Religious Tolerance in World Religions
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No one contests the proposition that religions bring about intolerance. But the mixed record of religious traditions also encompasses teachings that lead to the tolerance of specified peoples, behaviors, or beliefs. Through case studies covering a wide range of the major world religions, this book attempts to identify the components of religious systems—beliefs, practices, definitions of the social order—that yield attitudes of tolerance for or intolerance of other religious groups.

The contributors to this book frame the question of tolerance and intolerance as matters of public policy in the theory and practice of religious systems, past and present. We inquire into how a religious system in its political statement produces categories of tolerance that are to be explained in that system’s logical context, emphasizing cases that generate tolerance in social and political situations. Through these examinations, we hope to show the importance to public policy of understanding world religions as they have been practiced in diverse places and historical periods, of finding that the “infidel” or nonbeliever may be accorded an honorable position within the social order defined by Islam or Christianity or Judaism or Buddhism or Hinduism.

The Question We Propose to Investigate and Its Importance

Religions by their nature compete, for they present claims about matters of truth and value that conflict with the truths put forth by others. That is the reason religions have to learn how to live with competition. The question we propose to investigate is this: What ideas do religions advance that nurture toleration for competing religious traditions? What ideas does a given religion set forth to explain why it owes to the stranger in its midst the same rights of human dignity and respect that it accords to its own communicants?

In our current political atmosphere, people assume that religions feed intolerance and intergroup hatred. But there is a different record to examine, too.
Islam, for example, has produced Islamic states that located the foundations for tolerating the presence of Christians and Jews within the theology of Islam, most notably in Spain from the seventh century to the reconquest and in the Ottoman Empire. Christianity has a long record of coexisting with different faiths. Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the other world religions, likewise, have had to formulate, out of their own resources, an explanation of how the outsider, the nonbeliever, finds a legitimate place within the social order of humanity. Because today we hear more about the way in which religions condemn the outsider or the other, we feel that it is important to focus attention on the basis, in the world religions, for the opposite attitude.

An important clarification is in order. The word *tolerance* has more than the meaning “the capacity to live alongside a different religious tradition from one’s own.” It also refers to acceptance of attitudes and actions contrary to the morality to which one adheres, thus, tolerance of what is, from one’s own perspective, deceit or deviancy. This second connotation is not the sense in which the conception is approached in this book. We mean by *tolerance* the capacity to live with religious difference and, by *toleration*, the theory that permits a majority religion to accommodate the presence of a minority religion. Along with the aforementioned example of Islamic tolerance in Spain and the Ottoman Empire, we need to look only at the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) to provide a basis for a Catholic theology of toleration of other religions for a single Christian counterpart, among many. Indeed, the religious amity that characterizes American, Canadian, and British religious life draws its ideas from Christianity more than from any other religion. The power of religions to compete with one another—as they do—derives from a fundamental attitude that makes them able to live side by side with difference.

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*Jacob Neusner*

*Bruce Chilton*
PART 1

QUESTIONS ABOUT RELIGIOUS TOLERATION
Diversity is now a ubiquitous fact of life. In the industrialized West and increasingly in less-developed parts of the world as well, people are deluged with information about and images and interpretations of people unlike themselves. The globalization of the film and television industries, to say nothing of the impact of the World Wide Web means that people from across the globe encounter one another as never before in history. For the world’s religions, this is an important new condition. Not only do religions imagine one another in doctrine, in principle, and in theory, but they now experience and engage one another increasingly in practice. No religion, whatever its doctrine may say, can pretend that it is the only one here or even that it is the only one succeeding, at least in earthly terms.

The new environment of nearly instant communication sharpens the practical dimension of the enduring and important question of religious tolerance, the capacity of a religion to forbear another religion with which it disagrees. Since religious pluralism is now a practical reality of everyday life, the capacity of religions to tolerate one another in theory and in practice is a consequential issue of contemporary society.

To achieve a broad and preliminary perspective on this important ques-