



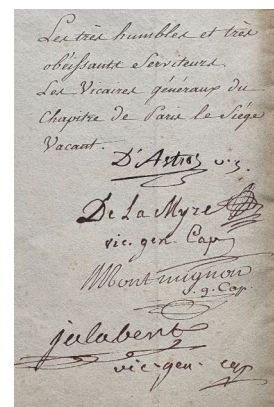
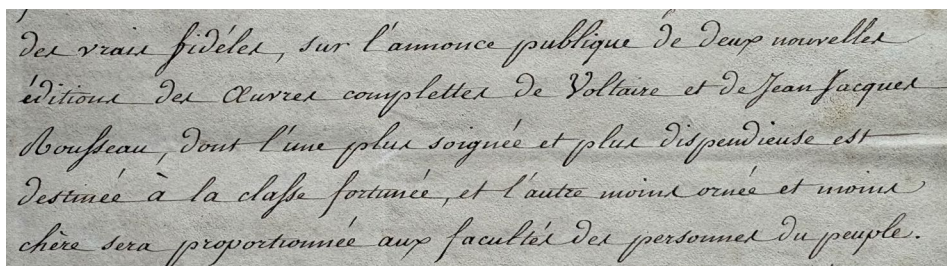
Blame Voltaire, Blame Rousseau!: Clerical Censorship of the *philosophes* that inspired Gavroche

This collection of manuscript letters documents an attempt by the Archevêché de Paris, to block the publication of new editions of the collected works of Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an effort duly circulated in 1817 in the *Mandement de Messieurs Les Vicaires Généraux du Chapitre Métropolitain de Paris... pour le Saint Temps de Carême* (or “Pastoral Letter of the Vicars of Paris, for Lent”). The contents and verbatim passages appearing in our manuscripts confirm a direct and explicit connection with the *Mandement*. The paper stock, letterhead, watermarks, and handwriting make the case that these documents were prepared together in 1817, at the time of the publication of the *Mandement*, confirming their relationship to the effort to censor the publications of Rousseau and Voltaire. The published version of the *Mandement* backfired, spawning sales for the publishers of the *philosophes* and a satire of the clergy, one that Victor Hugo would eventually draw on for *Les Misérables* [a work the Church added to the *Index* in 1864; see: Seville, Izquierdo, 1866. p.191].

Our five documents (15 pp., all manuscript) include:

1). A letter of February 4, 1817, 4 pp., written on “Archevêché de Paris” letterhead, watermark with eagle and shield in opposite corners. Addressed to “Monseigneur”, signed by D’Astros [Paul-Thérèse-David d’Astros], De La Myre, Montmignon, and Jalabert [Jean-Pierre Jalabert]. The letter opens with a warning of two forthcoming editions of the works of Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and asks the addressee to make their case with the King (Louis XVIII), to stop the appearance of these works whose object is to attack Religion, the corruption of morals, and the debasing of legitimate [royal and clerical] authority.

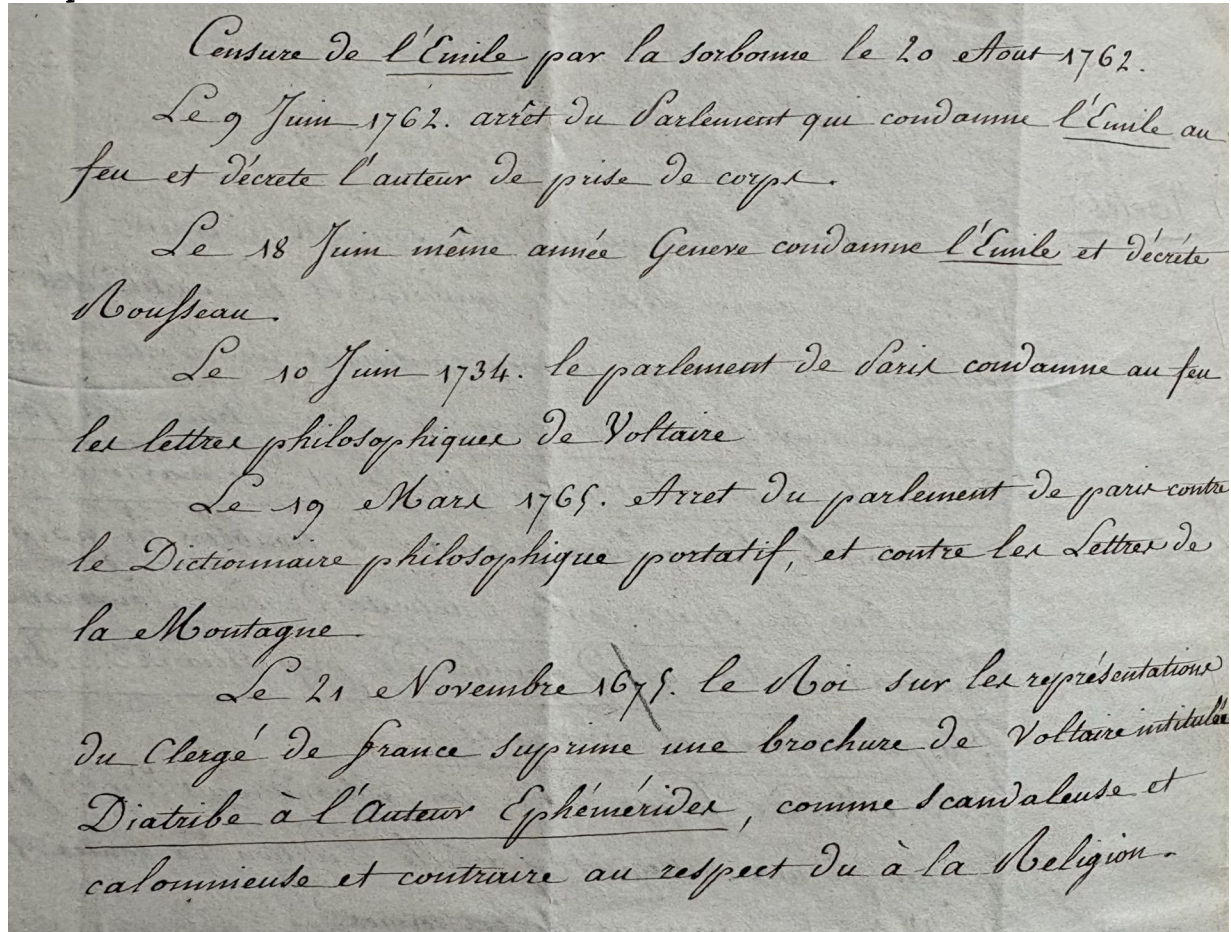
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Above: the signers of the Feb. 4, 1817 letter. **At left:** the opening passage mentioning Voltaire & Rousseau.

2). A copy of the above [Manuscript letterhead, Gaudin fils watermark]

3). "Notes." 2 pp. written on "Archevêché de Paris" letterhead, watermark with eagle and shield in opposite corners. The notes summarize previous acts of censorship of the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, by Christophe de Beaumont (Archbishop of Paris, 1746–1781) and his successor Antoine Éléonor Léon Le Clerc de Juigné (Archbishop of Paris, 1781–1801), among them Rousseau's *Émile* and Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif*. These condemnations took place prior to the revolution, and the clergy seeks to establish the previous banning of these works as a precedent for further prohibitions during the Restoration, i.e., the return of the Monarchy after the fall of Napoleon I. **The summary of forbidden works in this manuscript matches precisely the version published in the 1817 *Mandement*.**



4). A manuscript extract from *Procès Verbeaux des Assemblées du Clergé de France* for 1785 [published, Paris, 1789], 3 pp., "Archevêché de Paris" letterhead, watermark with eagle and shield in opposite corners. From the Clergy of France to King Louis XVI. This manuscript letter, which conforms exactly to the 1789 publication, objects to the projected complete edition of Voltaire's works (i.e., the Kehl edition, 1785), warning his Majesty that 30 volumes were already circulating and there was more to come. Its presence here serves as documentation of the previous efforts of the clergy to ban Voltaire's work.

5). A copy of the above [Manuscript letterhead, Gaudin fils watermark]

These manuscript documents show the efforts of the clergy to respond to the power vacuum that existed in France after the fall of Napoleon in 1814, and the return of the Monarchy and the Church to power. That Voltaire and

Rousseau should continue to represent a threat to the authorities speaks to both the prescience and the longevity of the two writers, as well as to the clergy's failure to learn from previous experience.

Mandement de Messieurs Les Vicaires Généraux... de Paris, 1817

The 1817 publication that followed our manuscripts was addressed to the clergy broadly in a post-Revolutionary moment when the Church and the Monarchy have been reestablished. It laments of the state of contemporary France, which according to the clergy is a place where the Pope and the King have returned, but the people have not returned to God, and where, among other ailments, one finds that **"the most frequented places of the capital are like a long public library, composed of obscene or impious works, whose titles and frontispieces captivate the passers-by, throwing into their eyes a subtle venom, which instantly cuts deep to the heart..."** p. 18.¹

A new and profound calamity, planned in secret: Voltaire and Rousseau

At the center of the *Mandement* is the warning of a coming calamity, the planned publication of the collected works of Voltaire et de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *"two collections of the complete works, without omission, of Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. One, more magnificent, is intended for opulent readers; the other, less expensive, is prepared for the common people."* Adding that *"[All of Europe is invited to subscribe...]"* (pp. 19-20).

The faithful are beseeched: "to repel these infernal productions, to snatch them from the hands of your children, to deliver them to the flames, and above all not to be immersed in the modern and frightful plot of the new editions."

The *Mandement* uses as precedent the censorship of Voltaire and Rousseau prior to the Revolution, providing in a long footnote (pp. 31-32) a summary of efforts to stop their publication, including the condemnation of Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques* (1734), Rousseau's *Émile* (1762), Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1763), etc. The *Mandement* attributes France's moral decay to the philosophy of Rousseau and Voltaire and appeals to the clergy and the faithful **"de repousser ces productions infernales, de les arracher des mains de vos enfants, de les livrer aux flammes, et de ne pas tremper surtout dans le moderne et affreux complot des nouvelles éditions"** (p.34).

The response of Béranger, Desoer, and... Gavroche!

The public reception of the *Mandement* was met with enthusiasm and humor, in favor of the *philosophes*. The French poet and *chansonnier*, Pierre-Jean de Béranger, responded with a satirical song whose immortal refrain, "C'est la faute à Voltaire... C'est la faute à Rousseau" was taken up by Gavroche in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, they are the words he is singing when he receives his fatal blow (vol. 9, p. 124. Paris, Lacroix, 1862).

Voltaire's publisher, Théodore Desoer, responded with a 25-page pamphlet, *Lettre de l'éditeur des Œuvres complètes de Voltaire en douze volumes in - octavo à MM. les vicaires - généraux du chapitre métropolitain de Paris, au sujet de leur dernier mandement* in which he accuses the clergy of overstepping their authority, defending both Voltaire and Rousseau as virtuous philosophers, mocking the *Mandement's* style, its erroneous chronology concerning Voltaire's apotheosis (i.e., his entombment in the Pantheon), and defends the resulting success of his "economical, commercially useful reprint."

The great Voltaire scholar Georges Bengesco has written that, "The *Mandement* issued by the vicars-general of Paris, by drawing public attention to the Desoer edition, contributed to its success—and even its popularity—while the resurgence of an intolerant spirit within the clergy throughout the Restoration period played a part in the publication of a great many [such works]." (Bengesco, *Bibliographie*, vol.4, p. 150).

¹ Les lieux les plus fréquentés de la capitale sont comme une longue bibliothèque publique, composée d'ouvrages obscènes ou impies, dont les titres et les frontispices captivent les passans, et jettent dans les regards un venin subtil, qui, à l'instant même, se communique au coeur.

ARCHEVÊCHÉ DE PARIS.

Extrait des
procès verbaux
des assemblées du
clergé de France

Paris, le 4 Juin 1785.

Lettre de L'Assemblée au Roi.

Sire,

En dévouant à Votre Majesté le projet de recueillir dans une superbe Edition toutes les Œuvres de Voltaire, soit imprimées, soit manuscrites, la dernière Assemblée du Clergé eut devoir ce nouvel hommage de sa confiance à votre amour pour la Religion, et au zèle qui ne cessera de vous animer pour le maintien de l'ordre, pour le repos et le bonheur des peuples.

Sans doute nous tenons notre mission du Père des lumières, et l'un de nos devoirs les plus doux sera toujours d'encourager les talents, et de mettre les Lettres en honneur. Mais Sire, témoins chaque jour des tristes progrès de l'irreligion, comment les Ministres de l'Eglise auroient-ils pu dissimuler à son auguste Protecteur les dangereuses influences d'une plume accoutumée à ne connaître, ni frein, ni mesure? Ils prévoyaient déjà, avec la douleur la plus profonde, que de nombreux écarte, consacrés par la forme imposante d'un monument littéraire, nourriront de plus en plus dans une jeunesse inconsidérée, la haine des principes, l'oubli de la pudeur, et cette funeste intempérance de raisonnement, qui ose interroger la Majesté des Rois sur le Trône, et Dieu même dans son Sanctuaire.