

TOLERANCE AND RELIGION

The following is an excerpt from a new pamphlet by Toward Tradition; the organization is led by our friend, Rabbi Daniel Lapin. The pamphlet, "Terrorized by Tolerance," was written by Adam Pruzan. It discusses how those who scream the loudest in favor of more tolerance (the Tolerance Teachers) actually abuse the word to advance their own intolerant agenda. To obtain a copy send \$2 to Toward Tradition, P.O. Box 58, Mercer Island, WA 98040.

In the American Left's political mythology, religion makes people intolerant. Religion is seen as dogmatic, forbidding critical thinking; exclusionary, encouraging an us-versus-them mentality; and immoderate, promoting fanaticism. This may have been an accurate picture of the medieval Church—although that is a very complex question—and it may even be a fair description of a few other religions throughout history. Certainly, a great many horrors have been perpetrated by imperfect human beings in the name of religion. But, in the American context, to equate religious fervor with intolerance (and its associated evils) is gravely dishonest, for several reasons.

First, this mythology simply doesn't fit the history of American Christianity.

Second, the most basic morals of American society—even the very ideas and values that the Tolerance Teacher claims to admire most—come directly from our Judeo-Christian heritage. Loving thy neighbor as thyself, showing compassion to the widow and orphan, freeing the slave, affording dignity to every person, governing by justice (rather than for the benefit of the rich and powerful), providing for the poor: In the rich amalgam that is Western civilization, none of these things comes from the Greeks, the Romans, the Germanic tribes, or any other source. All come directly from the Torah.

And who incorporated those Torah values into the Western traditions? Not secularists, and not even Jews. The Christian Church did.

Again, the mythology of the Left demands that we mention what should be an obvious fact. Too many “enlightened” liberals—and many Jews—unfortunately see little in their history of the Church besides the Crusades, the Inquisition, the blood libel, forced conversions, and the like. Christianity’s role in preserving the traditions of charity, human brotherhood, the rule of law, and liberal learning, is too often ignored.

Third, as usual, the Tolerance Teachers’ argument dissolves into incoherence, they criticize Christians—in particular the Catholic Church—for failing to do more to save Jews from the Holocaust. How self-contradictory can you get? The only way the latter criticism could be legitimate is if Christianity mandates a very high standard of concern for others, and therefore individual Christians are guilty of failing to live up to that standard. But that would be an admission that Christianity is in fact a pillar of *tolerance*, something liberals should welcome *more* of in public life.

Fourth, starting with the French Revolution, anti-religious ideologies, far from being more tolerant than religious one, have proven themselves to be infinitely less so. The past two centuries have seen oceans of blood spilled in the name of nationalism, socialism, communism, fascism, and Nazism—all doctrines that were at best indifferent to, and most often virulently hostile to, the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The truth is that religion is the only viable bulwark of decency in any society. (And let us not forget that in America, “religion” for all practical purposes *means* “Christianity,” with Judaism, Islam, and other minority faiths playing, at best, a modest supporting role.) Not only does religion promote tolerance; just as important, the Tolerance Teachers’ effort to banish religion from the

public square is in itself intolerant.