



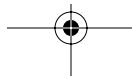
P R E F A C E

Absolute tolerance is altogether impossible; the allegedly absolute tolerance turns into ferocious hatred of those who have stated clearly and most forcefully that there are unchangeable standards founded in the nature of man and the nature of things.

LEO STRAUSS

There is widespread feeling today that something is very wrong with the way we think about tolerance. We have an intuition that in our diverse society tolerance is very important to practice, but at the same time we are unable to agree on what exactly it means to be tolerant. Does tolerance require the acceptance of all views on a given subject as equally true? Does it mean that I must not believe too strongly that my views are right about a given subject? Can I be tolerant and still believe in objective truth about religion, ethics and politics?

These are just three of the broad questions that any consideration of tolerance immediately places before us. But reflection on tolerance, like any topic of moment, leads very quickly into other topics, such as the nature of truth, the nature of human beings and the possibility of moral knowledge. Any study of tolerance will inevitably be broad in scope and interdisciplinary in focus, and this one is no exception. This book is not intended to be a technical philosophical or political tome on tolerance; nor does it have any pretensions of being a comprehensive study detailed in every respect. Rather the style and method of this work is impressionistic and panoramic; it seeks mainly to give to readers, in the worldview context of evangelical Christianity, an overview of the intersection of truth and tolerance in contemporary American social life.





The importance of this topic cannot be overestimated. The deep diversity of American life, and many other societies across the globe, demands a vigorous and proper understanding and practice of tolerance as a value. Without tolerance, pluralism and diversity dissolve into nothing more than tyranny and chaos.

It is perhaps one of the more disconcerting features of contemporary intellectual life that given the current prominence of social debates about tolerance, and given its obviously crucial standing as a social virtue today, comparatively few book-length studies of it have been published. This work's selected bibliography lists useful and sound reflections on tolerance, including those from a Christian perspective.

The fundamental aim of this book is to stimulate reflection and writing on tolerance (both social and personal), particularly from a Christian point of view, and to affirm that personal and political commitments to truth are not averse to genuine tolerance. Indeed, truth and tolerance are inseparable. In their symbiosis tolerance gives to truth the cognitive freedom it needs to be authentically recognized, and truth gives to tolerance the parameters and purpose it needs to function as it is intended—to serve people and communities in their quest for meaning and ultimately the knowledge of the One in whom alone lies their fulfillment.

