

VOLTAIRE'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS PROTESTANTISM IN FRANCE

FROM LA HENRIADE TO THE CALAS CASE

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by

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Protestantism in France as reflected in La Henriade
(1723), the Siècle de Louis XIV (1751), the
Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations (1756),
and in his involvement in the Calas Case (1762-
1765). As these works and the last event span
a large part of Voltaire's life, they will allow
us to discover both his constant feelings towards
Protestantism and new influence upon his thinking.

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INTRODUCTION

Most historians and religious scholars feel that the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a reaction to a deplorable moral lapse on the part of the Catholic Church. With many, serious qualifications, Voltaire shares that opinion. Both they, and he, are aware, however, that the desire for reform had been born hundreds of years before the word "Protestant" was first coined. Sectarianism in France was in evidence during the late twelfth century:

Il est très certain que les Francs et les Germains ne connaissaient alors ni images, ni reliques, ni transubstantion. Il se trouva ensuite des hommes qui ne voulurent de loi que l'Evangile, et qui prêchèrent à peu près les mêmes dogmes que tiennent aujourd'hui les protestants. On les nommait Vaudois . . . Albigeois . . . bonshommes, par la régularité dont ils se piquaient; enfin manichéens du nom qu'on donnait alors en général aux hérétiques. On fut étonné, vers la fin du XII^e siècle que le Languedoc en parût tout rempli.¹

Although Voltaire's attitude towards sectarianism was decidedly hostile, he shows a keen and often sympathetic interest in the followers of Pierre de Vaux, the founder of the Vaudois sect. It was the peaceful character of the Vaudois, which remained one of their qualities throughout the

¹Voltaire, Essai sur les mœurs, XI, 495.

centuries, that earned them Voltaire's praise. Unfortunately, in the twelfth century, as in the fifteenth, the Vaudois were to suffer a bitter fate. Condemned by the Catholic Church as heretics, they were the victims of religious massacres in 1198.

The early history of this sect forebushadows, in some ways, the progress of the later Reformation in France. A time of relatively quiet, inoffensive growth ended in persecutions. In the 1520's, as Martin Luther's influence began to spread, Strasbourg acted as a natural bridge between Germany and France. Luther's doctrines, and those of the Swiss reformer, Zwingli, brought a steady increase in the number of Protestants throughout France during the years 1520-1550. Léonard refers to French Protestantism of this period as " . . . une spiritualité et un mouvement de foi . . . " ² Its early development reflected that of the twelfth century sect:

Comme les Vaudois d'Italie et de Provence . . . [les] premiers réformés acceptaient le baptême de l'Eglise catholique, incontestablement chrétien d'ailleurs, parce qu'il n'y avait pas sans lui, d'état civil régulier;³ parfois aussi, et plus malaisément, la messe. . . .

These were years when small groups of French Lutherans met and worshipped, usually without the leadership of a pastor,

²Léonard, Histoire générale du protestantisme, II, 82.

³Ibid, 87.

for they were few. They bore courageously the persecutions, of varying degrees, which the Catholic Church and François I inflicted upon them. It was, however, only a preliminary period:

Cette situation pouvait-elle se prolonger? Calvin ne le crut pas: il intervint auprès des évangéliques français comme il le faisait auprès des Belges. Par ses soins, un protestantisme qui était 'de choix' se modela sur le protestantisme 'de masse' de Genève; des églises 'de convertis' furent transformées en églises 'pour convertir'.⁴

The influence of Jean Calvin became increasingly important from 1536 onwards. In that year his Christianae religionis institutio was printed, providing the new Church with a written summary of many Protestant principles. His greatest efforts, however, were more direct. In the late 1540's and the 1550's, as persecution increased together with the number of Protestants, the French Lutherans felt the need for closer leadership. Calvin had had the successful experience of his own Church in Geneva, and from there he sent trained pastors to the growing Protestant settlements to give them the spiritual guidance they lacked. As a result, within the two decades preceding the religious wars, French Protestantism became, in effect, French Calvinism. The change had both good and bad consequences:

⁴Ibid, II, 87.

... in thus becoming Calvinistic, [it] in a large measure abandoned the two leading principles of the movement out of which it had sprung, the spirit of free inquiry, and the spirit of individualism. But without this surrender it must in the long run have yielded to persecution. It was only by cohesion that it could build up the necessary strength for resistance.⁵

The creation of a Church 'pour convertir' and its success in this field led to further and stronger repressions by the Catholic Church and François I's successor, Henri II. By the mid 1550's a demand to meet violence with violence was making its voice heard in the French Protestant Church and Calvin, who opposed violence, was worried by the intolerant treatment of Catholics that was evident in some regions where Protestantism was strong.⁶ Then, in 1559, as the minority of François II began, the Guise family attained dominant political influence. The repercussions of this event had a profound effect upon the religious situation:

When the Protestant ranks were recruited by the accession of numerous political malcontents, a more worldly leaven pervaded the whole cause; the principle of passive resistance was abandoned, and an appeal to armed force became inevitable.⁷

The parallel between the Vaudois of the twelfth century and the French Calvinists of the fifteenth must end. The political-religious unrest of the 1550's erupted into the

⁵Tilley, "The Reformation in France". -- In: The Cambridge Modern History, II, 287.

⁶Léonard, ibid, 104, 111.

⁷Tilley, ibid, 280.

religious wars which were to ravage France for thirty years. The Reformation, which had begun as an earnest attempt to rid the Catholic Church of some of its worst evils, resulted in a bloodbath that did not fully end for two and a half centuries. In Voltaire's words, " . . . les querelles des théologiens sont devenues des guerres de cannibales."⁸

Religion, in all its theoretical and practical aspects, remained a subject of intense interest to Voltaire, from the early years in which he wrote Oedipe (1718) until the very last moments of his life. The existence of God, the nature of God, the presence of evil and suffering in God's world are some of the questions that Voltaire dwells upon particularly at certain times. And yet it is the practical aspect, the actual effects of religion upon man and the world which draws the strongest and the most lasting response from Voltaire. His study of history made him single out the reigns of Henri IV, of Louis XIV, and of Louis XV as the brightest eras of French history. However, Voltaire saw that the time of Henri IV was torn by the religious wars, and considered that the age of the Sun King and of Louis XV were scarred by religious intolerance. The disputes between Catholicism and Protestantism were dark stains upon the honour of the country.

⁸ Voltaire, Essai sur les moeurs, XII, 284.

What was Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism in France? What qualities did French Calvinists have, and of what wrongs were they guilty? What, too, was Voltaire's opinion on religious tolerance, the lack of which had led the way to open conflict? To try to understand these views, we shall study three of his major works: La Henriade (1723), Le Siècle de Louis XIV (1751), the Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations (1756), and also his involvement in the Calas case from 1762-1765. Through these works and the last event, which mark different periods of his life, we will be able to trace the thoughts -- some constant, some evolving -- that form his attitude towards Protestantism, discovering as well the criteria for his judgement and the different external factors that brought their influence upon him.

PREFACE

In the interest of simplicity, I have chosen to use abbreviations throughout this thesis when referring to works often quoted. As regards the primary sources, "La H." shall signify O.R. Taylor's critical edition of Voltaire's epic poem La Henriade, "Siècle" the Siècle de Louis XIV, and "Essai" the Essai sur les moeurs. In the case of the works in the fourth chapter, "Affaire" refers to L'Affaire Calas and, occasionally, "Traité" is used to stand for the Traité sur la tolérance. The editions of these works are recorded in the section "Source Material". Abbreviations for the critics' works most frequently quoted are:

Barni: Barni, J., Histoire des idées morales et politiques en France au XVIII^e siècle, tome premier. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1967.

Best: Voltaire's Correspondence (Besterman, T. ed.) 107 vols. Genève: Institut et musée Voltaire, 1953-1965.

Brumfitt: Brumfitt, J.H., Voltaire. Historian. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Champendal: Champendal, E., Voltaire et les protestants de France. Carouge-Genève: Moret et Schneider, 1919..

Léonard: Léonard, E.G., Histoire générale du protestantisme, 3 tomes. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1961.

Pomeau: Pomeau, R., La Religion de Voltaire. Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1956.

Moreover, any time that a quotation obviously refers to a particular work just mentioned, I have simply used the author's surname, plus page reference.

All quotations in French have been modernized.

CHAPTER ONE

La Henriade (1723)

The epic poem, La Henriade (1723) grew out of Voltaire's intense interest in Henri IV, and the era in which that king had lived. Between 1723 and 1730, nine editions of the poem were published, and more followed. This preoccupation with Henri IV had begun early in Voltaire's life when he was a pupil of the Jesuits. "Ceux-ci en effet vénéraient la mémoire de Henri IV qui les avait rappelés en France en 1603 . . . " (La H., 162-3). It is likely that Caumartin, a former Conseiller D'Etat, greatly contributed to that interest during Voltaire's stay at Saint-Ange in 1716. Either that year or the following, while he was in the Bastille, Voltaire began his epic poem. As O.R. Taylor notes, one intention of La Henriade was deliberate praise for Philippe d'Orléans (La H., 25). Voltaire saw this prince as the safeguard of France's hereditary monarchy at a time when the possible death of the young and ill Louis XV might divide the country into factions and result in civil war. However,

the inspiration for the poem came from two definite sources, as I have hinted above. Both Henri IV and that period of French history attracted Voltaire greatly and of his attitude towards the King, Vial says: "S'il admire Louis XIV, le roi magnifique, protecteur des lettres, c'est Henri IV qu'il aime, Henri IV, 'le meilleur roi qu'ait eu la France'."¹ On the matter of religion, the views of Voltaire and of Henri were in some ways alike. Referring to the monarch, Marcel Reinhard writes:

Sa correspondance, mieux que ses discours officiels, montre son impatience en présence du problème religieux. Il avait vitupéré contre les 'empoisonneurs papistes', les 'prêcheurs romains canonisant les assassins' . . . Les prétentions huguenotes. L'exaspéraient autant . . . Car les protestants exigeaient non seulement la tolérance, mais 'l'avancement de ladite vraie religion et des églises réformées'.² Les deux religions ne pouvaient-elles vivre en paix?

An equal, indeed, greater "impatience" is readily found on Voltaire's part for precisely the same reasons. Moreover, it is a fact that Voltaire looked upon Henri IV as a model of a strong monarch. With specific reference to ecclesiastical power and influence in the state, Henri had once declared: "'Je ne suis pas gouverné par les jésuites, mais je gouverne et les jésuites et les ministres protestants. Je suis le roi des uns et des autres.'"³

¹Vial, Voltaire sa vie et son oeuvre, 203.

²Reinhard, Henri IV ou la France sauvée, 116.

³Ibid, 249.

Voltaire, on exactly this subject, stated in 1750:

Dans un état quelconque, le plus grand malheur est que l'autorité législative soit combattue. Les années heureuses de la monarchie ont été les dernières de Henri IV, celles de Louis XIV et de Louis XV, quand ces rois ont gouverné par eux-mêmes.⁴ Il ne doit pas y avoir deux puissances dans un état.

J.H. Brumfitt goes so far as to attribute the writing of La Henriade mainly to Voltaire's interest in the " . . . career and personality of Henri IV."

(Brumfitt, 6), and certainly Voltaire writes with the greatest admiration when he says that it was under Henri IV that: "La justice est réformée et ce qui était beaucoup plus difficile, les deux religions vivent en paix, au moins en apparence. Le commerce, les arts sont en honneur." (Essai, XII, 552). However, although Voltaire obviously praises in Henri the creator of a peaceful, prosperous France, his comment shows equally clearly the importance he pays to justice, peace, commerce, and the arts themselves. Brumfitt's affirmation unfortunately, is too narrow. The truth of the matter is to be found in Voltaire's own words, in the 1730 edition of the poem: "Le point le plus important est la religion, qui fait en grande partie le sujet du poème, et qui en est le seul dénouement." (La H. 311).

⁴Voltaire, La Voix du sage et du peuple, 467.

One of the most important aspects of that era was its religious strife. In particular, the Saint Bartholomew massacre, subject of the second 'canto', appalled Voltaire even at that early age. René Pomeau, referring to this part of the poem in his book La Religion de Voltaire, writes:

Le chant le plus inspiré de la Henriade, le seul que Voltaire n'ait pas soumis, dans les rééditions successives, au menu travail de rapiéçage . . . est le second qui raconte, avec une réelle puissance d'imagination, le massacre de la Saint-Barthélemy,⁵

To be precise, Voltaire's feelings about this event were so deep and so unalterable that in all the editions of La Henriade from 1723 to 1775, only nine minor changes were ever made, and of these six took their final form by 1730. An even stronger affirmation of Voltaire's reaction is also to be found in Pomeau's work: while the 'philosophe' was living at Ferney, the marquis de Villette wrote:

' . . . M. de Voltaire n'a pas encore passé une seule année de sa vie, sans avoir le fièvre le jour de la Saint-Barthélemy. Il ne reçoit jamais personne à pareil jour; il est dans son lit; l'affaissement de ses organes, l'intermittance et la vivacité de son pouls caractérisent cette crise périodique . . . Il semble que son coeur soit ulcéré de toutes les plaies que la persécution religieuse a faites aux hommes . . . '

To this Pomeau adds the comment:

' . . . La 'crise périodique' . . . ne développera tous ses symptômes que dans la vieillesse du patient. Mais

⁵Pomeau, 108.

déjà Voltaire jeune souffrait cette passion, quand, fenêtres closes, sans manger ni dormir, il évoquait les spectres terribles.'⁶

The rôle then, that religion played in France during the life of Henri IV, is one of the main factors behind the writing of La Henriade, and now we shall look specifically at Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism and its rôle during those years.

I

Commenting on Voltaire's criterion of judgement, Constance Rowe, in her book Voltaire and the State remarks that:

"The law, the Church, and the monarchy he judged not by any ideals they theoretically represented, but by their actual contribution to the greatest good of the greatest number."

Such was Voltaire's basic and invariable code. He applied it rigourously when he was dealing with religion, and even when circumstances demanded moderation, this approach is still much in evidence. This is certainly the case in La Henriade as Voltaire described Protestantism in France during the late sixteenth century.

⁶ Ibid, 108-9.

⁷ Rowe, Voltaire and the State, 27; see also the article "Dogmes" (1765) in Dictionnaire philosophique.

The events of 1589 with which Voltaire's epic poem commence are, historically, near the end of the religious wars which had torn France for almost thirty years. Voltaire does not go into any details on the rôle of the French Calvinists during this earlier period, neither in La Henriade itself, nor in its prefatory work, Essai sur les guerres civiles en France (1727). Brumfitt's comment that the latter shows " . . . greater partiality for the Protestant cause than Voltaire is later to exhibit . . . " (Brumfitt, 7) is also applicable to the poem. Nevertheless, it seems that such restraint on Voltaire's part was dictated by the fact that the 1728 and 1730 editions of the poem were destined for a Protestant English audience (Brumfitt, 7). This helps to explain the absence of direct condemnations of specific barbarities committed by the French Calvinists. However, both works do offer a number of broader statements that convey Voltaire's attitude towards the effects of Protestantism in France.

One of the most damaging influences, Voltaire finds, is the division which the new faith brought to France and stimulated there. In the Essai sur les guerres civiles, he remarks:

Les protestants avaient essuyé en France les persécutions les plus violentes, dont l'effet ordinaire est de multiplier les prosélytes. Leur secte croissait au milieu des échafauds et des tortures. Condé, Coligny, les deux frères

de Coligny, leurs partisans, et tous ceux qui étaient tyrannisés par les Guises, embrassèrent en même temps la religion protestante. Ils unirent avec tant de concert leurs plaintes, leur vengeance, et leurs intérêts, qu'il eut en même temps une révolution dans la religion et dans l'état.

Voltaire's deep regret at the dissension caused is echoed in La Henriade. Although it is inferred there just as subtly, the tragedy of family, of army, of France divided is one of the recurring themes throughout the poem. Nowhere does Voltaire depict this more poignantly than in the eighth 'canto' where he describes the death of the young Protestant, d'Ailly, at his father's hands:

Enfin le vieux d'Ailly, par un coup malheureux,
Fait tomber à ses pieds ce guerrier généreux,
. . . D'Ailly voit son visage: ô désespoir! ô cris!
Il le voit, il l'embrasse: hélas! c'était son fils.
Le père infortuné, les yeux baignés de larmes,
Tournait contre son sein ses parricides armes;
On l'arrête; on s'oppose à sa juste fureur:
Il s'arrache en tremblant, de ce lieu plein d'horreur;
Il déteste à jamais sa coupable victoire;

Voltaire goes on to describe how the young man's wife finds his body on the field, "Le regarde, soupire, et meurt en l'embrassant." (p. 559). He ends his account of the scene with these words:

⁸Voltaire, Essai sur les guerres civiles en France; 268.

⁹La H., 557-8.

Père, époux malheureux, famille déplorable,
 Des fureurs de ces temps exemple lamentable,
 Puisse de ce combat le souvenir affreux
 Exciter la pitié de nos derniers neveux,
 Arracher à leurs yeux des larmes salutaires;
 Et qu'ils n'imitent point les crimes de leurs pères!¹⁰

At the beginning of the poem, Voltaire states that this same division is to be found within the ranks of Henri's own army; only the person of "Bourbon" is strong enough to bridge that gap:

On y voit ces héros, fiers soutiens de la France,
 Divisés par leur secte, unis par la vengeance.
 C'est aux mains de Bourbon que leur sort est commis:¹¹
 En gagnant tous leurs coeurs, il les a tous unis.

All of La Henriade is the story of France divided by religion, by the troubles that arose from the growth of Protestantism. It is these results of its development that are important to Voltaire far above and beyond any theological interest the new faith may have. The definitive attestation of these effects comes from the "vieillard vertueux" (La H., 380) as he tells Henri "' . . . la terre / Voit de sectes sans nombre une implacable guerre,'" (pp. 378-9).

However, Voltaire, judging French Calvinism on its actions, does not find its disruptive influence the only fault to be condemned. Voltaire, whose description of the

¹⁰ La H., 558.

¹¹ La H., 370.

Saint Bartholomew massacre became famous, knew all too well how guilty the Protestants themselves were of religious intolerance, and again, although he never singles out any specific examples of this, his criticism is still present.

Protestant persecution of Catholics before 1562 was, in fact, one of the causes of the religious wars. In his Histoire générale du protestantisme, Léonard well describes the atmosphere of those years:

Calvin s'inquiète des succès protestants en Provence, où des massacres marquèrent les victoires des huguenots à Brignoles . . . A Nîmes un capitaine se livre à des violences contre les églises; à Montpellier, de pareils excès viennent du populaire. Les populations catholiques avaient naturellement la même attitude, là où les protestants n'étaient pas en force . . . A Grenade, Cahors, Carcassonne, Toulouse et Gaillac notamment, des massacres de huguenots constituèrent, suivant le mot de Michelet, une 'première Saint-Barthélemy'.¹²

Voltaire, however, refused to allow the Protestants to escape blameless. From the "Histoire abrégée des événements sur lesquels est fondée . . . La Henriade", which he included in the 1730 edition of the poem, comes this comment:

Les églises étaient mises en cendres par les réformés, les temples par les catholiques; les empoisonnements et les assassinats n'étaient regardés que comme des vengeances d'ennemis habiles,¹³

¹²Léonard, II, 111.

¹³La H., 301.

In La Henriade, Voltaire expresses such thoughts through the hero, Henri IV himself, as the latter describes the religious wars to Queen Elizabeth. Indeed, the relating of the Saint Bartholomew massacre in the second 'canto' is preceded by this attack:

'De quelque nom divin que leur parti les nomme,
J'ai vu des deux côtés la fourbe et la fureur;¹⁴
. . . L'un et l'autre parti, cruel également,'¹⁴

To this, Henri adds, shortly after: "J'ai vu nos citoyens s'égorger avec zèle, . . . Pour de vains arguments qu'ils ne comprenaient pas.'" (p. 393). Furthermore, in speaking of Henri's own attitude, Voltaire comments: " . . . s'il ne jugeait . . . [les deux religions] que par la conduite des deux partis, il devait se défier des deux cultes, qui n'étaient soutenus alors que par des crimes."¹⁵ However, such criticisms are relatively few, and their significance does not lie in their number. Rather, what must be kept in mind is the fact that the intolerance exhibited by the Protestants, and the strife their faith caused, are the bases upon which Voltaire judges the new religion. We might, perhaps, have expected that Voltaire, who in Oedipe and now in La Henriade has harsh reproach for the Catholic Church, would at once have

¹⁴ La H., 391-2.

¹⁵ Voltaire, La Henriade. In: Oeuvre complètes, VIII, 66.

rejoiced at the rise of Protestantism, also the enemy of Rome. He is guilty of no such quick, biased attitude. Criticizing the actions of French Calvinism, and offering almost no positive qualities to counterbalance this picture, Voltaire shows that in his opinion, Protestantism in sixteenth century France was a destroyer of peace, and as guilty of persecution as Catholicism had always proved itself to be.

II

The active role that Protestants played in the late sixteenth century was most important in determining Voltaire's attitude towards that sect. However, Voltaire has more to say on the subject. Despite the faults Protestantism exhibited in practice, what did Voltaire think of the theology of the new faith, which was, after all, basically the cause of the religious strife? There are, as we shall see, several reasons for Voltaire's clear response on this issue. That response itself is revealed by the one word most frequently used to describe Protestantism in La Henriade; namely, "l'erreur". Twice in the opening 'canto', Voltaire speaks of Mornay, Henri's trusted advisor, but it is in an almost apologetic tone, for such a great man had one weakness which could not be overlooked: he was the "Trop vertueux soutien du parti de

l'erreur," (La H., 374). Elsewhere Voltaire writes:

Mornay parut surpris, et ne fut point touché:
Dieu, maître de ses dons, de lui s'était caché.
Vainement sur la terre il eut le nom de sage,¹⁶
Au milieu des vertus l'erreur fut son partage.

From the pages of La Henriade come numerous other examples of Voltaire's rejection of Protestantism as the true religion. In the same first canto, the "vieillard vertueux" refers to it in the following, deprecating terms:

'J'ai vu . . .
Ce fantôme effrayant lever sa tête altière,
Se placer sur le trône, insulter aux mortels,
Et d'un pied dédaigneux renverser nos autels.
. . . Un culte si nouveau ne peut durer toujours.
Des caprices de l'homme il a tiré son être;¹⁷

Voltaire reiterates the same thoughts expressed in these words -- the injurious rise of a false religion -- in the pages of the Essai sur les guerres civiles:

La superstition, les secrètes fourberies des moines de ce temps-là, le pouvoir immense de Rome, la passion des hommes pour la nouveauté, l'ambition de Luther et de Calvin, la politique de plusieurs princes, servirent à l'accroissement de cette sect, libre à la vérité de superstition, mais tendant aussi impétueusement à¹⁸ l'anarchie que la religion de Rome à la tyrannie.

However, Voltaire's rejecting Protestant theology creates, at first glance, a problem for him. Henri IV, the hero of the poem, had historically been a Protestant.

¹⁶La H., 380.

¹⁷La H., 378.

¹⁸Voltaire, Essai sur les guerres civiles en France, 268.

How was Voltaire to explain the king's adherence to "l'erreur"? Voltaire answers this question by denying, in effect, that the king was really a believing Calvinist:

. . . Plusieurs historiens ont peint Henri IV flottant entre les deux religions . . . On le donne ici pour un homme d'honneur, tel qu'il était, cherchant de bonne foi à s'éclairer . . .¹⁹

The words of the poem bear this out: "Henri doutait encore, et demandait aux cieux / Qu'un rayon de clarté vint dessiller ses yeux." (p. 377). Voltaire's feelings towards Protestantism are further borne out by the fact that he does not leave Henri's fate to chance. Repeatedly the prince is led away from the new faith. The "vieillard" is the first to warn Henri against Calvinism; the dying Henri III does likewise:

'Mon trône vous attend, mon trône vous est dû:
. . . Craignez en y montant, ce Dieu qui vous le donne.
Puissiez-vous, détrompé d'un dogme criminel,
Rétablir de vos mains son culte et son autel!'²⁰

The final warning, the final condemnation of Protestantism, is to be found in the last 'canto' in Louis' prayer to God for the enlightenment of his great successor:

¹⁹ La H., 409.

²⁰ La H., 484.

'Vois ce roi triomphant, ce foudre de la guerre,
 L'exemple, la terreur, et l'amour de la terre;
 Avec tant de vertus, n'as-tu formé son coeur
 Que pour l'abandonner aux pièges de l'erreur?
 . . . Ah! si du grand Henri ton culte est ignoré,
 Par qui le Roi des rois veut-il être adoré?
 Daigne éclairer ce coeur créé pour te connaître:
 Donne à l'église un fils, donne à la France un maître;'²¹

However, another word must be said on this subject.

Voltaire guards Henri from Protestantism, but he does not pretend to say that Henri lived in a religious vacuum.

"Le Henri de Voltaire n'est en effet ni protestant ni catholique; il est déiste, indifférent aux dogmes Chrétiens;" (La H., 166). Without a doubt, the Henri IV of La Henriade was a follower of Voltaire's own deistic beliefs, a strong exponent of natural religion. There is considerable evidence which is in favour of this argument. It might appear that the relegation of the new faith to the status of "erreur" correspondingly elevates Catholicism to the position of the true religion. History, of course, imposes this situation upon Voltaire, for Catholicism was the faith Henri espoused in 1593. But does this mean that Voltaire wishes his hero to worship the vengeful God of "Ces prêtres, dont cent fois la fatale éloquence / Ralluma tous ces feux qui consumaient la France,"? (La H., 613). Their God is that of the pope who " . . .

²¹La H., 615-16.

commenda . . . des peintures rappelant le massacre [de la Saint-Barthélemy] pour en orner le Vatican."²² Is the Catholic religion as it is portrayed in La Henriade, the true religion in Voltaire's opinion? That is, indeed, hardly likely. Henri IV enters Paris, at the end of La Henriade, a Catholic in name only. Throughout the poem, Voltaire stresses those qualities of Henri which made him "le modèle des rois" (La H., 612) in Voltaire's opinion. Henri is strong, tolerant, merciful, and his concern is for the welfare of his people and his country. Voltaire, through the mouths of the Parisiens, lauds the king as being " . . . du Dieu vivant, . . . la brillante image" (loc. cit.). Certainly this Supreme Being to whom Henri is compared is the merciful, loving God of Voltaire's natural religion. Only of such a God as this could Henri IV be the faithful believer. In the fourth 'canto', Voltaire offers this description of Henri's religion, the only true one:

Loin du faste de Rome, et des pompes mondaines,
Des temples consacrés aux vanités humaines,
Dont l'appareil superbe impose à l'univers,
L'humble Religion se cache en des déserts:
Elle y vit avec Dieu dans une paix profonde:
Cependant que son nom, profané dans le monde,
Est le prétexte saint des fureurs des tyrans,
Le bandeau du vulgaire et le mépris des grands.

²² Léonard, II, 125.

Souffrir est son destin, bénir est son partage:
 Elle prie en secret pour l'ingrat que l'outrage;
 Sans ornements, sans art, belle de ses attraits,
 Sa modeste beauté se dérobe à jamais
 Aux hypocrites yeux de la foule importune
 Qui court à ses autels adorer la Fortune.
 Son âme pour Henri brûlait d'un saint amour;
 Cette fille des cieux sait qu'elle doit un jour,
 Vengeant de ses autels le culte légitime,
 Adopter pour son fils, ce héros magnanime:²³

Neither intolerant Catholicism nor equally intolerant
 Protestantism can possibly be considered as Voltaire's
 "culte légitime".

Critics have paid considerable attention to
 Voltaire's advocacy of natural religion in La Henriade.
 Opinions vary. For his part, Vial states: "'Toute la
 religion naturelle de Voltaire, une partie de sa morale,
 et une partie de sa politique' y sont nettement exprimées."²⁴
 On the other hand, there is René Pomeau's critical judgement:
 Voltaire oppose-t-il au 'fanatisme' la générosité
 religieuse? Il a compris qu'il le fallait faire,
 mais ne l'a pu faire que faiblement. Au chant IV
 apparaît l'allégorie de la 'Religion solitaire,
 tranquille'; 'cette fille des cieux', nous dit-on
 . . . Puis il ne sera plus question de cette fade Religion.²⁵

Of the two, I feel Vial's is the more correct and that
 Pomeau has overlooked or misunderstood, in part, Voltaire's
 depiction of natural religion. It is unfortunately true

²³ La H., 452-3.

²⁴ Vial, op. cit., 206.

²⁵ Pomeau, 104.

that against the overwhelmingly dark background of the strife, fanaticism, and massacres described in La Henriade, the rays of hope found in natural religion seem to glow rather "feebly". However, is Pomeau correct in saying that after the fourth 'canto', there will be no further question of this 'fade religion'? Does not Henri IV's character reflect and perfect the precepts of that religion, throughout the entire poem? What is more, in his seventh 'canto', Henri says of God: "'Il grave en tous les coeurs la loi de la nature,'" (La H., 516). The king dwells upon such ideas until Voltaire feels obliged to "apologize" for him: "Tandis que du héros la raison confondue / Portait sur ce mystère une indiscrete vue," (loc. cit.). Indeed Henri's actions and thoughts never cease to bear good witness to Voltaire's natural religion, and in the end the king's conversion symbolises the triumph of Voltaire's own religious belief.

Although this last affirmation would seem to deny the historical conversion to Catholicism, this is, I believe, just what happens in La Henriade. Were Henri to profess Catholicism at the conclusion of the poem, as Pomeau thinks he does, all of Voltaire's ideals would be destroyed, for the Catholic God of La Henriade is irrevocably the " . . . Dieu jaloux . . . " ²⁶ of the Saint

²⁶Pomeau, 104.

Bartholemew massacre. It is inconceivable that Voltaire would abandon his "fille des cieux" for such an "' . . . injuste maître'," (La H., 516). The circumstances immediately preceding the conversion lend support to this theory of Henri's deism. In these last pages of the poem Louis, Henri's glorious ancestor, prays that God enlighten the king; this same Louis has already told Henri, "'Dans Paris, ô mon fils! tu rentreras vainqueur, / Pour prix de ta clémence, et non de ta valeur.'" (La H., 505. Has Voltaire shown "clémence" to be a characteristic of the faiths of Calvin or of Pope Gregory XIII? No, kindness and toleration are the qualities that only Voltaire's natural religion possesses, and in Louis' prayer for Henri, it is to the clemency of a forgiving God that he appeals:

'Père de l'univers, si tes yeux quelquefois
Honorent d'un regard les peuples et les rois,
Vois le peuple français à son prince rebelle;
S'il viole tes lois, c'est pour t'être fidèle.
Aveuglé par son zèle, il te désobéit,
Et pense te venger alors qu'il te trahit.'²⁷

This prayer, far from begging mercy for the heretical French Calvinists, is in supplication for that "peuple . . . rebelle" who can only be the Catholics and the Ligueurs.

²⁷La H., 615.

But just as this is no Catholic God upon whom Louis is calling, neither is it the God of the Protestants for, as we have seen, Louis goes on to ask that Henri be saved from the " . . . pièges de l'erreur . . . ". When "Soudain la Vérité, si longtemps attendu, / . . . Dans les tentes du roi descend du haut des cieux." (La H., 615), it is forever to the truth and toleration of natural religion that Voltaire has his Henri IV turn, despite the limitations of history. However, there is another reason for Voltaire's reaction to Protestantism. It is one that remains as constant throughout his life as did his deistic beliefs, and it finds perhaps its earliest expression in La Henriade. H.T. Mason notes in his book Pierre Bayle and Voltaire that it was:

. . . Voltaire's lifelong view that sects lead to errors. Already in La Ligue, the hero is a non-sectarian rather than a Protestant: 'Je ne décide point entre Genève et Rome.'²⁸

Although, as I have indicated, I believe this Henri was a deist, Mason is quite accurate concerning Voltaire's attitude towards sectarianism. As we have seen, the "vieillard" lamented the "implacable guerre" which the Protestant sects had engendered in all of Europe, and in France specifically. Voltaire's criticism is strongly

²⁸Mason, Pierre Bayle and Voltaire, 136.

felt in the article "Secte" in the 1765 edition of the
Dictionnaire philosophique:

Toute secte, en quelque genre que ce puisse être, est le ralliement du doute et de l'erreur. Scotistes, thomistes, réaux, nominaux, papistes, calvinistes, molinistes, jansénistes ne sont que des noms de guerre . . . Quand la vérité est évidente, il est impossible qu'il s'élève des partis et des²⁹ factions. Jamais on n'a disputé s'il fait jour a midi.

To Voltaire, the inevitable characteristics of sectarianism are war and error, and his portrayal of Protestantism in La Henriade amply bears out both aspects.

III

Voltaire's condemnation of the actions of the Protestant Church, his rejection of its theology, and his advocacy of natural religion as the alternative, are all part of his attitude towards Protestantism which he reveals in La Henriade. This attitude is, however, more complex. During the life of Henri IV, Protestantism was forced to play yet another rôle besides those already mentioned; it was to be the victim of Catholic intolerance. In Pomeau's words, Voltaire's epic poem " . . . n'a pas d'autre ambition que de peindre, en terribles images, le 'fanatisme' ".³⁰ Voltaire himself, with specific reference

²⁹Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique, 385.

³⁰Pomeau, 103.

to the Saint Bartholomew massacre, says:

. . . il faut [en] perpétuer la mémoire (tout affreuse et toute flétrissante qu'elle est pour le nom français), afin que les hommes toujours prêts à entrer dans de malheureuses querelles de religion, voient à quel excès l'esprit de parti peut enfin conduire.³¹

As has been implied earlier, Voltaire's attack was concentrated on the Catholics rather than on the Protestants. However, a bias in order to please a Protestant English audience is only one answer for this. Voltaire did find the Catholic Church guilty of many grave faults. His criticism of the pope, or Rome, is frequent and bitter:

'Et Rome, qui devait étouffer tant de maux,
Rome de la discorde allume les flambeaux:
Celui qui des chrétiens se dit encor le père
Met aux mains de ses fils un glaive sanguinaire,'³²

In the noteworthy fourth 'canto', Voltaire's description of "L'humble Religion . . ." is preceded by these words:

Sixte alors était roi de l'Eglise et de Rome.
. . . Sous le puissant abri de son bras despotique,
Au fond du Vatican régnait la Politique,
Fille de l'Intérêt et de l'Ambition,
Dont naquirent la Fraude et la Séduction.³³

Despite such volleys against Rome, however, his criticisms of the monks are even more devastating. It is

³¹La H., 301.

³²La H., 432.

³³La H., 450-1.

the "moines" and the "prêtres" who help the Ligue stand against Henri, France's hope, and who stir up "le faux zèle" and "le fanatisme" among the people. In his "Histoire abrégée . . . " Voltaire describes the Ligue as " . . . s'accroissant tous les jours par l'artifice des moines . . . " (La H., 302) and he condemns their rôle further in the last 'canto':

Ces prêtres cependant . . .
 Qui, loin de partager les misères publiques,
 . . . Vivaient dans l'abondance à l'ombre des autels,
 Du Dieu qu'ils offensaient attestant la souffrance,
 Allait partout du peuple animer la constance.³⁴

Voltaire's bitterness on this issue finds expression a third time, in his Essai sur les guerres civiles,³⁵ but their other crime, that of propagating fanaticism, is equally nefarious. La Henriade offers these accounts of their rôle: they are the eager followers of "la Discorde" who tells them:

'Il est temps de sortir de l'ombre de vos temples:
 Allez d'un zèle saint répandre les exemples;
 Apprenez aux Français, incertains de leur foi,
 Que c'est servir leur Dieu que d'immoler leur roi.'³⁶

With loathing Voltaire describes the monks' procession through Paris:

³⁴ La H., 607.

³⁵ Voltaire, Essai sur les guerres civiles en France, 281.

³⁶ La H., 456.

Ils chantent; et leurs cris, dévots et furieux,
 Semblent à leur révolte associer les cieux.
 On les entend mêler dans leurs vœux fanatiques,
 Les imprécations aux prières publiques.³⁷

Voltaire condemns their " . . . fatale éloquence",
 and in his Essai of 1727 describes priests as "les
 trompettes de toutes les révolutions" (p. 279).

The Protestants, battling in La Henriade had been
 the victims of the fanaticism and the intolerance of the
 Catholic Church. Their relatives and friends had been
 the victims of the Saint Bartholomew massacre which, under
 Charles IX's orders, had spread throughout all of France.
 The final aspect of Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism
 is related to this: namely, his plea for toleration. He
 was to become one of his century's strongest defenders of
 religious toleration, and he makes his voice heard as early
 in his life as the writing of La Henriade. René Pomeau,
 however, is not of this opinion:

C'est à partir de l'affaire Calas que la 'tolérance' devient
 l'un de ses maîtres mots. Le mot qui n'est ni dans la
Henriade ni dans les Lettres philosophiques est brandi
 désormais par Voltaire pour exiger une amélioration du sort
 des protestants.³⁸

On this same point, however, Jules Barni has the
 following comment:

³⁷La H., 457.

³⁸Pomeau, 328.

. . . il . . . est . . . injuste de prétendre que Voltaire ait attendu l'année 1762 pour se faire l'apôtre de la tolérance. Il ne fait que continuer ici la guerre qu'il n'a cessé de faire au fanatisme; seulement, il passe maintenant du livre à l'action . . . ³⁹

Mason is of exactly the same opinion concerning Voltaire's fight for tolerance, adding: "He was soundly attacked for what he had to say on the subject in La Henriade . . . " ⁴⁰

Pomeau is correct that the word "tolérance" is not to be found in the epic poem, but he is incorrect in implying that the spirit of it is not there. All of the poem and especially the sound 'canto', through the description of the horrors and the losses caused by the religious wars, is a plea for tolerance upon both sides. The recounting of the death of young d'Ailly, and Voltaire's comment in the "Histoire abrégée", vividly serve this same purpose, offering a plea for tolerance on the part of future generations, that such fanaticism may never rage again.

Pomeau himself defines the purpose of La Henriade as:

"peindre, en terribles images, le 'fanatisme'." Is the condemnation of fanaticism not the advocacy of toleration?

Voltaire, speaking of his portrayal of Henri, states that

On le donne ici pour un homme d'honneur, tel qu'il était . . . ami de la vérité, ennemi de la persécution, et détestant le crime partout où il se trouve. ⁴¹

³⁹Barni, I, 237.

⁴⁰Mason, op. cit., 134.

⁴¹La H., 409.

He emphasizes these qualities because they mirror his own feelings; if Henri is the enemy of persecution, he is, therefore, the friend of tolerance. Many years later, Voltaire had the occasion to affirm with vigour that " . . . l'historien ne respecte que la vérité, . . . qu'il déteste la persécution et le fanatisme partout où il les trouve . . . ",⁴² but we must remember that the first comment was written in 1730, and about La Henriade.

This work of Voltaire's early career, by its condemnation of religious intolerance, in the whole and in these specific instances, is a plea for toleration. However, what, precisely, are Voltaire's reasons for this plea? This question is important. Although open religious conflict and continued persecution of Protestants in his own time made Voltaire seek toleration of their sect, his defense is never based on sympathy towards their religion itself. We have already seen that Voltaire calls Protestant theology "l'erreur". In our study of the other periods of Voltaire's life, we will find many varied reason for his advocacy of tolerance towards Protestantism: in his early life, in La Henriade, perhaps the strongest is because of the sheer horror and inhumanity that marked the religious

⁴²Voltaire, "XXIII^e sottise dudit Nonotte", 503.

wars. We have already noted his reaction to the Saint Bartholomew massacre whose memory must be perpetuated, he felt, as a most eloquent warning against religious quarrels. In the words of his hero, Henri IV: 'Qui pourrait cependant exprimer les ravages / dont cette nuit cruelle étala les images?' (La H., 404). As the years went by he felt more and more deeply the profound shock that this event caused him, and in 1763 he says " . . . une paix plus funeste que la guerre produisait la Saint-Barthélemy, dont il n'y avait aucun exemple dans les annales des crimes."⁴³ As the pictures of the second 'canto' and of the rest of the poem multiply, it becomes evident that this humanitarian reason for religious tolerance is one of the most important to Voltaire. However, it is not the only one: its practical connotations exist along side it. Voltaire looks back at those days and sees that what becomes one of France's greatest eras, begins as a period of utter chaos and destruction. Indeed, one of the greatest reasons for his admiration and love for "' . . . le meilleur roi qu'ait eu la France'", is the fact that Henri was a gifted ruler, able to rebuild a country that had fallen into such an abyss. In the original dedication of La Henriade to Louis XV, Voltaire wrote:

⁴³Voltaire, Traité sur la tolérance, 575.

Après plus de cent combats sanglants et plus de deux cents sièges, il [Henri IV] se vit enfin maître de la France, mais de la France désolée et épuisée d'hommes et d'argent; les campagnes étaient incultes, les villes désertes, les peuples misérables. Henri IV en peu d'années répara tant de ruines; et parce qu'il était juste, et qu'il savait choisir de bons ministres, il rétablit l'ordre dans l'état et dans ses finances; il⁴⁴ sut en même temps enrichir son épargne et ses peuples.

Physical as well as moral destruction was the price of religious intolerance. Justice, order, the wealth of the country, and the well-being of the people: these are what Voltaire treasured, and these are the rewards that could be gathered when religious tolerance is practised, as it was during the reign of Henri IV.

However, La Henriade, offers one more important reason for Voltaire's pleas, and it derives from a characteristic we have already noted. Recalling Voltaire's standard for judging both men and religions, namely, that of their actions, we can find in this poem his repeated praise for the good qualities of men whose religious beliefs involved them in a strife which he abhorred. Such a man is Mornay:

Mornay, son confident, mais jamais son flatteur;
Trop vertueux soutien du parti de l'erreur,
Qui, signalant son zèle et sa prudence, ⁴⁵
Servit également son Eglise et sa France;

⁴⁴ La H., 257.

⁴⁵ La H., 373-4.

It is once again the faithfulness and the loyalty of Mornay, the Protestant, that earn him Voltaire's admiration in the sixth 'canto': "Il marche en philosophe où l'honneur le conduit, / Condamne les combats, plaint son maître, et le suit." (p. 501). Indeed it is in this light that Voltaire judges both the Catholics and the Protestants who fought for their king: "On y voit ces ^{héros} héros, fiers soutiens de la France, / Divisés par leur secte, unis par la vengeance." In La Henriade, Voltaire's praise is mainly for the Protestants although he fears sectarianism, condemns certain acts committed by Protestants and rejects their doctrine. Voltaire, however, cannot condemn the loyalty of individual Protestants -- indeed of most Protestants -- to their king and country. Despite the fact that Voltaire, as Pomeau states, does not directly demand toleration for these men, given his attitude towards them, toleration, in part as reward for their loyal service to Henri IV, can be his only desire.

The effects of Protestantism upon men and the world, the theology of Protestantism and the question of the toleration of that faith, are three basic elements of Voltaire's attitude towards Calvinism. La Henriade deals with all these subjects as they are revealed in a period of French history when the influence of Protestantism was at its greatest. Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism in France is clearly demonstrated in this work, written still early in his life and literary career.

CHAPTER TWO

Le Siècle de Louis XIV (1751)

In his early life, Voltaire was not known as an historian, nor did he originally seek to establish a reputation principally on his historical writings. Although his interest in history grew from his learning of Henri IV, Oedipe (1718) and La Henriade (1723) marked literature as his first chosen field. It was not until the 1730's that the new inclination became evident. During that fruitful decade Voltaire not only produced his Histoire de Charles XII (1731), he also began what has been called his masterpiece,¹ Le Siècle de Louis XIV. As in the case of La Henriade, it is both a king and an era that attracts Voltaire's attention, but in the Siècle, it is to the many great developments of that period that he gives the most importance:

'Il y a longtemps que j'ai assemblé quelques matériaux pour faire l'histoire du siècle de Louis XIV. Ce n'est point simplement la vie de ce prince que j'écris, ce ne sont point les annales de son règne, c'est plutôt l'histoire de l'esprit humain, puisée dans le siècle le plus glorieux à l'esprit humain.'²

¹Fellows and Torrey, (ed.), The Age of Enlightenment, 386.

²Siècle, 605.

During the years 1735 to 1739, as his work began to take shape, its most obvious characteristic was, perhaps, this positive outlook on the seventeenth century. Lanson, in his study on Voltaire, notes this point, and even sees it as an offshoot of Voltaire's early literary taste:

. . . Voltaire, homme d'esprit et poète alors avant tout, voyait dans ce long régime le prodigieux développement de l'intelligence, les chefs-d'oeuvre des arts et des lettres, la France manquant, il est vrai, la monarchie universelle, mais établissant sur toute l'Europe la domination de sa langue, de sa politesse, de sa culture, de ses grands écrivains. De là l'enthousiasme dont sortit le premier dessein, tout français et classique, du Siècle de Louis XIV.³

In the 1730's, Voltaire looked upon his work as a panegyric of the early military campaigns, the economic growth, the financial stability of Louis' reign. It was a panegyric which was to culminate in praise of the flowering of French literature under Louis XIV: " . . . dans l'éloquence, dans la poésie, dans la littérature, dans les livres de morale et d'agrément, les Français furent les législateurs de l'Europe." (Siècle, 1002). The Siècle de Louis XIV was to end upon such a note.

Further evidence exists supporting Lanson's explanation of Voltaire's interest in the reign of Louis XIV. From almost the very beginning of his literary career,

³ Lanson, Voltaire, 115.

Voltaire had found himself the victim of religious and political censorship. La Henriade and the Lettres philosophiques (1734) had both encountered the barriers of official hostility, and Voltaire no doubt looked back upon the days of the Sun King with some longing. As J.B. Black says: " . . . in exalting the France of Louis XIV, Voltaire was deliberately passing judgement on the France of his own day."⁴ It was certainly in order to exalt many specific aspects of " . . . le siècle le plus éclairé qui fût jamais" (Siècle, 616) that Voltaire began his Siècle de Louis XIV.

In a letter, written in 1738, Voltaire gave an exact outline of this history. There were to be approximately twenty chapters recounting the great events of the time, one dealing with the private life of Louis XIV, two pointing out the development of commerce, finances and internal government, only two on religious affairs, and finally " . . . cinq ou six pour l'histoire des arts . . . " (Siècle, 605). In 1738, such was the plan of the Siècle; however, it was not to remain in this form for long. As his research brought Louis XIV's reign into sharper focus, he felt an increasing and acute disillusionment concerning the rôle that religion had played at that time. The full effect of his change of attitude was soon to be clearly

⁴Black, The Art of History, 68.

revealed:

Entre 1738 et 1742 l'ordonnance fut modifiée. Les affaires ecclésiastiques interrompaient la progression. Elles furent rejetées à la fin: elles formèrent l'envers du beau règne. Les disputes et les persécutions religieuses, superstition et fanatisme, c'est 'l'histoire des fous.' Le XVII^e siècle, qu'on ne peut surpasser dans la poésie et les arts, a laissé un progrès à faire⁵ dans la philosophie au siècle de Louis XV et de Frédéric II.

Voltaire's criticism of Christianity is frequent in the Siècle, and very often appears in chapters which do not specifically deal with religion itself. He saw fit to terminate his introductory chapter of the 1751 edition on this pessimistic note:

Enfin on parlera de l'église, qui depuis si longtemps est liée au gouvernement; qui tantôt l'inquiète et tantôt le fortifie, et qui instituée pour enseigner la morale, se livre souvent à la politique et aux passions humaines.⁶

A large part of the following chapter, which concerns the countries of Europe in the years before Louis XIV's reign, is devoted to the bloody results of the Reformation:

Non seulement l'Allemagne, mais tous les états chrétiens saignent encore des plaies qu'ils avaient reçues de tant de guerres de religion, fureur particulière aux chrétiens, ignorée aux idolâtres, et suite malheureuse de l'esprit dogmatique introduit depuis si longtemps dans toutes les conditions.⁷

⁵Lanson, loc. cit.; see also Brumfitt, 50.

⁶Siècle, 620.

⁷Siècle, 622.

Both Pomeau and Rowe,⁸ in contrast to Lanson, tend to attribute Voltaire's change of attitude to the years he spent at Frederick's court immediately preceding publication of the Siècle. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that it was the religious quarrels, " . . . qui font la honte de la raison humaine" (Siècle, 1041), which caused that change.

The most important of the modifications which Voltaire brought to his history concerned the chapters on art and religion. Instead of five or six on art, he had only two, and these he removed from their triumphal position at the end to a penultimate one. The final section of the work, the one which by virtue of its position had greatest significance, was occupied with chapters dealing with religion. What is more, these were now to number five, not two as initially planned. On the disillusionment which resulted in these changes J.H. Brumfitt has several interesting comments. Referring to the 1751 edition, he remarks in his book Voltaire. Historian (1958), "One might say that the Siècle has been rewritten with a desire to 'écraser l'Infâme' rather than

⁸See Pomeau, 280, and Rowe, Voltaire and the State, 55.

to 'répandre la lumière'." (p. 54). However, in his article "History and Propoganda" (1963), Brumfitt adopts a somewhat different attitude when he makes these perceptive comments on the later editions of Voltaire's history:

When he revised the work in the late sixties, the campaign against 'l'infâme' was at its height. It would therefore seem reasonable to expect that the later versions of the work would be the most outspoken in their hostility to the Church. Yet this is not altogether the case. The first text of the Siècle (1735) contains a long and bitter attack on papal policy . . . The final version, however, despite its avowed policy of ridiculing ecclesiastical disputes, contains nothing so harsh . . .⁹ Voltaire seems to aim deliberately at moderation.

Brumfitt goes on to say that one reason for this restraint was the desire to escape censorship and to have the Siècle published in France without great difficulty.¹⁰ This factor, together with his wish, as an historian, to recount the truth, does lead Voltaire to treat the subject of religion with unusual moderation, and to temper the sarcasm which at times does still stand out.

Before turning to the chapter on Calvinism which is of the greatest interest to us, let us take a very brief look at Voltaire's treatment of other religious questions in his work. As Brumfitt indicates, Voltaire exhibits great

⁹Brumfitt, "History and Propoganda in Voltaire". In: Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, XXIV, 277.

¹⁰See p. 280 ff.; also Brumfitt, 57-8.

equanimity in his comments on Catholicism. No where are to be found the violent outcries against Catholic intolerance, against popes and 'prêtres' that were so common in La Henriade. Indeed, even such subjects as the annual loss of French revenue to the Church in Rome, and that of papal authority in French affairs -- subjects which never ceased to rouse Voltaire's ire -- are dealt with very objectively. The treatment of papal influence in France is an excellent example of his restraint. In 1750, Voltaire had written the short treatise, La Voix du sage et du peuple, in which he made no effort to hide his views on the relationship between Church and State: "Le gouvernement ne peut être bon que s'il n'y a une puissance unique."¹¹ He goes on to insist:

Il n'y a pas un seul exemple de trouble et de dissension quand le prince a été le maître absolu de la police ecclésiastique: il n'y a que des exemples de désordres et de calamités quand les ecclésiastiques n'ont pas été entièrement soumis au prince.¹²

Such a blunt affirmation contrasts sharply with statements in the Siècle de Louis XIV such as: "La France, malgré toutes ses libertés de l'église gallicane, souffre que l'on appelle au pape en dernier ressort dans quelques causes ecclésiastiques" (p. 627).

¹¹Voltaire, La Voix du sage et du peuple, 466.

¹²Ibid, 470.

In the thirty-fifth chapter of the Siècle, entitled "Affaires ecclésiastiques. Disputes mémorables", a further criticism of Papal policy is related in an equally untroubled manner. Despite Voltaire's obvious sanctioning of the stand of Louis and the Gallican Church against the pope over the 'régale' issue, his attitude towards Innocent XI is an understanding one.

Voltaire gives one chapter to each of Jansenism and Quietism. His discussion of these religious disputes is in a tone of indifference, tinged with mockery. Indeed, the well-documented, factual nature of his account gives us the impression of disinterest on his part. There are, however, definite reasons for this approach. Besides striving for objectivity, Voltaire was not, as Brumfitt points out,

. . . interested in the theological questions or in the spiritual differences between the various sects . . . In his comparison of Protestantism and Jansenism he is particularly concerned to find out why the former should lead to civil war, whereas the conflicts produced by the latter have been much less harmful.¹³

As in La Henriade, we find that Voltaire's interest in and judgement of religion is based on the morality of its adherents, not on doctrine. However, it cannot be said that Voltaire remained completely detached in his record-

¹³Brumfitt, 58.

ing of these quarrels. Always the enemy of sectarianism, he looked upon the unrest that Jansenism and Quietism caused as a sign of a lack of progress during the reign of Louis XIV (see Siècle, 1088).

The extent of Voltaire's disillusionment is measured by the subject of the final chapter of the work: the recounting of the strife Christianity brought to China which he believed to be the most peaceful and tolerant country in the world. His praise is for the wise Cam-Hi, emperor of " . . . le premier peuple de la terre dans la morale et dans la police . . . " (p. 1102). His sarcasm is for the stupid pretensions of Rome, and the jealousies of the Dominican order. And yet, even here, Voltaire shows moderation. Although the Jesuits shared in the blame for bringing unrest to China, Voltaire has praise for some individual members of the order. Such a one is the missionary Lecomte who strongly defended Chinese beliefs against the accusations of Rome. To a certain extent, the entire Jesuit mission basks in Voltaire's favour because of its defense of Chinese customs, as opposed to the dogmatic Dominican order. As in La Henriade where Voltaire praised the loyalty of the French Protestants, so, here, he gives credit where he feels credit is due. Nevertheless, the note upon which Voltaire ends his history of the great reign of Louis XIV is certainly not positive. As he says in his last chapter:

Cette dispute ne produisait pas de grands mouvements, mais elle caractérisa plus qu'aucune autre cet esprit actif, contentieux et querelleur qui règne dans nos climats.¹⁴

Now let us study Voltaire's attitude towards Calvinism, the religious movement that, more than any other, was to be the focus of violent conflict during Louis' reign.

Voltaire begins his chapter on Calvinism in France on a recurrent, even predictable theme.

Il est affreux sans doute que l'église chrétienne ait toujours été déchirée par ses querelles, et que le sang ait coulé pendant tant de siècles par des mains qui portaient le Dieu de la paix. Cette fureur fut inconnue au paganisme.¹⁵

In these few words Voltaire presents one more biting criticism of the religious disputes of the seventeenth century. While being consistant with his approach elsewhere in the Siècle, his attitude has remained unchanged from earlier days when he wrote La Henriade. He still bitterly regrets the dogmatism and the intolerance which have perpetuated the Catholic-Protestant quarrels, and the chaos and bloodshed which they have never ceased to spread. However, from this forceful beginning, Voltaire proceeds to give a seemingly factual, disinterested account of the

¹⁴Siècle, 1101.

¹⁵Siècle, 1041.

development of Protestantism throughout Europe. Several attitudes, which we first noted in his epic poem, stand out again now. For example, Voltaire states that Protestantism was accepted in Germany " . . . comme un prétexte pour s'emparer de tant de terres dont les évêques et les abbés s'étaient mis en possession, et pour résister aux empereurs . . . " (p. 1043). Once more, Voltaire's lack of interest in the theological aspects of the quarrel leads him to discredit it.¹⁶ Such are his feelings towards the rise of Protestantism in France. In the Siècle he reemphasizes this point which he first made in the Essai sur les guerres civiles (1727):

Les Condé et les Coligny, devenus calvinistes parce que les Guise étaient catholiques, bouleversèrent l'état à l'envi. La légèreté et l'impétuosité de la nation, la fureur de la nouveauté, et l'enthousiasme, firent pendant quarante ans du peuple le plus poli un peuple de barbares.¹⁷

Voltaire continues, showing a marked disinterest towards the Protestants of Henri IV's reign. This is a surprising change, for in La Henriade Voltaire defended their loyalty to Henri, but now a cold aloofness is clearly evident:

Enfin, Henri IV semble satisfaire son goût, sa politique, et même son devoir, en accordant au parti le célèbre édit de Nantes, en 1598. Cet édit n'était au fond que la confirmation des privilèges que les protestants de France avaient obtenus des rois précédents les armes à la main,

¹⁶See Champendal, 17.

¹⁷Siècle, 1044.

et que Henri le Grand, affermi sur le trône, leur laissa par bonne volonté.¹⁸

This attitude is all the more astonishing when we consider that Voltaire was about to deal with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) and the horrible persecutions of Protestants that preceded and followed it. Such persecution he had strongly attacked in his epic poem. However, Brumfitt accounts for this change in the light of Voltaire's generally moderate treatment of religion. On the one hand, Voltaire is still as much against sectarianism and the quarrels caused by Protestantism as he ever was. On the other, he describes its growth in Europe mainly in factual terms, rather than by stressing the strife it was to cause. In Brumfitt's words:

If the fanaticism of the 'camisards' is strongly condemned, Protestantism itself is explained sympathetically in sociological terms as a natural reaction of the evangelical, egalitarian Christian spirit against¹⁹ the stratified hierarchy of the Roman Church . . .

In a sense, then, Voltaire can be commended for giving an equitable description of Protestantism in parts of the Siècle. This moderation, here in favour of Calvinism, is found when Voltaire deals with the repressive actions,

¹⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁹ Brumfitt, "History and Propoganda", 278.

directed by the Church and the king himself, against the Protestants before the Revocation.

The history of French Protestantism between 1598 and 1685 is one of its decline. Internal decay played a major part in this situation, as Léonard points out: "Dix ans après l'édit de Nantes, les huguenots sont, en grand nombre, las d'être purs et durs. Le corps protestant se laissait aller à toutes les tentations de la paix" (Léonard, II, 326). Throughout this period, external pressure also affected its life:

the Edict of Nantes was a treaty between the king and his Huguenot subjects, a treaty that had created a Huguenot republic within the kingdom. Henry IV had spent much of his time trying to whittle away some of the privileges that he had been forced to give; Louis XIII and Richelieu had carried the sword to victory and had taken from the Huguenot party²⁰ its independent political and military power . . .

Both Richelieu and, later, Louis XIV sensed the moral weakening of Protestantism, and both implemented a policy to reunite the Calvinists with the Catholic Church.

Their initial efforts were by no means harsh. One of the first methods Louis sanctioned was that of buying the Protestants back with small gifts of money. Even the Protestant pastors were approached and, surprisingly, converts were won among their ranks also: "Triste témoignage

²⁰Wolf, Louis XIV, 384.

du déclin du protestantisme . . ." (Léonard, II, 357).

Lewis, without inferring any moral significance of this means, describes it as being "fatally successful."²¹

Voltaire, however, comments: ". . . on ne fit pas assez d'usage de ce ressort." (Siècle, 1050). His statement shows, in effect, a strong preference for the use of bribery over the repressive and more violent measures that eventually replaced it. It also indicates that he did not condemn the purpose of the bribery.

Although, as Léonard says, "La cour finit par préférer des moyens moins chers et plus efficaces . . ." (II, 358), Church and State did not immediately resort to violence.

Entre 1661 et 1679 s'étend . . . une trêve de dix-huit ans, durant laquelle on ne peut parler de persécution, mais seulement d'une sorte d'harcèlement continu, exercé sous des prétextes et avec des apparences juridiques.²²

During these years more and more repressive measures were passed by the government, such as forbidding the public exercise of Protestantism, closing Protestant churches and hospitals, excluding Calvinists from government positions and high military rank, and forbidding Protestants to practise most professions and trades. Lewis describes the

²¹ Lewis, The Splendid Century, 107.

²² Bailly, Le Règne de Louis XIV, 270.

situation in these words:

The contention of the Crown lawyers, breathtaking in its effrontery, was simply this: that any activity for which specific provision was not made in the edict [of Nantes], was by implication and intention, illegal . . . Where was the paragraph in the edict authorizing a Huguenot to be a shoemaker, a tailor, a wholesale merchant, or what you like? Nowhere. Then all these activities were illegal. And the victims had no redress, for by the middle sixties it was already only too evident that in no civil or criminal court in the land could a Huguenot hope to find justice.²³

Treatment of Protestants according to a literal interpretation of the Edict of Nantes was a policy which received Louis XIV's complete sanction; indeed, such had always been his policy.

Now we must look at the rôle the king played in these years, and to Voltaire's reaction towards it. There are three important views on this subject. Lewis stands alone in his wish to absolve Louis of almost all blame for what he calls the " . . . liquidation of the Huguenots . . . " (p. 102). In a rather contradictory fashion he mentions briefly that Louis' *mémoires* " . . . make it clear that the problem of his heretic subjects was exercising his mind from the beginning of the personal reign." (p. 105). Elsewhere he offers an interpretation which effectively takes the blame from the king. Such is the import of the following passage:

²³ Lewis, ibid, 106.

. . . there is no one villain to whom we can allot the blame; detestation of the Huguenots was in the very air of seventeenth-century France, and their extirpation was a national aspiration. The anti-Huguenot movement is the one case in the reign where a policy was initiated by the ordinary man, and imposed on the executive by pressure from below.²⁴

Lewis has certainly accurately evaluated French Catholic feeling. As he points out, not only was their religious antagonism during Louis XIV's reign, there were also bitter memories of Protestant intolerance during the religious wars of the late sixteenth century. In addition, there was a definite " . . . economic cause for hatred . . .", for " . . . to the people, the Huguenot was a very dangerous, and sometimes crushing business rival . . ." (Lewis, 103). The reason for this situation is rather ironic, in that the earliest restrictions which had forbidden higher professions of Protestants had forced them to put their knowledge to use in commerce.

However, although antipathy towards the Protestants was quite wide-spread, there are other, more convincing theories, which lay the blame closer to Lewis' door. Léonard proves conclusively, I believe, that the king held a characteristically important and active position in bringing this anti-Protestant policy into effect:

²⁴Ibid, 102.

Dictant, en 1671, ses Mémoires pour l'instruction du Dauphin, Louis XIV y traitait de 'la conduite à tenir à l'égard des protestants': 'Je crus, mon fils, que le meilleur moyen pour réduire peu à peu les huguenots de mon royaume était, en première lieu, de ne les point presser du tout par aucune rigueur nouvelle, de faire observer ce qu'ils avaient obtenu de mes prédécesseurs, mais de ne rien leur accorder au delà, et d'en renfermer même l'exécution dans les plus étroites bornes que la justice et la bienséance pouvaient permettre. Mais, quant aux grâces qui dépendaient de moi seul, je résolus, et j'ai assez ponctuellement observé depuis, de ne leur en faire aucune, et cela par bonté, non par aigreur, pour les obliger par là à considérer de temps en temps, d'eux-mêmes et sans violence, si c'était par quelque bonne raison qu'ils se privaient volontairement des avantages qui pouvaient leur être communs avec tous mes autres sujets. Cependant, j'ai résolu d'attirer, même par récompense, ceux qui se rendaient dociles.'

Léonard continues:

Ce texte est si net et si clair qu'il contraint presque l'historien à voir dans la politique anti-protestante de la fin du XVII^e siècle l'²⁵œuvre personnelle du roi, et une oeuvre sans bavures.

Somewhere between Lewis' and Léonard's outlooks comes that of Voltaire and several other historians. Like Léonard, Voltaire felt that Lewis wished to " . . . écraser le calvinisme . . ." (Siècle, 1052), but of greater interest is Voltaire's reaction to the increasingly harsh measures Louis used in order to achieve his aim. If Voltaire supported harmless bribery, what did he feel about the great monarch's later, intolerant measures? Champendal, referring specifically to Voltaire's treatment of the

²⁵Léonard, II, 356.

Revocation, describes his attitude in this way:

Au lieu de reprocher franchement à Louis XIV d'avoir révoqué un Edit perpétuel et solennel, que par deux fois il avait juré de respecter, Voltaire cherche à laver la mémoire du monarque de tout ce qui peut la salir.²⁶

To be precise, Voltaire eases most of the blame from Louis' shoulders onto those of the people who had influence upon him, and he is not alone in holding this view.²⁷ It is, perhaps, natural that Voltaire's first target should be his old enemies, 'les prêtres':

Louis XIV était animé contre les réformés par les remontrances continuelles de son clergé, par les insinuations des jésuites, par la cour de Rome, et enfin par le chancelier Le Tellier et Louvois, son fils, tous deux ennemis de Colbert, et qui voulaient perdre les réformés comme rebelles parce que Colbert les protégeait comme des sujets utiles. Louis XIV, nullement instruit d'ailleurs au fond de leur doctrine, les regardait non sans quelque raison comme d'anciens révoltés soumis avec peine.²⁸

In relation to the use of bribery, Voltaire offers a concrete example of the unfortunate influence upon the king:

De petites sommes d'argent distribuées à des indigents enflaient la liste que Pellisson présentait au roi tous les trois mois, en lui persuadant que tout cédait dans le monde à sa puissance ou à ses bienfaits.²⁹

²⁶ Champendal, 30.

²⁷ See Champendal, 28; Bailly, Le Règne de Louis XIV, 273, 277, and Wolf, Louis XIV, 383, 385, 386.

²⁸ Siècle, 1049.

²⁹ Siècle, 1050.

Voltaire was defending a king he greatly admired. When he remarks that Louis wanted to wipe out Calvinism, his comment is purely factual and without a hint of judgement. In discussing the use of more and more intolerant actions against the Protestants, he may question the practicality of certain measures, but again, he never judges the king. Such is his attitude in 1751 in the Siècle; so it is a year later in the "Poème sur la loi naturelle". Even in L'Ingénu (1767) he tries to exonerate Louis from personal blame.³⁰

Voltaire's defense of Louis XIV, which necessitated a lack of sympathy towards the Protestant cause, is in equally strong evidence regarding the most brutal anti-Protestant measure, the 'dragonnades'. Yet this last method of extirpation draws from Voltaire one of the very few harsh criticisms of a policy Louis sanctioned. Citing England, Holland, and Germany as examples, Voltaire points out that elsewhere it has been proven that citizens of different faiths can live together in peace and loyalty, despite their strife in former years. To this he adds:

Il parut enfin que la reine Christine avait eu raison de dire dans une de ses lettres, à l'occasion de ces violences et de ces émigrations: 'Je considère la France comme un malade à qui on coupe bras et jambes pour le traiter d'un mal que la douceur et la patience auraient entièrement guéri.'³¹

³⁰Voltaire, "Poème sur la loi naturelle", 285; and L'Ingénu, 245.

³¹Siècle, 1052.

In comparison with La Henriade, this note in favour of toleration is most subdued, and Voltaire still sought to alleviate the king's responsibility in the affair: "Ces violences parurent faites à contretemps. Elles étaient la suite de l'esprit qui régnait alors à la cour que tout devait fléchir au nom de Louis XIV." (p. 1052). In his article "History and Propaganda" Brumfitt remarks that

. . . Voltaire is insistent that Louis XIV himself did not realize the extent of the misery inflicted on the Protestant by the 'dragonnades'. His moderation arouses the wrath of a ³²'philosophe' like Grimm who saw it as a betrayal . . .

It appears that Voltaire was correct in absolving Louis of most of the blame for this last, harsh measure.³³

Nevertheless, his moderation had reached somewhat extreme proportions. As Brumfitt says, the reference to the letter of Queen Christine was only added to the text in 1753: the original edition lacked even that criticism (Brumfitt, 58).

The 'dragonnades' were certainly the most effective weapon used against the Protestants, and thousands of converts as well as thousands of emigrants were the result. Indeed, Voltaire's greatest criticism of Louis' policies is based on this last point, namely, the exodus of French Protestants:

³²Brumfitt, "History and Propaganda", 278.

³³Wolf, Louis XIV, 393.

Pouvait-on imaginer qu'en forçant un grand nombre de sujets, on n'en perdrait pas un plus grand nombre, qui malgré les édits et malgré les gardes, échapperaient par la fuite à une violence regardée comme une horrible persécution?³⁴

As we have seen before, Voltaire's attacks on intolerance are never the result of sympathy for the Protestant faith. In the case of the 'dragonnades', it is rather the economic considerations hinted at in the above passage which are of the greatest importance to him. However, this is not to say that Voltaire was no longer moved by the human considerations which were so clearly in evidence in La Henriade. These we shall find again in the other works we shall study, but in the Siècle, they are most rare. Again, it would seem that Voltaire sought to defend Louis, this time by overlooking the inhumanity of the anti-Protestant policy.

The increasing repression of Calvinists led to an inevitable conclusion. Bailly, emphasizing the rôle of the Catholic Church in these events, sums up the situation:

. . . d'assemblé en assemblé . . . se prépare graduellement la révocation de l'édit [de Nantes], décidée par l'église longtemps avant que le roi lui-même y eut songé. Elle répondait à son désir, et plus encore à un besoin de sa nature, mais elle n'était pas moins souhaitée par toute la France catholique.³⁵

³⁴ Siècle, 1052.

³⁵ Bailly, Le Règne de Louis XIV, 272-3.

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes is held, almost universally, as perhaps Louis XIV's greatest blunder. It was the culmination of a campaign which Lewis goes so far as to call

. . . a crime which stood pre-eminent in its vileness for over two hundred and fifty years, until a more advanced civilization produced the gas chamber and the concentration camp.³⁶

Such was certainly not the opinion of the majority in France in 1685. Voltaire reiterates the attitude of Louis XIV and French Catholics upon the revocation of the Edict:

. . . l'édit de Nantes fut enfin cassé, au mois d'octobre 1685; et on acheva de ruiner l'édifice qui était déjà miné de toutes parts.³⁷

To this passage Voltaire added the following note:

Toutes les histoires imprimées en Hollande reprochent à Louis XIV la révocation de l'édit de Nantes. Je le crois bien: tous ces livres sont écrits par des protestants. Ils furent des ennemis d'autant plus implacables de ce monarque, qu'avant d'avoir quitté le royaume ils étaient des sujets fidèles.³⁸

Once more, Voltaire is kind towards Louis himself, and yet the above two statements have a unique significance, for they are virtually the only words of justification Voltaire

³⁶ Lewis, The Splendid Century, 102.

³⁷ siècle, 1054; see also Léonard, II, 372.

³⁸ siècle, 1724.

ever has to offer on the subject of the Revocation.

Obviously they do not reflect his real thoughts about the infamous edict of 1685. His opinion was determined by the results of the Revocation, the disastrous results which have given it its place in history. Voltaire does not attempt to overlook them:

Mais dans ce célèbre édit qui révoqua celui de Nantes, il paraît qu'on prépara un événement tout contraire au but qu'on s'était proposé . . . Près de cinquante mille familles, en trois ans de temps, sortirent du royaume, et furent après suivies par d'autres. Elles allèrent porter chez les étrangers les arts, les manufactures, la richesse. . . . Ainsi la France perdit environ cinq cent mille habitants, une quantité prodigieuse d'espèces, et surtout des arts dont ses ennemis s'enrichirent. La Hollande y gagna d'excellents officiers et des soldats. Le prince d'Orange et le duc de Savoie eurent des régiments entiers de réfugiés.³⁹

This devastating loss to France is criticized frequently in the Siècle de Louis XIV. As Brumfitt stresses: "His condemnation [of the Revocation] is based, not on moral principles, nor on a theoretical belief in tolerance, but on the economic harm done to France by the Protestant exodus." (Brumfitt, 58). Voltaire, who had praised Henri IV and Louis XIV for the prosperity which they helped create in France, bitterly recognized the damage to the nation's economy which the flight of so many merchants and skilled

³⁹Siècle, 1054, 1055-6.

manufacturers had caused. They took their knowledge and experience to France's rivals, as well as a hatred for Louis which transformed them from loyal citizens into enemies (Siècle, 759). In La Henriade, Voltaire's plea for religious toleration was based, to a great degree, on the fear of the chaos and destruction caused by the wars of religion. It is this same, very practical concern for the well-being of his country that makes him protest the Revocation as strongly as he does.

The economic aspect of this event, " . . . un des grands malheurs de la France" (Siècle, 1055) is, indeed, the heart of Voltaire's reaction, but he had other feelings towards it as well. Speaking once more of Voltaire's moderation on religious questions, Brumfitt remarks:

This restraint is even more remarkable when Voltaire comes to deal with the event which, above all others, might have been expected to arouse the indignation of an opponent of Catholic intolerance -- the repeal of the edict of Nantes. The policy of persecution is condemned, not so much because it was morally wrong as because it failed
 . . .

Not only was Voltaire fully aware of the terrible economic effects of the Revocation, he also knew that Louis' policy had failed to extirpate Protestantism from France. In the Siècle he is forced to admit this failure:

⁴⁰ Brumfitt, "History and Propaganda", 278.

Toute persécution fait des prosélytes quand elle frappe pendant la chaleur de l'enthousiasme. Les calvinistes s'assemblèrent partout pour chanter leurs psaumes, malgré la peine de mort décernée contre ceux qui tiendraient des assemblés.⁴¹

Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism up to this point in the Siècle has been generally far from favourable. The same attitude is even more strongly evident in his treatment of the war of the Cévennes. After the Revocation, a strong group of Protestants in Languedoc, where Catholic repression had been violent, banded together in the mountainous Cévennes and Vivarais areas and practised their faith in defiance of the law. Continued persecution led to several small uprisings in which a number of priests were killed. Then, in 1701, troops were sent to put down the Protestants, and the result was armed revolt. In Voltaire's words: " . . . la rébellion et le fanatisme éclatèrent en Languedoc et dans les contrées voisines." (Siècle, 1057). Although the Cévenols were not entirely to blame for causing the strife, they were no less guilty of committing atrocities during the war than were the French troops. Brumfitt points out that " . . . Voltaire seems to deal more harshly with the fanatics of the Cévennes than with their persecutors."⁴²

⁴¹Siècle, 1057.

⁴²Brumfitt, "History and Propaganda", 278.

However, Champendal sees this reaction as being consistent with Voltaire's basic attitudes throughout the Siècle:

. . . pour justifier la répression sanglante des huguenots lors de la guerre des Cévennes, Voltaire cherche à dégager Louis XIV de sa part de responsabilité. Quoi de plus naturel que cette guerre puisqu'il s'agissait de réprimer un fanatisme dangereux? . . . En seconde lieu, les Cévenols n'avaient-ils pas fait appel à l'étranger⁴³ et ainsi gravement compromis la sûreté de l'état?

Champendal is correct, I feel, when he concludes that Voltaire's intention was to "dégager Louis XIV de sa part de responsabilité". Nevertheless, the somewhat mocking tone in which he presents Voltaire's reasons is, I would suggest, rather ill-advised. Voltaire's reaction is, really, perfectly logical. In Voltaire's words:

Cette rébellion fut excitée par des prophéties. Les prédictions ont été de tout temps un moyen dont on s'est servi pour séduire les simples et pour enflammer les fanatiques . . . Le ministre Jurieu fut un des plus ardents prophètes . . . Il promit la délivrance du peuple de Dieu pendant huit années . . . Un vieil huguenot, nommé de Serre, . . . annonça la ruine de Babylone et le rétablissement de Jérusalem . . .⁴⁴ Il était hors de lui-même; il avait des convulsions . . .

Such actions and such prophecies could not help but anger Voltaire who, in the Lettres philosophiques (1734) had ridiculed the inspired convulsions of the first Quakers,⁴⁵ and who always feared sectarianism. Moreover, the

⁴³ Champendal, 29.

⁴⁴ Siècle, 1057-8.

⁴⁵ See the second and third letters.

apparent intent of these prophecies was the eventual overthrowing of Catholicism and the establishing of Protestantism as the one religion in France. Voltaire's attitude towards religious wars is no secret, nor is his opinion of the Protestant faith. Champendal is also incorrect in belittling the importance of the threat of outside intervention in the war. Voltaire states that it was the famous pastor "Claude Brousson, . . . homme éloquent et plein de zèle . . . " who had formed " . . . le projet d'introduire des troupes anglaises et savoyardes dans le Languedoc" (Siècle, 1058). Moreover, when Brousson was captured and executed for his plot, "toute la secte, loin de le regarder comme un criminel d'état ne vit en lui qu'un saint qui avait scellé sa foi de son sang; et on imprima le martyre de M. de Brousson. Alors les prophètes se multiplient, et l'esprit de fureur redouble" (pp. 1058-9). How could Champendal expect Voltaire to react in any way other than by condemning the rebellions and fanatic Protestants? Voltaire's loyalty to his country never wavered throughout his life and, in his eyes, a band of Huguenots fighting Louis' troops and calling upon France's enemies to oppose the king's policies could be regarded nothing other than as traitors. Furthermore, during the strife, the Huguenots, ably led by Jean Cavelier, forced Louis to send to Languedoc large numbers of his regular

troops and eventually three marshals of France, at a time when the War of the Spanish Succession was already straining the country's resources. The war of the Cévennes was not simply another religious quarrel of the reign of Louis XIV: it was an armed revolt, sparked by fanatics, and potentially of great political danger.

Voltaire's reaction to this war is most understandable. However, he had yet another reason for treating the Protestants as coldly as he does. This was Protestant intolerance, with which he had long been familiar since the days of his research for La Henriade. Speaking first of the actions of the French soldiers, he comments: "On roue, on brûle les prisonniers, mais aussi les soldats qui tombent entre les mains des révoltés périssent par des morts cruelles" (Siècle, 1060). Voltaire had little reason to feel sympathy for the Protestants but, surprisingly, in one instance, he does. We have seen that his reaction to the suffering which the 'dragonnades' caused the Protestants, was much colder in the 1751 edition than in the later ones. A similar response is found here concerning the Cévenols. In 1751 Voltaire wrote that when the maréchal de Montrevel arrived with the first troops, "il fit la guerre à ces misérables comme ils méritaient qu'on la leur fît" (Siècle, 1725). In the later editions, Voltaire softened his comment to the statement that "il fait la

guerre à ces misérables avec une barbarie qui surpasse la leur" (p. 1060).

The Siècle de Louis XIV, like La Henriade, leaves little doubt in our minds as to Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism in France. One of the most important and most fateful events of the reign of Louis XIV was the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. It was a disaster for France, and the persecution of Protestants that preceded and followed it was a stain on the country's honour. Nevertheless, Voltaire treats these events as he does every aspect of religion in the Siècle -- with an unexpected moderation. But to Voltaire, who was trying to uphold the glory of the great king, Louis XIV, a defense of the monarch's policies entailed a much more aloof attitude towards the persecuted Protestants than he might otherwise have adopted. And yet, praise of Louis XIV was not the only deciding factor in Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism in seventeenth-century France. There is a certain consistency in Voltaire's attitude because many of the ideas first expressed in La Henriade (1723) reappear in the Siècle some twenty-eight years later. Easily recognizable in his scorn for the Protestant faith. In treating the war of the Cévennes, his criticism of the sectarian dogmas and 'prophéties' of the Cévenols is exceedingly severe. Throughout the Siècle, an absence of direct condemnation of Protestantism is offset by his personal acceptance of Louis'

desire to extirpate Calvinism from France. Voltaire's only quarrel was with the methods used. Certainly his opinion that Protestantism was 'l'erreur' had not changed.

Likewise, similarities in his attitude exist between La Henriade and the Siècle, as regards the results of intolerance. In both works he attacks persecution as a policy which created more new Protestants than the number it ever converted to Catholicism. Moreover, religious intolerance in the sixteenth century led to the barbarity and the destruction of the religious wars. During Louis XIV's reign, the increasingly harsh repressions of Protestants, culminating in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, resulted in the flight of thousands of French Calvinists and a great economic loss to the country. Again, Voltaire's practical concern for the political and economic stability of France is evident.

However, as in 1723, Voltaire is not entirely critical of the Calvinists. As he had then commended their loyalty to Henri IV, so, in the Siècle of 1751 he recognized the value to France of their continued loyalty, and of the skills and knowledge which they possessed.

Some of the circumstances involved in the writing of the Siècle were different from those of La Henriade. Voltaire was no longer dealing with loyal subjects of Henri IV, but rather with the sometimes rebellious subjects of Louis XIV whose qualities Voltaire was extolling. In

1751, the bias was reversed. Nonetheless, despite this, we have seen that Voltaire's attitude towards Protestant beliefs, the qualities and faults of the Protestants, and the question of religious intolerance as related to that sect, have remained basically constant from the time when he wrote his epic poem to that when he concluded his Siècle de Louis XIV.

CHAPTER THREE

L'Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations (1756)

The year 1749 began what was, perhaps, the bleakest decade of Voltaire's life. That year was marked by the death of Mme de Châtelet, and those to follow were to bring his flight, in disillusionment, from Frederick's court (1753), and the terrible Lisbon earthquake (1755). Those years, which produced Candide (1759), also saw the publication of Voltaire's two greatest histories, Le Siècle de Louis XIV (1751), and the Essai sur les moeurs (1756). We have already seen how strongly Protestantism, and Christianity in general, contributed to this pessimism in relation to the former work. In the case of the Essai, begun in the early 1740's, this feeling is again evident, although religion is certainly not its only cause. His detailed study of the history of the known world convinced Voltaire that man's development throughout the centuries was " . . . a record of passion, folly, and crime, lit up and traversed periodically by human genius."¹ Nevertheless, the influence religion had upon Voltaire's attitude was

¹Black, The Art of History, 44.

a most important one. J.H. Brumfitt makes the following comment on the matter:

Voltaire has become more pessimistic since the Siècle. He delights in pointing out that the greater part of medieval history is a long story of crimes and horrors, . . . And in the same spirit he treats the alternate crimes of popes and emperors throughout the Middle Ages, and, later, the similar barbarities of Catholic and Protestant.²

However, besides a bitter and sarcastic tone, there is present in the Essai the same moderation which Voltaire displayed in the Siècle,³ although he achieves a much greater degree of impartiality, I believe, in the later history.

In the Essai, Voltaire looks at the growth and the struggle of Protestantism in two distinct areas: that of the Reformation, and then that of its history in France from the time of François I through the reign of Louis XIII. Surprisingly, Voltaire's treatment of Protestantism in each of these areas varies radically. In the first section dealing with the Reformation, the tone is quite sarcastic, whereas his description of French Calvinism is marked by great equanimity. Yet, as regards the Reformation, his reaction is only what we would expect, having already seen his attitude towards Protestantism in La Henriade and the

²Brumfitt, 68.

³See Brumfitt, 166.

Siècle. Perhaps J.B. Black's words will serve as the best summary of Voltaire's feelings towards Christianity and Protestantism:

. . . Christianity destroyed the religions of the Ancient World and broke the peace which humanity had enjoyed under the easy toleration of Rome; then it gave birth to the Mediaeval State and the Mediaeval Papacy, two warring principles which plunged Europe into a blood bath for a thousand years. In the meantime, however, while these antagonistic powers struggled for the mastery, Mohammedanism annihilated Christianity in the East and Africa, thereby becoming a menace to Christendom -- a menace which could only be met by war; hence the Crusades, and a further plunge into bloodshed. Then, again, when the Mediaeval Church became corrupt, the Reformation split up the unity of Christendom, severed many countries from the Roman communion, and created sectarian strife, which plagued the world until the emergence of the sovereign State and the dawn of reason.⁴

For humanitarian and practical reason, Voltaire never ceased to condemn religious quarrels and violence, and the Reformation of the sixteenth century only served, in his opinion, to prolong and worsen the damaging influence of Christianity in Europe. Once again, it is a question, in part, of sectarianism, and while admitting that the medieval Roman Church was guilty of many faults, Voltaire nevertheless wonders whether the remedial action of Luther and Calvin did not prove to be worse. On several occasions he states a decided preference for

. . . les crimes de la cour du pape Alexandre VI, et l'ambition de plusieurs ecclésiastiques, ce qui est très étranger aux dogmes, aux disputes, aux persécutions, aux rébellions,

⁴Black, ibid, 35-6.

à cet acharnement⁵ de la haine théologique qui produisit tant de meurtres.

Voltaire refuses to believe that the Reformation began with well-intended, religious reasons.⁶ His attack upon it becomes even more explicit as he accuses its founders, Luther and Calvin, of being ambitious men,⁷

. . . brûlants de se signaler, et d'obtenir cette domination sur les esprits qui flatte tant d'amour -- propre, et d'un théologien fait une espèce de conquérant.⁸

Certainly he has no interest in their "subtilités théologiques" (Essai, XII, 277); rather, what he deems important is their nefarious rôle in starting a bloody movement which still shook Europe two hundred and fifty years later. Thirteen years after the Essai was published, Voltaire wrote

J'ai fait plus en mon temps que Luther et Calvin.
On les vît opposer, par une erreur fatale,
Les abus aux abus, le scandale au scandale.
. . . L'Europe par eux tous fut longtemps désolée;
Ils ont troublé la terre . . .⁹

⁵Essai, XII, 281.

⁶Ibid, 283; see also Champendal, 17 and 35.

⁷Voltaire, Essai sur les guerres civiles en France, 268.

⁸Essai, XII, 304.

⁹Voltaire, "Epître XIV", 404.

Sectarianism, Protestant dogmas, persecution, and especially the religious wars the Reformation caused, are all basic reasons for Voltaire's critical and sarcastic reaction towards that movement and its leaders. However, Voltaire's treatment of Protestantism in France is in an entirely different tone. Moderation and sympathy are the key words in his account of its development. Why would Voltaire's attitude change so considerably in the short time since the Siècle, and in the middle of that unhappy decade? Several compelling reasons offer themselves, I feel, and they will make themselves apparent as we look at Voltaire's work.

François I was king of France when the Reformation began in 1517. His reaction to rising Protestantism has been described in these terms:

The attitude of the French king . . . varied from time to time according to political exigencies, but became more hostile to Protestantism as time went on. He was greatly disturbed by the Peasant Revolt in Germany, fearing that the spread of the new faith might bring anarchy into his own country. In his closing years¹⁰ the laws against heresy were rigidly enforced . . .

In 1535, "political exigency" called for the seeking of support from German Protestant princes. This François did, although at home his policy towards sectarians was that of persecution. Voltaire's criticism of the king's

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Americana, XIII, 302.

actions in these circumstances is both bitter and repeated.

Quel funeste contraste de faire brûler à petit feu dans Paris les luthériens parmi lesquels il y avait des Allemands, et de s'unir en même temps aux princes luthériens d'Allemagne, auprès desquels il est obligé de s'excuser de cette rigueur . . . Comment des historiens peuvent-ils avoir la lâcheté d'approuver ce supplice, et de l'attribuer 'au zèle pieux' d'un prince voluptueux, qui n'avait pas la moindre ombre de cette piété qu'on lui attribue? . . . Ce fut en 1535 qu'on brûla ces malheureux dans Paris . . . exemple . . . d'une barbarie raffinée, qui inspire autant d'horreur contre les historiens qui la louent que contre les juges qui l'ordonnèrent.¹¹

The above passage reveals two characteristics of Voltaire's present attitude. Here, most obviously, he is speaking as an historian seeking the impartial truth. His harshness towards the king is equalled by that towards the historians whom he accuses of wilfully misrepresenting historical events. As Brumfitt has noted, Voltaire's desire to be impartial was of great importance in his writing of the histories we are studying. However, when he dealt with Protestantism in the Siècle, it was with a cold aloofness that is not found in the Essai. Herein lies the second trait of Voltaire's attitude: although he discusses Protestantism in an increasingly factual, seemingly disinterested way, the Essai bears witness to his real concern for religious toleration. Voltaire refers to François' policy towards French Protestants as "une barbarie raffinée", and whereas he occasionally praises

¹¹Essai, XII, 265.

the stable government of François I, he does not cease to condemn the intolerance evident in France at that time.

Les évêques, les parlements, allumèrent les bûchers: il ne les éteignit pas. Il les aurait éteints si son coeur n'avait pas été endurci sur les malheurs des autres autant qu'amolli par les plaisirs . . . Le nombre des suppliciés pour n'avoir pas cru au pape, et l'horreur de leurs supplices, font frémir: il n'en était point ému; la religion ne l'embarrassait guère.¹²

Intolerance was, in Voltaire's eyes, one of the main characteristics of the reign of François I, and he reacts by showing increased sympathy towards the persecuted Protestants. Nowhere is this more clear than in relation to the massacre of the peaceful and industrious Vaudois sect of the south of France. For several obvious reasons Voltaire has great praise for this sect:

Point de prêtres parmi eux, point de querelles sur leur culte, point de procès; ils décidaient entre eux leurs différends. . . . Ils priaient Dieu dans leur jargon, et un travail assidu rendait leur vie innocente.¹³

In 1545, through a deliberate miscarriage of François' orders, thousands of the Vaudois were massacred as heretics, their cities and their fertile lands laid waste. So passionately was Voltaire moved by such ruthless destruction of life and property which he calls "cette barbarie" (p. 332),

¹²Ibid, 330.

¹³Ibid, 331.

that the recalling of this event came to be one of his greatest condemnations of intolerance. As such, it has a place in each of the Essai, the Traité sur la tolérance (1763), and the Histoire du parlement de Paris (1769).

The persecution of French Calvinists under François I did not succeed in destroying the new faith as he and the Catholic Church had hoped it would. Indeed, it can be said that the effect was largely the opposite: "The stress of persecution had compelled the Reformers to practise prudence and secrecy, but each fresh execution added strength to the cause. One martyr made many converts."¹⁴ Voltaire fully realized this (Essai, XII, 332), and one of the basic reasons for his plea for tolerance was the sure knowledge that persecution failed. Such is his claim in the article "Tolérance" in the Dictionnaire philosophique and, appropriately, the example he uses comes from the reign of François I:

François I^{er} donnera de l'argent aux luthériens d'Allemagne pour les soutenir dans leur révolte contre l'empereur; mais il commencera, selon l'usage, par faire brûler les luthériens chez lui. . . . Mais qu'arrivera-t-il? Les persécutions font des prosélytes; bientôt la France sera pleine de nouveaux protestants. D'abord ils se laisseront pendre, et puis ils pendront à leur tour. Il y aura des guerres civiles, puis viendra la Saint-Barthélemy, et ce coin du monde sera pire que tout ce que les anciens et les modernes ont jamais dit de l'enfer.¹⁵

¹⁴Tilley, "The Reformation in France". In: The Cambridge Modern History, II, 289.

¹⁵Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique, 403.

The plea for religious toleration is at the heart of Voltaire's treatment of Protestantism under François I, as it was in La Henriade. Moreover, the same reasons still apply: some practical, and some humanitarian, for it would be unfair and untrue to say that his motives were all of the former kind. The vocabulary used by Voltaire, particularly the repeated word "barbarie" to refer to persecution, shows his sympathy towards the Protestants. This plea and this sympathy, together with the desire to give an accurate account of the reign of François I, creates a much more equitable picture of Protestantism than he had given, five years earlier, in his Siècle de Louis XIV.

Voltaire's attitude both towards the Protestants and the persecution of Protestants remains the same as he looks at the reign of François' successor, Henri II.

Léonard notes that

Les dernières années de François I^{er} avaient été marquées par le massacre des Vaudois . . . Les trois premières années du règne de Henri II le durent de^{plus} de cinq cents arrêts rendus contre l'hérésie . . .

However, the anti-Protestant campaign of Henri II was of a determined nature which had not characterized that of his predecessor: "It was not biased either by sympathy with humanism, or by the necessity of conciliating his

¹⁶Léonard, II, 95.

Protestant allies."¹⁷ The little Voltaire had to say about the reign of Henri II is concerned with the persecution of the Protestants carried out by Henri:

Henri II, par ses rigueurs contre les sectaires, et surtout par la condamnation du conseiller Anne du Bourg, exécuté après la mort du roi, par l'ordre des Guises, fit beaucoup plus de calvinistes¹⁸ en France qu'il n'y en avait en Suisse et à Genève.

Indeed, Voltaire's anger is increased, as it often is, when he looks at the religious situation elsewhere. France's honour suffered in this instance, as for example when he considered the state of religion in England:

On pouvait les tolérer comme Elisabeth en Angleterre toléra les catholiques; on pouvait conserver du bons sujets en leur laissant la liberté de conscience. Il eût importé peu à l'état qu'ils chantassent à leur manière, pourvu qu'ils eussent été soumis aux lois de l'état: on les persécuta, et on en fit des rebelles.¹⁹

Voltaire, who knew that persecution failed as a means of extirpating Protestantism, also knew that it bred persecution in turn, and would eventually result in civil strife. Such was its natural conclusion, but he admits that under the strong hand of Henri II, this development was arrested:

¹⁷Tilley, *ibid*, 292.

¹⁸*Essai*, XII, 498-9.

¹⁹*Ibid*, 499.

La mort funeste de Henri II fut le signal de trente ans de guerres civiles. Un roi enfant gouverné par des étrangers, des princes de sang et de grands officiers de la couronne jaloux du crédit²⁰ des Guises, commencèrent la subversion de la France.

The short reigns of François II and of Charles IX, both minorities, marked the dividing of France into factions. Protestantism played an unquestionable rôle in this, for the religious conflict fostered and strengthened political division (Tilley, 299). Here, as in the Essai sur les guerres civiles, Voltaire makes reference to the Condé - Guise rivalry in developing his account of the growth of Protestantism in France (Essai, XII, 550).

In the pages Voltaire devotes to the bloody, destructive years of civil war, his moderation as an historian is strongly in evidence. Both Catholics and Protestants are criticized equally for zealously advancing their particular interests and thus perpetuating the religious wars.²¹ Likewise, that "fanaticism" which blesses and encourages assassination is condemned, whether Catholic or Protestant be guilty of it. However, Voltaire's critical remarks make up only a relatively small part of the narrative of these chapters which is a detailed,

²⁰ Loc. cit.; see also Siècle, 1044.

²¹ Essai, XII, 507: "Le clergé . . . opposés."

historically accurate description of the wars and of the troubled lulls between them.

If Voltaire's restraint in the Siècle on the subject of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes caused wonder, so does the equally great moderation he shows when recounting the Saint Bartholomew massacre (1572). This tragic event was, to Voltaire, as we have seen from La Henriade, "le plus détestable exemple de fanatisme . . . "22 Two hundred years after that massacre, as preparations for its anniversary celebrations were being made, he wrote:

Tu reviens après deux cents ans,
Jour affreux, jour fatal au monde;
Que l'abîme éternel du temps
Te couvre de sa nuit profonde! 23

However, in the Essai, Voltaire sums up that event in one graphic sentence:

Je ne répéterai point ce que tout le monde sait de cette tragédie abominable: une moitié de la nation égorgeant l'autre, le poignard et le crucifix en main; le roi lui-même tirant d'une arquebuse sur les malheureux qui fuyaient. 24

As abrupt as this account is, Voltaire's sympathy for the Protestants and his shock at the barbarity of the massacre

²²Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique, 197.

²³Voltaire, "Ode XX. L'Anniversaire de la Saint-Barthélemy. Pour l'année 1772", 494.

²⁴Essai, XII, 510.

are yet clear. Perhaps he felt his well-read epic poem had already sufficed to describe that event and to proclaim his attitude. Perhaps he hoped the terse style, the brief résumé of the brutal details, would have a shock effect upon the reader. Or, perhaps Voltaire was making his strongest effort to treat his subject in an impartial manner. I believe that all these possibilities are, to a degree, valid. This tone of moderation seems to be especially evident for Voltaire continues on the same note: "S'il pourrait y avoir quelque chose de plus déplorable que la Saint-Barthélemy, c'est qu'elle fit naître la guerre civile au lieu de couper la racine des troubles" (p. 511).

If there were one word to describe Voltaire's study of the reign of Henri III, it would be "factual". Voltaire, the historian, gives a precise account of the rise and usurption of power of the Guise family, and Henri's retreat to Blois. So he does for the assassination of Henri de Guise, Henri IV's aid, and finally Henri III's own death. Voltaire criticizes Henri III for being a weak king, but on the subject of Protestantism he has little to say. In the following chapter, Protestantism is again of secondary importance, for now Voltaire is recalling the rise of Henri IV, " . . . le meilleur des rois de France . . . " (p. 508). J.B. Black accurately summarizes the place Henri has in the Essai and, indeed, in Voltaire's lifelong outlook:

. . . from time to time there arise great men, who gather up and incarnate in themselves the spirit of epochs; and through them the constructive power of humanity finds its best and most salutary expression. They are . . . the true heroes of the race. Caesar, Charlemagne, . . . St. Louis . . . Henri IV, Peter the Great, Frederick, Louis XIV, etc. The test of their greatness is the measure of good they confer upon the world.²⁵

Henri IV is, as always, the strong, tolerant king whose love for his people and country helped him bring France from chaos to a position commanding respect. During his reign, he was able to reconcile the opposing faiths, on the surface, at least.²⁶ Typically, Voltaire's interest here lies with Henri's feat, rather than with the two opposing religions. Protestantism, now no longer at war, no more the faith of the king, is left for the time being. In this chapter, the only times the question of religion is even indirectly of importance to Voltaire, is in regard to " . . . la fureur épidémique du fanatisme [qui] possédait encore tellement la populace catholique qu'il n'y eut presque point d'années où l'on n'attentât contre sa vie" (p. 548). However, the emotion which Voltaire shows in this comment is very much the exception, rather than the rule in the Essai. More usual is the restraint, coloured by sarcasm, that he exhibits on the same subject a few pages later:

²⁵Black, The Art of History, 44.

²⁶Essai, XII, 552.

C'est une chose bien déplorable que la même religion qui ordonne, aussi bien que tant d'autres, le pardon des injures, ait fait commettre depuis longtemps tant de meurtres, et cela en vertu de cette seule maxime, que quiconque ne pense comme nous est réprouvé, et qu'il faut avoir les réprouvés en horreur. Ce qui est encore plus étrange, c'est que des catholique conspirèrent contre les jours de ce bon roi depuis qu'il fut catholique.²⁷

With the reign of Louis XIII, Voltaire concludes his study of Protestantism in France. Once again it plays an active rôle in the nation's history, and once again the moderation Voltaire has shown on the subject throughout the Essai is apparent. During Louis' reign, initial efforts on the king's part to reduce the privileges Henri IV had given the Protestants were met by resistance. A number of Calvinist cities closed their gates to the king's representatives and, in some cases, royal troops had to lay seige to the towns. Although the actions of the Protestants amounted to open revolt against Louis, Voltaire's attitude bears no resemblance to that which he displayed towards the rebels of the Cévennes:

Les divisions de la cour, sous un roi qui voulait être maître, et qui se donnait toujours un maître, répandaient l'esprit de sédition dans toutes les villes. Il était impossible que ce feu ne se communiquât pas tôt ou tard aux réformés de France. C'était ce que la cour craignait, et sa faiblesse avoit produit cette crainte. . . .²⁸

²⁷Ibid, 555.

²⁸Ibid, 582.

Voltaire blames the first revolt (1620) on Louis XIII's policies, and defends the Protestants' reaction, that of desiring to create a Protestant republic within France following German example, as being sparked by "l'amour de la liberté, si naturel aux hommes" (p. 582). The struggle itself was not completely terminated until 1622 when Louis gave into the Protestant demands by reaffirming the Edict of Nantes. Again, instead of condemning the Calvinists for having rebelled, he reserves his criticism for the king's futile methods of dealing with them:

. . . Louis XIII, n'ayant pas cette force d'esprit de son père, qui retenait les protestants dans le devoir,²⁹ crut pouvoir ne les réduire que par la force des armes.

There is mockery evident in Voltaire's comment that, when the conflict ended, "tout resta dans les mêmes termes où l'on était avant la prise d'armes: ainsi il en coûta beaucoup au roi et au royaume pour ne rien gagner" (p. 586).

In 1627 for the last time during Louis XIII's reign, Protestants offered armed resistance to royal authority. The Calvinist stronghold of La Rochelle held out longest against Louis, withstanding blockade for a full year, and only surrendering to his troops because of famine. However, it was Richelieu who made the terms for peace and these he based upon the principle of conciliation: "La Rochelle

²⁹Ibid, 585.

ne perdit que ses privilèges: il n'en coûta la vie à personne. La religion catholique fut rétablie dans la ville et dans le pays, et on laissa aux habitants leur calvinisme . . . " (Essai, XIII, 9). Voltaire's praise for Richelieu's tolerant treatment of the Protestants, and especially for the effective, positive results of his policy, shines through his words:

Les [autres] villes calvinistes sont traitées comme La Rochelle; on leur ôta leurs fortifications et tous les droits qui pouvaient être dangereux; on leur laisse la liberté de conscience, leurs temples, leurs lois municipales, les chambres de l'édit, qui ne pouvaient pas nuire. Tout est apaisé. Le grand parti calviniste, au lieu d'établir une domination, est désarmé et abattu sans ressource.³⁰

Only in the last few words is there an inkling of criticism of the Protestant revolt, but much more obvious are Voltaire's moderation, and his continued concern for toleration as a kind and constructive policy towards the Protestants.

In his Essai sur les mœurs, Voltaire exhibits the moderation and impartiality of an historian, qualities he successfully sought despite the pessimistic times during which he wrote the work. The Reformation itself is

³⁰Essai, XIII, 10.

condemned because of the strife and lasting dissension it brought to Europe. However, towards the development of Protestantism in France, Voltaire shows a very different, more tempered attitude. Much of his account of the religious strife of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is factual, and bursts of indignation are rare in comparison with those earlier works we have studied. Despite Protestantism's rôle in the civil wars, Voltaire tries to explain the cause of its revolt, and does not dwell upon its faults. Moreover, a plea for religious toleration is recurrent throughout the Essai.

However, what, exactly, are the reasons for this change of attitude since the Siècle? There are three, I believe, two of which we have already treated. First, it is evident that Voltaire did succeed, to a much greater extent than in the Siècle, to attain the impartiality and moderation which he felt were necessary attributes of an historian. These characteristics are exemplified by the factual nature of his account and especially by his treatment of the Saint-Bartholomew massacre and the Protestant revolts under Louis XIII. In the second place, as in La Henriade, Voltaire gives expression to his great desire for religious toleration. His reasons, as in the epic poem, are both humanitarian and practical, and stress

the barbarity and the futility of persecution. The Essai has a place among those works and those events which earned Voltaire the title "l'apôtre de la tolérance" (Barni, 237). It is a title he deserves, but his particular reasons must always be kept in mind, and they shall be put into even sharper focus by his involvement in the Calas case.

Last is a reason from which, in a sense, the above two stem. Of the greatest importance is the fact that in the Essai, in contrast to the Siècle, Voltaire was not obliged to praise the policies of a king. His treatment of French Calvinism in the Siècle was entirely dominated by the need to justify Louis XIV's anti-Protestant campaign and, as a result, Voltaire simply could not treat the Protestant cause with the sympathy he shows in the Essai.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Calas Case

I

We have already observed that the Calas case marked, as Jules Barni says, the transition " . . . du livre à l'action . . . " ¹ in Voltaire's lifelong fight against intolerance. His efforts to rehabilitate the honour of the Protestant Calas family, accused of murdering an apostate son, made him famous throughout Europe. The first information which reached Voltaire, however, condemned the Calas as being guilty. How did Voltaire react? What made him become the defender of these seemingly intolerant Calvinists? Writing to a friend about his initial involvement, he admitted that many eminent persons " . . . me conseillèrent unanimement de ne me point mêler d'une si mauvaise affaire; tout le monde me condamna, et je persistai . . . " ² The reasons for Voltaire's reaction

¹Barni, 237; also Mason, Pierre Bayle and Voltaire, 134.

²Best, 11580.

and his decision speak eloquently of his attitude, in the late years of his life, towards Protestantism and Protestants.

In studying the Calas case, we shall first look at the atmosphere of Toulouse in 1761, the setting for this event, and then at the details of the case itself. Voltaire's efforts will be summarized and finally, with both the cause and the effect of his participation before us, we shall be able to discuss the reasons for his action.

II

In his book On the Calas case, David Bien notes the unfortunate events in and around the year 1761 which undoubtedly had an aversive influence upon the Calas' position:

The mingling of special circumstances -- war, economic crisis, social unrest -- with the Catholic view of the unsocial, anti-national Protestant historical tradition led . . . to a sudden flare-up of religious persecution at Toulouse in 1761 and 1762.

At that time, the Seven Years' War was being fought, and France was faring poorly in it, having lost Canada, India, and the West Indies. Fear and instability were two natural results of defeats in war which troubled all of France. The critical economic situation in which the country

³Bien, The Calas Case, 148.

found itself after six years of fighting, deepened the sense of unrest. However, perhaps of greatest significance, was another fear which affected the Catholic majority of the country. France's strongest enemies were the Protestant nations, England and Prussia, and still vivid in the minds of most Frenchmen were the Protestant revolts of the religious wars and then of the Cévennes region. The fear of a Calvinist uprising during the Seven Years' War was very real to the French Catholics. To them

Protestantism . . . meant the sixteenth century; it meant civil war, disorder, arson, pillage -- all things held in horror . . . by the average man as well as by the 'philosophes'. . . . The general revulsion at a barbarous past where citizens in groups⁴ killed their fellows was one which covered Protestantism.

Languedoc had seen some of the fiercest religious conflict throughout the previous two centuries. An event in the history of Toulouse was the mass slaughter of Toulousain Protestants in 1572, which the city subsequently celebrated by a religious festival each May. Although in 1761, personal Protestant-Catholic relationships there were good, for the most part (Bien, 75), the Calvinist sect, as such, remained suspect. In other words, there were definite underlying religious tensions complicating an already bleak situation.

⁴Ibid., 48-9; also Lewis, The Splendid Century, 103.

In September of 1761, these feelings were brought to a head. During that month, at the town of Caussade near Toulouse, a Protestant pastor, Rochette, was discovered and arrested. The day after his arrest, a band of armed Protestants attempted to set him free. Their attack was a complete failure, but the repercussions were great. Instantly the whole area was alive with rumours of a Protestant uprising, of armed bands of Calvinists roaming the countryside. It was amidst this new, great upsurge of fear that tragedy hit the Calas.

The Calas family consisted of the father, Jean, a merchant in Toulouse, his wife, four sons and two daughters. On the night of October 13, 1761, those present for supper were the parents and the oldest and third sons, Marc-Antoine and Pierre. With them were the Catholic servant, Jeanne Vigui r, and a young, Protestant friend of Pierre's, Gaubert Lava sse.

Jean and Mme Calas were tolerant parents. When their servant, acting according to the demands of her religion, helped decide the second son, Louis, to abjure, neither he nor Jeanne were reprimanded in any way.⁵ As Donat, the youngest of the boys, stated in his M moire:

⁵Voltaire, L'Affaire Calas, 538-9.

Mon père déclara en présence de son fils, Louis, devant M. de Lamotte, conseiller au parlement, que, 'pourvu que la conversion de son fils fût sincère, il ne pouvait pas désapprouver, parce que de gêner les consciences ne sert qu'à faire des hypocrites,' Ce furent ses propres mots que mon frère Louis a consignés dans une déclaration, au temps de notre catastrophe.⁶

However, it appears likely that Louis' decision was based on a desire to succeed in life, rather than on reasons of faith. His immediate reward was a small annuity which his father was required to pay him. Of greater importance was the fact that the anti-Protestant laws which followed the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) had, in the last ten or so years, been applied with increasing vigour. Protestants were barred from many professions;⁷ indeed, this was the very problem which the oldest son, Marc-Antoine, had to face.

Marc-Antoine was an intelligent young man and a good scholar whose ambition was to become a lawyer. Unfortunately, On ne voulut pas le recevoir avocat à cause de sa religion. Ce fut pour lui une grande mortification. Il voyait avec envie des amis plus riches et moins habiles que lui posséder des charges ou remplir des emplois dont il avait la douleur de se voir exclu.⁸

⁶Voltaire, loc. cit.

⁷See Lewis, ibid, 106; Léonard II, 370; and Bien, ibid, 43.

⁸Desnoiresterres, Voltaire et la société au XVIII^e siècle, VI, 170.

Although Marc-Antoine had apparently been in a normal state of mind on October 13 (Bien, 100-1), Donat insisted later that this thwarted hope and ambition weighed heavily upon his brother. Eventually, Marc-Antoine came to spend a lot of his time reading available books on the subject of suicide (Affaire, loc. cit.). It was Voltaire's conclusion that disappointment led the young man to take his own life.

On the night of October 13, the family dined at seven o'clock in their home above Jean's shop. Having finished his meal, Marc-Antoine immediately left, ostensibly to go out, while the rest went to the living room and chatted until about half past nine. At that time Gaubert had to depart and, accompanied by Pierre, went downstairs. There they noticed that the door leading into the store was open, although it was always closed before supper. Entering the shop, they saw its folding doors ajar with a wooden pole across the top to which a rope was tied. From this the body of Marc-Antoine was hanging. Marc-Antoine wore only a shirt; the rest of his clothes were neatly folded on the counter.

The cries of the two young men on making this discovery brought the rest of the family downstairs. In the hope that Marc-Antoine might still be alive, Jean Calas sent Pierre to get a doctor, but only after warning him not to mention the word "suicide". As Pierre later said, "Mon père, dans l'excès de sa douleur me dit: 'Ne

va pas répandre le bruit que ton frère s'est défait lui-même; sauve au moins l'honneur de ta misérable famille.'" (Affaire, 547). Suicide was a disgrace. The body of the dead person was liable to be dragged naked through the streets behind a cart and to be pelted with refuse by onlookers. Not only were his goods confiscated, but the shame was placed on the remaining members of the family. Since the Calas were Protestant, their position would be all the worse. And so Jean Calas, in an effort to spare his family, told them all to say that they had found the body lying on the floor.

When the doctor came, he pronounced Marc-Antoine dead. Outside, meanwhile, a crowd had already gathered, and soon David de Beaudrigue, one of the local capitouls, arrived. Although the capitouls were supposed to handle only minor legal cases, over the years they had assumed some of the functions of the judges of the parlements. With many members of the Parlement of Toulouse still away on vacation, Beaudrigue had, and took, this opportunity to extend his influence. He assumed full charge of the investigation. Like many capitouls, Beaudrigue did not have a sound knowledge of the law and, as Edna Nixon remarks, He was a man of blind devotion to State and Church. . . . In addition to allowing himself to be guided by violent feeling, he tended to assume more authority over his

fellow magistrates than was his right. . . .⁹

Desnoiresterres, in not quite so generous terms, offers this evaluation of the man:

Les malheureux ont été tombés dans les mains d'un fanatique doublé d'un ambitieux qui pensa qu'il ne pourrait retirer que gloire et profit d'une affaire où les intérêts de la religion et de l'état étaient en jeu, et qu'il fallait mener avec une énergie dont on ne manquerait pas de lui savoir gré en haut lieu.¹⁰

It was not Beaudrigue, however, but the crowd outside the shop, who first cast the blame on the Calas:

Les commentaires, les interprétations . . . circulaient dans cette foule profondément impressionnée par un meurtre . . . quand une voix, partie on ne sait d'où s'écria: 'Que Marc-Antoine avait été étranglé par ses parents huguenots pour s'être fait catholique,' C'en fut assez. Cette accusation, quelque téméraire qu'elle fût, répondait trop à ce besoin des masses de se rattacher à quelque chose de déterminé et de dramatique, pour n'être pas acclamé aussitôt comme le fait le plus avéré, en dépit des moeurs honorables du marchand . . . et de tout un passé irréprochable.¹¹

Beaudrigue readily accepted this opinion,¹² just as the judges of the Parlement were to do later: "[Ils] . . . ne balançaient pas entre un suicide, qui est rare en ce pays, et un parricide, qui est encore mille fois plus rare. Ils

⁹Nixon, Voltaire and the Calas Case, 38.

¹⁰Desnoiresterres, ibid, 165-6.

¹¹Ibid, 163.

¹²Bien, ibid, 14.

croyaient le parricide . . ." (Affaire, 541).

On this point, it must be mentioned, that the common people and Beaudrigue were simply among the majority of French Catholics who shared a very traditional view of Calvinists. We have already noted their idea of Protestants as rebellious subjects. The very fact that these people were practising a faith which the government had outlawed cast suspicion upon them. One of many popular misconceptions was the

. . . firm belief in the real existence of a Protestant justice which called for the murder of spiritually wayward children by Calvinist parents. Many Catholics believed that this was a sacrifice owed to God and religion, and had been taught by Calvin.¹³

Such was the attitude of many of the witnesses against the Calas, although Bien absolves the judges of this prejudice (p. 112).

On the night of October 13, Beaudrigue arrested the Calas, Gaubert, and the servant, and had them and the body escorted to the city hall. At that time he neglected to inspect the shop for evidence, disregarding the pole and rope which had been taken off Marc-Antoine and kicked aside. It can be argued, I believe, that as regards the crowd and Beaudrigue's attitudes and accusations, the

¹³Bien, ibid, 118.

Calas were the victims of religious bias. However, once arrested, the five were undoubtedly the victims of the French legal system of those times. As Bien notes, "the legal forms established by the Criminal Code of 1670 were designed to help the prosecution to get convictions. Accordingly, safeguards to protect the innocent were nearly nonexistent." (p. 95) In conformity with the law, the Calas, Gaubert, and Jeannne were imprisoned in separate cells and were also questioned separately: they could not know each other's testimony or fate. The prosecution, on its part, was most willing to lie to each individual about the others, in order to intimidate them. The fear of torture was ever-present, for this was the usual method of extracting the "truth" from "guilty" prisoners. Jean Calas himself was subjected to the "question". While in jail, the accused were not allowed the counsel of a lawyer. Their only defense was "mémoires", documents presenting the facts of the crime and attesting their innocence, which their lawyer had to write without ever hearing his clients' testimony. Furthermore, both prisoner and defense lawyer were forbidden to cross-examine witnesses.

Some of the greatest evils of that legal system have to deal with witnesses. Only the trial judge could call witnesses during the proceedings, and he was free to choose those he wanted:

There can be no doubt that in convicting Calas the court selected its evidence, using only what was most harmful to the defendants,¹⁴ evidence pointing towards a Protestant religious motive.

Under French law the accused, when confronted by a witness, had to accept or reject that person's testimony before having heard it. Should the accused hope the witness would support him, and be mistaken, he was then at the other's mercy for he had vowed that that evidence would be true. Such were some of the obstacles the Calas, Gaubert, and the servant had to face.

During the first interrogations in jail, all five began by repeating Jean's story of how the body had been found. However, quite illegally, a Protestant lawyer, Carrière, managed to see the father in prison and learned the facts from him. His advice was that only by telling the truth could the charge of murder be taken from them. That Beaudrigue did not believe the Calas is not surprising. Since they admitted that their first account had not been true, what was to prove that this second was not also false? Moreover, Carrière's seeing the prisoners aroused the capitoul's suspicions which were only deepened when intercepted letters to the Calas from their lawyer were brought to him. In these Carrière listed the facts

¹⁴ Bien, ibid, 111-2.

Jean Calas had told him, and counselled the accused to adhere strictly to them. To Beaudrigue, the facts appeared simply to be a very detailed alibi (Bien, 104).

Although these events and ambiguities in the details of the family's testimonies strengthened Beaudrigue's conviction as to the guilt of the Calas family, nevertheless, he was having difficulty securing reliable witnesses to support his case. Many came forward, but their stories were so conflicting, and so often the words of "a friend of a friend", that he could not find any which could actually be used as evidence. Moreover, Beaudrigue wanted witnesses with special information: it had to be proved that Marc-Antoine had wished to abjure, for it was upon this point that the prosecution based its case. However, " . . . on va visiter ses papiers, ses livres, pour voir s'il n'y avait pas quelque preuve de ce changement [de religion]; on n'en trouve aucune." (Affaire, 541).

Nevertheless, since this question was so important, Beaudrigue turned to the Church, asking that a monitory be published and read from the pulpits. Monitories were supposed to be impartial documents which stated both sides of a case¹⁵ and demanded, upon penalty of excommunication,

¹⁵Nixon, ibid, 58.

that witnesses come forward who could testify to its different sections. The monitory for Marc-Antoine was a blatant misuse of this procedure. In it were the affirmations that Marc-Antoine had fully intended to renounce Protestantism the day he was murdered, and had, as well, attended mass for some time; that because he desired to convert he was ill-treated at home, and that M. and Mme Calas had threatened him with death if he converted. Thus, on October 13, sometime after supper, the parents killed him with the aid of the others. Only such points as these were offered. Ironically, it failed completely, for although witnesses came, once again, their own personal interpretations held more to discrepancy than to fact. Moreover, despite the monitory, no Catholic priest was ever found to whom Marc-Antoine had expressed the desire to convert (Bien, 110). Nevertheless, three weeks after Marc-Antoine's death, Beaudrigue requested that the Church give the youth's body a martyr's burial, thus proclaiming to the world that Marc-Antoine was a true Catholic, and Jean Calas and the others were his murderers.

While the case was still in these early stages, the original "rapporteur" -- the man who recorded the legal proceedings -- was dismissed from the trial. The reason for this action was that he had criticized Beaudrigue's handling of the case, and because he felt the Calas were

innocent. His successor, Maître Carbonnel, was the only person who actually questioned every witness and each of the accused. He came to the same adamant conclusion, that the Calas were not guilty.

In November of 1761, Beaudrigue made the decision which drew the trial irrevocably towards its end. Since he and the other prosecutors still had no sound evidence, they decided to make the Calas confess by torture. It was the capitoul's intention that Jean, Madame, and Pierre Calas would undergo the "question": Gaubert and Jeanne would only be presented; that is, forced to watch and made to believe that they would soon suffer similarly. Permission for presentation to the torture, however, was not within a capitoul's office, and the Parlement of Toulouse, impatient with Beaudrigue's ambitious decisions, took the Calas case out of his hands. Upon this development, Maître Sudre, a Catholic lawyer who had decided to defend the Calas, published a "mémoire" giving proof of Marc's having committed suicide. This plea was virtually ignored, both by the authorities and by the people.

On March 9, 1762, the Parlement reached its verdict. Of the thirteen judges of the "Tournelle", the criminal court, five were in disagreement with the decision to execute Jean Calas, but the decision was approved by the majority. Because of the lack of evidence, it was felt that

only Jean should die now, for no doubt he would name his accomplices while under torture. Then the prosecutors could pursue their case against the others. Jean was to be subjected to the "questions ordinaire et extraordinaire", then to be taken to the public square where all his bones would be broken and his body tied to the wheel until he died:

Ce malheureux père de famille, qui n'avait jamais eu de querelle avec personne, qui n'avait jamais battu un seul de ses enfants, ce faible vieillard de soixante-huit ans fut donc condamné au plus horrible des supplices, pour avoir étranglé et pendu de ses débiles mains, en haine de la religion catholique, un fils robuste et vigoureux, qui n'avait pas plus d'inclination pour cette religion catholique que le père lui-même.¹⁶

Throughout the interrogations, torturing, and the actual carrying out of the sentence, Jean Calas simply reaffirmed his innocence and that of the other suspects. After two hours on the wheel, he was strangled and his body burned. When Mme Calas, Pierre, Gaubert, and the servant were told of Jean's fate, and made to believe theirs would be the same, both Pierre and Gaubert abjured.¹⁷ On March 18, sentence was passed on them. Pierre, who some still considered to have been Jean's chief accomplice, was sentenced to life exile from the area. The degree of the sentence was based on lack of evidence. For this same reason, Mme

¹⁶Affaire, 558.

¹⁷See Affaire, 551.

Calas and Gaubert were freed, although only Jeanne Viguiet was proclaimed innocent.

Their sentences made mockery of that of Jean Calas. As Voltaire points out repeatedly, if Jean had murdered his son, the others, especially Pierre, must have helped him, for being a weak man in his late sixties, Jean alone could not possibly have overpowered his strong, young son. If so, then the sentences of the other four were too light. If, however, they were innocent, as their sentences suggested, then Jean Calas must have been so too, and consequently an innocent man had been executed. However, it was with these sentences that the Parlement of Toulouse closed its case in March 1762.

We shall shortly study Voltaire's first reaction and the reasons for his involvement in the Calas case, but now let us look at the actual steps which eventually brought about the rehabilitation of the Calas' honour. Although first reports were hostile to the Calas family, by the end of April 1761, Voltaire was convinced of their innocence. He had brought both Donat and Pierre to Ferney from Geneva where they had fled seeking refuge. Their breeding and sincerity immediately impressed him and he could not believe that the parents of these young men could be cruel and intolerant (Best, 11580). After having studied their characters and painstakingly informed himself of the facts of the case, he was able to write to

a friend:

J'ai balancé longtemps sur l'innocence de cette famille; je ne pouvais croire que des juges eussent fait périr, par un supplice affreux, un père de famille innocent. Il n'y a rien que je n'aie fait pour m'éclairer de la vérité. J'ai employé plusieurs personnes auprès des Calas pour m'instruire de leurs moeurs et de leur conduite. Je les ai interrogés eux-mêmes très souvent. J'ose être sûr de l'innocence de cette famille comme de mon existence.¹⁸

One of the first steps of the campaign was the writing of the "pièces originales" by Donat and Pierre in defense of their family. Voltaire carefully revised all the articles before having them published. He insisted that Mme Calas go to Paris and there, by her presence and plight, force the influential "habitués" of the salons to realize the wrong that had been done to her husband. Voltaire was one of the first to recognize the influence of public opinion in controversial affairs.¹⁹ He wrote to such important friends as the maréchal de Richelieu, the comte d'Argental, the cardinal de Bernis, and the duc de Choiseul, asking that they help Mme Calas and seek to win the king himself to their cause:

Mes chers frères, il est avéré que les juges toulousains ont roué le plus innocent des hommes. . . . Jamais depuis le jour de la Saint-Barthélemy rien n'a tant déshonoré la nature humaine. Criez, et qu'on crie.²⁰

¹⁸ Best, 10188.

¹⁹ See Pomeau, 327.

²⁰ Best, 9608.

Writing to the kings, queens, and philosophers of every country in Europe, Voltaire soon had the opinion of the continent on his side, demanding justice and a retrial of the case.

In spite of such evident success, however, Voltaire had to use great caution in his handling of the case. Defending a Protestant against seeming Catholic intolerance, in Catholic France, could easily have unfavourable repercussions. To attack the injustice of the Parlement of Toulouse was to cause all the parlements of France to rise in defense of the injured member. Of the two, the first, was the greater problem. Although Voltaire was carefully cultivating public opinion, this same public was mostly Catholic. He could not, therefore, be too open or direct in his criticism: he could plead for tolerance, but could not afford to condemn the Church too roundly. The Church's influence extended not only to the people, but to the king himself, from whom it demanded the vow to extirpate heresy.²¹ As Voltaire knew only too well, this same Church already felt a deep antipathy for him, engendered by his frequent and bitter attacks on it. Restraint was of the greatest necessity, as he noted in a letter, dated 1763:

²¹Taylor, "L'Ingénu, the Huguenots and Choiseul", 120.

Venez mon cher monsieur. m'éclairer et m'échauffer, ou plutôt me modérer car je vous avoue que l'horreur de l'arrêt de Toulouse m'a un peu allumé le sang, et il faut être doux en prêchant la tolérance.²²

Despite his shock at the implications of the martyr's burial given Marc-Antoine, Voltaire spoke guardedly, mostly in general terms, of religious intolerance and fanaticism in the "pièces originales" and in the Traité sur la tolérance (1763). Moreover, Voltaire found that pacification of both the Catholic Church and the parlements involved a demand for moderation on the part of the Protestants. In 1765, as the case was drawing towards its conclusion, Voltaire was forced to act quickly and decisively to prevent the publication of the Lettre toulousaines. This book, by the Protestant Court de Gébelin, denounced intolerance and the Parlement of Toulouse so vehemently that Voltaire was afraid it would provoke an even more active resistance than he was already encountering. He exhibited like restraint in the "pièces originales" where he had Donat affirm that

Ce ne sont pas les juges que j'accuse: ils n'ont pas voulu sans doute assassiner juridiquement l'innocence; j'impute tout aux calomnies, aux indices faux . . . aux cris d'une multitude insensée, et à ce zèle furieux qui veut que ceux qui ne pensent pas comme nous soient capables des plus grands crimes.²³

²² Best, 10128.

²³ Affaire, 532.

The dangers were very real. On several occasions, and especially just before the King's Council announced the final verdict in March 1765, Toulouse was swept by fanaticism. The parlements of France, naturally, had united in opposition to the questioning of the Parlement of Toulouse. Such was the import of this letter to Voltaire from d'Alembert:

. . . un conseiller au parlement disait, il y a quelques jours, à un des avocats de la veuve Calas, que sa requête ne serait point admise, parce qu'il y avait en France plus de magistrats que de²⁴ Calas . . . Voilà où en sont ces pères de la patrie.

As his campaign progressed Voltaire received a threatening letter, and he was constantly afraid that Mme Calas might be arrested by the convenient "lettre de cachet". Nevertheless, through his close, tactful supervision of the case, with the efforts of his friends, Voltaire was greatly successful in preventing religious wrath and the parlements' wounded pride from becoming dangerous to his cause.

Generally, however, events were favourable to Voltaire, and in the spring of 1763 his lawyers took the first step towards victory. Having the support of the king himself, they approached the King's Council, the only judicial body in France which could grant permission for a case to be

²⁴ Best, 10090.

reviewed, and they won that permission. Upon the insistence of the duc de Choiseul, the King's Council in turn called the Great Council to take charge of the case, for the extra strength of this body would be needed to outvote the parlements. By a unanimous decision the Great Council granted Voltaire's petition for review and demanded that the proceedings of the trial be sent to Paris. This was Voltaire's request for his own efforts and those of his friends and Mme Calas had turned opinion in the capital in favour of the Calas family.

Although this step signified only a recognition of errors of procedure in the first trial, the Parlement of Toulouse delayed sending the documents for six months. Once the papers had arrived, as the Great Council began to study the case, interest in the Calas affair reached a new height. It was then that Voltaire published abroad his Traité sur la tolérance of which several chapters dealt with the Calas. Once again, Voltaire sought to win the public's support, and the Traité succeeded in this objective.

On June 4, 1764 the Council declared the sentence on Jean Calas and the four others associated with him to be null and void. Now, a new trial was necessary and, for the first time, the public testimonies of the four accused would be heard. For the first time, the witnesses

for the Calas would be allowed to speak. Nine months later, on March 9, 1765, the second trial concluded. On that, the third anniversary of the sentencing of Jean Calas, he, his family; Gaubert, and Jeanne Viguier, were all found innocent of the death of Marc-Antoine.

Voltaire had won his case and rehabilitated Jean Calas' name and honour. It was unheard-of that a Huguenot family should triumph over a parlement, but that was what Voltaire had achieved. The task he had faced had been truly monumental, and so was his success:

Voltaire, après trois années de lutte, contraint l'état à s'incliner devant un droit individuel violé et fait triompher, par la réhabilitation de Calas, la vérité judiciaire.

III

Now we may return to the two questions which are at the heart of this study: How did Voltaire first react? What made him defend a Calvinist family accused of parricide? Both these questions ask, in effect, what Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism was in 1762. We shall find on the one hand that many of his ideas had changed little since the days of La Henriade, but also that new and important considerations had a strong influence upon his decision.

²⁵Thorp, Voltaire et l'affaire Calas, 402.

To a very great extent, Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism and Protestants was a negative one. In his opinion, Protestantism was, above all, a destructive offshoot of the destructive parent, Christianity. As Bien says:

For Voltaire . . . Christianity itself represented superstition, barbarism, and human unreason. It was a force which had kept, and would still keep, the mind of man in chains. In this view, the believing Protestant was no better than the believing Catholic.²⁶

In each of the three main works we have studied, Voltaire's mistrust, even hatred of, sectarianism has been apparent. From its very birth, Calvinism had proven to be as dogmatic as Catholicism was. In 1766, in his Avis au public, Voltaire bluntly asked, " . . . quel dogme théologique n'a pas fait répandre du sang?"²⁷ The history of Protestant-Catholic relationships in France seemed to substantiate his criticism. Likewise, Voltaire's historical research had shown the intolerance of Calvinists, although they could at least be held blameless for initiating such conduct.²⁸ However, the worst stain upon the name of Protestantism was its choosing to defend its beliefs by war. To Voltaire

²⁶ Bien, ibid, 166.

²⁷ Voltaire, Avis au public sur les parricides imputés aux Calas et aux Sirven, 844.

²⁸ See Champendal, 23; also Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique, 403.

it shared equal blame with Catholicism for two hundred and fifty years of bloodshed and unrest in Europe.

Voltaire's active defense of the Calas led him to what I believe must have been the embarrassing necessity of softening earlier, anti-Protestant criticisms. In the Siècle de Louis XIV, praise for Louis himself sometimes led Voltaire to adopt a biased attitude. Now a similar partiality was required, this time in favour of the Protestants. This perhaps explains Voltaire's writing Du protestantisme et de la guerre des Cévennes, in 1763. Coinciding with the Calas case is the publication of this work which apologized for and, to a certain degree, defended the Protestant action in the Cévennes war. Twelve years earlier, he had had only the strongest condemnation for the Cévennes revolt (Siècle, 1751).

In the years preceeding the Calas case, Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism had mainly been critical, and it did not change during the period of 1762-1765. Most revealing are his comments in a letter dated March 22, 1762. They were based on the first news he had heard concerning the death of Jean Calas, news which proclaimed the father to have been guilty:

Vous avez entendu parler peut-être d'un bon huguenot que le parlement de Toulouse a fait rouer pour avoir étranglé son fils: ce saint réformé croyait avoir fait une bonne action, attendu que son fils voulait se faire catholique et que c'était prévenir une apostasie; il avait immolé son fils à Dieu et pensait être fort supérieur à Abraham, car Abraham n'avait fait qu' obéir,

mais notre calviniste avait pendu son fils de son propre mouvement, et par l'acquit de sa conscience. Nous ne valons pas grand' chose, mais les huguenots sont pires que nous, et de plus ils déclament contre la comédie.²⁹

Voltaire's first reaction was to condemn the "intolerance" of Jean Calas. However, this letter also brings to light a new aspect of Voltaire's attitude towards Protestants. Ironically, Voltaire was guilty of that grave fault of which he accused the Toulousain judges. He himself did not hesitate to suspect parricide, rather than suicide (Affaire, 541). Voltaire's opinion can be explained.

Champendal suggests that Voltaire, like most Frenchmen, knew very little about Protestants (p. 59). As surprising as this may seem, it is very possible, for since 1685 active Protestantism in France had been driven underground.

Continued persecutions -- death to pastors, the galleys or jail for worshippers who were arrested -- naturally demanded the secret observance of the faith. As a result, to Catholics of the 1760's while Calvinists obviously existed, their worship and their beliefs were cloaked in mystery. Under such circumstances, traditional theories such as those about the "disloyalty" of Protestants and their "murdering" of apostate children appeared plausible.

²⁹Best, 9583.

In Voltaire's particular case, he no doubt had limited personal contact with Protestants before coming to Les Délices in 1755. Both there, and later at Ferney, despite his proximity to Calvinist Geneva, it is likely that he had little inclination to study deeply either the Protestant faith or the state of Protestantism in France. His quarrel with the Genevan pastors caused him to write to d'Alembert in 1757, "Fanatiques papistes, fanatiques calvinistes . . . tous sont pétris de la même boue détrempée de sang corrompu" (Best, 6813). Although Voltaire may otherwise be credited with vast knowledge and experience, it appears he believed that Calvinist parents were inclined to murder their children in order to "prévenir une apostasie". At the time of Jean Calas' execution, he never questioned the probability of such an act.

Voltaire's correspondence continues to show his disdain for Protestantism. This is evident in a letter in November of 1762, when he was already long since active in the Calas case. To a friend in Paris he said:

Protégez mon frère tant que vous pouvez la veuve Calas. C'est une huguenote imbécile mais son mari a été la victime des pénitents blancs. Il importe au genre humain que les fanatiques de Toulouse soient confondus.³⁰

³⁰ Best, 9996.

Voltaire's first reaction was based on his own misconceptions and his contempt for the Calas' religious beliefs. Nevertheless, his final decision was to defend the family with all his strength. The reason, as the above letter shows, was because they were persecuted: they were the victims of religious intolerance.

Il défendra . . . les protestants, mais, en les défendant, il se gardera bien de faire entrer en ligne de compte leurs idées et leur foi. C'est uniquement en les considérant comme des victimes malheureuses du despotisme royal et de l'intolérance du clergé qu'il s'efforcera de leur être utile.³¹

Throughout his life Voltaire had fought for toleration as the one possible means to end fanaticism. In his opinion, the blind prejudice which led the Toulousain crowd to accuse the Calas of parricide, and the zeal of Beaudrière which made him insist upon religious motives, were fanatical. Even more so was the Catholic Church's proclamation and burial of Marc-Antoine as a martyr. Religious fanaticism had condemned the Calas family and determined their fate before they ever went to trial. David Bien, on this point, criticizes Voltaire's attitude, stressing that the anti-Protestant feelings in Toulouse were not typical, but rather "unique" (p. 42) and, therefore, not a sign of widespread intolerance. Considering his evaluation of everyday relationships between Toulousain Protestants and Catholics,

³¹Champendal, 34.

his theory seems valid. However, there is evidence which would indicate convincingly, I believe, that religious intolerance was a deeper and more pervasive influence in Toulouse and that area than Bien supposes. René Pomeau, in his book La Religion de Voltaire, describes the situation in this way:

. . . sur les treize magistrats de la Tournelle, cinq n'étaient pas persuadés de . . . [la] culpabilité [de Calas]. Mais la majorité du Parlement fut gagnée par la contagion: n'avaient-ils pas condamné à mort, trois semaines avant de juger Calas, le pasteur Rochette et ses amis, pour le seul crime d'hérésie? Le même Parlement n'a-t-il pas ordonné, le 28 janvier d' 'approfondir' le crime du calviniste Sirven? . . . Non, décidément, l'affaire Calas ne fut pas une erreur judiciaire isolée. Le fanatisme faussa la première enquête du capitoul David. Ce magistrat . . . qui [n'] aimait . . . pas du tout les protestants, ne chercha pas la vérité mais la confirmation d'une conviction préalable: d'où les insuffisances de l'enquête. . . . Ce fut le fanatisme qui créa dans l'esprit de sept juges la certitude qui ne se dégagea pas de la procédure. Ils rouèrent Calas 'par provision', persuadés qu'il avouerait sur la roue, Ils attendaient donc du supplice la preuve qui justifierait ce supplice même. Et cette preuve ne vient pas. Comment des magistrats expérimentés et honnêtes commirent-ils une si cruelle imprudence?³²

This question Voltaire himself asked, and he had no doubt as to the answer. On that unfortunate occasion, fanaticism had flared up and had proven fatal to the Calas family, but as Pomeau indicates, this was not a "unique" occurrence.

Some critics, as Pomeau elsewhere mentions, feel that Voltaire's reasons for intervening in the Calas affaire were purely selfish, that his sole interest was to strike

³²Pomeau, 325-6.

a blow at Christianity -- "l'infâme".³³ Undeniably, he rejoiced at the occasion and, as Bien notes, he saw " . . . the judicial murder of Calas . . . [as] simply a typical Christian, as well as Catholic, act."³⁴ However, this negative attitude of hatred was accompanied by a positive desire for the peace and security that toleration brought to all men, that were necessary for the well-being of the state, and that marked the victory of reason. Voltaire's humanitarian nature, which made him suffer at the thought of the Saint-Bartholomew massacre,³⁵ must not be overlooked.

Predicatably, however, humanitarian reasons were only part of the basis for Voltaire's plea for toleration. The research for La Henriade, the Siècle, and the Essai, had convinced him all too well of the need for toleration in a peaceful state. Certainly it alone would prevent further religious wars. Voltaire looked upon " . . . la paix qui 'débouche' les canaux du commerce."³⁶ as one of the reasons for France's economic growth under Louis XIV. Conversely, the intolerance of the Revocation brought

³³ Pomeau, Politique de Voltaire, 38; also Pomeau, 321-2.

³⁴ Bien, The Calas Affair, 26.

³⁵ Pomeau, 108-9.

³⁶ Pomeau, Politique de Voltaire, 82.

economic disaster to the country because of the Protestant exodus. In the Traité he thinks with longing of the return of those Protestants, but only toleration would make that return possible. (p. 581). Furthermore, toleration would bring security. In La Henriade the Protestants had won Voltaire's favour as loyal subjects of Henri IV. Voltaire believed that men of different faiths could be loyal to their king and country.³⁷ Despite his bitter criticism of the Cévennes war in the Siècle, he does not feel that Protestants are seditious by nature. He excuses their taking arms during Louis XIII's reign (Essai, XII, 582), and reiterates his faith in their loyalty both in the Traité and the Mémoire of Donat Calas.³⁸ These reasons are not new, but they find expression again in the Calas case which marks another stage in Voltaire's fight against intolerance.

Although a consideration of less importance, a word should be said for what may be called Voltaire's national pride. The Calas case had revealed " . . . a shameful difference . . . between the state of justice in France and moves being made at the very same time by Russia, Poland, Prussia, and other countries to establish tolerance by law. . . ."³⁹ In 1763 Voltaire had completed

³⁷ See Siècle, 1052 and Essai, XII, 499.

³⁸ Voltaire, Traité, chapter 4; Affaire, 537.

³⁹ Taylor, "L'Ingénu, the Huguenots and Choiseul", 116.

his Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand in which he greatly praised that czar's policy of religious toleration. During the 1760's Voltaire was in correspondence with Catherine II of Russia whose ambition was to base her country's laws on the principle of toleration. But although reason had made progress elsewhere, Voltaire, the great "philosophe", was forced to say of his own country:

On crie que nous sommes une nation odieuse, intolérante superstitieuse, aussi atroce que frivole, qui passe des Saint-Barthélemy à l'opéra comique, qui sait rouer des innocents⁴⁰ . . . J'entends avec douleurs ces reproches affreux.

In view of the intolerance shown in the condemnation of Jean Calas, Voltaire's decision to defend the family is not altogether surprising. However, he had another, equally strong reason for seeking the rehabilitation of the Calas' honour. There had been a second, equally terrible evil involved in the Calas case, namely, the injustice of the trial. For many years Voltaire had shown an increasingly great interest in laws and the reforms of the judicial system. He hated " . . . la barbarie de la justice et de la législation pénale . . . "⁴¹ of earlier times, and had himself been the victim of the

⁴⁰ Best, 9592.

⁴¹ Barni, 306.

"lettre de cachet" during the first years of Louis XV's reign. In the Siècle de Louis XIV (1751) he subjected the French legal system to a critical study. One entire chapter was devoted to this topic, and Voltaire heaped praise upon Louis XIV's attempts to bring about reform (p. 971-2). However, the king's efforts had not met with great success and Voltaire, who believed a nation's strength partly lay in " . . . une liberté fondée sur les lois . . ." (Siècle, 618) was led to make repeated criticism of the penal code:

. . . il est à souhaiter . . . que chaque ordre ait sa loi uniforme dans tout le royaume, que ce qui est juste ou vrai dans la Champagne ne soit pas réputé faux ou injuste en Normandie. L'uniformité ⁴² en tout genre d'administration est une vertu . . .

Such a wish is to be found in his "Poème sur la loi naturelle" (1752): "La loi dans tout état doit être universelle / Les mortels, quels qu'ils soient sont égaux devant elle."⁴³ In both La Voix du sage et du peuple (1750 and the article "Lois civiles et ecclésiastiques" (1764) of the Dictionnaire philosophique, Voltaire urgently stressed the need for the supremacy of state over Church in matters of the law. In the Essai sur les moeurs (1756), Voltaire's interest is again apparent, as he lists the

⁴²Siècle, 979.

⁴³Voltaire, "Poème sur la loi naturelle". In: Mélanges, 287.

reform of the laws as one of Henri IV's great achievements (p. 552). Then, in 1762, the miscarriage of justice evident in the trial of Jean Calas gave this subject a sense of immediacy it had not had before:

. . . si un père de famille innocent est livré aux mains de l'erreur, ou de la passion, ou du fanatisme; si l'accusé n'a pas de défense que sa vertu; si les arbitres de sa vie n'ont à risquer en l'égorgeant que de se tromper; s'ils peuvent tuer impunément par un arrêt, alors . . . on voit que personne n'est en sûreté de sa vie devant un⁴⁴ tribunal érigé pour veiller sur la vie des citoyens . . .

The importance of justice to Voltaire may be measured by reading his works associated directly, and indirectly, with the Calas affair. Among the former are the Mémoires of Donat and Pierre (1762), the Histoire d'Elisabeth Canning et des Calas (1762), and the Traité sur la tolérance (1763). In parts of each of these, a point by point recounting of the judicial injustices of the trial is carefully made. Beaudrigue is criticized for having failed to inspect the scene of the death, as the law required. The misuse of the monitory is attached, as is the selecting of witnesses and the sentencing of Jean Calas to torture and death despite a lack of evidence:

Il n'y avait, comme on l'a déjà dit, et comme on le dira toujours, aucune preuve contre cette famille infortunée: on ne s'appuyait que sur des indices;⁴⁵ et quels indices encore! La raison humaine en rougit.

⁴⁴Voltaire, Traité sur la tolérance, 563.

⁴⁵Voltaire, Histoire . . . des Calas, 557.

Seemingly most hateful is the absurdity of the convictions of the other four accused. Voltaire dwells on this period no fewer than six times in the Affaire. He also takes the opportunity to suggest the reform of accepted procedure in the French judicial system:

Il semble que, quand il s'agit d'un parricide et de livrer un père de famille au plus affreux supplice, le jugement devrait être unanime . . . La faiblesse de notre raison et l'insuffisance de nos lois se font sentir tous les jours. . . .⁴⁶

Voltaire's long interest in the reform of law is clearly reflected in his works on the Calas affair. On the question of tolerance, he saw France dishonour itself by the fanaticism which held sway there. Now, on the question of justice, he saw that his country had made little progress from the barbarous days of previous centuries. However, the Relation de la mort du chevalier de la Barre and the Commentaire sur le livre des délits et des peines (both 1766) add to the picture of his feelings on this subject. In 1765 Voltaire had won the rehabilitation of the Calas family's honour. A year later, with the immediacy of the situation now removed, Voltaire's general considerations on law can be seen.

There is no doubt that Voltaire was influenced by the book of the Italian, Beccaria, on legal and penal reform.

⁴⁶Voltaire, Traité, 567; also Affaire, 551.

Written in 1764, it had been translated into French the following year and was avidly read by Voltaire. Nevertheless, Voltaire was, in his own right, a leader in that field. In the Relation, from a further plea against the use of monitories comes the general maxim: "'Ce qui n'offense pas la société n'est pas du ressort de la justice.'" In Voltaire's opinion, "Cette vérité doit être la base de tous les codes criminels . . ." (p. 783). One of its worthiest effects would be keeping religious offenses out of the civil court. Cases such as those of Jean Calas and the young la Barre would never again conclude in execution.

It is in the Commentaire that Voltaire presents some of his strongest recommendations. Following the example of England, he would have the king himself as final arbitor in cases demanding the death sentence, for "la cabale, le préjugé, l'ignorance, peuvent dicter des sentences loin du trône." (p. 805). The universality of civil law is again upheld. The use of torture to extract evidence when none can be found is harshly condemned, as is the glaring disproportion between severe punishments meted out for minor offenses. Secret trials, the system of half and quarter proofs as evidence, the confiscation of a criminal's goods thereby leaving his family destitute are all attacked as unjust and, in some cases, stupid practices. A number of his more important suggestions for

reform also find a place in this work. The limiting of the death sentence to crimes involving the security of the state, and the choosing of useful punishments are two ideas Voltaire strongly supports, for " . . . un homme pendu n'est bon à rien, et . . . les supplices inventés pour le bien de la société doivent être utiles à cette société." (p. 803).

These are only a few of Voltaire's views to be found in the Commentaire. Some of them were first stated in his earlier works for he had long been concerned with the subject of legal reform. The Calas case was the event which moved Voltaire to gather and to express so concretely his various ideas. However, his interest in justice by no means waned after 1765. His efforts to rehabilitate the honour of the Sirven family, which were finally successful in 1772, show that the flame fanned by the Calas trial had not died down. Unfortunately, the legal reforms Voltaire sought throughout his life and which he emphasized in these works, were never brought about in France while he still lived:

De quelque côté qu'on jette les yeux, on trouve la contrariété, la dureté, l'incertitude, l'arbitraire. Nous cherchons dans ce siècle à tout perfectionner; cherchons donc à perfectionner les lois dont nos vies et nos fortunes dépendent.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Voltaire, Traité, 825.

Of these, the closing thoughts of the Traité, Voltaire only lived to see the first, despite his own efforts.

The Calas case which began in tragedy on October 13, 1761, and which ended in triumph on March 9, 1765 won Voltaire fame throughout all of Europe. He had successfully defended a persecuted Protestant family against Church and parlement. Nevertheless, as ever,

. . . en défendant les protestants Voltaire ne défendait pas le protestantisme comme doctrine ou idée . . . les réformés restaient dans son esprit 'des paysans imbéciles dont le seul crime était de communier avec quelques gouttes de vin et un morceau de pain levé . . . ,⁴⁸

Voltaire's involvement in the Calas affair was the result of his vital interest in toleration and justice. The Calas were victims of religious intolerance, and

Après Voltaire, et grâce à lui, l'opinion ne doute plus que la tolérance soit naturelle, humaine, nécessaire: ce fut là sa contribution majeure dans le domaine de la politique religieuse.⁴⁹ Il atteignit ce résultat à travers l'affaire Calas.

The Calas were also the victims of "la barbarie" de la justice". In seeking their rehabilitation, he sought the justice he wished for every man. On March 9, 1765, he could say: "Messieurs les maîtres des requêtes avaient rendu à la famille Calas une justice complète, et en cela ils n'avaient fait que leur devoir."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Champendal, 70.

⁴⁹ Pomeau, Politique de Voltaire, 202.

⁵⁰ Voltaire, Traité, 649.

CONCLUSION

Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism in France was essentially a negative one. His great distrust of sects was amply justified, he felt, by the history of Calvinism from the time of François I to his own day. The dogmatic nature of the Protestant theology, the intolerance of the Protestants, and their readiness to defend their faith by violent means, were brought to light by his research for La Henriade, the Siècle, and the Essai. Voltaire, who judged religion by the practical good it did to mankind, could only condemn the religious and civil strife which Calvinism had brought to France and perpetuated there. Although he found reason to praise the loyalty and the skills of some Protestants, he was much more acutely aware of the seemingly disruptive influence of their faith. Voltaire's criterion of judgement and his basic attitude towards French Calvinism are both revealed in La Henriade. His two historical works, the Siècle de Louis XIV and the Essai sur les moeurs, demonstrate that his ideas had not greatly changed during the three decades following the writing of his epic poem. The Essai establishes, in particular, his contention that

Protestants were not inately seditious citizens. In that universal history he offers a very understanding account of the growth of Protestantism in France, even when he is discussing the civil strife which resulted from that growth. In respect to this treatment of Protestantism, the Essai stands in sharp contrast to the Siècle, for the reasons we have seen.

In all these three works, Voltaire often raises the question of toleration. His sincere practical and humanitarian interest in the peace and security of both citizen and state made him demand toleration of Calvinism in France. The long, bloody history of religious strife in his country proved to him that intolerance only bred intolerance. Moreover, persecution not simply failed to extirpate Protestantism, it even had the opposite effect of winning more converts to the new faith. However, Voltaire's attack upon persecution reached its peak during the years 1762-1765. The execution of Jean Calas showed all too clearly how strong a force intolerance and religious "fanaticism" still was in France. And yet, in defending the Calas family, Voltaire was fighting for two causes. Besides condemning intolerance, he was also making his greatest plea for justice, and used the occasion to develop and to expound systematically his long-felt ideals about legal reform.

The Calas were Protestants, and Voltaire's success in the case created that image of him as the defender of Protestants. However, the reasons for his involvement have, I feel, often been misinterpreted. Voltaire had no more sympathy for the Protestant faith in 1762 than he had had in 1723 when he referred to it as "l'erreur". Had he not believed that the Calas family were the victims of religious intolerance and injustice, his first reaction to the trial of Jean Calas would have been his only one. Throughout those years, from the time he composed La Henriade until he won the rehabilitation of the honour of the Calas, Voltaire's attitude towards Protestantism in France was rarely anything but deprecatory.

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