20. Religious Toleration

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In his Project for Perpetual Peace in Europe, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre addresses religious toleration and the dialogue between different communities, whether they are Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, or Orthodox.

The union under discussion is not the rapprochement of different religions, but rather peace between nations of different religions. But then, is anything impossible? The Lutherans of Germany, for example, are they not at peace with the Catholics of Germany? Has a difference in religion prevented Spain from unifying with Holland? If we waged war only for religion, this objection would have meaning, but this project leaves to each his own religion, as it does all his other possessions. Hence, there is no need to reconcile all the nations of the world to this issue; I have only said, as I have said before, that if there are any human means that hope to bring diverse sects little by little closer to the truth, the establishment of perpetual peace is the most reliable of all those means. It is even the foundation of all conciliation. Through frequent exchange, opinions can be frequently compared, and it is only with the promise of frequent comparisons that we can hope that the most reasonable opinions will rise to the top in the end, and that reason will consequently serve to bring all men to the true religion. […]

I have heard the objection that among Muslims, it is an article of faith to limit negotiation with Christians to truces, without ever making treaties, but those who speak thus are not well informed on an essential distinction. Although their faith prohibits making solid and resilient peace with Christian enemies who are their equals, or nearly equals, in strength, they are not forbidden from making solid and resilient peace with Christians who are irrevocably superior in strength, since it would put their faith in evident peril. Therefore, if the Sultan alone became the enemy of the European Society, would his Empire and his religion not be in clear danger? Moreover, since faith permits them to make truces
lasting twenty years and then to renew them, do not these perpetually renewed truces come to the same end as a perpetual peace?

Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre,  
*Project for Perpetual Peace in Europe* (1713).