

Religion and the Politics of Tolerance

How Christianity Builds Democracy

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Chapter 1

The Politics of Tolerance



America has from the beginning been a nation bent on redemption. That, after all, is what John Winthrop was getting at in 1630 when he famously predicted, “We shall be a city upon a hill.” The struggle to define what needs saving by whom has been fought out continually on a variety of battlefields. And it continues today, in what Nobel laureate Robert Foel recently called our “Fourth Great Awakening”: a new religious revival fueled by revulsion with the corruptions of a contemporary society.

—Michael Kazin, “*The Politics of Devotion*” in *The Nation*, April 6, 1998

The more things change the more they remain the same. In every generation, religion invades the public square, or so it might appear to a casual observer. With that “invasion” comes the concomitant reification of political tolerance. Although political tolerance is an important virtue, particularly in a liberal democracy, it is not the only virtue; but when the issue is religion, political tolerance is the only virtue that can command center stage. Nevertheless, political tolerance is also a virtue that religious individuals in the United States routinely have been accused of lacking. Religious individuals are perceived in this way, in part, because clear distinctions between the public and private spheres of behavior no longer exist. What was once private behavior, encompassing objectionable values, is part of and central to the public sphere. As such, it now becomes incumbent upon all citizens to accept and support (or reject) the new public values, especially in terms of legal equality (Eisenstein 2005).

The resulting incompatibility of orthodox religious values with liberal democracy's acceptance of varied personal lifestyles is exacerbated by the contradiction between the demands for religious expression to remain in its private sphere and the simultaneous pressure of secularism to be accepted as appropriate democratic expression in the public arena. The crux of the problem is that a secular view of alternative lifestyles is accepted in the public square, while the religious view is rejected there and deemed acceptable solely in the private sphere. Thus, no issue of tolerance exists with those who advocate for homosexual marriage, but an inherent intolerance does exist for those who disagree with homosexual marriage because of religious values. However, the maintenance of the conflict between the public and private sphere is unnecessary. The freedoms prized in a liberal democracy do not require acceptance of another's values or perspectives; it requires tolerance (Eisenstein 2005). Understanding what tolerance is and what tolerance is not is central to any meaningful assessment of how religion and political tolerance intersect. Given the centrality of political tolerance, its meaning and application, the first task is to give a definition to this important concept.

Defining Tolerance

Political tolerance is a difficult concept. It has what Sullivan, Pierson & Marcus (1982) call a confusing relationship to other concepts such as (absence of) prejudice, notions of democracy, religious toleration, and open-mindedness. When political tolerance is connected to or used interchangeably with these other concepts, clarity finds a way of escaping and the waters in which tolerance resides get murky. Nevertheless, accurately defining and ultimately measuring tolerance is necessary before any analysis can be undertaken.

In everyday conversation, for the most part, tolerance is used whenever someone disagrees with another, particularly when the position is well known and accepted within popular circles. Abortion is an excellent example. The popular and accepted orthodoxy is that abortion is and should be an individual (the woman's) choice. Any position contrary to this is intolerant. The problem with this use and definition of tolerance is that it is entirely inaccurate. Political tolerance, as used and defined within empirical political science scholarship, has a very particular meaning and has nothing to do with whether or not an individual agrees with any particular set of

issue positions. Political tolerance is not about attitudes; it is not synonymous with a set of particular attitudes on a set of particular topics wherein if you do not fall into agreement with the norms of the day, then you are intolerant. Political tolerance is about actions, not attitudes. For an excellent discussion of this distinction, see Andrew Murphy's 1997 article "Tolerance, Toleration, and the Liberal Tradition." While Murphy's suggested terms are not used to differentiate between actions and attitudes, his argument that a distinction does and must exist between these two in order for a proper understanding of political tolerance to exist is incorporated into how political tolerance is used and measured.

Political tolerance as a concept "implies a willingness to 'put up with' those things one rejects or opposes. Politically, it implies a willingness to permit the expression of ideas or interests one opposes" (Sullivan et al. 1982, 2). When depicted in this manner, political tolerance is broadly construed. "In a narrower sense, tolerance is closely associated with the idea of procedural fairness" (Sullivan et al. 1982, 2). Focusing on procedure rather than on substance means that as long as one is willing to apply the "rules of the game" equally, then that individual is tolerant. As with Sullivan et al., the authors Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978, 12) state, "Tolerance is a straightforward attitude that allows people to have freedom of expression even though one may feel that their ideas are incorrect or even immoral." Marcus et al. (1995, 3) states, "[p]olitical tolerance requires that democratic citizens and leaders secure the full political rights of expression and political participation of groups they find objectionable." In short, political tolerance is the action of allowing those with whom you disagree to practice their constitutionally asserted civil liberties. Political tolerance is when you allow those with whom you disagree the freedom to practice their constitutional rights in the promotion of their own views.

According to Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978, 12), one of the biggest misconceptions regarding tolerance involves equating tolerance with acceptance. "Acceptance is to agree with or condone the opinions, values, and behavior of others who are perhaps initially different from oneself." Acceptance is something quite different from tolerance. Thus, the word "oppose" is essential in conceptualizing tolerance. It makes no sense to speak of an individual being tolerant of ideas or groups with whom he or she agrees. If the person is indifferent, he or she cannot be tolerant. Indifference to an idea or group is simply not the same as opposition to an idea or group.

Defining tolerance in a manner in which opposition is central to its conceptualization (and operationalization) is preferable to other definitions. Gibson and Bingham (1985, 604) define political tolerance as “a willingness to extend the rights of citizenship to all members of the polity—that is, to allow political freedoms to those who are politically different.” However, Gibson and Bingham’s definition leaves the potential to define as tolerance the willingness to extend civil liberties to a “politically different” group with whom one may find oneself in agreement. Using a definition for political tolerance that may or may not include the act of forbearance or endurance does not adequately capture the act of political tolerance.

In earlier research, the frequent definition of tolerance was acceptance of abstract norms of democratic procedure (McCloskey 1964, 361–82). However, defining tolerance as acceptance of abstract norms of democracy leads to a substantial gap between theory and practice. Theoretically, 90 percent of Americans overwhelmingly agree that they believe in free speech for all, regardless of others’ views (McCloskey & Brill 1983, 50). But when individuals are asked a more substantive and less abstract question that requires a concrete application of a general principle, such as willingness to extend free speech to a disliked group, individual willingness to extend this particular civil liberty drops below 50 percent. As the work of McCloskey and Brill (1983) demonstrates, relying upon questions in the abstract regarding support for democratic norms versus asking about a concrete application of a general principle leads to an overestimation of political tolerance. Moreover, support for democratic norms in the abstract or acceptance of abstract norms of democracy, has proved more useful as a predictor of political tolerance than as a definition of it (Sullivan et al. 1982; Marcus et al. 1995).

At this point, it is important to clarify concepts of positive and negative liberty, as conceptualized by the British political philosopher Isaiah Berlin, and not to confuse them with notions of positive and negative political tolerance. For example, the Amish have a right to be left alone. Based on Berlin’s conceptualization of liberty, we would identify that as the “negative” liberty to be left alone from state interference (in contrast to positive liberties such as freedom to be educated or freedom to be employed). However, willingness to be left alone to structure your own existence or community, presumably in nonpolitical ways (as demonstrated by the Amish), is not an example of the Amish practicing political tolerance. In exercising

the negative liberty of “freedom from” state interference to structure their individual lives as they deem appropriate, the Amish are not being required to endure the opinions, practices, or beliefs of individuals or groups that they find objectionable (even vehemently so), which would be a breach of their negative liberty.

Brief Historical Exegesis: Toleration to Tolerance

The concept of political tolerance as discussed and measured in this book is the product of a long history on the theory and philosophy behind the very conceptualization of “toleration,” particularly as it relates to the social life of religious practices. Any discussion of the concept of toleration can go as far back as Socrates’ dialogical method as a means of searching for “truth” (Stetson & Conti 2005, 26–28). However, toleration did not become a topic of serious philosophical import or concern until sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe—when it was centered largely on religious toleration (Sullivan et al. 1982, 3). During that time, several important philosophers wrote on the topic, including Baruch Spinoza and John Locke.

In his poignant “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” Locke focused on the relationship between what he called the “State,” meaning an official political or governmental authority, and individual religious belief. Locke’s writings on tolerance have been universally influential on the Western idea of political tolerance. When applying tolerance to religion, Locke argued that the political authority (or governmental authority, in the case of the United States) should not interfere with an individual’s religious beliefs. To Locke, these were two distinct spheres of knowledge and action. Religious belief was between the individual and his or her God and therefore was private. By definition, political action, on the other hand, had consequences for all. For Locke, the only way to enforce religious homogeneity would be through violence or use of force upon the individual, which would negate the justification for government and replace legitimate government with illegitimate government (tyranny). Legitimate government was still governed by natural law and therefore could still act to prohibit individual action of sin or actions that would undermine the social or economic order. These distinctions by Locke become what we today recognize as the legitimate distinction or separation between civil authority and religious authority. Civil authority is concerned with peace and security of the whole, whereas religious authority is concerned with the individual and his

or her relationship with the divine. This was also reflected in Locke's argument concerning knowledge. Although Locke is recognized as an empiricist, he was a traditional Christian in his belief. He distinguished between knowledge attained through the senses and reason and knowledge attained through revelation. Government ought, then, to concern itself with things of this world (with sense and reason) and not with religious beliefs that deal inherently with another realm in which knowledge is attained through revealed Scripture. In many ways, Locke's writings inform the ideological founding of the United States, beginning with the Declaration of Independence (including social contract theory and inalienable rights), as well as the Constitution, which defined a secular government by endorsing no nationally recognized religious adherence. Although the idea of political toleration began as a concept that applied predominantly to religious toleration, it has been expanded to other types of toleration, specifically in liberal democracies, toward beliefs and opinions in general and political beliefs in particular.

In fact, John Stuart Mill used his essay "On Liberty" to make just such an argument—the argument that the religious toleration as developed by Locke should be extended to political toleration. Mill advocated for individual liberty of thought, speech, and action as necessary components for individual and societal development as well as for the defense of and promulgation of truth. For Mill, the only plausible limit of toleration for liberty (thought, speech, and action) was when, and only when, one's use of liberty brought direct and unavoidable severe harm to others. The toleration Mill argued for, of course, went beyond religious toleration to encompass political toleration. But it went still further than that. Mill's arguments for liberty and his writings on toleration were meant to be applied to social, as well as political and religious, aspects of life. It was so broad as to be all encompassing. In contrast to Locke who argued for toleration based on a theory of individual natural rights, Mill argued for toleration on purely utilitarian grounds. For twenty-first century America, Mill's conception of toleration, arguably a masterpiece of liberal polemic, is the basis of the political tolerance that has become such an important virtue of liberal democracy.

Political Tolerance and Prejudice

Tolerance is not interchangeable or synonymous with a lack of prejudice. Tolerance is about enduring what a citizen holds up to

be objectionable or disagreeable; tolerance presumes disagreement. According to Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982, 4), "We sometimes say a person without prejudice is very tolerant, while those who are prejudiced are necessarily intolerant. Yet this need not be so. The prejudiced person may in fact be tolerant, if he understands his prejudices and proceeds to permit the expression of those things toward which he is prejudiced." Nunn et al. (1978, 11) also argues that tolerance is not synonymous with a lack of prejudice: "One may hold to prejudices and still be willing to let other people have their opinions and beliefs. Or one may even have a relatively benign attitude toward a people of a particular ethnic background and yet frequently violate others' civil liberties." Sullivan et al. (1982) concisely highlights the distinction between prejudice and political tolerance:

A "prejudiced" attitude is commonly said to combine (1) stereotyped beliefs about a group, (2) negative evaluations of the group, and (3) a predisposition to act negatively toward the group. It is sometimes argued, as noted, that the reverse of a "prejudiced" attitude is a "tolerant" one; the tolerant individual does not hold stereotyped beliefs or negative evaluations of groups and is generally disposed to act positive toward them. Jackman (1977) questions this view. Even if people hold generalized beliefs about other groups that lead to negative evaluations, it does not follow that such beliefs will lead to hostile actions. People may combine strong norms of tolerance with generally negative feelings about some groups, in which case they must be said to be prejudiced but tolerant. Thus, the prejudiced person may be either tolerant or intolerant, depending on what action he or she is prepared to take politically. Given our definition, in fact, the issue of tolerance or intolerance does not come into play unless one holds negative beliefs or evaluations about the group or doctrine in question (Sullivan et al. 1982, 5).

In general, prejudice is either an inappropriate or a negative value judgment of an individual or group of individuals that is not based upon fact but is rather a stereotyped generalization formed previously to any interaction with the individual or group. Gordon Allport (1954) developed a classic definition of prejudice by arguing that prejudice was an antipathy, based on incorrect and unchangeable generalizations, toward a group or individual from a specific

group. Prejudice is, in short, a thought or an attitude. Therefore, prejudice does not imply tolerance or intolerance. Political tolerance depends on the actions taken in relationship to one's judgment (e.g., thoughts or attitudes) whether or not that person is prejudiced toward ideas, groups, or persons he or she is opposed to. Basically, tolerance and value agreement are not synonymous. Actually quite the opposite is true: When there is agreement on values, tolerance is not an issue or concern.

Limits of Political Tolerance

Arguably the most obvious and consequential limitation to political tolerance involves the debate and discussion about whether or not we are required to tolerate those things that would ultimately lead to the demise of liberal democracy. If political tolerance is the preeminent and most important virtue of liberal democracy, then are there no grounds on which intolerance is acceptable? In contrast, if political tolerance is only one virtue among many in a liberal democracy, there are indeed things that become acceptable for citizens to be intolerant about.

Tolerance, of course, should not be extended to every person in every circumstance. For example, an individual, who, out of a strong desire to be tolerant and nonjudgmental, stands by and watches a heinous assault being committed—doing nothing to stop it or call police when he or she has the ability to do so—could hardly be praised for being tolerant of the beliefs or actions of others, in this case a violent attacker (Stetson and Conti 2005, 142).

This is a straightforward example of other values, such as moral culpability, and how those values influence the condition under which tolerance or intolerance may be preferred among other values. Crick (1973, 64) subscribes to a similar view when he says tolerance “. . . is a value to be held among other values—such as justice, and liberty itself, but also order and truth; it can never always be right to be tolerant; there are occasions on which we should be intolerant.”¹

The answers produced in debate and discussion about the appropriate limit of political tolerance depend on the democratic theory used in defense of them. In characterizing representative democratic theory in contemporary America, the work of John Stuart Mill and John Locke has led to the argument that what tolerance best exemplifies is the freedom to enter and exit the marketplace

of ideas. This freedom must be broadly protected because the only way to counter or eradicate intolerance is for the “right” or “good” to vigorously compete and ultimately prevail over other less desirable ideas. The assumption undergirding representative democratic theory is that human nature is sophisticated; therefore, given competition of ideas, the ideal of tolerance will prevail over intolerance. For those who subscribe to an elitist democratic theory, as represented in contemporary political thought by the work of Joseph Schumpeter (1950) and Walter Lippman (1955), only those with the requisite skills and abilities to govern are capable of practicing political tolerance. Therefore, intolerance is mitigated by the governance of the elites and the passivity of the masses (because, after all, the citizen masses are deemed incapable of practicing political tolerance). The assumption here is that elites have a sophisticated human nature while the masses do not. Finally, federalist democracy theory is best exemplified by the writings of James Madison who argued for divisions of government (both between the branches of government and between the levels of government) and the need for a plurality of “factions” to ensure against the tyranny of the majority (*Federalist* 51 and 10, respectively). Political tolerance is guaranteed through the structure of governmental institutions to ensure competition for power. In short, the constitutional structure and competing interests cause political tolerance to prevail over intolerance because tolerance is in the self-interest of the competing factions. The assumption of human nature in this theory is that all human nature is flawed or circumspect.² Political intolerance could only be an advantage when one faction attains absolute power over all the rest, resulting in political tyranny and the end of tolerance.

Consequently, the role of political tolerance is extremely important from the perspective of representative democratic theory, and therefore, limitations on it should be minimal. In contrast, within elitist democratic theory, the role of political tolerance is less important insofar as it is not expected that the mass citizenry is capable of exercising it. The logical conclusion is that if the governing elite deem some opinions dangerous to the survival of the society, then those opinions can be limited. Finally, federalist democracy theory relies neither upon the spread of a tolerant ideal among the citizens (as does representative democratic theory) nor does it rely on a sophisticated elite (as does elitist democratic theory), rather the theory relies on a diverse constitutional structure and numerous

political interests to constrain political intolerance as a viable option. The argument is that there will be so many divisions of interests and opinions that no single interest or opinion will be able to dominate.³ Ultimately, all empirical studies of political tolerance lead to an examination of the underlying democratic theories (and their related assumptions) on which the empirical models rest. Mine is no different.

Religion and Tolerance in the United States: Mapping the Deficiencies

The relationship between religion and political tolerance has been (and still is) studied in separate and distinct scholarly arenas (as it relates to the discipline of political science).⁴ Although the analyses in the following chapters will bridge some of the gaps that such a situation inevitably creates, informing the reader of this situation must begin at the outset of the book. The project I undertake here is situated at the intersection of religion and politics and political tolerance scholarship. Both bodies of research are a necessary basis for my project.

It is also necessary that I position the analyses accurately in relation to others in these respective fields and be forthcoming in laying out the evidence against which I am arguing, because this book challenges the accepted orthodoxy as it relates to religion/religiosity and political tolerance. Past scholarly research casts more than mere aspersions on the influence of religion/religiosity in a liberal democracy, and I am arguing against nearly forty years of study that suggests not only that religion/religiosity is a threat to liberal democracy but that it produces attitudes inimical to fostering and sustaining a healthy liberal democracy. Although such a foundational exercise may appear to be a straightforward literature review, the tasks in this project represent much more.

Beginning with Stouffer's ([1955] 1992) seminal study "Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties: A Cross-Section of the Nation Speaks Its Mind," the weight of nearly four decades of empirical political tolerance scholarship bears heavily on the question of whether or not religiously committed individuals act in a politically tolerant manner. The research (including Erskine & Siegal 1975; Filsinger 1976; Nunn et al. 1978; Corbett 1982; Smidt & Penning 1982; Sullivan et al. 1982; Beatty & Walter 1984; and Wilcox & Jelen 1990) suggests

that the answer is “no.” Given the record of results, I nevertheless advance the argument that the religion/religiosity of individuals in the contemporary United States is not the threat to liberal democracy that research and popular perception have declared.

I advance my argument on three fronts: empirical limitations, recent theoretical developments that have not been fully explored in the literature, and practical political and sociological considerations. The empirical limitations are brought into full view through a brief review of the extant political tolerance literature, I integrate the mainstream political tolerance literature—vis-à-vis the religion and politics literature that addresses political tolerance—and discuss how the relationships and linkages between religion and political tolerance have not been carefully examined. This is followed by a discussion of the other two fronts on which I advance my argument—recent theoretical developments that have not been fully explored and practical political and sociological considerations.

Extant Political Tolerance Literature and Its Empirical Limitations

The American political landscape is replete with the perceived incompatibility of our political ideals and our religious beliefs. Historically, this perceived inherent incompatibility rested on the idea that the very action of expressing religious belief required an individual to be intolerant of other individuals of dissimilar beliefs. The perception was that religion is about absolutes and liberal democratic politics is about compromise and tolerance (i.e., being a gracious loser); therefore, it was impossible to practice both in the same arena.⁵ Also, liberal democratic politics was for the public arena and religion was for the private arena. Such a perception does not appear all that unreasonable. After all, religion tends to deal in absolutes whereby a set of truths delineates good from evil and facts from lies. To compromise with what one truly believes is evil or false is a steep demand.

Because they do not lend themselves so readily to compromise solutions, religious issues may challenge the normal system of governance. If you regard abortion as murder, and I see it as a neutral medical procedure, it will be hard to find a middle ground that either one of us will accept as a legitimate public policy. . . . The same kind of problem may arise in the context of debates over prayer in public schools, the rights of homosexuals, traditional sex

roles, and other policy areas in which religious groups have been active. . . . As religious issues do not easily permit compromise solutions, so, too, religious values may produce rigidity, dogmatism, and contempt for alternative points of view. Such destructive traits, far from being accidental, may actually be the consequence of religious commitment (Wald 1997, 321).

And modern empirical research appears to substantiate the connection between religion and political intolerance.

One of the first major studies of American attitudes toward civil liberties (or tolerance) was done by Stouffer ([1955] 1992). Using a format that would be replicated many times in the future, Stouffer obtained data from a national sample conducted in 1954. In it, respondents were asked about their willingness to extend various forms of freedoms to communists, socialists, and atheists; specifically, their willingness to let such a person teach in a college or university or give a speech in their community and whether they were willing to allow a book written by such a person to be housed in the public library.

Stouffer's seminal study supported a link between religious commitment (e.g., behavior) and intolerance and suggested that individuals who attended church regularly were less tolerant than those who attended irregularly or not at all. Twenty-eight percent of individuals who indicated that they had attended church in the last month fell into the "more tolerant" category. In contrast, 36 percent of individuals who indicated that they were nonattendees fell into this category (Stouffer [1955] 1992, 142, 144). Stouffer also uncovered differences among religious affiliations (e.g., religious belonging). Southern protestants, for example, had the lowest levels of tolerance with only 21 percent falling into the "more tolerant" category when combining church attendees and nonattendees. The tolerance level of northern protestants and Catholics was similar and occupied the middle ground (neither the most tolerant nor the least tolerant). Finally, although Stouffer cautioned that there was not a large enough sample of Jewish respondents to draw empirically substantive comparisons, he did note that Jewish respondents tended to be far more tolerant than both Catholics and protestants (Stouffer [1955] 1992, 142–43). These results held up under various control variables related to religion that might independently reduce political tolerance.

Stouffer's study did include religious tradition (a measure of belonging) and a measure for religious commitment (a measure of behavior), but the study relied on simple bivariate correlations, even when using control variables, between religious commitment and political tolerance, and the religious tradition categories were limited to protestant (northern/southern), Catholic, Jewish, Other, and None. In contrast, the work of Kellstedt and Green (1993), Layman (1997), Layman and Green (1998), and Steensland et al. (2000) provides a much better understanding and a more nuanced view of religious denominations within various religious traditions.⁶ For example, we now know that a distinction exists between mainline Protestantism and evangelical Protestantism, which is something not incorporated in earlier studies, including Stouffer's.

In another comprehensive study, Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978) concluded that there is a negative link between religion and tolerance. These researchers based their data upon a 1973 survey. In order to map changes in political tolerance over the previous two decades, their study repeated the Stouffer items. Regarding the relationship between religion and tolerance, the evidence remained similar to that presented two decades earlier by Stouffer.⁷ First, the rank order of tolerance among the religious versus nonreligious remained. Replicating the 1954 data, the Nunn, Crockett, and Williams results showed that 28 percent of the protestants, 31 percent of the Catholics, 71 percent of the Jews, and 49 percent of the individuals with no religious affiliation fell into the "more tolerant" category (Nunn et al. 1978, 129). The results from the 1973 survey showed that 46 percent of the protestants, 59 percent of the Catholics, 88 percent of the Jews, and 87 percent of the individuals with no religious affiliation fell into the "more tolerant" category. Nunn et al. (1978, 140) concluded that intolerance is built into the very nature of religious commitment.

Similar to Stouffer's work the Nunn et al. study was confined to the same limited denominational categories. In addition, in their "Multiple Classification Analysis" that controlled for education, gender, size of residence, age, and participation in voluntary associations, Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978, 140) measured religious commitment by a single measure that combined doctrinal belief (such as belief in the devil) and frequency of church attendance. Thus, what we now know to be two distinct measures of religiosity—belief and behavior—were combined in the 1978 study.

The next groundbreaking work on political tolerance was produced by Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982). In this seminal work, the authors successfully argued for a content-controlled (e.g., least-liked) measure of political tolerance,⁸ and they also rigorously defined and causally modeled the social, psychological, and political predictors of political tolerance. These scholars also demonstrated a substantial difference between those with a denominational attachment versus the nonreligious; the nonreligious were far more likely to fall into the “more tolerant” category (44 percent) whereas only about 12 percent of protestants, Catholics, and Jews could be classified as “more tolerant” (Sullivan et al. 1982, 137–39).⁹ In addition, they found little difference in tolerance levels between the various religious denominations. In the end, they concluded that religion was important insofar as one had a denominational attachment versus no attachment; the particular denominational attachment was of little consequence.

Nevertheless, there were several problems with the use of religion in their study. As with the research that preceded it, the religious tradition categories were limited (e.g., protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other, and None) and in their analysis of various types of protestants (1982, 138), they use denominational classifications instead of a classification of the various denominations in broader religious traditions. The variable becomes even more imprecise when incorporated into their multivariate model in which religion is coded as Baptist/Other Religion/No Religion. Based on this tri-model variable, they conclude that “those from less traditional religions” have a more open personality and that the “less fundamentalist religious groups” are more liberal (1982, 222, 225). Such an imprecise measure cannot adequately distinguish between religious traditions. Furthermore, the “secular detachment” variable is a measure of sociological belonging (e.g., religious affiliation), not a measure of cognition (e.g., beliefs). Fundamentalism is more accurately defined as a specific theological belief or outlook (Marsden 1980), and it is more accurately measured by items tapping the level of doctrinal orthodoxy, such as beliefs about the Bible (Green et al. 1994; Layman 1997; Layman & Green 1998) or whether someone considers himself or herself “born-again” (Jelen 1991; Layman & Green 1998).

McCloskey and Brill (1983) produced a tour-de-force analysis of political tolerance in America. In their assessment of religion in relation to political tolerance (1983, chap. 8), they concluded that

Jews, Episcopalians, and those with no religious affiliation had the highest support for civil liberties, while Baptists scored the lowest (1983, 404, 405); the different religious affiliations they assessed were Jewish, Catholic, total protestant, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, other protestant sects, and none. These scholars also assessed support for civil liberties by what they called “religiosity,” which was defined as “strength of religious conviction . . . the degree to which respondents value and rely upon religious beliefs and modes of explanation” (1983, 406). The results across all three of their data sets indicated that increased religiosity resulted in decreased support for civil liberties, and the trend remained the same even when controlling for education (1983, 406–11).

Once again, this study has some of the same problems associated with the measurement of religion as those that preceded it. McCloskey and Brill (1983) use denominational categories, which we now know are less useful than classifying respondents by religious tradition. There are also problems with the way in which McCloskey and Brill measured religious belief (what they called “religiosity”). The most common way in which religious believing is conceptualized is by doctrinal orthodoxy (or doctrinal beliefs). Typically, this can be measured by questioning individual beliefs regarding the literalism or inerrancy of the Bible (Leege & Kellstedt 1993; Layman & Green 1998). It can also be measured by tapping into the relationship between the individual and the divine by asking about the “born-again” experience. Many, if not most, of the questions used by McCloskey and Brill to measure religious believing did not address doctrinal orthodoxy at all (1983, 406).

A common problem with the political tolerance scholarship is that, all too often, religion is left out of the analysis altogether. Such is the case with Marcus et al. (1995), Gibson (1992), and Davis and Silver (2004). These are examples of scholarship by some of the most widely published and well-known scholars of political tolerance today (e.g., Marcus et al. 1995; Gibson 1992) as well as scholarship based on national samples (e.g., Gibson 1992; Davis & Silver 2004). Other studies that have addressed the role of religion in relation to political tolerance have deficiencies in the measurement of political tolerance as well as in appropriately specifying the determinants of political tolerance.

For various reasons (including the use of secondary data analysis), many of them could not employ the content-controlled tolerance

measure developed by Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (e.g., Filsinger 1976; Smidt & Penning 1982; Beatty & Walter 1984; and Wilcox & Jelen 1990).¹⁰ In addition, many of the political tolerance studies (including Cutler & Kaufman 1975; Davis 1975; Filsinger 1976; Smidt & Penning 1982; Beatty & Walter 1984; and Wilcox & Jelen 1990) did not incorporate two of the most important predictors of political tolerance: threat perception and support for norms of democracy (Sullivan et al. 1982; Marcus et al. 1995).¹¹ Also, they did not control for a secure personality,¹² which has been found to be an important psychological predictor of political tolerance (Sullivan et al. 1982; Davis 1995; Marcus et al. 1995; Peffley et al. 2001).

Green et al. (1994) is one of the best attempts to bring together religion, political tolerance, and important political predictors in a causal model. Nevertheless, the data for this study is focused solely on religious activists. In addition, some of the predictors of political tolerance used, such as the authors' Christian militancy scale, may be applicable solely to religious activists—the study categorized this variable as one of several political variables and argued that this variable was meant to assess a particular sample of the “political strata.” At any rate, such a variable is not commonplace within the broad scope of the tolerance literature (e.g., Sullivan et al. 1982; Davis 1995; Marcus et al. 1995; Peffley et al. 2001). Furthermore, they include other predictors—political information and political participation—that have not received much support within the broader political tolerance literature. At the same time, the authors left out some of the most important predictors for political tolerance—support for the norms of democracy, threat perception, and secure personality (Sullivan et al. 1982; Marcus et al. 1995).

Theoretical Developments and Political/Social Considerations

In addition to the problems and limitations just discussed, the earlier empirical findings are at odds with contemporary theory regarding the relationship between religion/religiosity and modern democracy. According to Kraynak (2001, 1), within the American Christian community there is widespread agreement that “the form of government most compatible with the Christian religion is democracy.” Democracy is a God-ordained style of governance that is to be preferred above other types of governance; although he later adds, “[t]oday's condition, where most Christian theologians and churches accept democratic politics, is a historical anomaly, a peculiarity of

modern time” (2001, 3). Therefore, while the American founding fathers properly acquainted with the evils perpetrated by (or in the name of) religion across Europe had legitimate concerns about tolerance and thus the proper place for religion within a democratic decision-making process, the same does not hold true for contemporary American culture.

If Kraynak is correct and those within current American religious culture welcome “modern liberal democracy as a friend and an ally, even though they may criticize some of its features as misguided or downright immoral,” then there is no reason to conclude that religion/religiosity *per se* fosters liberal democratic intolerance or that it is inimical to liberal democratic tolerance (2001, 167). In fact, Kraynak argues that “modern liberal democracy needs a religious basis because its moral claims cannot be vindicated by secular and rational means alone” even if that basis is derived from a revealed book and a tradition that has not been “necessarily liberal or democratic” (2001, xii, xiii).

Although the theoretical logic of the perspectives that have held sway against religion being compatible with the democratic value of tolerance since the writing of the American Constitution is understandable, this attribute of religion is not expected to be empirically consistent with modern religiosity nor is it expected that intolerance is empirically attributable primarily to religion or religious conviction. This is the case because the socialization of American liberal democratic values, which permeate religion in the United States, negates the European tradition of intolerance. Arguably, the very nature of religion has changed in the United States to make the religious individual neither more nor less tolerant than his or her less religious neighbor.

There is no way to understate this argument. The interaction between liberal democracy and American governance has produced a unique situation in which those most committed to their religion are not advocates of any other form of government than liberal democracy (they do not advocate theocracy as is often implied). They are proud supporters of American liberal democracy and very convinced that it is a better (more moral) form of government than other forms of government (e.g., the “godless” communists). The relationship between committed religious individuals in support of liberal democracy is not the same relationship between religion and government found in Old World Europe—the relationship that

so vexed the American founding fathers that they sought to disestablish religion from the government and, at the same time, guarantee religious freedom. The experiment of democracy in the United States has created a situation in which the relationship between religion and government is qualitatively different than that which had existed for millennia.

Additionally, a natural political maturation of different religious sectors has emerged. The data collection for previous empirical survey studies occurred more than fifteen years ago. For example, Nunn et al. (1978) used data collected in 1973 and concluded that intolerance is built into the very nature of religious commitment. Wilcox and Jelen (1990) used that same data from 1973 and concluded that doctrinal orthodoxy plays a major role in the intolerance of evangelical protestants. Jelen (1991), using data collected in 1988, found an indication of a link between religious commitment and intolerance. The data from the late 1980s marks an important point in time. At that point, the reemergence of evangelical protestants into the public arena became institutionalized with the end of the Reagan presidency. Because evangelical protestants were already politically involved, this trend required Catholics and mainline protestants to either develop or learn tolerance as the *modus operandi* with this new political elephant. On the other hand, evangelical protestants found themselves as new actors on the political stage. With the increased involvement in modern politics of the various religious communities, along with Kraynak's arguments that Christian communities believe in democratic governance, I argue that we should expect findings, at a minimum, to begin to diverge from those culled from research using outdated data.

Finally, a shift has occurred in the educational demographic of religious communities. During the latter part of the twentieth century, an overall increase in the educational level of religious adherents (Greeley 1991) demonstrated that Catholic priests were no longer the most educated individuals in their churches. Marsden (1997) argues that evangelical protestants have made advances in educational attainment as well, although they still are likely to lag behind those of other religious traditions. Given the role of education as one of the primary agents in socializing citizens to support the norms of democratic behavior, we can expect religious individuals among the citizenry to possess socialized political values similar to nonreligious individuals.

Since Thomas Jefferson first argued for the logical and psychological incompatibility of religious orthodoxy and democratic decision-making, this has been an “accepted presupposition” of American democratic action and ideas of rights. However, it is important to challenge this “presupposition” by questioning whether the European religious orthodoxy that Thomas Jefferson recognized as problematic is qualitatively different from the religious orthodoxy in the contemporary United States. Bringing evidence to bear on this question, broadly speaking, is what the following chapters will facilitate. For a liberal democratic society, results contrary to the tightly held “presupposition” suggest that one need not be overly concerned that, by definition, religious individuals will act in a politically intolerant manner. Such findings may very well begin to free liberal democratic theory from the belief that religion is incompatible with commitment to liberal democratic ideals (particularly in terms of political tolerance).