

**Sébastien Castellion, Conseil à la France désolée, 1562 [Counsel to France in her distress] (3 extracts)**

In contrast to *Libelle contre Calvin*, this text was published, but without the author's name, in 1562. At the moment when the confrontations between Catholics (in the majority) and Protestants (in the minority) in France were taking a more and more violent turn and at the beginning of that period of the civil wars known as the 'wars of religion', Castellion diagnosed the evil (the 'sickness') in France and concluded that it was the forcing (or the constraint) of consciences which was at the root of the evil. In the second extract, after having alluded to what is called today the 'golden rule' ('do not do to others what you would not have them do to you'), he says ironically that to be constrained by force to betray his conscience is a wrong so great that he would perhaps prefer to die. Lastly, echoing in the third extract what he had already said in *Contre le libelle de Calvin*, he claims that one should not take up arms against heretics.

**THE CAUSE OF THE SICKNESS** I find that the principal and effective cause of your malady, that is to say of the sedition and war which torment you, is the forcing of consciences, and I think that if you consider this well, you will assuredly find that this is so

**FALSE REMEDIES** Now the remedy which your children, O France, are seeking is, firstly, to make war with each other, to kill and murder one another and, what is worse, to go and fetch money and men from foreign nations in order to resist still better, or rather in order to avenge their brothers still better and, secondly, to force one another's consciences. Those are the remedies which your children, O poor France, seek for your malady. They are, however, so unlike real remedies that they are having exactly the opposite effect, for these are the correct means to disembowel and destroy you, bodily as well as spiritually. (p19-21)

Now consider this point well. If already in this life, full of ignorance and carnal influences, which very often cloud man's understanding, this truth nevertheless has such efficacy that it forces you, whether you want to or not, to confess that you have done to others something other than that which you would like to be done to you, what will it be like on the Day of Judgment, when all things will be clearly and vividly discovered and revealed? And do you not know that men's consciences will accuse or excuse each one at the Day of the just Judgment? And do you know whether the injustice which you have done to your brothers is small? It is, indeed, so small that they preferred to endure all the evils which your cruelty (I must, in truth, call it this) managed to invent, rather than (as you required) to do something which was against their consciences. And this is proof that to force a person's conscience is worse than to deprive him cruelly of his life, for a God-fearing person prefers to have himself cruelly deprived of his life rather than to let his conscience be forced. Let us now discuss the practical experience, and here I shall take you yourselves as witnesses. There have been and are certain Evangelics who want to force you to go to their sermons, and I ask you how this violence pleases you? Without any doubt it displeases you, and you say that you are being done a great injustice, and still your conscience cannot be so hurt by hearing a sermon as that of an Evangelic is by hearing mass. Learn from your own consciences not to force those of others, and if you cannot support a small wrong, do not do a greater one to another. (p 25 ff)