

Tolerance

Ludwig von Mises

Liberalism limits its concern entirely and exclusively to earthly life and earthly endeavour. The kingdom of religion, on the other hand, is not of this world. Thus, liberalism and religion could both exist side by side without their spheres' touching. That they should have reached the point of collision was not the fault of liberalism. It did not transgress its proper sphere; it did not intrude into the domain of religious faith or of metaphysical doctrine. Nevertheless, it encountered the church as a political power claiming the right to regulate according to its judgment not only the relationship of man to the world to come, but also the affairs of this world. It was at this point that the battle lines had to be drawn.

So overwhelming was the victory won by liberalism in this conflict that the Church had to give up, once and for all, claims that it had vigorously maintained for thousands of years. The burning of heretics, inquisitorial persecutions, religious wars these today belong to history. No one can understand any longer how quiet people, who practiced their devotions as they believed right within the four walls of their own home, could have been dragged before courts, incarcerated, martyred, and burned. But even if no more stakes are kindled *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, a great deal of intolerance still persists.

Liberalism, however, must be intolerant of every kind of intolerance. If one considers the peaceful cooperation of all men as the goal of social evolution, one cannot permit the peace to be disturbed by priests and fanatics. Liberalism proclaims tolerance for every religious faith and every metaphysical belief, not out of indifference for these "higher" things, but from the conviction that the assurance of peace within society must take precedence over everything and everyone. And because it demands toleration of all opinions and all churches and sects, it must recall them all to their proper bounds whenever they venture intolerantly beyond them. In a social order based on peaceful cooperation, there is no room for the claim of the churches to monopolize the instruction and education of the young. Everything that their supporters accord them of their own free will may and must be granted to the churches; nothing, may be permitted to them in respect to persons who want to have nothing to do with them.

It is difficult to understand how these principles of liberalism could make enemies among the communicants of the various faiths. If they make it impossible for a church to make converts by force, whether its own or that placed at its disposal by the state, on the other hand they also protect that church against coercive proselytization by other churches and sects. What liberalism takes from the church with one hand it gives back again with the other. Even religious zealots must concede that liberalism takes nothing from faith of what belongs to its proper

To be sure, the churches and sects that, where they have the upper hand, cannot do enough in their persecution of dissenters, also demand, where they find themselves in the minority, tolerance at least for themselves. However, this demand for tolerance has nothing whatever in common with the liberal demand for tolerance. Liberalism demands tolerance as a matter of principle, not from opportunism. It demands toleration even of obviously nonsensical teachings, absurd forms of heterodoxy, and childishly silly superstitions. It demands toleration for doctrines and opinions that it deems detrimental and ruinous to society and even for movements that it indefatigably combats. For what impels liberalism to demand and accord toleration is not consideration for the content of the doctrine to be tolerated, but the knowledge that only tolerance can create and preserve the condition of social peace without which humanity must relapse into the barbarism and penury of centuries long past. Against what is stupid, nonsensical, erroneous, and evil, liberalism fights with the weapons of the mind, and not with brute force and repression.