

Source: Voltaire, *On Toleration*, 1763

Seek not to lay a restraint upon the mind, and you may always be sure that the mind will be yours

[The Ottoman Sultan] peaceably rules over subjects of twenty different religions; upwards of two hundred thousand Greeks live unmolested within the walls of Constantinople; the mufti [high-ranking Islamic legal scholar] himself nominates the Greek patriarch and presents them to the emperor; and at the same time allows of the residence of a Latin patriarch. The sultan appoints Latin bishops for some of the Greek isles ... The Ottoman empire swarms with Jacobines, Nestorians, Monothelites, Cophti, Christians of St. John, Buebres, and Banians; and the Turkish annals do not furnish us with one single instance of a rebellion occasioned by any of these different sects.

Go to India, Persia, and Tartary, and you will meet with the same toleration and the same tranquility. Peter the Great encouraged all kinds of religions throughout his vast empire: trade and agriculture have been gainers by it, and no injury ever happened therefrom to the body politic. ...

It is true that the great Yong-T-Chin, the most wise and magnanimous of all the emperors of China, drove the Jesuits out of his kingdom; but this was not because the prince himself was non-tolerant, but on the contrary, because the Jesuits were so. ...

The Japanese were the most tolerant of all nations; twelve different religions were peacefully established in their empire: when the Jesuits came, they made the thirteenth; and, in a very little time after their arrival, they would not suffer any other but their own. Every one knows the consequences of these proceedings: a civil war, as calamitous as that of the league, soon spread destruction and carnage through the empire; till at length the Christian religion was itself swallowed up in the torrents of blood it had set a flowing, and the Japanese for ever shut the entrance of their country against all foreigners, looking upon us as no better than savage beasts. ...

May all men remember that they are brethren! ... [Make] use of the few moments of our existence to join in praising, in a thousand different languages, from one extremity of the world to the other, thy goodness, O all merciful creator, to whom we are indebted for that existence.