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## Candide

by Michael Halla

(History 1820)

any people describe eighteenth century Europe as the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. However, Daniel Gordon describes eighteenth century Europe as the Age of Voltaire (1). Voltaire is both a supporter and critic of the Enlightenment. In his writings and actions, Voltaire championed his beliefs and ridiculed the ideas and practices that he disagreed with. According to Gordon, Voltaire uses "literature to draw attention to prejudices" (3). Voltaire wrote, "I write in order to act" (3). In *Candide*, Voltaire creates an ideal society in Eldorado where strangers are welcome, people are treated with dignity, priests are non-existent, gold is not valued, education is important, and science is emphasized.

Judith G. Coffin and Robert C. Stacey, the authors of *Western Civilizations*, describe the Age of Enlightenment as confidence in the powers of human reason, decreased dominance of the Catholic Church, optimism and the belief in universal human progress, application of the scientific method to all areas, and emphasis on human dignity (604). As a supporter of the Enlightenment, Voltaire uses *Candide* to expose the arrogance of the nobility, the corruption of the Catholic Church, the value of the scientific method, and the importance of human dignity. However, Voltaire does not agree with Enlightenment thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau who maintain that the people should govern themselves and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz who champions the philosophy of "the best of all possible worlds" (20). Voltaire uses the continuous suffering in *Candide* to refute the philosophy of optimism.

In the story, Candide and his valet, Cacambo, are lost in South America. They enter a country where the streets are made of gold and jewels. Candide notices that the children forget their jewels. When he tries to return the jewels to the tutor, the tutor throws them away. Candide observes, "The children of kings must be well educated here because they are taught to despise gold and jewels" (77). In Voltaire's vision of a good society, people do not value gold and money; instead, they value education.

Unlike European society, people of Eldorado are welcoming to the two foreigners, Candide and Cacambo. The innkeepers provide Candide and Cacambo with food. Later they transport the two travelers to the capital where they are provided baths, luxurious hummingbird feather robes, and a delicious banquet. They are given a tour of the city and enjoy dinner with the King. In contrast, Candide and his companions do not receive warm hospitality in European countries. Beginning in Westphalia, Candide is kicked out of the castle for kissing Cunegonde. In Holland, a woman pours the contents of a chamber pot on Candide's head when she learns that he does not believe that the Pope is the Antichrist. After the earthquake in Lisbon, Candide is arrested by the Inquisition. In Cadiz, Cunegonde and the old woman are robbed. Later in France, Candide is arrested and swindled. Leaving France, Candide said, "Let me out of this country where monkeys attack tigers. I lived among bears in my country. Only in Eldorado did I live with human beings" (98). In Voltaire's vision of a good society, strangers are welcomed, fed, and treated kindly. Furthermore, people are treated with dignity.

The sage in Eldorado explains to Candide that the people worship one God and they have no priests. The sage tells Candide that "we are all priests" (79). Later, the sage informs Candide, "Everyone here has the same beliefs and we do not understand what your monks are for" (79). Since the Eldorado streets are made of gold, the people in the country are not greedy for gold and wealth;

instead they constantly thank God for all He has given them. In contrast, Voltaire portrays the Catholic Church, priests, and members of religious orders as corrupt. In Holland, there is no tolerance for different religious views. An exception, however, is Jacques, an Anabaptist, who treats Candide with kindness. Later, the Inquisition in Lisbon arrests Pangloss because he expresses different views. Candide is arrested because he listens to Pangloss with "an air of approval" (53). The Grand Inquisitor, Brother Giroflee, the Abbe of Perigord, the long-sleeved Franciscan, and the Baron's son are all members of religious orders. Voltaire portrays them as hypocrites. The Grand Inquisitor tortures people. Brother Giroflee is not celibate. The Abbe tries to swindle Candide. The long-sleeved Franciscan robs Cunegonde and the old woman. The Baron's son is a commander in the Jesuit army, which is called the Padres. According to Cacambo, "The Padres have everything, the people nothing. It's a masterpiece of reason and justice... Over here they make war against the kings of Spain and Portugal, and in Europe they hear the confessions of the same kings. Here they kill Spaniards, and in Madrid they send them to heaven" (68). In Voltaire's vision of a good society, people believe in one God, there is religious tolerance, and there are not any priests.

According to the sage, Eldorado is ruled by a King who "commands with the nation's consent" (78). Candide is surprised to learn that a person greets the King by embracing the King and kissing him on both cheeks. This is in contrast to European countries where a person displays subservience to the King by bowing or kneeling before the King. It appears that Eldorado does not have a noble class like many European countries. In contrast, Candide is angered that the Baron's son is arrogant and refuses to give permission for Candide to marry Cunegonde because Candide is not of the noble class. Candide is exasperated because he has rescued both the Baron's son and Cunegonde. Even though Cunegonde is no longer beautiful and has developed a nasty disposition, Candide wants to honor his promise to marry her. In Voltaire's vision of a good society, the King rules with the consent of the people and there is not the tyranny of arrogant nobles.

Candide is amazed to learn that Eldorado does not have law courts or prisons because they are not needed. In contrast, Candide has spent time in the Lisbon prison for agreeing with Pangloss' views. Voltaire himself spent time in the French prison, Bastille, because of his views (2). Candide is especially pleased to see the Palace of Science where mathematics and physics are displayed. It is revealing that Voltaire does not mention the role of science or mathematics in European society leading the reader to assume that science and mathematics are of little importance in Europe. In Voltaire's vision of a good society, law courts and prisons are replaced by science and mathematics academies.

Despite the advantages of Eldorado, Candide decides to leaves Eldorado. Candide tells Cacambo, "...Miss Cunegonde isn't here..." (81). Candide misses Cunegonde and he is willing to travel the world to find her. Furthermore, Candide said, "If we stay here, we'll just be like everyone else, whereas if we return to our world, even with only twelve sheep loaded with stones from Eldorado, we'll be richer than all the kings put together. We won't have to be afraid of inquisitors...." (81). The gold and jewels make Candide extremely wealthy. By returning to Europe, Candide becomes an important person. In addition, the wealth enables him to avoid the consequences of having murdered the Grand Inquisitor and the Jew. In this passage, Voltaire demonstrates the power of the wealthy to be above the law.

Eldorado society shares many similarities with Christianity. Like Christians, the people in Eldorado believe in one God. Furthermore, the Eldorado people constantly thank God for all that He has given them. While not believers in Jesus Christ and Christianity, the Eldorado people's actions display a Christian attitude. For example, the Eldorado people feed and clothe Candide and Cacambo. In contrast to Christianity, the people in Eldorado do not acknowledge Jesus or the Holy Spirit, celebrate a mass, or have priests guide the people. The Eldorado people do not need priests because as the sage tells Candide "we are all priests" (79).

The Age of Enlightenment emphasized human reason, the scientific method, and human

dignity. At the same time, the power of the Catholic Church was de-emphasized. As an influential writer, Enlightenment supporter, and Enlightenment critic, Voltaire's name is synonymous with the Age of Enlightenment. In *Candide*, Voltaire exposes the arrogance of the nobility, the corruption of the Catholic Church, the value of the scientific method, and the importance of human dignity. Voltaire creates an ideal society in Eldorado where strangers are welcome, people are treated with respect, priests are non-existent, education is important, and science is emphasized. After leaving Eldorado and while traveling through Europe, Candide observes to Cacambo, "Only in Eldorado did I live with human beings" (98).

Works Cited

Coffin, Judith and Robert C. Stacey, <u>Western Civilizations</u>, V. II, 16<sup>th</sup> ed., New York: W.W. Norton, 2008.

Gordon, Daniel. Candide. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 1999.