



# **A Philosophical Commentary on these Words of The Gospel, Luke 14:23**

*Pierre Bayle*

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The topics of church and state, religious toleration, the legal enforcement of religious practices, and religiously motivated violence on the part of individuals have once again become burning issues. Pierre Bayle's *Philosophical Commentary* was a major attempt to deal with very similar problems three centuries ago. His argument is that if the orthodox have the right and duty to persecute, then every sect will persecute, since every sect considers itself orthodox. The result will be mutual slaughter, something God cannot have intended.

*The Philosophical Commentary* takes its starting point from the words attributed to Jesus Christ in Luke 14:23, "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be full." Bayle contends that the word compel cannot mean "force." From this perspective, he constructs his doctrine of toleration based on the singular importance of conscience. His point is not that coercion usually is ineffective in matters of faith but that, even when effective, it is wrong because it ignores the indispensability of the free conscience.

Bayle's book was translated into English in 1708. The Liberty Fund edition reprints that translation, carefully checked against the French and corrected, with an introduction and annotations designed to make Bayle's arguments accessible to the twenty-first-century reader.

**Pierre Bayle** (1647–1706), Protestant philosopher and critic, was born in France. In 1675 he became professor of philosophy at Sedan until forced into exile in Rotterdam in 1681, where he published works on religion with a liberal and tolerant tendency. He was dismissed from his position at the Huguenot refugees academy in 1693 following the accusation that he was an agent of France and an enemy of Protestantism. In 1696 he completed his major work, the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*.

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