

THE NEW TOLERANCE

“How much tolerance can we tolerate?”

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There is a new best-selling book by Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler entitled “The New Tolerance” with the subtitle “How a Cultural Movement Threatens to Destroy You, Your Faith, and Your Children.” By unmasking the true nature of the cultural movement of “Tolerance,” this paperback will not only help you to understand it but equip you to counter its insidious effects on your faith, your family, your church, and your children. In addition, the authors teach you how to encounter and neutralize this threat by helping you to discern truth from error. Like it or not, we live in a post-Christian culture. What used to be a nation under God is now a nation separate from God, His Ten Commandments, and His Spirit. The new culture of secular humanism has made man the measure of all things. It is also a culture of relativism that would trivialize and relativize the truth of the gospel.

“Truth and Tolerance”

Today’s definition of tolerance goes beyond merely respecting a person’s rights because the new tolerance declares that all beliefs are equally valid Christians, or for that matter, anyone who believes in objective truth and morality will face increasing pressures to be silent about their convictions. Because to speak out at school, at work, or in the public forum will be seen as an intolerant judgment on sinful beliefs and evil lifestyles. Such pressure will pose severe problems not only for families but for children as well. This is illustrated by the case of Shannon Berry, a first grader at Bayshore elementary school in Bradenton, Florida. Shannon and a classmate were talking about Jesus one day during recess. A teacher pulled them aside and reprimanded them telling them that they were not allowed to talk about Jesus at school. The rise of the new tolerance makes the sharing of faith an increasingly dangerous proposition for many people who now believe not only in the separation of church from state but also in the separation of state from God.

“One Word Two Meanings”

The traditional definition of tolerance means simply to recognize and respect another person’s valid beliefs and practices. The attitude based upon the dignity of the human person in the freedom of religious expression is what tolerance meant to most people. Today’s definition is vastly different. The new tolerance considers every person’s beliefs, values, and lifestyles no matter how sinful, pagan, or destructive as equally good and valid. Not only does everyone have equal rights to his beliefs, but all beliefs are considered equal. This new tolerance goes beyond respecting a person’s rights. It demands praise and endorsement of every person’s beliefs, values, and lifestyles no matter what they are. This fundamental shift in meaning represents one of the greatest shifts in history, certainly in the history of our country and most people are missing that.

“Dangerous Implications”

This new tolerance had many dangerous implications. Unless Christian churches and families recognize it, the beginning of the next millennium is likely to be marked not only by much anti-Christian sentiment but also by the repression of public discourse. The issue no longer the truth of the message but rather a belief that there is now absolute moral truth. Recently, John Leo wrote an article in U.S. News and World Report entitled Absolute Phobia in which he stated that an increasing number of college students are not willing to say that the Holocaust was morally wrong. What they are willing to say is that “I think it’s wrong and you may think it’s wrong, but who’s to say what is right and wrong since there is no absolute truth. One person’s opinion is as good as any others.”

“No Ten Commandments”

In short, what is being stated today is that there is no Ten Commandments, no objective Judaic-Christian objective standard of morality. If you want to hold belief in God, or that murder, adultery, and sodomy are wrong, that’s only your opinion. An opposite opinion would be held as equally valid and this is scary. The Ten Commandments are reduced to Ten Suggestions that Moses brought down from the mountain or they are some religious person’s subjective and personal view of what is right or wrong.

“Politically Correct and Incorrect”

Actually, the situation is not quite that black and white. There is, at present, a politically correct gospel that most liberals agree with in union with conservatives but there’s also a politically incorrect one. The politically correct gospel teaches that it is wrong to take drugs, to murder, to rob, to rape, to steal, to break and enter, to smoke in public places, to advertise cigarettes, and to sexually harass a person. When conservatives speak in these fields, they find that most liberals will agree with them. To this extent, both groups accept certain of the Ten Commandments, but there’s a whole vast other field of Judaic-Christian values that would be called Politically Incorrect and therefore, must be tolerated. These would include sodomy, artificial contraception, divorce, living together, pornography, and abortion. When one dares to enter this field of “Tolerance” one is immediately attacked or shot down. Abortion is now called by the Euphonism of Pro-Choice. Sodomy is now called Alternate Lifestyle. Pornography is Freedom of Expression, Vulgarity in the Public Forum is Freedom of Speech. Here the Ten Commandments are definitely thrown out.

“Glaring Inconsistencies”

The inconsistencies of the new Tolerance are apparent. Even a liberal person is definitely not Pro-choice when it comes to ordinary murder, breaking and entry, or rape. But they definitely are Pro-Choice when it comes to the baby in the womb. Liberal people will not allow an alternative lifestyle for murderers, thieves, and rapists but they definitely do allow it for sodomists. People will be against the sexual harassment of a woman in the office but put that same woman in a pornographic film, the amount to which you can degrade, dehumanize and vulgarize her is literally limitless. Simply to point out to liberals that such glaring inconsistencies are not logical does not help. What is needed is a change of heart; what is called normally Conversion.

“Liberalism in the Court”

This New Tolerance unfortunately has made its way even to the Supreme Court. In 1997 forty United States religious leaders declared in a July 4th statement that by the consent of the governed has been thrown into question. These religious leaders wrote “On this 221st anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we join in giving thanks to almighty God for what the founders called this American experiment in ordered liberty. In the year of our Lord 1997, the experiment is deeply troubled but it has not failed and please God, will not fail. As America has been a blessing to our forebears and to us, so will it be a blessing to future generations if we keep faith with the founding vision.

“The Law of Nature and the Law of Nature’s God”

Invoking ‘the law of nature and of nature’s God,’ the founders declared ‘we hold these truths to be self-evident.’ This Fourth of July Americans must ask themselves whether they hold them still. We, for our part, answer emphatically in the affirmative. We affirm that before God and the law all are equal, ‘endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ In recent years it has become increasingly manifest that these truths cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, there is ominous evidence of their rejection in our public life and law.

“Religion and Morality are Indispensable”

As leaders of diverse churches and Christian communities, we address our fellow citizens with no partisan political purpose. Our purpose is to help repair a contract too often broken and a covenant too often betrayed. We recall and embrace the wisdom of our first president, who declared in his farewell address: ‘Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens.’ Religion and morality are not an alien intrusion upon our public life but the source and foundation of our pursuit of the common good

“Nations Judged”

“Nations are ultimately judged not by their military might or economic wealth but by their fidelity to ‘the laws of nature and nature’s God.’ In the view of the founders, just government is self-government. Liberty is not license but is ‘ordered liberty’ – liberty in response to moral truth. The great threat to the American experiment today is not from enemies abroad but from disordered liberty. That disorder is increasingly expressed in a denial of the very concept of moral truth. The cynical question of Pontius Pilate, ‘What is truth?’ is today frequently taken to be a mark of sophistication also in our political discourse and even in the jurisprudence of our courts.

The bitter consequences of disordered liberty resulting from the denial of moral truth are by now painfully familiar. Abortion, crime, consumerism, drug abuse, family disintegration, teen-age suicide, neglect of the poor, pornography, racial prejudice, ethnic separatism and suspicion – all are rampant in our society. In politics, the public interest is too often sacrificed to private advantage; in economic and foreign policy, the lust for profits overrides concern for the well-being of families at home and the protection of

human rights abroad. The powerful forget their obligation to the powerless, and the politics of the common good is abandoned in the interminable contention of special interests. We cannot boast of what we have made of the experiment entrusted to our hands.”

We, the people, while we are all responsible for the state of the nation and while our ills no doubt have many causes, on this Fourth of July our attention must be directed to the role of the courts in the disordering of our liberty. Our nation was constituted by the agreement that ‘we the people,’ through the representative institutions of republican government, would deliberate and decide how we ought to order our life together. In recent years that agreement has been broken. The declaration declares that ‘governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.’ In recent years, power has again and again been wielded, notably by the courts, without the consent of the governed.

“Abortion on Demand”

The most egregious instance of such usurpation of power is the 1973 decision of the Supreme Court in which it claimed to have discovered a ‘privacy’ right to abortion and by which it abolished, in what many constitutional scholars have called an act of raw judicial power, the abortion law of all 50 states. Traditionally in our jurisprudence, the law reflected the moral traditions by which people govern their lives. This decision was a radical departure, arbitrarily uprooting those moral traditions as they had been enacted in law through our representative political process. Our concern is for both the integrity of our constitutional order and for the unborn, whom the court has unjustly excluded from the protection of law.

“Disordered Liberty”

Our concern is by no means limited to the question of abortion, but the judicially imposed abortion license is at the very core of the disordering of our liberty. The question of abortion is the question of who belongs to the community for which we accept common responsibility. Our goal is unequivocal: every unborn child protected in law and welcomed in life. We have no illusions that, in a world wounded by sin, that goal will ever be achieved perfectly. Nor do we assume that at present all Americans agree with that goal. Plainly, many do not. We believe, however, that democratic deliberation and decision would result in laws much more protective of the unborn and other vulnerable human lives. We are convinced that the court was wrong, both morally and legally, to withdraw from a large part of the human community the constitutional guarantee of equal protection and due process of law.

“Most Disagree”

The American people as a whole have not accepted, and we believe they will not accept, the abortion regime imposed by Roe vs. Wade. In its procedural violation of democratic self-government and in its substantive violation of the ‘laws of nature and of nature’s God,’ this decision of the court forfeits any claim to the obedience of conscientious citizens. We are resolved to work relentlessly, through peaceful and constitutional means and for however long it takes to effectively reverse the abortion license imposed by Roe

vs. Wade. We ask all Americans to join us in that resolve.

“Responsible Self Government”

The effort of ‘we the people’ to exercise the right and responsibility of self-government has been made even more difficult by subsequent decisions of the court. In its stated effort to end the national debate over abortion, the Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey* (1992) transferred the legal ground for the abortion license from the implied right of privacy to an explicit liberty right under the 14th Amendment. The court there proposed a sweeping redefinition of liberty: ‘At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning of the universe and of the mystery of human life.’ The doctrine declared by the court would seem to mean that liberty is nothing more nor less than what is chosen by the autonomous, unencumbered self.

“Antithesis of Law”

This is the very antithesis of the ordered liberty affirmed by the founders. Liberty in this debased sense is utterly disengaged from the concepts of responsibility and community and is pitted against the ‘laws of nature and of nature’s God.’ Such liberty degenerates into license for the oppression of the vulnerable while the government looks the other way and throws into question the very possibility of the rule of law itself. *Casey* raises the serious question as to whether any law can be enacted in pursuit of the common good, for virtually any law can offend some individuals’ definition of selfhood, existence and the meaning of life. Under the doctrine declared by the court, it would seem that individual choice can always take precedence over the common good.

“An Objective Order”

In the field of science, everyone admits that there is objective truths. There is a sun that shines by day and there is a moon that is lit up at night. So true is that that we call the first day of the week Sunday and we call each period of 30 days A Month (Moon-th). There are 9 planets and we can name them. No one questions such truths and if one dared to question they would be considered simply wrong. In the field of mathematics, it is the same. Two plus two = 4 and not 5 or 3. This is not questioned, and if we’re one to question, they would simply be considered in error. Such truths are objective. They are out there for anyone to see. In the field of medicine, it is the same. We do not give any quack the license to operate on a patient in the hospital. Each doctor has to be certified by objective medical tests. It is not a question of private opinion; it is objective and true. No doctor is allowed to use dirty or unsanitary needles. It is simply wrong for everyone no matter what their personal beliefs may be.

“All The More True”

This is all the more true in the field of theology. There is one God in three persons. This is not a matter of conjecture or opinion. It is true. And this true God gave to Moses Ten Commandments that everyone must reverence God, respect His name, and keep holy His day. No one is allowed to be disobedient or murderous. Adultery, stealing, and lying are wrong for everyone everywhere and no one, under any circumstance, has the right to covet another person’s spouse or goods. These are objective moral norms for everyone everywhere and for all times.

“Written into the Human Heart”

These moral norms have been written into the human heart so that each and every conscience intuitively knows that it is wrong to steal, to lie, to swear, or commit adultery. For example, when 2 young killers entered Littleton High School to murder teachers and classmates, no one ran for a bible to discern whether or not it was right or wrong. Everyone knew it in their hearts. It had been written there by God.

“Splendor of the Truth”

Because of widespread permissiveness on the part of many liberals this objective moral law is being discarded. That is why Pope John Paul II wrote his magnificent encyclical entitled “The Splendor of Truth.” The Holy Father was simply calling for a return to objective morality. He was saying what we all know to be true that every human being has a self-evident right to life - nobody has a right to take it away. As Americans, we constitutionally hold the same. Namely, that every American citizen is endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights the first of which is the right to life. Listen to what the Holy Father says now about objective truth in the field of morality.

“Pope John Paul II’s encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* (“The Splendor of Truth”), is first of all an encyclical about objective moral truth - specifically about what kinds of moral theology are compatible with revelation and Catholic moral teaching and what kinds are not. For a sampling of the pope’s words, here are some quotes from the encyclical indicating papal thinking on Christian moral life and key moral issues today:

On Christian Morality:

The moral life presents itself as the response due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man. It is a response of love (No. 10)

On Law and Redemption

“From the very lips of Jesus, the new Moses, man is once again given the commandments of the Decalogue. Jesus himself definitively confirms them and proposes them to us as the way and condition of salvation.” (No. 12).

On Church as Moral Teacher:

‘From the Church’s beginnings the Apostles, by virtue of their pastoral responsibility to preach the Gospel, were vigilant over the right conduct of Christians, just as they were vigilant for the purity of the faith... The Church is in fact a communion both of faith and of life.’ (No. 26).

On Freedom as a Moral Issue:

“The human issues most frequently debated and differently resolved in contemporary moral reflection are all closely related, albeit in various ways, to a crucial issue: human freedom. Certainly people today have a particularly strong sense of freedom.. (but) certain currents of modern thought have gone so far as to exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values: (Nos. 31,32).

On a “Crisis of Truth” Today

“Once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person’s intelligence.... A judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly.” (No. 32).

On the Rights of Conscience:

“Although each individual has a right to be respected in his own journey in search of the truth, there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known. As Cardinal John Henry Newman, that outstanding defender of the rights of conscience, forcefully put it: ‘Conscience has rights because it has duties.’” (No. 33).

On Freedom and Moral Norms:

“God’s law does not reduce, much less do away with human freedom: rather it protects and promotes that freedom...Some people, however, disregarding the dependence of human reason on divine wisdom...have actually posited a complete sovereignty of reason in the domain of moral norms.” (No. 36).

Against a Dichotomy of Natural and Supernatural:

“Certain moral theologians have introduced a sharp distinction contrary to Catholic doctrine, between an ethical order, which would be human in origin and of value for this world alone, and an order of salvation...This has then led to a denial that there exists, in divine revelation, a specific and determined moral content, universally valid and permanent....Naturally, an autonomy conceived in this way also involves the denial of a specific doctrinal competence of the Church and her Magisterium with regard to particular moral norms.” (No. 37).

On Freedom as Obedience to God:

“Patterned on God’s freedom, man’s freedom is not negated by his obedience to the divine law; indeed, only through this obedience does it abide in truth and conform to human dignity.” (No. 42).

On Recognizing Good and Evil:

“In his journey towards God, the one who alone is good, man must freely do good and avoid evil. But in order to accomplish this he must be able to distinguish good from evil... (a task) which he himself carries out by his reason, in particular by his reason enlightened by divine revelation and faith.” (Nos. 42,44).

On Freedom and Nature:

‘One has to consider carefully the correct relationship between freedom and human nature, and in particular the place of the human body in questions of natural law. A

freedom which claims to be absolute ends up treating the human body as a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom, has shaped it in accordance with its design. This moral theory does not correspond to the truth about man and his freedom. It contradicts the Church's teaching on the unity of the human person." (No. 48).

Conclusion

"We must always remember, however, that when the apostle Peter told us, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have," he added, "but do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

We must aggressively practice love. Everyone loves love, it seems, but few recognize how incompatible love is with the new tolerance. Tolerance simply avoids offending someone; we must help out children live in love, which actively seeks to promote the good of another person.

Tolerance says, "You must approve of what I do." Love responds, "I must do something harder; I will love you, even when your behavior offends me."

Tolerance says, "You must agree with me." Love responds, "I must do something harder; I will tell you the truth, because I am convinced 'the truth will set you free.'"

Tolerance says, "You must allow me to have my way." Love responds, "I must do something harder; I will plead with you to follow the right way, because I believe you are worth the risk."

Tolerance seeks to be inoffensive; love takes risks. Tolerance glorifies division; love seeks unity. Tolerance costs nothing; love costs everything.

I believe the dreadful potential of the new tolerance can be averted, but only with a renewed commitment to truth, justice and love. And, as it happens, that powerful trio of virtues can do more than prevent disaster; it can bring about true community and culture in the midst of diversity and disagreement.