Summary

No society, including a professedly liberal one, can tolerate everything, such as threats to its existence. But some societies, as those inaccurately labeled ‘theocracies’ by liberal theorists, are denied, in the name of liberal toleration, the right to suppress threats to their existence. The denial is incoherent and question-begging. Toleration is good if it serves the common good of society and bad if it does not. The common good understood instrumentally, as in liberalism, is politically self-refuting. The common good understood substantively is not self-refuting but does not support liberalism’s view of religious toleration. On the contrary it supports active promotion of the true religion. Toleration of false religions may be unavoidable in certain circumstances but is not simply good. Among religions only Catholicism can give a rational defense of itself as true.
Toleration is hailed in today’s world as an important, even the most important, political ideal. We say that we should tolerate each other’s opinions and values and not seek to impose our own by force on those who disagree with us. Such an ideal of toleration is not adopted everywhere. Toleration of different religions does not exist in some countries (as Saudi Arabia) and toleration of different political views does not exist in others (as North Korea and Myanmar). Indeed no country even in the First World is universally tolerant. All countries are convinced that some differences are intolerable, such as racism and sexism and anti-Semitism.

One might say there is no paradox here. Such things are instances of intolerance, and there cannot be a society of toleration if intolerance is one of the things tolerated. All differences are to be tolerated save those that do not tolerate difference. There is no professedly tolerant society which does not have extensive security, intelligence, and spying networks to seek out such people and jail or expel them. The same sentiments that motivated the rooting out of communist subversives from liberal democracies in the years following WWII have lain behind more recent attempts to root out Islamic subversives, whose spectacular destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City still benumbs the mind.

Let us change countries and centuries and turn to Spain at the time of Ferdinand and Isabella. If their Catholic Majesties, along with the political and ecclesiastical
hierarchies, believed, and had good reason for believing, that the Talmudic Jews\(^1\) in Spain were political and religious subversives, was the expulsion of them in 1492 a legitimate exception to the principle of toleration, as the uprooting of communist and Islamic subversives is believed by us to be such an exception? The answer to this question is taken to be an obvious no. According to modern liberal theorists, Ferdinand’s and Isabella’s Spain was not a liberal democracy but a Catholic ‘theocracy’ and theocracies, so called, are not legitimate forms of government.\(^2\)

The reason we are given that such governments are not legitimate is that people have rights to live their own lives as they wish and should always be allowed to live as they wish provided they allow others the same rights. Liberal democracies allow people these rights but theocracies do not. Therefore liberal democracies are permitted to uproot subversives but theocracies are not. The problem is not that theocracies are intolerant of subversives, for liberal democracies are intolerant in the same way. The problem is that theocracies are illegitimate and have no right to do what is necessary to protect themselves. Legitimacy means toleration and toleration means allowing people to live as they wish provided they allow others to do the same, that is, it means tolerating all those

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\(^1\) I say Talmudic Jews because not all Jews accept the Talmud (the Karaites only accept the Torah), and because it is the Talmud, not Jewishness, that lies behind the problems all societies have had over the centuries with the Jews in their midst.

\(^2\) The term ‘theocratic’ is used loosely here. A theocracy is strictly a system of government where the spiritual or religious power is the same as the temporal power and has full political as well as spiritual authority. In this sense ancient Israel and certain Islamic countries are theocracies. Catholic Spain was not thus a theocracy, for it recognized, as do all Catholic countries, the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual powers and did not subordinate either to the other. Nevertheless the distinction between the two powers is not the same as the separation of church and state espoused in the US. The separation of church and state means that the church is a private association and has no public authority in matters of faith or morals and no power of public coercion (no power of the sword, as is sometimes said). Where the church does have such power, even if this power is conceived of as distinct from the temporal power, it constitutes, in terms of US political thought, or in terms of modern liberal thought generally, a theocracy. In this sense Catholic Spain was a theocracy, and such sense is the one used in this essay, wherein the argument indeed is that theocracy so understood is a good and even necessary thing which liberalism and the US falsely reject.
who believe and practice the principles of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy alone is legitimate because it alone is tolerant; and it alone is tolerant because it alone is liberal democracy. The argumentation is viciously circular. If we are to get anywhere in understanding the good and bad of toleration we need to start somewhere else.

Definition and Kinds of Toleration

We speak of the tolerance not only of people but also of material things like bodies and bridges. The tolerance of a bridge is how much weight it can carry without collapsing, and the tolerance of the body is how much of a certain substance it can absorb without illness or death. Tolerance in this sense is not wholly different from the tolerating of other people that is meant by political toleration, for we tolerate that in political life which we are able or willing to bear with. Toleration means how much difference of opinion or behavior a community or individuals are able or willing to bear before the community collapses or the individuals forcefully resist. Toleration in its most general sense is a capacity to bear things, and the capacity to bear something is the capacity not to be adversely affected by that thing (as a bridge that bears a weight or a society that bears differences). Hence tolerance might be defined as a capacity not to be affected by another, and political toleration as a community’s capacity not to be affected by that which is other, whether in opinion or behavior.

Toleration is a capacity both of nature and of choice. A community is both a definite thing with definite features and something determined by the choice of those who compose it. A community’s natural capacity of toleration is what it can in fact tolerate without being corrupted or destroyed. A community’s voluntary capacity of toleration is
what it chooses to tolerate whether or not what it chooses to tolerate is something the community has the natural capacity to tolerate. Toleration as a public policy is a community’s voluntary capacity of toleration (a community’s natural capacity of toleration is determined by the community’s nature and not by the choice of its rulers). Choice is of the good but when mistaken or perverse it is of the bad. Choice and action in the case of toleration are also of someone and by someone and about something, for they are someone’s tolerating of someone about something said or done. Further, they are for some reason or end and at some time and place and in some way or manner and for some duration.

Of these differences the most important are the ‘by whom’, the ‘of whom’, the ‘about what’, and the ‘why’, for these constitute the substance of the choice and action. The others constitute the circumstances. The why is more determinative than the by or of whom or the about what, for it is in view of the why that one decides who is to be tolerated and by whom and in respect of what. The why itself is the good or some part of it or the opposite. Good tolerations will be those that tolerate for the sake of the good and the bad tolerations those that tolerate for the sake of the bad. Conversely, good intolerances will be those that are intolerant for the sake of the good and bad ones those that are so for the sake of the bad. Those who do the tolerating, the by whom, are the rulers or the ruled, and those who are tolerated are also rulers or ruled but contrariwise (rulers are ruled insofar as they are subject to the rules they make). The about what will be either words or actions or both (and thought and character too, insofar as thought and character issue in words and actions). The kinds of toleration based on these differences
are many but it would be tedious to list them. Sufficient to notice the principles of the division.

_Tolerance and the Common Good_

The ‘why’ is the chief determining factor in the kinds of toleration and distinguishes toleration into good and bad. So the first thing to consider is the why of toleration or the end toleration must serve. This end must be the end that the community proposes to itself as the object of pursuit. The proper end of community is the common good. Rulers who pursue their private good (their own power or fame or wealth) at the expense of the common good (the welfare of the people as a whole) are corrupting community and reducing it to tyranny (the classic definition of tyranny, going back to Aristotle and beyond, is precisely that the rulers pursue their private good and not the common good). The common good of community may be understood in two main ways, either substantively as the good itself that is worth pursuing, or instrumentally as the necessary means for such pursuit. Modern liberal doctrines take the instrumental way of understanding the common good and take toleration to be relative to such understanding. They rely for their justification on the view that the good is individual to each and known only to each and hence that it cannot be up to the rulers of the community or anyone else but only the individual to decide what it is. The problem here is the dogmatic character of the assertion that the good is individual to each and to be decided by each. The dogmatism is self-refuting. It amounts to an imposition of what each is free to decide about the good, since it denies that any may decide, at least as a matter of public policy, that the good is the same for all.
Liberalism defends itself on the historical grounds of the wars and oppression and other violence that always result when rule is imposed by force and toleration is refused. The wars referred to are the European wars of religion. But these wars only support the liberal thesis if interpreted to support it. There are other and better ways to interpret these wars which do not support the liberal thesis. Besides liberalism imposes liberal rule and the liberal principle of toleration on those who oppose both. Therefore liberalism, by its own argument, must produce oppression and wars and violence. And it does. The wars of the twentieth century, which were fought by secular liberals against secular illiberals and were the bloodiest and most destructive in all of recorded history, had nothing to do with religion and, if the calls of religious leaders had been followed (notably Benedict XV and Pius XII), would not have taken place. Liberalism lacks rational foundation. Toleration cannot be defended on its ground of the instrumental common good. The substantive common good alone furnishes a legitimate end for toleration and for distinguishing good toleration from bad.

The substantive common good is that fullness or completeness of life of which man is capable. The good of anything is the completion of its being. All men have the same good because they have the same being. But they have the same being only specifically and not individually. One should not expect all men to do the same things or to be complete in doing the same things. But one can expect them to do things after the same manner and to be complete in doing them after the same manner, that is to say, after

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3 An alternative account is that the so called wars of religion were not about religion but about power and land and wealth. The proof is that the differences in religion that supposedly started and sustained the wars of religion long preceded those wars and had been around in different parts of Europe for centuries without provoking wars of the sort the religious wars were. What provoked the religious wars were other factors that gave ambitious and powerful princes the opportunity to use these religious differences as an instrument and pretext for securing independence by force from Church and Emperor.
the human manner. By the human manner is meant the rational manner, for man is par
excellence the rational or reasoning animal. Whether one is a soldier or a lawyer, one is
perfect as a soldier or a lawyer if one does each of these things well, that is, in the way
which accords with rational judgment. He is best as a soldier who does what befits a
soldier when and how and where it befits a soldier, and what is befitting a soldier is
judged by reason.

The most important factor after the ‘why’ is the ‘what’. The what is words and
deeds. Thoughts will only be included insofar as these cause and are manifest in words
and deeds (things not manifest or that cause nothing manifest escape human control). All
those thoughts and words will be tolerated that belong to the common good. All those
which oppose it will constitute the range of candidates for not being tolerated. Which of
these candidates should not in fact be tolerated will vary. In a simply just society, none of
them will be tolerated, but the use of force will not be required because no citizen will
want to do or say them (education in justice will teach them otherwise). All citizens will
judge them to be bad and to be avoided. Only in less than simply just societies, where not
everyone is just, will there be need for use of force.

Religious Toleration

So much for the theory. It needs to be illustrated and religion is the best example for the
purpose. An assumption must first be made, that religion is a matter of truth or falsehood.
If this assumption is not made religions and the differences between them do not rise
above differences in tastes, and it would be absurd to talk about the toleration of tastes
qua tastes or to make them an object of public policy. The discussions of religious
toleration typical in liberal democracies do not begin to be serious because the assumption is made, at least for political purposes, that religion is not a matter of truth or falsehood.\textsuperscript{4} The liberal position on religious toleration is incoherent. No serious debate about the question can be had on the assumption it adopts.

If the assumption has to be made that religion is a matter of truth or falsehood, and if, further, religion turns out to be false, it should, if possible, be got rid of – unless it is trivial or has some incidental advantage, as easier control of the people and more effective suppression of crime. In this case one might suppose that religion should not just be publicly tolerated but publicly promoted, and that all religions popular among the people should be thus promoted which have the same incidental advantage. A policy of this sort was adopted in the ancient world. In the medieval world it was also adopted but with a difference. Religion was held at that time not only to be practically beneficial but also theoretically true, whereas in the ancient world it had often been held to be practically beneficial but theoretically false. The ancient world only faced a serious question of religious toleration when a religion arose that was popular, had the incidental advantages just mentioned, and claimed to be simply true and the others wholly or largely false. The rulers did not know what to do with a popular religion that made truth, a truth rationally defensible before learned men, its distinctive badge. Other popular religions, being intellectually bankrupt, could not do the same. The rulers took the easy way out: let nothing disturb the \textit{status quo} and let the new religion be suppressed. They failed. The new religion conquered not just the masses but the rulers and the intellectuals too. It won without force of arms and the other religions lost despite force of arms.

\textsuperscript{4} This assumption underlies Locke’s famous discussion in his \textit{Letter Concerning Toleration} and vitiates his whole argument.
The success of the new religion created a new world in which religion was on all hands acknowledged to be a matter of truth and not just of utility. Settling for utility at the expense of truth, as the ancient world had done, was never a happy compromise: the human mind wants truth as much as the human heart wants goodness. Only in a world like that of Medieval Christendom could a serious question of religious toleration arise. What to do about false religions, even and especially useful ones?

A false religion can have no rights of principle against a true one. A society that accepts the true religion must have a right to resist or marginalize other and opposed religions. It would have no obligation to tolerate them. Such policy would be imposed on it by the common good, which is the measure of correct toleration. Obedience to the true religion must be part of the common good if not indeed the most important part.

A standard response to this conclusion is that even if religion is a known and public truth (and not, say, a matter for merely private judgment) the use of force to impose assent is not justified. The truth should be allowed to operate and persuade by its own conviction. One can rationally assent only to what one recognizes by one’s own mind to be true. A forced verbal assent would never be more than external and insincere.\(^5\) The answer to the objection is that there are many sorts of truths and the mental grasp of them does not happen in the same way nor is it subject to the same impediments.

The proper organ of truth is the mind and if the truth is evident the mind naturally embraces it. Instruction and reasoning are the means for making truth evident. But some truths, even if they can be made evident to the mind, may be opposed by one’s desires. Moral truths are especially liable to this opposition. Desires can impede the intellect and blind it to evident truth, even truth accessible to unaided human reason. They can also be

\(^5\) This argument is the only one Locke gives, and he ignores its obvious response.
an impediment to truth not accessible to unaided human reason but known only by divine revelation. Truth by revelation has to be accepted, if it is accepted, not because its truth is seen from within (as when, say, we see the truth of some mathematical proof), but because it is guaranteed by divine authority.

Acceptance of truth on authority is something we do all the time, as in medicine where we trust the authority of doctors, or in schools where we trust the authority of teachers. In these cases the truth that we do not know ourselves but accept from others is a truth we could come to know ourselves if we went through the right training. In the case of divinely revealed truth we can, ex hypothesi, never know it directly for ourselves (at least not in this life) but only on authority. The name we give to acceptance of truth on authority is faith. Faith is of truth; it is knowledge; it is knowledge derived from authority; it is rational. These features are present in the case of putting faith in what a doctor tells us about our health. What we know in this way is truth (it is truth about our health); it is knowledge (it is a coming to have what the doctor has, which is knowledge); it is based on authority (it is based on the authority of the doctor); it is rational (it is rational to accept the authority of one’s doctor). Such knowledge is indirect. It goes to the truth through another. But it is knowledge. The difference is between knowing, say, that water is H₂O because a chemist has told us and knowing that water is H₂O because we have ourselves performed the experiments that prove it. The first is knowledge by faith and the second is knowledge direct.

Knowledge by faith, while it exists in the mind, is attained by act of will. We must choose to trust our doctor or the chemist, and only because we do so do we have knowledge about our health or about the chemical composition of water. The choice must
be rational in that it must be based on adequate evidence. The evidence will not be about
the fact known (we would not then need to trust anyone to know it); it will be about the
trustworthiness of the authority. We are rational in trusting our doctor because we have
evidence that, say, he went through the right training, that he is licensed by known
medical authority, that he is acknowledged as an expert by other doctors who went
through the right training and are licensed by the same authority, that what he told us
about our health before turned out correct (we were cured of this or that ailment by
following his instructions), that he is not a liar, that he has an upstanding character, and
the like.

Such faith is rational but it is also an act of choice. The evidence, because it is
about the trustworthiness of the authority and not about the things the authority says, does
not convince the mind of the truth of these things but only of their trustworthiness. To
believe their truth the mind must be moved to do so by an act of trust. But an act of trust
is an act of will. We can, if we like, refuse to believe the doctor or the chemist however
convincing the evidence of their trustworthiness may be. We cannot, by contrast, refuse
to believe that the angles of a triangle equal two right angles once we have seen the proof,
though we can contradict it in words if we like, for speech is an act of will. Where acts of
belief dependent on acts of will are involved coercion can be legitimate – not to force the
act of will (an act of will cannot be forced) but to facilitate it by the suppression of
opposing irrational desires and opposing irrational contradictions. The force is used to
facilitate the act of trust, not to prove its rationality (which is done instead by the
evidence). That there is such force with respect to belief and that it is legitimate is
ignored by liberal doctrines of tolerance even though they have to rely on something like it to justify their own coercive acts of self-protection.

Use of force with respect to belief presupposes legitimate authority and sufficient evidence for trusting it. In the case of divinely revealed truths there will be need of sufficient evidence that the source of the revelation is divine. The source must be God himself, speaking either directly or through instruments whose divine origin and sanction are publicly manifest. Any religion claiming to be divine whose divinity is not publicly manifest can be dismissed on these grounds alone. We must assume that God is at least as rational as we are and that if he wanted to reveal something which he also wanted everyone to believe he would reveal it in such a way that everyone could see that it came from him. No written document could thus constitute evidence of divine authority. A written document needs authentication and interpretation. The Bible is neither self-authenticating nor self-interpreting. It must get its authentication and its interpretation from some other source. That source must be public if the authentication and interpretation are to be public. The source must be living and visible if the religion is to retain its authority for all the generations that successively come and go. It must be possessed of an authoritative teaching authoritatively proclaimed, and it must be open to the view and examination of all if it is to proclaim, by its authority, a teaching accessible and necessary to all. There is only one candidate that could plausibly answer to this description: the Catholic Church. If the Church is not the public divine authority, nothing in our world is.

These elementary considerations are sufficient by themselves to rule out as inauthentic all Protestant churches and so to rule out as illegitimate all attempts by
Protestant churches to impose their teaching as revealed truth. What goes for Protestantism, which relies on the Bible, goes also for Islam, which relies on the Koran and its associated documents (the Sharia and the Hadith). The Koran is a document and in need, like the Bible, of authentication and interpretation. To the extent that Islam relies on the Koran for its promulgation and imposition of religious belief and its suppression of religious difference it is inauthentic and contrary to reason. Judaism is differently placed. It does not rely on a book but on a tradition of teaching and interpretation handed on in the Talmud (and also the Kabbalah, the Zohar, and the like), and practiced by the rabbis. Yet that tradition, like Protestantism and Islam, has no publicly known and acknowledged authority of interpretation. The Talmud and its associated documents also lack divine sanction, having neither Moses nor the prophets for author. Judaism also claims to have divine authority only for Jews. It fails to meet the conditions of reason for being a divine revelation authoritative for all men.

The Catholic Church, to be divinely authoritative, must be publicly manifest as such. A divine authority whose divinity is not manifest cannot rationally be accepted as divine. How then is the divinity of the Church manifest? The first fact is its simple existence as a public body claiming and exercising divine authority and claiming to do so with infallibility. It would be absurd for a divine authority to be capable of mistake, else what it said could never be trusted as being true. Only a Church that made claim to

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6 Muslims speak of the ‘standing miracle’ of the Koran which, they say, no human source could have written either as regards content or style. This claim, if true, is only that the Koran is self-authenticating and not that it is self-interpreting. But the Koran, like all books, is subject to much dispute and there is no public authority to settle these disputes. The claim is anyway not believable, either in itself or as a mark of divinity. First, only those who know the classical Arabic in which the Koran is written (and even most Arabs do not know classical Arabic) are in a position to judge its style and, second, matters of content and style are too subtle and complex for most people to be able to judge fairly, so that, third, if God, who is supremely wise, had wanted to make the divinity of the Koran manifest he would have made it so in ways that all men, learned and unlearned, speakers of classical Arabic and non-speakers, could see the fact. The Koran, even if it has elements of divinity in it, is not publicly divine.
infallibility could even in principle be divine. The second fact is miracles and prophecies and exorcisms of demons and the sanctity or the luminous goodness of individual believers and practitioners within the Church. The existence of all these things and the records of witnesses of them are publicly available for examination. All that is left for any who doubt or deny them is to take the Church at its word and examine the records for themselves. Where there is authentication by eyewitnesses there is no rational ground for rejecting the evidence: if it is irrational to believe without sufficient evidence it is no less irrational not to believe with sufficient evidence. There are other facts making the divinity of the Church manifest, as the evidence of history and its attestation to the continuing existence of the Church over long centuries always saying and doing the same things (ancient churches and cathedrals are more manifest here than written records). There is also the learning and teaching of the Church and its promulgation of doctrines which, though not repugnant to human reason, are inexplicable as discoveries of human reason. The Trinity and the Incarnation of the Second Person thereof are such doctrines (Islam and Judaism have no such doctrines; indeed they expressly repudiate them).

An obvious response to these facts is that miracles and exorcisms and prophecies and saints and the like exist outside the boundaries of the Church in other religions. If these things prove the divinity of the Church they must prove the divinity of these other religions. The response is correct but insufficient. That other religions contain holiness and miracles and prophecies shows they must in some way be divine. It does not show that they have public divine authority. It is one thing that the divinity of something be manifest; it is another thing that that divine thing have public authority to speak and rule in the name of the divine. That only the Church could have such authority is evident
because, as shown above, only the Church makes the claims and does the things that are rationally required of such authority. If its divinity is publicly manifest, its authority to speak in the name of the divine is publicly manifest at the same time. If the divinity of some other thing is publicly manifest, its authority to speak in the divine name will not be manifest. For either it does not claim such authority (as Buddhism and Hinduism do not), or it does not make a rational claim to such authority (as Protestantism and Islam and Judaism do not).

So much establishes that the Church makes a rational claim to divine authority and that a choice to accept the Church and what it says is rational and generates knowledge in the same way as acceptance of what a doctor says about health, or a chemist about water. The Church alone has right, divine right, to speak and rule with authority in matters of religion. If a whole society or nation accepts the authority of the Church, it would have a right and duty to follow the Church where matters of religion were concerned. The duty would arise, as do all political duties, from the common good. Toleration would be measured in the same way, and the secular or political authorities would have the duty, and the right, not to tolerate attacks on the Church or open disobedience to it. All those who had chosen, even if irrationally, not to accept the authority of the Church would not be subject to the Church. They would be free to pursue their own life but only in obedience to the political authority. They could rightly be prevented by the political authority, and with force if necessary, from trying to attack or destroy the Church.

A situation more or less along these lines is what existed in Medieval Christendom. The political organization of Medieval Christendom and its understanding
and practice of what was to be tolerated and what was not to be tolerated was in principle right. Mistakes and excesses occurred but the principle itself was rationally unimpeachable. The same cannot be said of Protestant or Islamic countries or of modern Israel, which have no rational claim to divine authority. Ferdinand’s and Isabella’s Spain, by contrast, did have such a claim.

The modern world has declined from the moral and religious heights of Medieval Christendom. Attacks on the Church and its teaching can no longer be repulsed by force because societies and nations have grown old and sickly and are no longer capable of so much goodness. We must settle for something less. The less is freedom for the Church to operate and perform its functions, though without special protection and defense from the state. The Church will survive without the state but liberal democracy may not survive without the Church. Indifferentism and skepticism about truth, or organized hostility thereto, along with unrestrained yielding to the imperious demands of passion, as they spell the collapse of the human spirit, so they spell the collapse of the decent communal life which that spirit supports and in which it flourishes. There are times when societies and nations reach points beyond which little or nothing can be done to preserve them from further decay and death. We may hope for something better. We cannot guarantee it.