

# Religious Tolerance

Over the course of Church history we have seen a distinct lack of religious tolerance.

- The great schism between the Eastern Orthodox and western Roman Catholic churches
- Islam's invasion from the east and forced conversions to Islam
- The Crusades, which included the genocide of Jews and Muslims by the church
- The Roman Catholic use of capital punishment for those who were considered heretics and the inquisitions
- Post reformation
  - The irreconcilable difference between Luther and Calvin
  - Persecution of the Anabaptist
  - Calvinist and Armenians
  - Persecution of Catholics in Protestant areas
  - Bloody Mary and her sister Elizabeth
  - The Anglican Church's persecution of the Separatist and Puritans
  - Persecution of the Huguenots

The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the evolution from religious intolerance to tolerance and then to freedom of religious practices as a human right. It began as governments found it harder and harder to enforce religious conformity. When there was only one church option in an area and the government and the church were highly connected conformity was easy to enforce. People could be controlled if they felt that the spiritual welfare rested solely in the established church. With the reformation came the attempt by governments to align with whatever was the popular belief system of its populace. But as the different Protestant groups began to multiply and spread on the wings of the Enlightenment writings, ease of travel and the printing press this began increasingly more difficult.

There were some attempts prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century at religious toleration. It was Erasmus who said "it is better to cure a sick man than to kill him". King John II Sigismund of Hungary, had the Edict of Torda issued decreeing religious toleration of all Christian denominations except Romania Orthodoxy and it did not apply to Jews or Muslims. The Warsaw Confederation pledged mutual support and tolerance of major religions in Polish and Lithuanian culture. The Edict of Nantes gave Huguenots rights in the Catholic nation of France for a time. During the Enlightenment of the 17<sup>th</sup> century began the development of a distinction between civil tolerance and ecclesiastical tolerance. The poet John Milton argued for tolerance at least within the Protestant denominations. There were a number of examples in the American colonies.

### **John Locke**

Had a profound influence on many philosophers and thinkers of his including the American Revolutionist. He promoted the idea of limited representative government and the protection of basic rights and freedoms under the rule of law. His works were little noticed during his lifetime or shortly after his death. In the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century his works began to read and recognized. Thomas Jefferson ascribed to him, Bacon and Newton the laying of the foundation of Moral Science. There is actually a direct quote from Locke in the United States Declaration of Independence. In his Letters Concerning Toleration he lays out three arguments for religious toleration based on the idea of freedom of conscience which Luther use as his reason for not recanting.

1. earthly judges, the state in particular, and human beings generally, cannot dependably evaluate the truth-claims of competing religious standpoints;
2. even if they could, enforcing a single 'true religion' would not have the desired effect, because belief cannot be compelled by violence;
3. coercing religious uniformity would lead to more social disorder than allowing diversity.

He was therefore a strong advocate of the separation of church and state. He struggled with toleration of Catholics because he saw them as have a political allegiance to a foreign government. He did not support tolerance for Atheist either. He questioned, "whether 'atheism' was necessarily inimical to political

obedience." He argued, "Lastly, those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist."

**Questions we might ask:**

- What should religious tolerance look like?
- How should we understand the separation of church and state?
- What is the ultimate result of religious coercion?

<https://achttiendeeeuw.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/hunt.pdf>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Peace-of-Westphalia>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious\\_tolerance#:~:text=Beginning%20in%20the%20Enlightenment%20commencing,legal%20codes%20on%20the%20concept.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_tolerance#:~:text=Beginning%20in%20the%20Enlightenment%20commencing,legal%20codes%20on%20the%20concept.)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Locke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Letter\\_Concerning\\_Toleration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Letter_Concerning_Toleration)