A question of compatibility

Faith & Tolerance

A Papal Apology

Thirteen months ago - on March 12th of last year - Pope John Paul II issued a sweeping and unprecedented declaration of apology on behalf of the Catholic church. In his homily, which was a part of his celebration of the new millennium, the then 79-year old pontiff asked for "a deep examination of conscience" and called for what he termed "a purification of memory".

"In certain periods of history", he said, "Christians have at times given in to intolerance and have not been faithful to the great commandment of love, sullying in this way the face of the Church." He asked for "forgiveness for the divisions between Christians, for the use of violence that some have resorted to in the service of truth, and for the acts of dissidence and of hostility sometimes taken towards followers of other religions".

Seven cardinals and bishops stood by the Pope on the occasion and participated in the ceremony. Each cited an example of Catholic lapses into intolerance: injustice toward Jews, women, indigenous peoples, immigrants, the poor and the unborn.

One might have supposed that this remarkable statement of repentance would have elicited an equally generous and broadly positive response. Regrettably, though perhaps not surprisingly, such was not the case. There was, of course, much blandly favorable editorial commentary, but a good deal of it was laced with complaints that the apology did not go far enough on this or that subject, or that it failed to come to grips with some particular issue.

There followed slews of letters to the editor carping about omissions. The March 16 edition of *The New York Times* carried some typical examples:

A certain Mary Brockway, writing from Fishkill, N.Y. argued that the Pope should have welcomed women into the ordained ministry. "He could even name women to the College of Cardinals" she added.

Another lady named Audrey Bernstein wrote that she "would be more than happy to forgive ... past sins if [the Church would help] to make family planning available and acceptable to all people who want it".

One Allan Nadler, a professor at Drew University in New Jersey, wrote that the apology "remains unsatisfying" because the dead who "might have been saved had the Vatican been willing to oppose the Nazis more vigorously" are not around to accept an apology.

Theological Hairsplitting

Criticism was also heard at more abstract and theologically hairsplitting levels. At issue was the dilemma of how a church that considers itself holy can admit mistakes. A formal Vatican document, issued in conjunction with the Pope's homily, explained that while the church is holy, it can be stained by the sins of its children. But this left open the question of which children qualified.

The Rev. Thomas Reeves, editor of the Jesuit magazine *America* commented that "It should have [been] put in bold print that the ' children of the church' includes popes, cardinals and clergy, and not just people in the pews." In a similar vein, some found fault in the fact that the Pope expressed contrition for sins committed by individuals in the Church's name as opposed to sins committed by the Church itself. The historian Garry Wills, an American Catholic liberal and prominent critic of the papacy, writing in *The New York Review of Books* [May 25, 2000], grumbled that the Pope's statement contained "a little dance of words" which meant that it was "never 'the Church' that erred, just its ' sons and daughters'".

Another aspect of the controversy posed the question of whether past generations can be fairly judged by contemporary moral or religious standards. At issue was whether what is referred to in theological jargon as "knowable error" was committed during particular historical events. Did the Crusades, the Inquisition, the torture and burning of heretics or forced conversions in past centuries involve "knowable error"?

The Vatican document was somewhat ambiguous on this point. While saying that contemporary Catholics cannot be held responsible for sins committed hundreds of years ago, it also conceded "an objective collective responsibility" for past errors. In a briefing, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who heads the Vatican's primary doctrinal body, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, also acknowledged that sins had been "committed in the service of truth". It should be recognized, he said, "that even men of the church in the name of faith and morals have sometimes used methods not in keeping with the Gospel".

As this debate unfolded, a variety of stories surfaced in the press suggesting that the Pope had pushed forward with his statement against the express desires and advice of many Vatican cardinals and bishops. There were further reports that the widespread negative and knit-picking commentary had resulted in a chorus of "I told you so's" within the church hierarchy. Some within the church saw the Pope's initiative as having only invited further controversy of the sort the apology was designed to dissolve. Conservative Catholics were said to have taken the attitude "Will nothing satisfy them?"

Reason versus Passion

The entire saga of the Pope's singular request for forgiveness for past errors, and the disputes which it engendered, evokes a number of provocative questions:

- Does a religion overly concerned with appeasing its critics lose potency and vigor?
- How far can a religious institution extend a hand to critics or competitors without threatening its own cohesion and viability?
- Does adapting too readily to transitory social and cultural pressures undermine the strength inherent in long-guarded and venerable traditions?
- Is it fair and reasonable to expect a true believer in one orthodoxy to be broad minded and unbiased toward a competing orthodoxy?
- Is there - in sum - an inherent tension between faith on the one hand and tolerance on the other?

The seventeenth century French religious philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal espoused the view that man is always internally at war between his reason and his passion. "He cannot be at peace with the one," Pascal wrote, "without being at war with the other. So he is always divided, and always his own adversary." Reason is sustained by doubt; passion involves certitude. Contemporary neuro-scientists advise us that emotions reside in sections of the brain that developed early in man's evolution while reason is centered in portions that evolved more recently. Moreover, the activities of these areas are less than perfectly synchronized.

Be that as it may, I believe a dichotomy comparable to Pascal's can be applied in a modern context, as well. In the diverse and heterogeneous culture in which we live, reason demands tolerance for other faiths, if only to maintain social peace and stability. But passion makes equivalent demands, namely in the spiritual odyssey of the individual and his need for confidence in the validity and vitality of the faith which steers his life. Thus it is possible to see religious fanaticism and tolerance as separate elements in a single continuing landscape of the mind. Fanaticism is to be avoided and condemned because it creates strife and allows no room for complexity, variousness, and skepticism. But tolerance is not without its own shortcomings.

For if all faiths are tolerated - if all are viewed as equally valid, don't they is some essential way cancel each other out? Don't they all lose some validity? If someone else's faith deserves the same respect as one's own, does it not follow that what is unique and special about one's own faith - the rock upon which one's loyalty is built - is eroded? Harmony, in other words, is not easily reconciled with strong adherence, much less with evangelical fire.

Rigidity in the application of tolerance can itself translate into a form of fanaticism. A good example is provided by the attempts of universities to enforce tolerance by the adoption of speech codes, compulsory "sensitivity training" and the like. When tolerance has itself become the dominant orthodoxy it naturally is threatened by orthodoxies perceived as potentially in conflict. So people are propelled into diluting their views or their faith for fear of being labelled as too zealous or "judgmental". When overly concentrated, tolerance can also lead to spiritual lassitude, indifference, or nihilism. The late Allen Bloom, author of *The Closing of the American Mind* noted something like this when, commenting on his students at the University of Chicago in the 1980's, he wrote:

> "It was not necessarily the best of times in America when Catholics and Protestants were suspicious of and hated one another; *but at least they were taking their beliefs seriously,* and the more or less satisfactory accommodations they worked out were not simply the result of apathy about the state of their souls. Practically all that young Americans have today is an insubstantial awareness that there are many cultures, accompanied by a saccharine moral drawn from that awareness: We should all get along."

Religious Dogma

Perusing the history of religion as it unfolds over the centuries casts up a variety of graphic examples of fanaticism and violence. Examples of tolerance are fewer, though that overall historic pattern has been dramatically reversed in recent decades. Religious tolerance is now the dominant attitude in Western countries, particularly in our own, and conflicting attitudes are severely castigated. At the same time, in many parts of the non-Western world, the pendulum has swung the other way. Where in times past there was considerable tolerance for other faiths there is now a fundamentalist reaction and fanaticism. Most famously, religious xenophobia has swept through many parts of the Muslim world, but is also to be found among Hindus in India, Jews in Israel, and elsewhere.

Fundamentalism may exist, but wars purely in behalf of religious doctrine are now rare. When religions come into conflict, in places like the Middle East, where it is Muslims vs. Jews; in Ireland, where it is Protestants vs. Catholics; in Bosnia where it is Catholics vs. Orthodox; in Kosovo, where it is Orthodox vs. Muslim; in Kashmir, where it is Muslim vs. Hindu; or in Sri Lanka, where it is Hindu Tamils vs.

Buddhist Sinhalese, the violence relates in great part to tribal battles over turf, or involves questions of sovereignty and historic social, ethnic or political grievances, rather than actual matters of religious doctrine.

It was not always so. Over much of the last two thousand years bitter conflicts have regularly arisen over *authentic* theological disputes and interpretations of doctrine. Typically, these appear minor or arcane to the contemporary observer - involving controversies aptly referred to as "the dialectical splitting of dogmatical hairs" - but in their day they were murderously bitter. This was particularly true among the countries of the Mediterranean, where the classical Greek tradition of philosophic debate carried over into the Christian era. Matters of philosophy and religious dogma were then far more central to people's lives than they are today.

In a recent autobiographical memoir, Norman Podhoretz answered the question of why doctrinal matters can be of such intense importance in the following way:

> "There is a reason", he writes, "why people have been excommunicated, and sometimes even put to death, by their fellow congregants for heretically disagreeing with the official understanding of a particular text or even of a single word. After all, to the true believer everything important - life in this world as well as life in the next - depends on obedience to these doctrines and dogmas, which in turn depends on an accurate interpretation of their meaning and which therefore makes the spread of heresy a threat of limitless proportions."

Undoubtedly, it was just for this sort of reason that furious conflicts over theological detail were a constant hallmark of the early days of Christianity. There was little actual first century documentation of the life of the historical Jesus to fall back on, a fact which certainly contributed to the intensity of religious argumentation in subsequent centuries. Theological disputes exceeded in ferocity those that take place today among even the fiercest advocates of political or social policies. Moreover, passionate disagreements over abstract biblical interpretations were not engaged in just among the clergy, but became a popular pastime among ordinary citizens. A major instance is the bitter controversy that broke out in the fourth century over the exact nature of Christ's divinity.

Arius and Athanasius

The dispute was kindled by a charismatic presbyter in Alexandria named Arius. Alexandria at the time was not some dessicated provincial outpost but a vibrant metropolis of more than a million, spreading along ten miles of Mediterranean coast. Its harbor was graced by the Pharos, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a lighthouse four hundred feet tall. In this sparkling setting Arius preached that Jesus, although a person of such sublime moral accomplishments that he was adopted by God as his son, was himself not of the same substance as the Father. Since God is perfect by nature, Arius argued, He is inimitable, whereas Christ's virtue, achieved by acts of will, is available, at least potentially, to those who try to follow in his path. So while Arius did not entirely deny Christ's divinity, he held that Jesus was *less* than God the Father.

Arius' arch foe and rival was Athanasius, also of Alexandria. In Athanasius' view, it was God *himself*, who descended into human flesh in order to save mankind from sin and death. If Christ were any less than God, Athanasius maintained, he could not act as Savior. Athanasius' language was fiery: those who declared Jesus inferior to God, he proclaimed, were heretics trying to shipwreck Christianity. They were no better than the Jews who denied him, or the Romans who crucified him.

The controversy became so heated that Constantine, the first Christian

Emperor of Rome, was forced to intervene by calling forth a synod to settle the matter. The synod was held in Nicæa in what is now Turkey in the year 325 and Athanasius and his version of orthodoxy prevailed. The synod is now best remembered for hammering out the Nicene Creed, which embraces the doctrine that God the Creator and Jesus the Savior are as one. Although written in Greek and amended in subsequent synods, the essential wording of what was written in 325 is still accepted as authoritative by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and major Protestant Churches. The key phrases are familiar:

God from God, Light from Light
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father ....

Athanasius' views dominated in Nicæa, but the controversy was far from over. Arius and some of his followers refused to sign, and the dispute raged on. Constantine's son and successor, Constantius, who, unlike his father, openly favored the Arian view, tried to appoint an Arian, George of Cappadocia, Bishop of Alexandria. But the hapless George was unable to establish control of the sharply divided Christian community even with the aid of the Emperor's troops and an angry mob soon ran him out of town. He eventually returned, but by unhappy coincidence, Constantius died a few days later. As the news spread, Athanasius's supporters took control of Alexandria's churches and tossed George and his associates into the local dungeon.

Not long afterwards, word got around that the new Emperor, Constantius' nephew Julian, was not an Athanasian, nor even an Arian. He was, of all things, a pagan! The Alexandrian mobs reacted to this news by pulling George and his followers out of jail, beating them to death, dragging the corpses through the city, and finally burning them.

Grotesque as it was, George's death at the hands of a lynch mob was hardly an unusual event among the turbulent Mediterranean cities of that day. With theological disputes as much the province of the man in the street as of the philosopher or bishop, mobs customarily turned religious rifts into savage combat. Riots and assassinations over doctrinal disputes were commonplace.

Athanasius, the dominant figure at the Nicæan synod and later to be elevated to sainthood, was himself a tough and unprincipled street brawler. He had opponents beaten, kidnapped, and imprisoned. The luckier were merely excommunicated or exiled. Nor were his enemies exactly slouches. Athanasius was repeatedly condemned by Church councils, and on several occasions mobs chased him from Alexandria and forced him into hiding. He was charged at varying times with every imaginable crime: bribery, theft, extortion, treason, murder, and - not least - sacrilege.

The Holy Trinity

Angry battles over Christ's divinity continued until 381, when the matter was - officially at least - laid to rest. The Council of Constantinople, convened by the Emperor Theodosius, amended the Nicene creed so as to give greater emphasis to the Holy Spirit. The *concept* of the Holy Spirit had been around since the days of the Old Testament when it had to with such things as healing, prophecy, and the expelling of demons. Now, however, using ample ingenuity, it was converted into a philosophical device to fuse the Father and the Son together. The creed adopted in 381 views the Holy Spirit as a Person both distinct and divine who is equal to the Father and Son as well as a bond linking the two. The words adopted, and still embodied in the Nicene Creed, are: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified."

Theodosius decreed that all churches were to be controlled by bishops who affirmed the Trinity. The advocacy of Arian views or the possession of Arian writings became criminal acts punishable by death. That is not to say, of course, that the issue was stilled for ever. Its appeal proved irrepressible, and it managed to pop up again and again in subsequent eras. In the sixteenth century, for example, the Spanish theologian Michael Servetus after minutely examining the New Testament, declared that there was nothing there to sustain the Trinity. The doctrine was just a human fabrication, he declared, which "alienated the minds of men from the knowledge of the true Christ."

A view so rashly heretical obliged Servetus to flee Spain. He took up refuge in Geneva, then under the sway of John Calvin and the Reformation. Servetus imagined the unbiblical provenance of the Trinity would cause Calvin to be sympathetic to his Unitarian views. The dour and no-nonsense Calvin was interested in a great many things religious, but unhappily for Servetus slicing up Trinitarian dogma was not among them. Calvin pondered the matter for a number of days and then promulgated a decision: He ordered Servetus lashed to a stake and burned. A couple of prominent Italian theologians who subscribed to Unitarian views similar to those of the late Servetus and who had also migrated to Geneva did not fail to get the point; they hastily departed for Poland and Transylvania, where their ideas apparently won some influential and lasting adherents.

But Arian heresies refused to be suppressed even in less exotic locales. Joseph Priestley, an eighteenth century British scientist and clergyman began preaching what he called "Unitarian Christianity" which stressed Jesus' humanity as well as the rational faculty of man. Priestly lectured first in England and then in this country to which he migrated in 1794 . To the dismay of traditional churchmen, Unitarianism spread quickly and abundantly in both Britain and the U.S. in the nineteenth century. It was an unsettling development, which caused the established clergy to debate with utmost earnestness the question of whether Unitarians were among those truly entitled to be called Christian.

Schisms

The long running struggle between opposing views of Christ's divinity took other odd turns as well. The seemingly innocent phrase added to the Nicene Creed at the Council of Constantinople asserting that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son" actually contributed to the schism that gradually developed between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. The Western bishops, who wanted the Father and Son to be regarded as equal in all things, insisted that the words "and the Son" be added to "proceeds from the Father". The Eastern Churchmen continued to believe that the divine Father was in certain respects greater than the divine Son. So these three monosyllables - "and the Son" - combined with a variety of underlying regional disputes and rivalries, contributed to the lasting split between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity.

There were, of course, an impressive assortment of additional controversies and fissures: In the East, there was a complicated wrangle over whether Christ had one nature or two, divine and human. The argument, referred to as the Monophysite controversy, brought about breaches that gradually solidified into several separate branches of Eastern orthodoxy. Complex schisms occurred in the West as well. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century there existed two and for a time even three competing papacies. There were also endless disputes about whether fallen humanity could be saved by God's grace via the sacraments of the Church.

The Virgin as Co-Redeemer

Contention over the precise role of the Virgin Mary and of the saints in mediating between man and God represented yet another significant source of controversy, one which in fact persists to this day. A contentious drive is presently underway to elevate the status of the Virgin. Six million people, including over five hundred bishops and numerous cardinals, have signed petitions asking the Pope to declare the Virgin a so-called Co-Redeemer, which would formally transform her into an "Advocate for the people of God", with power to grant all graces. Such a declaration would raise her position to one almost equal in magnitude to that of the Holy Ghost. As one would expect, much agitated opposition exists. Some regard the move as heretical and others see it as divisive and fear it would complicate ecumenical efforts. The Reverend Paige Patterson, leader of the Southern Baptist Convention, is among many who condemn the idea. Being "a Redeemer would require a person to be perfect. It would require a person to be God. We certainly don't believe she was God", he recently announced.

The Inquisition in the Netherlands

The long history of religious strife is scarred with astounding examples of mulish stubbornness and zealousness. Certainly among the more startling are the efforts of the Spanish Inquisition to eliminate Protestant heresies in the Netherlands. In 1535, King Charles V of Spain issued an edict which specified that unrepentant heretics were to be burned, repentant males were to be executed with the sword, and repentant females were to be buried alive. No one seems quite sure whether this quaint sexual distinction was intended to favor the males or the females. In any event, during Charles' reign somewhere between fifty and a hundred thousand Netherlanders were burned, strangled, beheaded or buried alive.

Charles' concerns were not entirely religious. John Lothrop Motley, the nineteenth century American author of the authoritative *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* suggests that Charles worried that political heresy lurked closely behind religious heresy. Charles, he writes, "was too shrewd a politician not to recognize the connection between aspirations for religious and for political freedom".

Things hardly improved under Charles' successor Philip II, whose edicts were, if anything, even wilder. One such edict required everyone to inform on suspected heretics. Failure to do so made one liable to the same punishment as the heretic himself. If a person succeeded in getting a heretic executed, that individual was entitled to receiving up to a half of his property.

The unrest caused by this hair-raising repression brought about further brutal countermeasures. Philip sent the notorious Duke of Alva to crack down. Motley writes that within a few months of Alva's arrival "the scaffolds, the gallows, the funeral piles, which had been sufficient in ordinary times, furnished now an entirely inadequate machinery for the incessant executions. Columns and stakes in every street, the doorposts of private houses, the fences in the fields, were laden with human carcasses, strangled, burned, beheaded. The orchards in the country bore on many a tree the hideous fruit of human bodies."

In 1568, the Holy Office decided that even these measures were insufficient; it condemned the *entire* population of the Netherlands to death as heretics. Philip ordered the sentence carried out without regard to age, sex, or condition. But this mad task turned out to be beyond even the Duke of Alva's capabilities and prompted the Prince of Orange to lead an armed revolt. The war of Dutch independence which followed lasted for eighty years. The Protestant forces committed vast atrocities of their own. Hundreds of churches across the country were burned or vandalized and countless invaluable statues, paintings and other sacred treasures were looted or destroyed during the rampages. Only the pillaging of churches that accompanied the French Revolution two centuries later cost the world so many priceless treasures.

Tolerance in the Orient

I move now to less brutal things. Historic examples of tolerance among religious groups exist and are notably more abundant in the East than in the West. The Mongols in the period of Genghis Khan, for instance, permitted worship under a variety of different religions, treating them all more or less equally. Like a cautious capitalist, the Mongols hesitated to invest all their eggs of worship in one religious basket, fearing that if they bet on the wrong God or prophet, they might be losers at the time of judgment. Hence they spread their allegiance around.

Over the centuries (and until the recent spread of anti-Western fundamentalism) Muslim countries also treated religious minorities with greater tolerance than they enjoyed in predominately Christian nations. Although second class citizens in some respects, Christians and Jews were accorded the status of a protected minority, could practice their religion, and were largely free to run their own affairs. The eight hundred year period during which the Moors dominated the Iberian peninsula illustrates the matter well. Minorities, particularly the substantial Jewish population, prospered and enjoyed ample liberties. All this came to a spectacular end in 1492, when Ferdinand and Isabella conquered Granada, the last Muslim stronghold. Spanish Jews were offered the choice of baptism or expulsion. Some 150,000 were forcibly deported, but even those who converted to Christianity remained under suspicion. Many were imprisoned or executed by the Inquisition as presumed heretics. Sultan Bayazid II of the notably tolerant Ottoman empire opened the empire's frontiers and a significant percentage of those who left Spain emigrated to various parts of that vast realm. Four hundred years later - in the 1893 census - almost a third of Ottomans were registered as Christians or Jews; in Istanbul, Muslims made up less than half of the population.

The Indian sub-continent affords another interesting example. There Muslims and Hindus have been slaughtering each other for years, and continue to do so in Kashmir and elsewhere. But in earlier centuries there existed notable and sustained periods of harmony. Although Islam was dominant in Moghul India, Hinduism remained dynamic, and Muslims and Hindus cooperated in the arts and intellectual endeavors. Muslims and Hindus even formed interfaith societies, the most important of which evolved into Sikhism. Nanak, who founded Sikhism in the fifteenth century combined Muslim and Hindu beliefs in his book of holy writings. The Moghuls also tolerated substantial minorities of Christians, Jains, Parsees and Jews.

Akbar, the powerful Moghul emperor who ruled in the second half of the sixteenth century is still remembered for laying the foundations of secularism and religious neutrality in India. He insisted that "no man should be interfered with on account of religion, and [that] anyone is to be allowed to go over to a religion that pleases him." Although a Moslem, Akbar was so responsive to Hindu sensitivities that he became a vegetarian, gave up hunting, and forbade the sacrifice of animals in Hindu holy places.

Locke's Treatise

It took another two centuries before the concept of religious tolerance made an appearance in the West. The unfolding came as part of the seventeenth century Enlightenment. Its discoverer and still most illustrious proponent was the English philosopher, John Locke. Locke's classic treatise, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* is still regarded as the most influential and important work on the subject.

Life in seventeenth century England was tumultuous: steeped in civil war, counter-revolution, Parliamentary rule, and Restoration. In this country Locke is, of course, best remembered for his political writing: he espoused individual liberty, government by consent, the social contract, and the right of citizens to revolt against authoritarian governments, all of which had a major impact on the America of the eighteenth century.

Like the American colonists whom he influenced, Locke himself was the victim of a repressive regime and *A Letter Concerning Toleration* stemmed from that experience. Locke composed it in 1689, while living in exile in Holland. As a follower of the Protestant leader, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Locke's name had been inscribed on a list of traitors by the Catholic monarch, Charles II. The struggle against Charles II caused Locke to reflect on the proper relationship between the state and religious institutions. *A Letter Concerning Toleration* warns of "the vicissitude of orthodox and Arian emperors". "We must acknowledge" Locke wrote, "that the church... is for the most part more apt to be influenced by the court, than the court by the church."

Toleration, Locke insisted, is "the chief characteristic hallmark of the true church." Churches, he stated, should be a "free and voluntary" societies without any pretense of superiority or jurisdiction over one another. The true Christian, he went on, shows "goodwill in general towards all mankind". "The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion", he wrote, "is so agreeable ... to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind, as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it". Furthermore, he contended that "neither pagan, nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth, because of his religion". This principle, which was later embedded in the First Amendment to the U.S Constitution, may seem undramatic now. But at the time Locke propounded it, the view was startlingly radical .

Critics have not been shy about poking holes in Locke's arguments. Certainly Locke provided some ground. He held that all churches have equal validity and that each "is orthodox to itself". But at the same time he clung to the traditional Platonic position that fundamental moral and political ideas remain universal "by the judgment of all mankind". His detractors gleefully jump on the contradiction. His position is simultaneously relative and absolute and hence is logically flawed, they maintain. Locke's defenders retort that his phrase "the judgment of all mankind" does not mean that rational men must always reach the same conclusions, only that man, through his powers of reason, is capable of grasping basic moral and political principles. Reason alone, however, is not sufficient to answer the question of which church or doctrine is most apt to lead to salvation.

Locke had another even more vexing conceptual problem. He sought to win acceptance for the then novel proposition that members of unpopular sects should be left alone, as long as they lived within the society's laws. But to accomplish this, he had to demote religion from the realm of absolute knowledge to the province of opinion. In other words, to advance social and political order, it was necessary to deflate the claim of religious bodies to moral and metaphysical certitude. And, of course, there were many then, and there remain some now, who are profoundly resentful of this tilting of the balance to the secular.The question of whether it is proper for political exigencies to override the need of religious groups to proclaim moral absolutes is still hotly contested.

Yet regardless of whether or not Locke's theses contain weaknesses or internal contradictions, his views on tolerance gradually won the day. Fanaticism within the broader Christian community subsided and freedom of opinion became the new absolute. No single corps of belief could any longer assert its superiority.

The Oxford Movement

The Anglican church remained the state religion of England, but after 1832 the law no longer required office holders to receive the Eucharist within it. Restrictions formerly imposed on Catholics were also dropped. Religious antagonisms diminished and, in the view of some, the Church of England sank into a state of sloth. Lytton Strachey described what happened this way:

> "For many generations the Church of England... slept the sleep of the comfortable. The sullen murmurings of dissent, the loud battle-cry of Revolution, had hardly disturbed her slumbers. Portly divines...sank quietly into easy livings, rode gaily to hounds of a morning as gentlemen should, and, as gentlemen should, carried their two bottles of an evening....The fervours of piety, the zeal of Apostolic charity, the enthusiasm of self renunciation - these things were all very well in their way - and in their place; but their place was certainly not the Church of England."

The reaction which inevitably set in centered in an unlikely place: Oxford University. What became known as the Oxford Movement, was initiated in the 1830's by a group of intensely earnest and pious young Oxford academics and Oxford-trained clergymen. They resented Protestant incursions into English church traditions and sought a return to rituals reflecting its Catholic roots, or what one called the "intricate ecstasies of High Anglicanism". Its leaders included John Henry Newman and Henry Edward Manning, both of whom later converted to Roman Catholicism and became Cardinals, and Hurrell Froude, John Keble, and Edward Pusey. The latter three remained in the Anglican Church but struggled to purge it of Protestant tendencies.

The movement's ideas were published in a series of articles called *Tracts* *for the Times*. These claimed that the doctrinal authority of the church was absolute, that it was independent of the state and immune from secular intervention, and that its authority stemmed from the simple fact that it taught Christian truth. Its members tended to read the liturgy literally. When they declared their belief in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic church, they meant it. And if the Church of England was indeed a part of the Catholic church, they asked, were not Locke and other such reformers renegades?

Oxford Movement members were much given to fiery oratory. Hurrell Froude, in a speech disparaging Thomas Cranmer, the sixteenth century Protestant Archbishop who had been burned at the stake by Queen Mary I, announced "The only good I know of Cranmer was that he burnt well."

John Keble, another zealous member, proclaimed that "It would be a gain to this country were it vastly more superstitious, more bigoted, more gloomy, more fierce in its religion, than at present it shows itself to be." In 1869, Oxford named one of its colleges in honor of Keble. In the twenty-first century, having a college name so much as a dormitory or gymnasium after an individual costs millions. But as we see, things were less expensive in the nineteenth century. It was possible to have a name attached to an entire college simply by calling for more superstition and bigotry.

Decline in Church Attendance

The Oxford Movement's successes in restoring traditional doctrine and high church ritual were, in any event, relatively short lived. Religious identity, solid allegiance to particular faiths, and churchgoing itself, gradually waned throughout the twentieth century. Though about forty percent of Americans still tell pollsters that they attend church or synagogue at least once a week, independent research suggests the actual number is considerably lower. Mark Chaves, a sociologist at the University of Arizona, who has delved into the matter, claims that only 28% of Roman Catholics and fewer than one in five Protestants are to be found in church of a Sunday morning. Commenting on the subject, John Updike noted that "In its centuries of dominance [the church] had the power to exclude and excommunicate; now, unlike most other organizations, it will take us in if we so much as show up."

Curiously, low church attendance does not necessarily mean that faith itself has receded. More Americans than ever insist they believe in God. In a *Gallup* survey taken last year, 86% said they believe in God and another eight percent said they believe in some form of "universal spirit or higher power". (For what it is worth, I might add parenthetically that only 63% believe there is a devil.) Some observers ascribe the paradox of low church attendance combined with evidently widespread religious belief to such things as home study and religious shows on television. Sales of religious books have also soared in recent years; so even religious observance may be subject to the do-it-yourself trend.

With denominations widely perceived as having lost theological vigor, worshipers have come to view them as interchangeable commodities, fungible institutions easily replaced. Thus, people casually alter their religious affiliation as they move, or marry, or because of a likable minister, or more congenial social atmosphere. The formal setting of spiritual communications, in other words, is as readily transferred as are temporal communications; the process is not much different than changing long distance service from *AT&T to MCI.*

Another trend worth noting in this context is referred to as "the new ecumenicalism". Traditional ecumenicalism has to do with formal efforts to bring Christian denominations together. The new involves free-lance experimentation by individuals in combining elements of various faiths, both Eastern and Western, in personal efforts to find spiritual fulfillment. In this vein, a recent *New York Times* poll found that forty-two percent of respondents agreed with the proposition that "The best religion would be one that borrowed from all religions" Interesting as this idea is, there is cause to wonder what it really means. If all the globe's religions were put into a blender, what would it be that emerged? It is difficult to say. But is it not curious that where men once fought street battles over a few words of doctrine, now many would be content to have all religions stirred into a single stew?

Tolerance Reigns

G.K. Chesterton, the English novelist and critic who transferred his allegiance from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism, famously remarked that "Tolerance is the virtue of a man without convictions". It reflected an attitude that would win him little applause in contemporary America. Indeed, most would agree that this now very diverse country requires a decent measure of tolerance simply to maintain civil peace. Most would also concede the fact that tolerance is now the only openly acceptable stance within the American mainstream. The political fuss over the Doctrine of Papal Infallibility that transpired when Al Smith ran for president in 1928 now seems entirely quaint and unseemly.

Yet as late as 1937, according to *Gallup,* only 60% of qualified voters said they would be willing to vote for a Catholic for president and only 46% said they would be willing to vote for a Jew. By 1999, those figures had soared to 94% and 92%, respectively. There is no evidence that Joe Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew who won't drive in a car on the Sabbath, damaged the Democratic ticket and, in fact, reports are abroad that he is preparing to run for president in 2004. The intense opposition that developed to the nomination of John Ashcroft as Attorney General was perhaps an example of the opposite sort, though to what extent that opposition was linked to fears about his loyalty to Pentecostalist fundamentalism remains unclear.

A Vexing Problem

When John Locke first ushered in the modern era of religious tolerance, he took a forward step without which liberal democracy could not have flourished. But, as I have tried to suggest, he also left behind a vexing problem. By demoting the status of religious doctrine from knowledge to opinion he stripped it of its authority in the eyes of the faithful and in a sense, deligitimized it. It was an historically inevitable step and one necessarily taken, but its effect on religious institutions and the faith of individuals was debilitating and destabilizing.

The quest for answers to metaphysical or ontological questions about the nature of the universe and humanity's role within it is a permanent fixture of civilization. So is the search for moral assurance and order. Therefore, in closing, I shall revert again to the fourth century, where, as we have seen, such matters were the subject of far greater public discourse than they are today.

In the year 384, a famous debate took place between Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, a distinguished Roman statesman and orator and Ambrose - later to become St. Ambrose - the Christian bishop of Milan. Symmachus argued for the retention of ancient Roman religious practices in the face of inroads being made by the newly fashionable Christianity. Speaking of the nature of reality and the true end of man, Symmachus contended that "The heart of so great a mystery cannot ever be reached by following one road only". Naturally, Ambrose disagreed. There was only one true path to salvation, he insisted.

One road or many? Orators are less eloquent now, but disputation on the matter can hardly be said to be over. In some ways, the situation today is not dissimilar to Rome in the year 384. Now as then, traditional religions are struggling to maintain their validity and their relevance. The long standing tension that exists between the demands of faith and the requirements of tolerance continues, as well. Undoubtedly it will persist, since it embodies a dilemma from which there is no easy exit.

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