Candide is a story about optimism, overcoming obstacles, love, and philosophy. In this satire, the author Voltaire uses events, characters, and style to criticize the Catholic Church during the Inquisition. Voltaire claims criticisms not only of the Church in general, but also more specifically of the Catholic Church clergy. When Candide is reunited with a very sickly Pangloss, Voltaire announces that Pangloss received syphilis from a long chain of lovers including a Jesuit novitiate (106). This implies that the Jesuits are not devout to their faith and instead choose to sleep with others. Candide was written during the Inquisition, a time in which there was a lot of contradictions, hypocrisy, and confusion in the Church. Voltaire added this note about the Jesuits to suggest that those leaders of the Catholic Church should not be praised in the way that they are praised because they do not take their jobs seriously. A Jesuit is normally viewed as a very wise and honorable priest who is well respected in the community, and Voltaire finds these clergy members to be a mere joke. Particularly in the time period Candide was written, it was quite risky to criticize the Church and its clergy. This very direct insult to the Jesuits lets the readers know that the author does not take respecting the clergy seriously.

Voltaire continues to criticize the Church by belittling Christians’ ethical choices. When Candide wants to save Jacques’s life, Pangloss “prevented him by proving that the bay of Lisbon had been formed expressly for this Anabaptist to drown in (107).” Pangloss ends up creating unethical justifications for this murder and is then rewarded for it with his life. Voltaire adds this scene and the character of Pangloss to make fun of the bizarre justifications for death that were occurring at the time of the Inquisition. Jacques represents the positive aspects of religion in the way that he acts in blind faith and makes very ethical decisions to help others. Pangloss’s character represents the problems Voltaire sees with the Church.

Voltaire uses sarcastic and blunt tone to demean Christians in the way that they irrationally and hypocritically respond to situations. Following their arrival on land and an earthquake, the readers find out that auto-da-fé is an act of faith that was used in Lisbon as a way of repenting and “averting total destruction” (109). During the Inquisition, auto-de-fes were used as a ritual of public penance for heretics. There is a hypocritical component of these acts because it is a sin to murder, however the Church was the leader of these executions. Voltaire is recognizing this in his writing. He uses these auto-da-fes to belittle the way Christians respond to situations.

Voltaire also attacks the organization and structure of the Church by praising the extreme opposite of it in the utopia of Eldorado. Voltaire wrote that the people of Eldorado “should have to be mad” to have monks, whose purpose is to argue and kill those who disagree with them (129). Not only is Voltaire criticizing the structure and organization of the Church, but he is also saying that in a perfect society, the leaders would not have as much power. The people in this perfect society do have and worship a God, therefore Voltaire may be suggesting a more Protestant approach to religion in which the people have a direct relationship with God, instead of going through the corrupt and hypocritical Church leaders.