out to Roman Catholics, however, the latter appears to be a very rare case -- if there is such a case at all. Those who reject the doctrines of the Roman Church do not in fact believe it to be the truly catholic or universal church. Roman Catholics ought therefore to extend also to them the category of material heretics.[36] Indeed, Leibniz noted with approbation, "[t]he Jesuits have maintained that invincible ignorance excuses, and that therefore the sincere conscience of anyone is always the last judge down here, *in conscientiae foro*."[37] "If someone were to embrace truth in bad conscience," he went on to claim, "he could be said a formal, and not a material heretic; and would be worthy of punishment although he did not err". A bad conscience

[34] Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 9-10. Cf. Mario Sina, 'Tolleranza religiosa e scetticismo in Locke', *Vita e Pensiero*, 72/12 (1989), 839-850 and Mario Sina, 'Il cammino di Locke verso la dottrina della tolleranza religiosa' in Mario Sina (ed.), *La tolleranza religiosa: indagini storiche e reflessioni filosofiche* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1991), pp. 199-222 (republished in Mario Sina, *Studi su John Locke* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2015), pp. 123-34 and pp. 135-54).

[35] Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 43. In the *Letter concerning Toleration*, Locke limited the sphere of competence of the Magistrate to "civil" or temporal interests, sharply excluding any extension to the care and salvation of souls (see especially pp. 6-9).

[36] A I, 6, 164-65: "Mr Pellisson … admits amongst material heretics only those who do not know, or do not believe, that the dogmas in matter of faith which they reject are the doctrine of the Catholic Church. If we apply this restriction to the Protestants we will find that they are of this number. … So it is not easy to prove to the Protestants that they deny what they know to be decided by the Catholic Church." Cf. also A I, 6, 165-8.

[37] A I, 6, 94.

[malum animum], as opposed to a false belief, is what "constitutes the formal nature of heresy."[38]

Arguably, the strongest epistemological underpinning of the non-culpability of an erroneous conscience was the doctrine (embraced by both Locke and Leibniz) of the non-voluntariness of belief. "*Articles of Faith* … which are required only to be believed," Locke wrote in the *Letter concerning Toleration*, "cannot be imposed on any Church by the Law of the Land. For it is absurd that things should be enjoyned by Laws, which are not in men's power to perform. And to believe this or that to be true, does not depend upon our Will."[39] In the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, which appeared the same year in which the *Letter concerning Toleration* was published,[40] Locke provided the full epistemological grounding of this claim. "As Knowledge, is no more arbitrary than Perception," Locke explained, so "Assent is no more in our Power than Knowledge. … And what upon full Examination I find most probable, I cannot deny my Assent to."[41] The will can influence belief only obliquely, that is, we can stop our enquiry, or fail to attend to supporting evidence,[42] or turn "our attention away from a disagreeable object so as to apply ourselves to something else which we find pleasing; so that by thinking further about the reasons for the side which we favour, we end up by believing it to be most likely."[43] Culpability may lie in our refusal to attend to reasons and to employ fully our faculties of knowledge and judgement in the search of truth, but not in our believing what seems to us true on the basis of an

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[38] *De Haeresi Formali et Materiali*, c. 1695 (A IV, 6, 337). See also A I, 6, 141: "One can be of bad faith and obstinate even if he asserts the truth, that is to say, when this is maintained without foundation on the basis of a bad principle." Cf. Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 26-7.

[39] Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 39. See also pp. 7-9.

[40] The first edition of Locke's *Essay* appeared at the end of 1689, although the title-page bore 1690 as the year of publication.

[41] John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P. H. Nidditch, [The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 717 (Book IV, chap. 20, § 16). Commenting this paragraph, Leibniz noted in the *Nouveaux Essais* (trans. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 517): "what we believe is never just what we want to believe but rather what we see as most likely".

[42] Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, chap. 20, § 16 (Nidditch ed., p. 717): "But though we cannot hinder our Knowledge, where the Agreement [of any two ideas] is once perceived; nor our Assent, where the Probability manifestly appears upon due Consideration of all the Measures of it: Yet *we can hinder both Knowledge and Assent, by stopping our Enquiry*, and not employing our Faculties in the search of any Truth."

[43] Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais*, Book IV, chap. 20, § 16 (trans. by Remnant and Bennett, p. 517).

attentive and honest consideration of the issue at hand.[44] Belief, therefore, cannot be coerced. As Leibniz wrote in 1693, giving as an example the still controversial case of the Copernican system,

> to believe or not to believe is not a voluntary thing. If I believe I see a manifest error, all the authority of the world could not change my view if this [authority] is not accompanied by some reasons capable of satisfying my difficulties or of overcoming them. And if the whole Church were to condemn the doctrine of the movement of the Earth, the able astronomers of this opinion [ce sentiment] could certainly dissimulate, but it would not be in their power to give up [their view].[45]

Amongst those embracing instead a Cartesian epistemology, according to which assent is given voluntarily, and error is squarely attributable to the will assenting to what is not clear and distinct,[46] it was easier to come to the view that "all Errors are Acts of the Will, and consequently morally evil."[47] As Pierre Bayle lucidly explained in his *Philosophical Commentary*, published in three parts and a supplement in 1686 – 1688,

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[44] Cf. Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, chap. 20. Leibniz wrote in 1684 (A I, 4, 320): "opinion is not something which depends on the Empire of the will and which can be changed as one pleases." In 1711, he reiterated: "one does not have a belief at will, but acts as one wills; it is not the lack of belief which deserves properly to be punished" (G. W. Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, ed. by C. I. Gerhardt, 7 vols (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1875-1890), vol. III, p. 415; hereafter GP, followed by volume and page).

[45] G. W. Leibniz, *Textes inédits d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Provinciale de Hanovre*, ed. by G. Grua, 2 vols. (Paris: PUF, 1948), vol. 1, p. 216.

[46] Cf. Descartes, *Fourth Meditation*: "the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use to matters which I do not understand. Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin." (René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. by C. Adam and P. Tannery, 12 vols. (Paris: Léopold Cerf, 1897–1910), vol. VII, p. 58; trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-1991), vol. 2, pp. 40-1).

[47] Pierre Bayle, *A Philosophical Commentary on These Words of the Gospel, Luke 14:23, "Compel Them to Come In, That My House May Be Full"*, ed. by John Kilcullen and Chandran Kukathas, general ed. Knud Haakonssen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), chap. xvii, p. 485.

> The new Philosophers teach with a great deal of Reason, that what was formerly call'd the second Operation of the Understanding, is truly an Operation of the Will; that's to say, all the Judgements we make upon Objects, whether by affirming concerning 'em that they are such and such, or by denying, are Acts proceeding from the Soul, not as capable of perceiving and knowing, but as capable of willing. Whence it follows, that since Error consists in our affirming concerning Objects what does not belong to 'em, or in our denying what does, therefore every Error is an Act of the Will, and consequently voluntary.[48]

Bayle pointed out, however, that to conclude, from these epistemological premises, that "all Error proceeds from a Source of Corruption, and consequently deserves Hell-Punishment" is absurd. Also within a Cartesian epistemological framework one could and should distinguish between culpable and non-culpable error. According to Bayle, "there are Errors which are innocent tho voluntary."[49] The difference between sinful and non-sinful error rested, for him, on the *motives* which have led the will to an erroneous judgement, not on the object presented by the understanding to the will for its judgement:

> All Error is sinful, when the Party is led into or entertain'd in it by any Principle of which one knows the Disorder, as a Love of Ease, a Spirit of Contradiction, Jealousy, Envy, Vanity. … But I dare not make the same Judgment on a Man, who without any secret Reserve, or hidden Motive whose Obliquity he perceives or knows … quits the best Sect of Christianity, to embrace one with a thousand Errors in it. … all the Morality which enters into the Acts of our Soul, proceeds from the Motives which determine it, with the Knowledge of the Cause, to direct these Acts towards certain Objects; … the Nature of the Objects makes no alteration, consider'd as it is in it self, but only as envisaged in the Understanding.[50]

Bayle recognised, however, that neither the affirmation of the non-culpability of an erroneous conscience, nor the non-voluntariness of belief supported by Locke and Leibniz, provided on their own a sufficient basis for a general theory of toleration. To start with, one had still to

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[48] Bayle, *A Philosophical Commentary*, chap. xvii, p. 486.

[49] Ibid. pp. 485-7.

[50] Ibid. pp. 488-91. See also p. 494.

contend with the Augustinian view that, even if belief is not voluntary, some amount of coercion in religious matters is still justified. Measures ranging from compulsory attendance of Sunday classes to forced removal of children from their heretical parents to be raised in the true religion, so the argument went, may well result in sincere belief. As for the non-culpability of an erroneous conscience, this doctrine would oblige one to defend the non-culpability of the conscientious persecutor who sincerely believed he had a duty to spread his religion with all means, including burning heretics and engaging in holy war against the infidel.[51]

**Toleration of all but the intolerant as a path to toleration**

One way to address the conscientious-persecutor objection, would be to endorse toleration of all but the intolerant. Both Bayle and Locke proposed versions of this view. Bayle, who courageously affirmed in the *Philosophical Commentary* that "Toleration is the thing in the world best fitted for retrieving the Golden Age, and producing a Harmonious Consort of different Voices",[52] went on in the same chapter to clarify:

> I extremely approve, and think it the indispensable Duty of Princes, if new Sects arise, who offer to insult the Ministers of the establish'd Religion, or offer the least Violence to those who persevere in the old way, to punish these Sectarys by all due and requisite methods, and even with Death if occasion be; because in this case they betray a persecuting Spirit, they break the Peace, and aim at the Subversion of political Laws.[53]

Locke, on his part, wrote in the *Essay concerning Toleration* of 1667:

> Papists are not to enjoy the benefit of toleration because where they have power they thinke them selves bound to deny it to others. For it is unreasonable that any should have a free liberty of their religion, who doe not acknowledg it as a principle of theirs that noe body ought to persecute or molest an other because he dissents from him in religion. … It being impossible either by indulgence or severity to make Papists whilst

[51] Cf. ibid. pp. 242, 333-4, 356-9, 360, 375-81, 512-4.

[52] Ibid. chap. vi, p. 200.

[53] Ibid. p. 202.

> Papists freinds to your government being enemys to it both in their principles &; interest, & therefor considering them as irreconcileable enemys of whose fidelity you can never be securd, whilst they owe a blinde obedience to an infalible pope, who has the keys of their consciences tied to his girdle, & can upon occasion dispense with all their oaths promises & the obligations they have to their prince espetially being an heritick.[54]

In the later *Letter concerning Toleration*, Locke adopted a more nuanced stance toward Roman Catholics. On the one hand, he maintained that all speculative opinions should be tolerated if they have "no manner of relation to the Civil Rights of Subjects," explicitly giving as an example the Roman Catholic belief in Eucharistic transubstantiation.[55] On the other hand, he reaffirmed that

> That Church can have no right to be tolerated by the Magistrate, which is constituted upon such a bottom, that all those who enter into it, do thereby, *ipso facto*, deliver themselves to the Protection and Service of another Prince. … Nor does the frivolous and fallacious distinction between the Court and the Church afford any remedy to this Inconvenience; especially when both the one and the other are equally subject to the absolute Authority of the same person[.][56]

No one could miss the reference to Roman Catholics, especially when coupled with the mention, a few paragraphs earlier, of those "who teach that *Faith is not to be kept with Heriticks*"[57] – a view widely denounced by Protestants as the underpinning of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.[58]

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[54] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration*, ed. by Philip Milton and J. R. Milton, [The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke] **(**Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 290-1. Cf. Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, pp. 193-4.

[55] Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 40: "If a *Roman Catholick* believe that to be really the Body of Christ, which another man calls Bread, he does no injury thereby to his Neighbour." Later in the *Letter*, pp. 53-4, Locke maintained that public worship should be permitted to all "those whose doctrine is peaceable".

[56] Ibid. p. 47.

[57] Ibid. p. 46.

[58] See John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 691.

Although adopting the rule of excluding from toleration only the intolerant may seem straight-forward, it proved far from easy to determine in practice who counted as intolerant and therefore intolerable.[59] Bayle presumably did not intend to number Protestants amongst his "new Sects," or Roman Catholics amongst "those who persevere in the old way," but it is not difficult to imagine Pope Leo X thinking that Martin Luther was indeed "insulting the Ministers of the establish'd Religion" by identifying the Roman Pontiff with the Anti-Christ, thereby "breaking the Peace" and deserving punishment "by all due and requisite methods." Similarly, a peaceful atheist in Locke's England may well have been excused for thinking that the intolerant one was Locke in denying toleration to atheists on the ground of their alleged unfitness for moral life.[60] Spinoza's advice that it was only "seditious opinions [opiniones seditiosae]" which should not be tolerated does not seem to help either, given that his own opinions were regarded as seditious (not least by his own Jewish community) and were, therefore, not tolerated.[61]

The exclusion of Roman Catholics from toleration, supported by both Bayle and Locke, is a particularly interesting example of the difficulty of disentangling contingent political reasons for regarding a certain religion as intolerable, from a principled appraisal of any religion's claim to toleration.[62] This exclusion is not uncommonly mentioned en passant as an unremarkable matter of course. One may think that it went without saying that toleration could not be granted to masters of intolerance such as Louis XIV. This approach,

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[59] Marshall's monumental study documents in great detail that the justification of intolerance, with the attendant intolerant practices, was widespread amongst Protestants as amongst Catholics. Not only followers of Luther and Calvin joined Catholics in defending their right to coerce and stop with whatever means the spread of 'heresy'; religious intolerance was theorized and practised also amongst Anglicans, Huguenots, the Dutch Reformed Church, and even Polish Socinians, has shown by the imprisonment of Ferenc David for his Christological views.

[60] See Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 48.

[61] See *TTP*, chap. 20. Cf. Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, p. 205: "it is important to recognise how difficult it is to draw the boundary between the harmful, 'seditious' opinions, which Spinoza wants to exclude on the grounds that they constitute actions, and the unorthodox opinions that the citizens are permitted to express."

[62] On the exclusion of Catholics from toleration, with particular reference to Bayle and Locke, cf. Marshall, *John Locke*, pp. 681-694. It should be noted that in Locke as in Bayle there are also signs of a more nuanced attitude towards Catholics. In the *Philosophical Commentary*, while listing "particular reasons against tolerating Papists", and advising that states with "Papists still in their Bosom, shou'd keep 'em chain'd up like so many Lions … by the severest Penal Laws," Bayle also supported the "private Exercise of their Religion," including their right to raise children "in their own Faith" (pp. 185, 191).

however, arises less from a careful scrutiny of early modern Catholicism than from the deep-seated English tendency to conflate continental Europe with France. Half of continental Europe was Roman Catholic, and most of it regarded Louis XIV as their worst enemy. Indeed, the principal opponent of the Sun-King was another Roman Catholic, namely the Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold of Habsburg. Far from trying to use his power to deny toleration to Protestants (as Locke claimed Roman Catholic authorities always do), the Emperor sponsored talks for the reunification of Catholics and Protestants. Locke's claim that Roman Catholics could not in principle be trusted because of their oath of allegiance to a foreign power must have seemed wishful thinking to Pope Clement VII, cowering in the Castel St'Angelo as the armies of the Catholic Charles V sacked Rome in 1527. In Locke's days, his doctrine must have elicited a wry smile from the Popes of Louis XIV's reign, struggling as they were to maintain theological authority (let alone political power) over France against the push of Gallicanism, spear-headed by the preceptor to the Dauphin and Bishop of Meaux, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet.

Locke, Bayle, and other authors' perception of Roman Catholics, and of Jesuits in particular, as intolerable,[63] was equally at odds with the experience of a subject of the Holy Roman Empire such as Leibniz. A Lutheran for all his life, Leibniz's intellectually most open patrons and friends included Roman Catholics, amongst them not a few Jesuits, whose efforts at the *propagatio fidei per scientiam* he greatly admired.[64] In the Empire, Roman Catholics such as the Archbishop of Mainz, Johann Philipp von Schönborn, or Duke Johann Friedrich of Hanover, ran tolerant courts and organized ecumenical colloquia. Protestant Princes received Papal envoys with pomp and ceremony. Catholic and Protestant Electors sat together in the Imperial Diet in Regensburg, and the three main Christian confessions which they represented (Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist) were not merely tolerated but legally guaranteed the right to practice their religion with the full protection of the law – a remarkable feat achieved through the adoption of a legal framework which suspended judgement on the truth claims of rival confessions as a means to ensure the cohabitation of competing doctrinal systems.[65]

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[63] Cf. Marshall, *John Locke*, pp. 689, 691.

[64] They included Baron Johann Christian von Boineburg, Archbishop Johann Philipp von Schönborn, Duke Johann Friedrich of Hannover, Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, Bishop Rojas y Spinola, Joachim Bouvet, and Bartholomew Des Bosses.

[65] The suspension of religious truth claims as a condition of religious pluralism was also discussed among eighteenth-century German constitutional jurists. Such 'suspension' seems to constitute a form of legal

In brief, viewed from the pluralistic perspective of the Holy Roman Empire rather than the fiercely anti-papal England after the Glorious Revolution, the exclusion from toleration of millions of Roman Catholics was not a minor omission.[66] Rather, it reflected a theory of toleration still heavily influenced by contingent political reasons which were universalized as grounds for a principled denial of toleration to Europe largest and oldest religious denomination. Although it softened over the years, it is remarkable that Locke maintained a strong anti-Catholicism despite the fact that calls for the toleration of Catholics were spreading in his own circle, not least voiced by the very translator of his *Letter concerning Toleration*, William Popple.[67] English Catholics such as John Gother, did point out that it was a misrepresentation of Catholics to regard them as embracing the principle "to keep no faith with any that are reputed heretics."[68] Locke, on his part, in the *Letter concerning Toleration*, still regarded Catholics as, strictly speaking, not even qualifying as heretics. To be a heretic, he reasoned, one has to belong to the same religion. Due to the reliance on authority and tradition as the rule of their faith, as opposed to *sola Scriptura*, Catholics were of another religion altogether than Protestants.[69] This view seems to suggest that Locke's resistance to granting toleration to Catholics was not based purely on political grounds (as it is commonly assumed) but also on theological reasons. The principle of Papal authority appears to have been regarded by both Locke and Bayle as an intrinsically

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agnosticism regarding religious truth which needs to be distinguished from the denial, minimalization, or homogenization of religious truth on the part of the state and its juridical system. I am grateful to Ian Hunter for drawing my attention to this issue.

[66] Interestingly, the Holy Roman Empire is not included in the extensive study of Marshall on *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* and Leibniz is barely mentioned in Forst's insightful volume *Toleration in Conflict*.

[67] Cf. William Popple, *A Letter to Mr Penn* (London, 1688), and *Three Letters Tending to Demonstrate How the Security of This Nation Against All Future Persecution for Religion, Lys in the Abolishment of the Present Penal Laws … and the Establishment of a New Law for Universal Liberty of Conscience* (London, 1688). See Marshall, *John Locke*, p. 692.

[68] See Gother's influential *A Papist Represented and Misrepresented* (London, 1685). Gother argued (p. 41): "Why therefore should the Character of the *Church* of *Rome* and her *Doctrine* be taken only from the loose Behaviour and wicked Crimes of such, who, tho' in Communion with her, yet live not according to her Direction? She teaches Holiness of life, Mercy to the Poor, Loyalty and Obedience to Princes, and the necessity of keeping the *Commandments*, (witness the many Books of Devotion and Direction, made *English* for Publick benefit, written originally by *Papists*,) and great numbers there are (God be prais'd) who practise this in their Lives." Marshall, *Locke*, p. 691 notes that Gother's work reached its third edition by 1687.

[69] See Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 57-8.

intolerant "forcing of conscience" which disqualified *ipso facto* Roman Catholicism from toleration. As Bayle wrote in the *Philosophical Commentary*,

> That Party which, if uppermost, wou'd tolerate no other, and wou'd force Conscience, ought not to be tolerated. Now such is the Church of *Rome*. Therefore it ought not to be tolerated. … there is this material difference between her [the Church of Rome] and us, that Non-Toleration on our part is depriv'd of that fearful Sting, that most odious and most criminal Quality which it has from Popery, to wit, the forcing of Conscience.[70]

Whether such judgment could be squared with the view that any belief (including, one may think, belief in a principle of authority in speculative doctrinal matters) had a right to be tolerated as long as it did not result in unlawful actions, is at best doubtful. Moreover, as anyone familiar with Shi'a Imams and Sharia Law would know, and as Spinoza had experienced in Amsterdam in his own Jewish community, a principle of authority in religious matters which could be construed as a "forcing of conscience" is far from unique to Roman Catholicism. Bayle had, of course, abundant reasons to denounce the appalling treatment to which he, his brother, and his co-religionists had been subjected at the hands of French Catholics. As a universalized approach, however, in different times and historical contexts, the line taken by Bayle and Locke against Roman Catholicism, could well be used (for instance) for an exclusion of Islam from toleration in traditionally Christian countries. The early modern view that some individual Catholics might have been tolerable although their religion as a whole was not, is no more helpful for a principled theory of toleration than the qualification by a present-day politician that "some [Mexicans], I assume, are good people."[71]

In any case, Locke concluded, the epithet of heretics ought instead to be reserved to those Protestants who made a "Separation … in their Christian Communion, for Opinions not

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[70] Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, pp. 193-4. See also p. 214: "*a Religion which forces Conscience, does not deserve to be tolerated*." Cf. Locke, *An Essay concerning Toleration*, p. 291: Roman Catholics cannot be tolerated because "they owe a blinde obedience to an infalible pope, who has the keys of their consciences tied to his girdle." Another Protestant, Leibniz, who lived side-by-side with Catholics in the different political context of the Holy Roman Empire, and had stayed for an extended period in Rome, came instead to a different view: "The authority of the pope which frightens off many people above all, in fact deters me least of all, since I believe that nothing can be understood as more useful to the Church than its correct use." (A VI, 4, 2286-7)

[71] Donald Trump, speech announcing his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination, New York (Manhattan), 16 June 2015.

contained in the express words of Scripture", such as (it turned out) "*Lutherans*, *Calvinists*, *Remonstrants*, *Anabatists*, and other Sects".[72]

**Religious truth minimalism as a path to toleration**

This quite extraordinary claim, for a champion of toleration, that not only Roman Catholics were not of the same religion as Protestants, but most Protestant churches may as well qualify as heretical, should be read in the context of the doctrine of fundamental and non-fundamental articles of faith. This doctrine was well established in Protestant circles, and constituted the backbone of one of the most influential approaches to religious toleration in the early modern period – an approach built upon the reduction to a minimum of the religious truths required for qualifying as Christians.

The key claim -- deeply grounded in the Protestant appeal to Scripture and its direct reading by the individual as the sole rule of faith -- was that all articles of faith necessary to salvation must be contained *in terminis* in Scripture. Only these articles are fundamental, and only these articles need to be embraced to be part of the Christian community. Toleration should be extended to all Christians who hold them as true, leaving all the rest to the liberty of individual opinion and indifferent matters.

In the early modern period, versions of this doctrine went back at least as far as the humanist approach of Erasmus, who proposed a distinction between the "childish trifles", or *adiaphora*, which divide the Church, and the essential core of Christianity, for the discovery of which it is necessary to go back to the sources of the Christian faith, the gospels.[73] In Remonstrant circles, all main authors embraced versions of the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles as a way to overcome ecclesiastical divisions, including Arminius, Grotius, and Limborch.

Likewise, in the Anglican Church, the focus on the core truths of Christianity, leaving the rest to the freedom of opinion, shaped Latitudinarian theology. Influenced especially by the thought of Grotius, Chillingworth, and the Cambridge Platonists, prominent Anglican divines such as Bishop Gilbert Burnet advocated this approach as the only solution to

[72] See Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 58-60.

[73] Cf. Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, esp. pp. 103-5, quoting Erasmus of Rotterdam, *The Manual of the Christian Knight*, [Enchiridion militis christiani] (London: Methuen, 1905), pp. 208-10.

controversies which were tearing apart not only Catholics and Protestants but also Protestants amongst themselves.[74]

Although a promising way forward in principle, finding agreement on what counted as fundamental articles proved far from straight-forward. To start with, the point which was controversial in the doctrine of fundamental and non-fundamental articles of faith, was not that there are some articles which are more fundamental than others, but that *all* the articles which are fundamental are contained clearly and explicitly in Scripture. Catholic champions of controversies with Protestants such as the Bishops of Cologne, the brothers Adrian and Peter van Walenburch, were quick to note that Protestants could not agree even amongst themselves about which articles were fundamental: "the Protestants read the Holy Scriptures diligently: nevertheless, they did not find a catalogue of necessary articles, which are proved sufficiently as such by Scripture alone. In establishing the necessary articles, Lutherans do not agree with Lutherans, nor Reformed with Reformed."[75]

Grotius himself had a taste of the bitterness of the intra-Protestant disagreement denounced by the van Walenburch. In his widely read *De Veritate Religionis Christianae* (1627), he defended the truth of the Christian religion on the basis of its conformity with natural reason as regards the existence of God and his attributes; its morally superior teaching; and the authenticity and lack of corruption of Scripture.[76] The treatise sailed virtually undisturbed through the Spanish and Venetian Inquisitions, and was applauded by eminent Roman Catholic clergymen, such as Cardinal Francesco Barberini. In this case it was hard-line Calvinists who loudly castigated Grotius as crypto-Socinian for the absence in *De Veritate* of the doctrine of Trinity.[77] Grotius, for his part, had deemed sufficient to show with historical and philological arguments the reliability of biblical texts, as befitting his view that

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[74] See, for instance, a letter of 27 February 1699 by Gilbert Burnet to Leibniz (A I, 16, 595).

[75] Adrian and Peter van Walenburch, *Tractatus Generales de Controversiis Fidei* (Cologne: I. W. Friess Jr., 1670), treatise III, section III, 23. The third treatise is devoted specifically to the problems raised by the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles of faith (*De Articulis Necessariis, Fundamentalibus, seu Essentialibus: Eorundemque Oppositis Erroribus*).

[76] Cf. Maria Rosa Antognazza, 'Introduction' in Hugo Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion. With Jean Le Clerc's Notes and Additions*, trans. by John Clarke (1743), ed. by Maria Rosa Antognazza, general ed. Knud Haakonssen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012).

[77] A notorious example of Calvinist intolerance toward Antitrinitarianism was the execution of Miguel Servetus in Geneva in 1553, supported by Calvin himself, who went on to justify persecution for the suppression of heresy.

Christians should turn directly to the reading of Scripture where all the necessary articles of faith were clearly and explicitly contained.

The acute frustration with divisions amongst Protestants on doctrinal issues was apparent in Locke's closing paragraphs of the *Letter on Toleration* in which, as we have seen, he went so far as to regard Protestant churches as heretical if they insisted on requiring as necessary articles of faith which were not directly contained in Scripture. Locke himself turned to Scripture, rigorously applying his criterion. The result was the *Reasonableness of Christianity* of 1695. After a full immersion into the New Testament, Locke emerged with the view that the only article of faith expressly required to become a Christian was to recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Such minimalism proved too much even for otherwise fairly Latitudinarian theologians. It was soon Locke's turn to be accused of Antitrinitarianism by Anglican divines, including not only Calvinists and High Churchmen like John Edwards, but also Latitudinarians like Edward Stillingfleet.[78]

In fact, precisely the doctrine of the Trinity, which had already caused trouble for Grotius, was at the centre of the dispute also in England. Although strongly endorsed by Lutherans and Calvinists alike, was it really contained *in terminis* in Scripture? And if not, were traditionally defining doctrines of Christianity at risk, including the divinity of Jesus Christ? The predictable answer by the likes of Adrian and Peter van Walenburch was to fall back into the view of the Roman Church: "*Without the tradition of the unwritten Word of God, and the witness of the Church, it is not possible to know what the necessary articles are.* . . . Without tradition, and the witness of the Church, no one can know the true meaning of the necessary articles[.]"[79]

Be that as it may, *mutando mutandis*, also Spinoza and Hobbes suggested a minimalist approach to religious belief through the identification of the only dogmas which "a catholic or universal faith" should contain.[80] "The (*Unum Necessarium*) Onely Article of Faith, which the Scripture maketh simply Necessary to salvation," Hobbes wrote in the

[78] Cf. John Edwards, *Some Thoughts concerning the several causes and occasions of Atheism* (London: J. Robinson and J. Wyat, 1695); John Edwards, *Socinianism Unmask'd* (London: J. Robinson, 1696); Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Henry Mortlock, 1697).

[79] Van Walenburch, *Tractatus Generales de Controversiis Fidei*, treatise III, section XVI, 30.

[80] *TTP*, chap.14 (pp. 517-8). As discussed above, the category of 'truth' does not really apply to these dogmas.

*Leviathan*, "is this, that *Jesus is the Christ*."[81] Everything else, including which consequences follow or do not follow from this single article, was for the sovereign to regulate.[82]

Other authors of various stripes drew up their own lists of what was necessary and sufficient for salvation, increasingly basing the short-listing process on the reduction of religion to natural religion.[83] As early as 1633, Herbert of Cherbury's *De Veritate* identified five *notitiae communes* (common notions) in which was distilled the fundamental content of true religion. These common notions (namely, that there is a supreme Deity, that worship is due to this supreme Deity, that the most important aspect of this worship was a life of virtue and piety, that vices and wicked actions must be expiated by repentance, and that there is reward or punishment after this life), defined, in his view, the true catholic or universal church.[84] Since "God, at all Times, has given Mankind sufficient Means, of knowing whatever he requires of them," Matthew Tindal argued in 1730, there was no need for churches and their worship. "The Religion of Nature is an absolutely perfect Religion; and…external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from its Perfection." On the contrary, any deviation from natural religion could only be detrimental to true religion.[85] Last but not least, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea of a minimalist "civil religion" as a necessary basis for maintaining sovereignty, stretched into the eighteenth century Hobbes' inheritance of a state entrusted with religion and morality.[86]

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[81] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vol. 3, p. 938.

[82] Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vol. 3, esp. p. 952. Cf. also Samuel Pufendorf's advocacy of the state's right to establish a uniform, official worship and creed (*De habitu religionis christianae ad vitam civilem*, 1687; English translation: *Of the Nature and Qualification of Religion in Reference to Civil Society*, trans. by Jodocus Crull, ed. by Simone Zurbuchen, general ed. Knud Haakonssen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), sec. 49: "it is to be wished, and ought to be endeavoured, to procure but one Faith and Religion in a State … But where there is not any Publick Form of Religion established in a Commonwealth, it is the Sovereign's care, that one may be composed by the assistance of such as are well versed in the Holy Scripture, which being approved by the general consent of his Subjects, ought to be professed by all"; see also sec. 7).

[83] Cf. for instance *A Summary Account of the Deists Religion* in Charles Blount, *The Oracles of Reason* (London, 1693) and Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as old as the Creation: or, The Gospel, a republication of the Religion of Nature* (London, 1730).

[84] Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate* (London, 1633), pp. 208–21.

[85] Tindal, *Christianity as old as the Creation*, pp. v-vii.

[86] See Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, p. 196. Forst notes the shortcomings for toleration of a conception based on a minimalist approach which purchases "the possibility of toleration at the price of declaring religious differences, which give rise to the most acrimonious conflicts, to be merely 'incidental matters', and in addition at the risk of according primacy to the contents of one's own religion in a supposedly higher-order, neutral core

The question still to be answered, however, is whether the drastic reduction of the doctrinal content of religion is in itself always a remedy to intolerance. Requiring everyone to hold that only a certain minimal set of beliefs is sufficient is not *per se* tolerant of what (rightly or wrongly) religious believers actually believe to be essential to their relationship with God, eternal life, and so on. Their disagreement is precisely on whether their beliefs over and above the proposed minimal core of religious truth are dispensable. To answer that these beliefs can be tolerated as long as they are declared non-fundamental is tantamount to the non-toleration of these belief-systems. If Moses's special mission, or the divinity of Christ, or the divine inspiration of the Qur'an, are essential tenets of true religion for their religious communities, it would not help to say that Moses, Christ, and Mahoumet may well be three impostors since all acceptable religion is to be reduced to some minimal truths of natural reason.[87] In other words, the danger of intolerance is far from over even if it comes from an enlightened, minimalist religion which rules out as heretical, or unacceptable, or dispensable supposedly less enlightened religious beliefs and their manifestations. Paradoxically, by labelling all members of all mainstream confessions – Catholics and Protestants – heretics from the perspective of his minimalistic creed, Locke was being intolerant of the beliefs of a far larger share of the European population than the confessional churches were.

## The unknowability of religious truth as a path to toleration

A different approach which fully acknowledged revealed truths while opening a path to toleration was based on the traditional distinction between "contrary to reason" and "above reason".[88] Both Locke and Leibniz defended an epistemic space for truths which are "above

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religion. This is shown not least by where the limits of toleration are drawn, namely with those who do not agree with this core religion, and this concerns not just atheists" (p. 262).

[87] Cf. the famous *Traité des trois imposteurs* which circulated in manuscript form under various titles until it was published in Amsterdam in 1719.

[88] A version of this distinction is found, for instance, in Thomas Aquinas (see *Summa contra Gentiles*, Book 1, chap. 7: "The truth of reason is not contrary to the truth of the Christian faith. Although the truth of the Christian faith which we have discussed surpasses the capacity of human reason, nevertheless what reason is naturally endowed with cannot be contrary to that truth"). An extensive study tracking this distinction in early modern British thought is offered by Mario Sina, *L'avvento della ragione: 'Reason' and 'above Reason' dal razionalismo teologico inglese al deismo* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1976).

reason," while adamantly rejecting the claim that there can be truths "against reason." Their religious epistemologies sharply distinguished between the sphere of knowledge and the sphere of belief and faith.[89] The proper epistemic sphere of faith was, for them, the sphere of truths "above reason" which are not *known* but *believed*. Such beliefs, however, ought to be rationally justified. In other words, according to their conceptions of knowledge, truths "above reason" are unknowable but not irrational.

This was not, however, a sceptical position, since the objective truth of revelation was fully endorsed. [90] In fact, according to them, there are also religious truths which are demonstrable (e.g. the existence of God) and which are, therefore, knowable. On the other hand, most religious truths cannot, in the strict sense of the term, be known, leading to a religious epistemology which is tolerant toward religious diversity.

Locke embedded these distinctions into the innovative conception of knowledge and its limits explored in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. "*Knowledge*," he wrote, "seems to me to be nothing but *the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas.* In this alone it consists." It extends, therefore, only as far as we can perceive the agreement or disagreement between our ideas: "Where this Perception is, there is Knowledge, and where it is not, there, though we may fancy, guess, or believe, yet we always come short of Knowledge."[91]

When we cannot *perceive* (by intuition or demonstration) the agreement or disagreement amongst our ideas, we leave the sphere of knowledge and enter the sphere of judgment,[92] that is to say, we *judge* (as opposed to perceive) whether two or more ideas agree or disagree on the basis of testimony from others and external evidence. The sphere of judgement is the sphere of *belief*, defined by Locke as "admitting, or receiving any

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[89] It should be noted that also this distinction was not new. For instance, it is explicitly proposed by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* IIa IIae, q. 1, art. 4 and 5.

[90] The claim that the roots of Locke's doctrine of toleration are to be found in theological scepticism is strongly rejected by Sina in 'Tolleranza religiosa e scetticismo in Locke.'

[91] Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, chap. i, § 2.

[92] Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, chap. xiv, § 4 (Nidditch ed., p. 653): "Thus the Mind has two Faculties, conversant about Truth and Falshood. *First, Knowledge*, whereby it certainly perceives, and is undoubtedly satisfied of the Agreement or Disagreement of any *Ideas*. *Secondly, Judgment*, which is the putting *Ideas* together, or separating them from one another in the Mind, when their certain Agreement or Disagreement is not perceived, but *presumed* to be so; which is, as the Word imports, taken to be so before it certainly appears. And if it so unites, or separates them, as in Reality Things are, it is *right Judgment*." Cf. also Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, chap. xv, § 1.

Proposition for true, upon Arguments or Proofs that are found to perswade us to receive it as true, without certain Knowledge that it is so." Such belief or assent has degrees that range "from full *Assurance* and Confidence, quite down to *Conjecture*, *Doubt*, and *Distrust*."[93]

When testimony is from God himself, Locke continued, that is, when we are confronted with divine Revelation, our assurance of the truth of what is revealed is as strong as any certainty we reach through knowledge:

> Besides those we have hitherto mentioned, there is one sort of Propositions that challenge the highest Degree of our Assent, upon bare Testimony, whether the thing proposed, agree or disagree with common Experience, and the ordinary course of Things, or no. The Reason whereof is, because the Testimony is of such an one, as cannot deceive, nor be deceived, and that is of God himself. This carries with it Assurance beyond Doubt, Evidence beyond Exception. This is called by a peculiar Name, *Revelation*, and our Assent to it, *Faith*: which as absolutely determines our Minds, and as perfectly excludes all wavering as our Knowledge it self; and we may as well doubt of our own Being, as we can, whether any Revelation from GOD be true. So that Faith is a setled and sure Principle of Assent and Assurance, and leaves no manner of room for Doubt or Hesitation.[94]

However, to avoid the risk of falling into religious fanaticism or "enthusiasm," we must be sure that what we are believing is a genuine divine revelation, and not something absurd or irrational. Locke distinguished therefore between propositions which are "according to reason," propositions which are "against reason," and propositions which are "above reason" – the latter constituting, as we have seen, the proper sphere of faith.[95]

Leibniz proposed a similar religious epistemology.[96] "A truth will never be against reason," we read in the *Theodicy*, "and very far from a dogma fought and refuted by reason

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[93] Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, chap. xv, § 2 and 3.

[94] Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, chap. xvi, § 14.

[95] Cf. Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, chap. xvii, § 23 and chap. xviii, § 6.

[96] For a full discussion see Maria Rosa Antognazza, 'Faith and Reason' in Maria Rosa Antognazza (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Leibniz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming) and 'The Conformity of Faith with Reason in the "Discours Préliminaire" of the *Theodicy*' in Paul Rateau (ed.), *Lectures et interprétations des Essais de théodicée de G. W. Leibniz* [*Studia Leibnitiana* Sonderhefte 40] (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2011), pp. 231-45.

being incomprehensible, one can say that nothing is easier to comprehend nor more manifest than its absurdity."[97] Truths, however, can be "above reason":

> what is against reason is against the absolutely certain and indispensable truths; and what is above reason, is only against what one commonly experiences or comprehends. … This distinction is certainly well founded. A truth is above reason, when our spirit (or even every created spirit) cannot comprehend it: and such is, in my opinion, the Holy Trinity; such are the miracles reserved to God alone, as, for example, the Creation; such is the choice of the order of the Universe, which depends on the Universal Harmony, and on the distinct knowledge of an infinite number of things at once.[98]

But how can we be assured that a proposition which we "cannot comprehend" is not merely "above reason" but "contrary to reason"? In other words, how can we test the non-contradictoriness of what is "above reason"? Leibniz tackled the problem head-on, devising a sophisticated religious epistemology based on the notion of "presumption". For doctrines "above reason," the non-contradictoriness of which cannot be positively demonstrated, one can appeal to a "presumption" of possibility which remains valid until there is proof to the contrary, that is, until someone is able to demonstrate impossibility. In other words, putative revealed doctrines are 'innocent' until proved 'guilty'. A religious believer is rationally justified in holding them as true, on the basis of motives of credibility such as a long ecclesiastical tradition, until a proof of contradictoriness is forthcoming.[99]

Moreover, Leibniz noted, presumption "has the power to shift the *onus probandi in adversarium*, or of charging the opponent with the burden of proof."[100] The task of the believer is merely to respond to objections against the possibility of doctrines held as true, not to present positive arguments in their favor. The believer's bet is that there will be no proof of

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[97] Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 'Preliminary Discourse', § 23; GP VI, 64.

[98] Ibid.

[99] See, for instance, Leibniz's early *Defensio Trinitatis*: "Until the contrary has been more adequately proved, we will continue to maintain this statement: that the Son and the Holy Spirit are he who is the one God" (A VI, 1, 520); "Anything is presumed [to be] possible until the contrary is proved" (A VI, 1, 522). Later on, in 1702, Leibniz repeated (GP III, 444): "possibility is always presumed and must be held as true until impossibility is proved."

[100] GP III, 444.

contradictoriness since an authentic revelation can never be against reason.[101] In principle, however, it cannot be excluded that what was believed to be true could in fact be demonstrated to be false, and hence not at all a divine revelation. "Faith is to believe," Leibniz thought, and "to believe is to hold as true [verum putare]" as opposed to *knowing* that something is true.[102] As in the case of *any* belief, the possibility of error could not be excluded.

In this way, belief in objective revealed truth was wedded by both Locke and Leibniz to a more humble epistemic attitude that does not claim knowledge of truths above reason, and "does not imagine that reason is always on its side."[103] After all, as Locke noted in the *Letter concerning Toleration*, "every Church is Orthodox to it self; to others, Erroneous or Heretical."[104]

A more radical affirmation of the unknowability of religious truth was found in the author most directly targeted by the 'Preliminary Discourse' of Leibniz's *Theodicy*, namely, Pierre Bayle. In his enormously influential *Dictionaire historique et critique*, Bayle claimed that reason was "a way which leads astray," "a principle of destruction, and not of edification," due to its relentless doubting.[105] Most importantly, reason could not reconcile the presence of evil in the world with the Christian conception of an omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God.[106] This failure, however, was a consequence of human reason's weakness and should not result in a rejection of revelation. Rather, in matters of faith, reason should be silenced, fully acknowledging its incapacity to attain what is superior to it.[107] Religious truths handed down by revelation were not denied. But, as regards religion,

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[101] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. I, a. 8: "since faith is based on infallible truth, and it is impossible to demonstrate the contrary of truth, it is evident that arguments brought against faith are not demonstrations but arguments that can be answered".

[102] *Commentatiuncula de judice controversiarum*, c. 1669-1670 (A VI, 1, 550).

[103] Leibniz's remark on a letter by Paul Pellisson-Fontanier of 4 September 1690 (A I, 6, 87). Cf. Maria Rosa Antognazza, 'Leibniz and Religious Toleration: the Correspondence with Paul Pellisson-Fontanier', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 76/4 (2002), 601-22 and 'Leibniz's doctrine of toleration: philosophical, theological and pragmatic reasons' in J. Parkin and T. Stanton (eds.), *Natural Law and Toleration in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press – The British Academy, 2013), pp. 139-64.

[104] Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 16.

[105] Pierre Bayle, *Dictionaire historique et critique*, 2nd ed. (Rotterdam, 1702), pp. 2432 and 2026.

[106] Cf. Bayle, *Dictionaire*, article 'Manichéens', D.

[107] Cf. for instance Bayle, *Dictionaire*, articles 'Bunel', E; 'Pyrrhon', G.

no one could claim to *know* to be in possession of absolute truth.[108] Thus, in the *Philosophical Commentary*, Bayle argued:

> If you demand any thing further [than searching for the Truth], it's plain you demand that a Man shou'd fix his Love and Zeal on nothing but absolute Truth, known certainly and acknowled'g for such. Now it is impossible, in our present state, to know certainly that the Truth which to us appears such (I speak here of the Truths of Religion in particular, and not of the Propertys of Numbers, or the first Principles of Metaphysics, or Geometrical Demonstrations) is absolutely and really the Truth … It's plain then, we can't by any infallible Mark or Character distinguish what is really Truth when we believe it[.][109]

This epistemic status of religious truth constituted one of the pillars of Bayle's doctrine of toleration.[110] Once acknowledged, Catholics and Protestants alike could no longer maintain that their use of coercion was justified by their knowledge of possessing truth. Given human epistemic weakness, the only thing one could do was to follow what sincerely *appeared* true to his/her individual conscience, abandoning any pretence of *knowledge* of absolute religious truths to be forced upon others.

**Religious truth as a path to toleration**

Revealed truth embraced by faith could, in turn, help ground an inclusive theory of toleration. The aim of Bayle's massive *Philosophical Commentary* on the words of Luke 14.23, "Compel them to come in, that my house may be full" was to reject a literal interpretation justifying religious coercion. Such an interpretation, Bayle argued, was contrary to the spirit of the gospel:[111]

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[108] Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, argues against a sceptical interpretation of Bayle's position, tentatively suggesting the neologism of "rational fideism" (p. 257, footnote 183). His conclusion is that "Bayle was the first thinker to develop this notion of 'reasonable faith' in such a consistent way" (p. 257). It seems to me, however, that Locke and Leibniz developed robustly consistent notions of 'reasonable faith' without sliding, like Bayle, into fideism and its possible 'enthusiastic' excesses (to use Locke's phrase).

[109] Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, pp. 261-2. See also pp. 263, 272.

[110] Cf. Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, pp. 238-65.

[111] See in particular Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, Part I, ch. 3.

> The more any Religion requires the Heart, the Good-will, a Persuasion thorowly enlighten'd, and a reasonable Service, as the Gospel does, the farther it shou'd be from any kind of Constraint. I observe in the second place, that the principal Character of Jesus Christ, and, if I may say it, the reigning Qualitys of His Soul, were Humility, Meekness, and Patience[.][112]

Similar considerations contributed to reorienting Locke's views on toleration from their initial focus on juridical issues,[113] to a more capacious theory appealing to the teaching of the New Testament itself. Especially in the context of the Protestant's emphasis on the direct reading of Scripture, this line of argument provided a path followed by a number of authors.

Toleration, Leibniz wrote, is "necessary on account of the principle of Christian charity";[114] "it is clear that the spirit of Christianity should lead to mildness".[115] In his *Institutiones Theologicae* (1650–51), Episcopius had already proclaimed the opposition between coercion and "the law of charity, clemency and grace" promulgated by Jesus Christ.[116] Revisiting the history of the inquisition, Limborch denounced the contrariety of persecution to the original teaching of the Gospel and of the primitive Church. "The precepts of the Gospel themselves," he noted, "exude only charity and love; the Saviour calls charity his new precept, from which he wishes his disciples to be recognized. But nothing is more opposed to charity than the punishment of the errant".[117] Locke's *Letter concerning Toleration*, addressed to Limborch himself, took as its point of departure precisely this sort of theological considerations:

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[112] Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, p. 83. See also p. 84.

[113] Cf. the two early *Treatises on Government*.

[114] A I, 14, 691.

[115] A I, 4, 341. Cf. also *Oeuvres de Leibniz*, ed. by A. Foucher de Careil, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1869), vol. 2, p. 173: "Charity (which is the highest of virtues), the love of peace, so recommended by Jesus-Christ, and the proofs of Christian moderation given for such a long time by this side [i.e. the Lutherans], demand that we omit nothing now which is in our power and which could serve to remove or diminish the unfortunate schism which is so harmful to souls and which has rent the West for over a century and a half[.]"

[116] Cf. Episcopius, *Institutiones Theologicae*, Book III, chap. 9, 2, in Episcopius, *Opera Theologica*, I/I, 2nd ed. (London, 1678), p. 104.

[117] Philipp van Limborch, *Historia Inquisitionis* (Amsterdam, 1692), p. 2.

> I esteem that Toleration to be the chief Characteristical Mark of the True Church. For whatsoever 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; All, of the Orthodoxy of their Faith; (for everyone is Orthodox to himself:) These things, and all others of this nature, are much rather Marks of Men striving for Power and Empire over one another, than of the Church of Christ. Let any one have never so true a Claim to all these things, yet if he be destitute of Charity, Meekness, and Good-will in general toward all Mankind, even to those that are not Christians, he is certainly yet short of being a true Christian himself.[118]

**Universal truth, natural law, and natural rights as a path to toleration**

On the other hand, a line of argument drawing on the teaching of the gospel could not claim the universality needed for a theory of toleration fully sharable also by non-Christians. Many of the authors appealing to Scripture to ground toleration, however, took the view that the relevant teaching of the gospel agreed with natural reason. Thinkers like Leibniz would argue that since both reason and revelation come from God, there could be no opposition between them.[119] It was, therefore, far from surprising that universal moral truths discoverable by natural reason, and inscribed in human nature by its creator, were in conformity with the gospel. Most importantly for the matter at hand, the gospel's golden rule "do to others what you would have them do to you,"[120] in both his positive and negative formulations, endorsed a universal rule of reciprocity to which "the light of nature, or the first principles of reason universally receiv'd" already led.[121]

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[118] Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 1. The examples of Locke and Limborch show with particular clarity how religious truth minimalism of a doctrinal sort could be combined with appeals to the model of Christ as the bearer of a morally edifying religious truth which supports toleration.

[119] *Theodicy*, 'Preliminary Discourse', §§ 39, 61. This thesis, of course, was not novel. See for instance Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 1, chaps 3-8.

[120] See Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31. The negative form "do not do to others what you would not like done to yourselves" is attested in Tob. 4:15 and in 2nd century Christian documents. The 'golden rule' is found also in various forms in Jewish, Ancient Greek, and Roman writings, and in Confucius.

[121] Cf. Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, p. 65 and part I, ch. 3. Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, identifies this rule of reciprocity, independent of particular religious assumptions, as one of the two complementary elements of a novel normative-epistemological foundation by Bayle of a general theory of toleration (see esp. pp. 246-50, 255, 264). In their introduction to Bayle's *Philosophical Commentary*, John Kilcullen and Chandran Kukatas stress

'Universality' was precisely the missing element of other approaches to toleration. Only a theory grounded in universal truths, presented by the natural light of reason common to all human beings, could aspire to true generality. This stress on universality was in itself nothing new to the early modern period. In fact, it constituted the backbone of medieval theories of natural law of which Thomas Aquinas had given the most influential formulation. In one of his writings, Aquinas stated that the natural law "is nothing other than the light of intellect infused within us by God. Thanks to this, we know what must be done and what must be avoided. This light or this law has been given by God to creation."[122]

As the "participation in the rational creature of the eternal law" governing all creatures, the natural law was conceived by Aquinas as proper to human nature and as universally shared by humankind due to its being a manifestation of natural reason. "The light of natural reason," he concluded, "whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the sphere of pertinence of natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light."[123]

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the grounding of natural law in eternal reason was sized upon by Jesuit thought to stress the independence of natural law from any will, including the will of God.[124] Francisco Suarez distinguished between 'content' and 'form' of natural law. Grotius went further, attempting to show that not only the 'content' of natural law would be valid independently of God's will; there could be 'obligation' to follow the natural law even without God because the honouring of rights was good and obligatory in itself.[125] In this way, Grotius prepared the ground for a notion of moral autonomy of human beings on which a general and principled theory of toleration could be founded.

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that "the mark of Bayle's intellectual style is his energetic effort to argue from 'common principles'" (p. xxi) and that, for him, "natural law must guide the interpretation of religious doctrine." (p. xvi)

[122] Thomas Aquinas, *In Duo Praecepta Caritatis et in Decem Legis Praecepta Expositio*, c. I, in *Opuscola Theologica*, vol. II: *De re spirituali* (Turin – Rome: Marietti, 1954), p. 245.

[123] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia-IIae, q. 91, a. 2. The key texts for the formulation of Aquinas's theory of natural law are questions 90-7 in *Summa Theologiae* Ia-IIae. See especially question 94.

[124] See Knud Haakonssen, 'Natural law' in Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), vol. II, and Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: from Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 1.

[125] See Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*, pp. 26-9. For an illuminating account of the journey from natural law to natural rights as underived fundamental moral features of human beings, see ibid. ch. 10. For Grotius's definition of right/rights (*jus/jura*) see Hugo Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis* [*The law of war and peace*], I.1.iii-iv and ix.

Independently of particular religious views, or even of any reference to God, human beings could appeal to a universal rule of reciprocity presented by the natural light of reason.[126]

It was this light, Bayle strongly argued, that unequivocally rejected a literal interpretation of Luke's *Compelle intrare*.[127] According to Bayle, although natural reason was unable to attain religious truths, it did know moral principles, notably "the natural Idea of Equity" which regulated all other moral laws:

> We can never be assur'd of the truth of any thing farther than as agreeable to that primitive and universal Light, which God diffuses in the Souls of Men, and which infallibly and irresistibly draws on their Assent the moment they lend their Attention. … my meaning is, that all moral Laws, without exception, ought to be regulated by that natural Idea of Equity, which, as well as metaphysical Light, *enlightens every Man coming into the World*.[128]

Leibniz, on his part, appealed to the "natural right [droit naturelle] to express what one believes to be the truth," to cast doubts on the "right to proceed … to the ultimate punishment" even in the case of atheists. It is not opinions but actions which are punishable and, most importantly, it is "natural right" which provides the criteria for identifying intolerable actions:

> it is against natural right to punish someone because he is of some opinion, no matter which, as opposed to punishing someone for some actions; *for the penalty for one who is mistaken is to be taught*. And again, I do not believe that we have the right to punish someone with corporal pains for actions which he undertakes in accordance with his opinion, and which he believes his conscience obligates him to perform, unless these actions are evil in themselves, manifestly contrary to natural right. As if someone wanted to trouble the State and use violence and poison for a religious principle.[129]

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[126] On the importance of the notions of moral autonomy and reciprocity see Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, esp. pp. 246-7, 427-8.

[127] See Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, chap. 1. Cf. also ibid. p. 84.

[128] Ibid. p. 69.

[129] Leibniz to Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, 4/14 August 1683 (A I, 3, 535).

## Conclusion

In theory and in practice, the paths to toleration are, and have been, many. The question of which one is most appropriate or most effective is inextricably interwoven with the historical contexts in which it was developed. Historically, each path has shown its merits but also its shortcomings. The chief aim of this paper has been to evaluate the relationship between truth and toleration. Its main conclusion is that, from a theoretical point of view, the culprit in intolerance is not in itself belief in some objective truth. On the contrary, the acknowledgment of some universal truth discoverable by natural reason and endorsed by many religious traditions, such as the 'golden rule' of reciprocity, can provide the underpinning of a general and principled theory of toleration.[130]

Moreover, it is not belief in some religious truth and in its objectivity which is per se intolerant. For instance, one may regard as a religious truth that religious coercion is against the spirit of the gospel or that Jihad should be interpreted as an internal struggle to become good, not as a call to holy war against all infidels. Nor is the denial of religious truth in itself a path to toleration. Historically, it has also been a route to intolerance, as communist totalitarianisms of the twentieth century have shown. Vigilance seems also to be needed toward the rise of a 'liberal' or 'progressive' intolerance of those who do not align with every article of the latest liberal or progressive orthodoxy, such as (once upon a time) the minimalist civil religion of the Enlightenment. A liberal, tolerant society must retain the capacity to tolerate dissent toward its own liberal views, provided such dissent is expressed within the limits of what is "lawful in the ordinary course of life."[131] In sum, belief in truth or in some objective values is not in itself intolerant, but a truly tolerant society can never simply assume that possessing a "very clear creed" gives it the right "to enforce [its] values right across the spectrum".[132]

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[130] This is not to deny that appeal to universal truths and natural law could also be used to support intolerance.

[131] Locke, *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 33.

[132] David Cameron, 20 July 2015, speaking in Birmingham as British Prime Minister.