

Candide is a
humorous satire
about young candide
religion essay



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Criticism of religion is a reappearing topic in *Candide*. After the great earthquake that destroys Lisbon, agents of the Inquisition capture Candide and Pangloss. Pangloss is charged with speaking his mind and Candide for “seeming to approve what he had said.” Eight days later, they are prepared for an auto-da-fe where Candide is whipped and Pangloss is hanged. The very same day, there is another earthquake. Voltaire intended this event to show the foolishness and ineffectiveness of the Church. The auto-da-fe is organized because the Inquisitors believe that by punishing offenders, they can save the city from any additional damage. The reader sees through the closely following earthquake that the Church made no difference with their impractical solution. One also sees the cruelty shown by the Inquisitors, the intended ‘servants of God’ that in Candide’s reality only harm. They wickedly torture and execute their fellow citizens over philosophical disputes, many of which cannot be backed up by Scripture. Voltaire strongly emphasizes the hypocrisy shown by the Church officials that Candide encounters. The Grand Inquisitor captures a man for marrying his godmother, and yet he himself is guilty of several crimes. He threatens to use his influence with the Church to punish Don Issachar for his Jewish religion if he does not share Cunégonde with him as his mistress. The Inquisitor plainly shows his hypocrisy through this blackmail and unchaste behavior. Cunégonde’s own brother, the baron, becomes a Jesuit priest. He is guilty of having homosexual tendencies, as implied throughout his part in the book. Even the most prominent Church figure, the Pope, has a role in *Candide*, even though Candide does not meet him directly. Candide meets an old woman who is the daughter of a Pope. Simply the fact that the Pope has a daughter makes him a sinner and a hypocrite, for he violated his vows

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of celibacy. These themes of sin and blatant hypocrisy appear in connection with the Church throughout Candide.

As a well-known philosopher, Voltaire had his own specific beliefs about life and human nature, many of which he expressed in Candide. One of his major ideas throughout the book is a question of philosophy, but in a different sense than one would think should come from a man of his time. Voltaire still channels Enlightenment thought as he argues against philosophy as a pattern for life and instead promotes practical action and hard work.

Candide's mentor, Pangloss, believes in unrestrained optimism. This is shown through his constant assertions that everything is for the best.

Pangloss is Voltaire's burlesque representation of a group of philosophers during the Enlightenment known for their optimism. As crisis and calamity repeatedly befall Candide and Pangloss, his never-wavering optimism appears self-indulgent and senseless. Voltaire supplies a polar opposite to Pangloss in Martin. Also a philosopher, Martin is an internally scarred man who advocates complete pessimism. His negativity is so absolute that he disagrees with Candide's statement that "there is some good in the world." Martin's philosophy appears to be more reasonable. This could be because his character is more knowledgeable, or simply because the philosophy itself is more suited to human nature. Voltaire himself leans more towards Martin's views in his personal thinking, but he points out that Martin's philosophy is also flawed. Because Martin believes that nothing happens for the better in the world, he cannot see it as it really is. Although the many tragic events that happen support Martin's pessimism, Voltaire denounces this philosophy as asinine as well. Coming from a philosopher, condemnation of a

philosophic lifestyle, both optimistic and pessimistic, creates a heavy emphasis on the virtues of hard work and action instead of unreasonable thoughts.

In *Candide*, Voltaire champions honest hard work. His character Cacambo is a reliable, practical man. In contrast to the philosophers, Pangloss and Martin, Cacambo inspires confidence and optimism, although he is neither an optimist nor a pessimist. When Candide gets into trying situations, Cacambo repeatedly helps him. Through this, Voltaire shows that action is more beneficial and practical than ideas are. Cacambo disagrees with Pangloss' opinion that the world is created perfect by his own experiences, saying that "the law of nature teaches us to kill our neighbor." He directly disproves Martin's view of the world through his trustworthiness. Cacambo is responsible for reuniting Candide with his love, Cunégonde. Instead of taking advantage of Candide as so many others did, Cacambo stays true to his word. Many misfortunes befall Cacambo, as with most other characters in the book, but he manages to lessen the ill effects of these events through his intellect and willingness to work in order to improve the world. Cacambo restores the reader's faith in human nature after so many other characters have destroyed it.

Voltaire's *Candide* is a masterpiece of the Enlightenment, championing the ideals of hard work and morality. Voltaire takes a traditional Enlightenment perspective on the corruption within the organization of the Church, exposing the guilt and hypocrisy he sees in Church officials. While Voltaire condemns philosophy as a basis for life, he does not denounce it completely.

He elevates Cacambo above the other characters because he uses thought
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in a practical way, while Pangloss and Martin's philosophies prevent them from seeing the true world and living in reality. Voltaire masterfully manipulates his characters to reflect Enlightenment values and his personal beliefs pertaining to them.