

# LGBT and Political Correctness

Everything about the subject of LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) identity and sexuality is colored in some way by political correctness. PC thinking embraces all beliefs and positions (except orthodox Christianity), and seeks to validate any and all self-expression (as long as it differs from biblical morals). One of the most amazing demonstrations of PC thought is this video, in which a short Caucasian male asks students at the University of Washington how they would respond if he told them he was a 6'5" Asian woman. The students were more committed to his right to be whatever he said he wanted to be, no matter how silly it sounded, than what was objectively true:

So much of PC thought in our culture today reminds me of the Hans Christian Andersen tale of a vain emperor who cares about nothing except wearing and showing off his luxurious clothes. He hires two weavers—two scammers—who promise him the finest, best suit of clothes made from a magic fabric that is invisible to anyone who is hopelessly stupid or unfit for his position.

Neither the emperor nor his ministers can see the fabric themselves, but they pretend that they can for fear of appearing unfit for their positions. Finally the weavers report that the suit is finished. They mime dressing him, and the emperor marches in procession before his subjects.

The townsfolk, who of course cannot see the (imaginary) fabric, play along with the pretense, not wanting to appear

stupid or unfit for their positions. Then a child in the crowd, too young to understand what was going on, blurts out the truth for all to hear: "The emperor's not wearing any clothes!" The townspeople try to hush him up, even though what he's saying is the truth.

Political correctness is often about maintaining an illusion and hushing up the people who speak the truth. Those who speak out the truth, like the little boy, are shamed with the intention of silencing them. This certainly happens in the arena of sexuality and identity, where the illusion is that sex is the highest pleasure and the most important aspect of life, and everyone has a right to express their sexual feelings however they want.

In order to think rightly about political correctness, we need to know what's really going on—what is fueling the illusion. (Which is why it's so important to understand worldview!) Recently I was privileged to address a Christian high school chapel on this topic, and I told the students that they were born into a cultural brine that is shaping and pickling their thoughts about sexuality and identity, just like the college students on the video. They needed to know how our culture got to the place it is today so they have a chance to refuse the pickling process.

In 1989, Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen wrote a manifesto for normalizing homosexuality, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s*. Their very specific, very achievable goals now describe American culture. (Please note, the bolded words are Kirk and Madsen's words, not mine):

1. **Talk about gays and gayness as loudly and often as possible.** This would desensitize people to the issue of homosexuality so it would become an always-present, no-big-deal aspect of American culture.
2. **Portray gays as victims and not as aggressive challengers.**

Two main ways to achieve this: propagate the “born that way” mythology, and portray homosexuals as victims in an anti-gay society.

3. **Give protectors a just cause.** Fighting discrimination, or what is portrayed as discrimination, makes people feel good about themselves as they defend the underdog.

4. **Make gays look good.** Particularly in media such as TV and movies, make the gay characters as good-looking, charming, smart, witty and winsome as possible.

5. **Make the victimizers look bad.** Make the “anti-gays” look so nasty that average Americans will want to dissociate themselves from such types.

Every one of these goals has been attained, and this is the culture we now live in. In order to be aware of the PC thought that shapes how most people think, we need to be aware that the entire society has been manipulated.

What earned Probe Ministries a spot on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s list of hate groups is our website content about homosexuality, which agrees with the biblically orthodox position that same-gender sexual behavior, like every other violation of God’s intention for sex to be limited to the marriage bed of one man and one woman, is wrong. As [my pastor](#) says, “Truth sounds like hate to those who hate the truth.” There are so many cultural lies about God’s design for sex and identity that when we proclaim God’s truth in a culture that embraces lies, we get called hateful and discriminatory.

In order to think biblically, we need to know the difference between the culture’s lies (politically correct thought) and God’s truth:

**CULTURE’S LIE:** Who I am is a sexual being. Whether it’s a culture or an individual, when God is left out of the equation, sex is elevated to the #1 most important spot because it’s so powerful and a source of such intense pleasure (or can be). So people define themselves by their sexuality.

**GOD'S TRUTH:** Who I am is God's beloved creation. Made in the image of God, created for intimacy and fellowship with Him, my worth proven by what the Son was willing to pay for me: His very life.

**CULTURE'S LIE:** Sex is a need and a right for everyone to experience. Many people believe it is on the same level of necessity as food, water and sleep.

**GOD'S TRUTH:** Sex is so powerful it is to be contained only within marriage between one man and one woman. The mingling of bodies and souls through sex is deeply spiritual as well as physical. God's prohibitions against sex outside of marriage are His gift to us, meant for our protection from the painful consequences of sexual sin. They are like guard rails on a treacherous mountain road, intended to keep us from going off the cliff to pain and destruction.

**CULTURE'S LIE:** I create my own identity depending on what I feel. Untethered from a connection to God as Creator, people live out the sad, repeated description of Israel in the book of Judges, where "all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." (Judges 17:6, for one).

**GOD'S TRUTH:** My identity is who my Creator says I am. All of us exist because God wanted us and hand-crafted each of us (Psalm 139). Feelings are real but they're not reliable. Jeremiah 17:9 instructs us on why our feelings can't be trusted: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

**CULTURE'S LIE:** Gender is whatever we want it to be. Biological sex has been separated from gender (how one feels about maleness and femaleness). (Personally, this strikes me as illegitimate as proclaiming that the white keys on a piano are bad and the black keys are good.) Facebook currently offers 58 choices of gender.

**GOD'S TRUTH:** God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; *male and female* He created them. (Gen. 1:27) The first words in the room when a baby is born are

still, "It's a girl!" or "It's a boy!" Gender is still binary because God still creates male and female.



**CULTURE'S LIE:** I can create my own reality. For example, recently a man abandoned his wife and seven children, announcing his chosen identity of a 6-year-old girl.

Another man, deciding his identity is a female dragon, cut off his ears and nose, dyed his eyes, and inserted horns in his forehead.



**GOD'S TRUTH:** There is objective truth and objective reality because God is real and true. We do not have the freedom to dismiss what is objectively true and real;  $2 + 2$  will always be 4, not 7 or 200, and gravity will always be operational on the planet. These things are real and true because a real and true God rooted His creation in His own nature.

**CULTURE'S LIE:** "Born this way." This lie has so much traction because it's repeated so often people assume it to be true.

**GOD'S TRUTH: No Evidence.** There is actually no scientific evidence of a gay gene or any other determiner of same-sex attraction. **Identical Twins Studies:** In identical twins (who share the same DNA), when one identifies as gay or lesbian, the other one only identifies as gay or lesbian about 11% of

the time. If homosexuality were a genetic issue, the correspondence would be 100%.

American culture continues to pump out the illusion—the fantasy, the myth—that sexuality is the most important thing about life and about us, and that sexual identity and expression is where life is found.

Beware: ***the emperor has no clothes!***

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## Politically Correct Education

*Don Closson considers the impact that affirmative action, multiculturalism, and speech codes have had on education. He also argues that the heart of the issue is the rejection of both the Judeo-Christian worldview and Western Civilization.*

### The Power of Political Correctness

The media has recently taken notice of a trend in education that has actually been around for some time. This trend has been obvious to anyone well-acquainted with the goings-on in our citadels of higher learning or even on selected high school campuses. The term *Political Correctness*, or *politically correct speech*, covers most of the issues involved. Multiculturalism is often given as the driving ethic that prompts one to be politically correct.

At the foundation of this movement is the belief that all

education is political. Nowhere in the curriculum can one find a hiding place from race, class, or gender issues. Added to this assumption is the law of moral and ethical relativism: All systems of thought, all cultures, are equal in value. To assume otherwise is politically incorrect by definition.

Just how important this type of thinking is to those who influence our nation's students is reflected by some of their comments. According to Glenn Maloney, assistant dean of students at the University of Texas at Austin, "Multiculturalism will be the key word for education. I believe that will be the mission of the university in the 90's." (1) Donna Shalala, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, adds that this movement amounts to "a basic transformation of American higher education in the name of multiculturalism and diversity." (2)

A recent study of the New York school system found that "African Americans, Asian Americans, Puerto Rican/Latinos, and Native Americans have all been the victims of an intellectual and educational oppression that has characterized the culture and institutions of the United States and the European American worlds for centuries." (3)

The report goes on to state, "Unfortunately, stereotyping and misinformation have become part of the dominant culture enveloping everyone. . . . Because of the depth of the problem and the tenacity of its hold on the mind, only the most stringent measures can have significant impact." (4)

And stringent measures are what have occurred. Curricula, admissions policies, the hiring and promotion of faculty, and the freedom to debate issues have all been modified by those who currently define political correctness. There is a growing body of evidence that quota systems are now in place in many admissions offices across the country. Textbooks are being written and courses changed to promote multiculturalism at the expense of teaching about Western Civilization. Professors are

unable to teach their courses or participate in the academic enterprise because their views fail to conform to the new guardians of culture.

What is most appalling is the attempt to remove the freedom of speech from students who fail to conform to the correct position on a broad spectrum of topics. What is ironic is that many of those now attempting to limit the freedom of speech of students in the name of multiculturalism are the very same individuals that began the free speech movement in the sixties, arguing for academic freedom and student input into the curriculum. It seems that the issue was more a matter of gaining power to control the curriculum and inject it with their views rather than truly to promote freedom of academic endeavors.

## **Ethnic Studies**

Let's look at a few places where political correctness has had a major impact. In 1988 the Stanford faculty voted to change the Western Culture course, one of the most popular on campus, to "Cultures, Ideas and Values." The fifteen-book requirement was dropped and replaced with the admonition to give substantial attention to issues of race(5) and gender. The reading list now had to include a quota of works by women and minorities. Out goes Shakespeare, in comes Burgos-Debray.

Shakespeare is deemed to be racist, sexist, and classist, a product of the ultimate evil—Western Civilization. French writer Elisabeth Burgos-Debray is, on the other hand, politically correct. One of her works, now part of the Stanford curriculum, describes a Guatemalan woman's struggle against capitalist oppression. She rejects marriage and motherhood and becomes a feminist, a socialist, and finally a Marxist, arguing politics with fellow revolutionaries in Paris. According to the author, this simple Guatemalan woman speaks for all the Indians of the American continent.(6)



Berkeley, Mount Holyoke, and the University of Wisconsin are just a few of the schools where students must take a course in ethnic studies but are not required to take a single course in Western Civilization. At Berkeley, the ethnic studies course is the only required course on campus, and Wisconsin students can graduate without taking any American history. Ohio State has gone even further, revamping its entire curriculum to reflect issues of gender, race, and ethnicity. The chairman of the English department at Pennsylvania State University has remarked, "I would bet that Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is taught in more English departments today than all of Shakespeare's plays combined." (7)

An ironic twist to this revolution is that when writings of third-world authors are included in the curriculum, they rarely are the classics from that culture. Instead, they tend to be recent, Marxist, and politically correct works.

Unfortunately, curriculum revisions are not confined to the college campus. The state of New York recently commissioned a committee to review its statewide secondary-school curriculum. The results were a bit startling, to say the least.

According to the report, no topic is culture-free. The Eurocentric, white, American culture currently dominating the curriculum must give way to one which represents all cultures equally. Even math and science were cited as culturally biased because they failed to give credit to contributions from other cultures. (8)

In the social sciences, even more radical demands have been made. One Black Studies professor charges that the current curriculum in New York's high schools reflects "deep-seated pathologies of racial hatred." He argues that time spent studying the U.S. Constitution, which is seriously flawed in his opinion, is grounds for miseducation. He adds that studying the Constitution is egocentric and blatant White Nationalism. (9)

# Instruments of Exclusion

In chapter 2 of his book *Illiberal Education*, Dinesh D'Souza takes up the case of high school senior Yat-pang Au. To make a fairly long story short, Yat-pang received a rejection letter from the University of California at Berkeley in 1987 although he had graduated first in his high school class, scored 1340 on the SAT, earned letters in track and cross-country, served on the student council, and won seven scholarships from groups such as the National Society of Professional Engineers. What went wrong?

It wasn't his credentials. In fact, Yat-pang was considerably above the Berkeley average in his qualifications. His only real problem was his race, and what chancellor Ira Michael Hayman called "a little social engineering." Under Hayman the university began to devalue the importance of merit and achievement in admissions in order to achieve a racially balanced student body, one that reflects the population at large.

As a result, this family of immigrants from Hong Kong found that their son could not go to Berkeley although ten other students from his high school had been accepted with lower qualifications. The policy of racial balance which seemed so fair to Hayman was anything but fair to the Au family.

If Yat-pang had been Hispanic or Black he would have had no problem attending Berkeley. Asians, many of them immigrants, are now being excluded from Berkeley because they happen to be a too-successful minority that values the family and education.

Unfortunately, Berkeley is not the only place one can find this type of discrimination. Harvard, UCLA, Stanford, Brown, and others have been charged with discrimination towards Asians. As D'Souza writes, "Quotas which were intended as instruments of inclusion now seemed to function as instruments

of exclusion.”(10)

Even if we set aside Yat-pang’s individual rights, does this policy make sense for the minorities it is trying to help? Often it does not. D’Souza notes that Blacks and Hispanics admitted under reduced academic requirements do not fare well at Berkeley. In one study, only 18 percent of the Black and 22 percent of the Hispanic affirmative-action students graduated within five years. Almost 30 percent of Black and Hispanic students drop out at the end of their freshman year.(11) Because we have set aside academic preparation as the criterion for admission to our top schools, many students who cannot compete are being admitted. They simply drop out, more frustrated and angry than before.

Another issue that goes hand-in-hand with admissions is the issue of testing itself. Many argue that since some groups do better than others on the SAT, the test is biased. A New York federal judge has ruled that, since women do not do as well as men on the SAT, using the test as a criterion for awarding its Regents and Empire State scholarships violates state law.(12)

What is remarkable about this trend is that testing was installed in the 1920s to fight arbitrary bias in admissions. When one removes testing, which even the critics must agree is still the best way to predict academic success, all other criteria except race and gender are subjective.

In light of this fact, College Board president Donald Stewart, who is black, has argued that the test covers words and ideas necessary for success in college, regardless of cultural background.(13)

## **Freedom of Speech**

Those who consider themselves politically correct have inflicted grave damage on the concept of free speech. It is interesting to note that Christians have endured free-speech

restrictions for years, but only recently have others who hold to politically incorrect positions experienced this form of discrimination.

Restrictions on speech come in three different forms on campus. The most widespread form is the conduct code. Another is the refusal to allow conservative speakers to address groups on campus. And last is the censure of faculty members who step outside the sphere of politically correct thought.

The University of Michigan has been a leader in restricting First Amendment rights. Responding to a student radio disc jockey who invited other students to call in their favorite racial jokes, the university began a long crusade to stamp out racism, sexism, and a multitude of other "isms." Instead of just punishing the offender, all students were now under suspicion, and all speech would be monitored carefully.

A new policy on discrimination and discriminatory harassment was approved. It defined as punishable "any behavior, verbal or physical, that stigmatizes or victimizes an individual on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, creed, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, handicap, or Vietnam-era veteran status." (14)

Debate on these topics was to be restricted in fear that someone might be stigmatized by the discussion. The so-called marketplace of ideas that colleges are supposed to represent had been shrunk down to convenience-store size.

Since one cannot be certain that even the most balanced discussion of a topic such as gay rights or religious cults might not stigmatize a fellow student, one must refrain from entering into that territory. The result of this type of policy is to guarantee a monopoly to the radical Marxist and feminist ideas now being promoted by the faculty and administration on many of our campuses.

Fortunately, this policy was successfully challenged by an

unnamed psychology professor who realized that most of the subject matter he dealt with in class might stigmatize someone. In a strange twist, the ACLU was on the right side of this issue and represented the professor. Eventually a U.S. District Court struck down even a modified version of the code. But there are still codes in effect at Emory, Middlebury, Brown, Penn State, Tufts, and the Universities of California, Connecticut, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and others. Many more schools are considering implementing codes.(15)

Some groups on campus have used more blatant tactics to keep conservatives from speaking. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, U.N. ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan have all been victims of censorship in the form of gay and pro-abortion groups shouting them down. In one case, black students with clubs disrupted a meeting for the National Association of Scholars, a conservative group of professors, charging that they were actually supported by the Ku Klux Klan.(16)

Another form of censorship is the silencing of faculty. Alan Gribben, a professor at the University of Texas, made the mistake of voting against the politicization of a writing course in the English Department. As a result he was ostracized by the department and decided to leave after seventeen years on the faculty.(17)

## **The "Ism" Proliferation**

The goal of the political correctness revolutionaries on campus is the removal of any remnant of racism, sexism, class elitism, and even lookism, the practice of treating people differently because of their looks. There are also specific positions on ecology, foreign and domestic policy, homosexuality, and animal rights that are politically correct.

The hope behind all of this is the creation of a society where

each culture and social group is appreciated for its contributions. But the fallout has been to encourage people to find some reason to declare oppression, for it seems that only those who are oppressed are in a position to determine what is politically correct. White, middle-class males are the great Satan incarnate—even the most repentant among them must be watched closely.

Politically correct people argue that they are calling for a philosophy of inclusion. They are not thought police, they say; they are only concerned with correcting centuries of unfairness. In reality the effect of this movement has been to silence or remove from campus those who differ from the politically correct position. If a professor opposes racially based admissions policies, he is racist. If a student holds to religious convictions concerning homosexuality, she is homophobic. The issue really goes beyond mere tolerance; the goal of this movement is to remove opposition to the plans of the radical left.

Since those who are politically correct agree that Western Civilization is the cause of all evil in the world, one might ask what should replace it. Not surprisingly, the writers and heroes of this movement tend to be Marxist, feminist, and gay. It is interesting that Marx, a white male European, is still considered politically correct, although he held quite incorrect views on racial issues (in fact, he spoke positively concerning slavery in America).(18)

If true multiculturalism were the issue, these folks would be calling for the study and implementation of traditional cultures from around the world, which, by the way, are just as racist and far more male-dominated than our own. Whether one looks at Islam or the teachings of oriental traditions, one finds that a dim view is taken of both modern feminist thought and homosexuality.

The tradition of Western thought has been to deal with ideas

that transcend race, and it has been anything but homogeneous in its conclusions. The irony of the accusations leveled at Western thought by the politically correct is that the ideas they favor have been most fully developed in America and Europe. Even with all of its faults, Western Civilization has been the most open and tolerant of all societies. It has been eager to find and incorporate ideas that are beneficial from other cultures.

All the important issues considered on our campuses have religious elements. Whether one is considering the uses of technology or the relationships between the sexes, everyone is informed by his or her religious presuppositions. Placing a prior restraint on someone's freedom to speak because he is coming from a different position not only violates our historic view of freedom of speech but also can be used to further remove Christian thought from our schools.

What those in authority on our campuses really hope to accomplish is the unquestioned implementation of a worldview that releases man from his moral obligation to a creator God, a God who sees all men and women, regardless of their color, as in need of redemption. As Christian parents and alumni, we need to make certain that colleges remain places where students can seek and find the truth.

## Notes

1. "Multiculturalism Seen As Education Key," *Dallas Morning News*, 9 December 1990, sec. A, p. 56.
2. Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 13.
3. Helle Bering-Jensen, "Teaching All Things to All People," *Insight*, 2 April 1990, 49.
4. Ibid.
5. Allan C. Brownfeld, "'Cultural Imperialism' Is Destroying American Education," *Human Events*, 29 June 1991, 523.
6. D'Souza, *Illiberal Education*, 71.

7. Brownfeld, "Cultural Imperialism," 523.
8. Bering-Jensen, "Teaching All Things," 50.
9. Ibid.
10. D'Souza, ILLIBERAL EDUCATION, 29.
11. Ibid., 39.
12. Ibid., 44.
13. Ibid., 45.
14. Ibid., 142.
15. Ibid., 146.
16. "Race Riot: Minority Students Disrupt NAS Lecture," *Campus Report from Accuracy in Academia*, May 1991, 1.
17. "P.C. or Not P.C., That Is the Question," *The Dallas Morning News*, 21 April 1991, sec. J, p. 1.
18. Brownfeld, "Cultural Imperialism," 11.

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## Crusader Terrorists? – How Should Christians Respond

In this day of multiculturalism and political correctness, Christians should have been prepared to learn that a New Jersey school district recently chose Christian Crusaders as an imaginary terrorist group for its first live action hostage response drill. To portray the terrorists, the school district organizers made up a right-wing fundamentalist group that denies the separation of church and state. Then, they created a fake hostage situation instigated by the supposedly angry parent of a student expelled for praying.

The stated goal of the event was summarized nicely by the district superintendent. He claimed that "You perform as you practice. We need to practice under conditions as real as



possible in order to evaluate our procedures and plans so that they're as effective as possible." While many comments could be made about the phrase as real as possible, the most critical aspect of this issue is a deeper consideration.

Sadly, just as the impact of the aforementioned PC dogma on our schools is predictable, so is the vehement response of the local Christian community to this perceived offense. One Christian demanded that a public apology be given by school officials, along with their resignations. Other critics pointed out the obvious bigotry against Christians and the absurdity of the scenario itself. Christians have the legal right to pray in schools, and they are far more likely to bring their lawyers than their guns.

Still others mentioned that this is not the first time a school district had deliberately steered clear of the obvious terrorist groups, deciding instead to pick on Christians. For example, three years ago a Michigan school district substituted a group of crazed Christian homeschoolers called Wackos Against Schools and Education for their mock terrorism drill to avoid offending any Muslims.

Unfair scenarios such as these have a lot of Christians upset, and in a perfect world, they have a right to be. But is this the best response to events such as these? How should an ambassador for Christ handle them? May I suggest an alternative?

Instead of the immediate declaration of how persecuted and indignant we Christians are, perhaps we should ask ourselves why school officials see the followers of Jesus in this light in the first place. Are we doing anything that prompts this kind of stereotyping? Unfortunately, many school administrators only hear from outraged believers when there is a problem. Rarely are Christians viewed as beneficial to the school and surrounding community.

I know of a small evangelical church in New Zealand that was marginalized as an almost cultish group until they decided to pick a school to bless each spring. Church members take one week each year to clean, paint, and repair at the church's expense whatever needs fixing at the selected school. Their Christ-like service has completely changed the surrounding community's attitude regarding the church, and school officials have even attended services as a result of their gratitude. A similar scenario played out recently in a small village in China. An underground church went from being persecuted to being appreciated when they decided to restore a bridge vital to that city.

It is relatively easy and natural to respond to negative stereotyping, even persecution, with a demand for political rights and privileges. It is far more difficult and supernatural to bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you.

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# The Meaning and Practice of Tolerance

*Don Closson investigates the ideas surrounding the tolerance controversy and offer principles to communicate to the culture around us why absolute tolerance, or what some call hyper-tolerance, might not be a wise choice.*

## Introduction

One of the most damaging charges aimed at Christians today is that we and our religion are intolerant. This is an effective

insult, not because some Christians are indeed intolerant, but because Christianity itself is judged to be an intolerant (meaning lacking in virtue) faith system. The weight of this accusation is compounded by the fact that few things are looked down upon more in our culture than a person or group of people who are perceived to be intolerant. Unfortunately, it is also true that there are few words or ideas that are less well defined or understood in our society than the meaning of the word *tolerance*.



Critics of Christianity, especially of conservative Christians, often equate tolerance with moral virtue and intolerance as an unqualified evil. One admittedly liberal Christian commentator writes, "Conservative Christians have adopted the warrior mentality of Onward Christian Soldiers, and intolerance is nothing to be hidden under a white robe and pointed white hood: it's to be waved proudly as a flag demonstrating Christian rigor and personal rightness."[\[1\]](#) This author argues that conservative Christians have changed the meaning of the word *tolerance* from that of a virtue to that of a sin. She seems to imply that failure to tolerate any and every behavior or idea is a moral evil and that all intolerance is absolutely wrong, or at least that all conservative Christian intolerance is wrong. Since she is obviously intolerant of conservative right-wing Christian intolerance, we might surmise that some intolerance is morally acceptable some of the time, at least in some cases.

If all this is a little confusing, it might be because of the fog in our culture surrounding the meaning of the terms used when discussing the topic. In this article we will investigate the ideas surrounding the tolerance controversy and try to find principles that might help us to communicate to the culture around us why absolute tolerance, or what some call

hyper-tolerance, might not be a wise choice.

You might be thinking that this issue doesn't really matter. Who cares if our culture thinks that Christians are intolerant? It matters because we are Christ's ambassadors, and the way that we are perceived by our neighbors can distort the message of reconciliation with God that we offer. There is no reason to add offense to the message of the Bible. Besides, there is an opportunity to help people to better understand the concept of tolerance and thus help to make a better society for all of us to live in.

We shall see that there are good arguments for promoting true tolerance, and that a better society can be built upon a common understanding of the concept.

## The Meaning of Tolerance

In his book *True Tolerance*, J. Budziszewski writes, "The specific virtue of true tolerance has to do with the fact that sometimes we put up with things we rightly consider mistaken, wrong, harmful, offensive, or in some other way not worth approval."[\[2\]](#) The word tolerance comes from the Latin *tolerare* which means "to bear" and carries with it the idea of a prudent, long-suffering silence. So what are we to make of a U.N. statement issued during its 1995 "Year of Tolerance" which declared tolerance to be "respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human?"[\[3\]](#) Do you notice what is missing? People think that tolerance includes affirmation. But affirmation is not tolerance. When you affirm or accept something, you do not need to tolerate it. Tolerance can only occur when you disagree with something.

Our current confusion has occurred because tolerance has been elevated to a place above all other virtues. Again, Budziszewski writes,

Our most gifted thinkers no longer treat tolerance as a queenly virtue to be guarded among many others equally precious, but as a shrewish virtue that excludes all the rest. For now we are told that the meaning of tolerance is *ethical neutrality*neutrality about which things are worth the love of human beings and which traits of character are worth praising.{4}

Because many in our culture have become skeptical about knowing the difference between what is good and what is evil, they argue that we are left with only two options when it comes to tolerance. We can either be ethically neutral, choosing to value equally all ideas and actions, or be a religious fanatic who claims to have perfect moral knowledge and who tries to impose absolute moral virtues on everyone else.

Actually, ethical neutrality is an impossible and irrational position to defend. Holding the position assumes that one has answered the question, "Why should I be ethically neutral?" Yet the construction of any answer violates the very neutrality being defended.

Another problem with moral skepticism is that the act of tolerance is dependent on some concept of what is morally good. One tolerates behavior or beliefs he or she disagrees with because of a higher or more important good. For instance, even though we believe that Christianity is true and that Christ is the only answer to mankind's problems, we encourage freedom of religion because it is only by freely choosing to believe, and not by force or coercion, that someone comes to true faith. Religious intolerance and coercion can actually cause someone to claim faith in Christ when none exists.

We argue that there is a third option, what we will call "true tolerance." How does this traditional view of tolerance work?

# True Tolerance

Budziszewski argues that ethical neutrality based on moral skepticism is not a reasonable option. He writes, "If a skeptic finds reasons for tolerance, he finds it not by reason of the things he is skeptical about, but by reasons of the things he is not skeptical about."[{5}](#) In other words, one is tolerant because one is not ethically neutral. Someone cannot be neutral about everything and still have a reason to be tolerant because they would be neutral about tolerance as well.

Is there another alternative? There is, what might be called the *traditional* view of tolerance, or what we will call *true tolerance*. Rather than ethical neutrality or a blind appeal to religious authority, true tolerance has to do with making judgments based on a concept of what is "good."

Again Budziszewski writes,

True tolerance is not the art of tolerating; it is the art of knowing when and how to tolerate. It is not the forbearance from judgment, but the fruit of judgment. We may disapprove something for the love of some moral good—yet we may be moved to put up with it from still deeper intuitions about the same moral good or other moral goods, and on such deeper intuitions the discipline of tolerance is based.[{6}](#)

His point is that real tolerance always depends on judgment regarding what one values. It is never the result of moral skepticism. The act of tolerating something is not the heart of the issue. The key to understanding tolerance is to appreciate the process of weighing the different goals or moral ends that might be involved. These moral ends are often separated into three groups. The lowest order of ends includes health, happiness in the generic sense, good repute, peace, beauty and companionship. Next comes what can be called intrinsic goods like virtue and truth. Finally, the highest

order good is the unconditional commitment to one's ultimate concerns or worldview. The confusion surrounding this topic today might be so acute because we have turned this list of moral goods on its head; our society seems to value personal happiness and peace over virtue, truth, and commitment to a faith or worldview.

Even when we do decide to put up with behavior that we disapprove of, we can do so for good or bad reasons. At worst, we might tolerate boorish behavior due to cowardice, at best because of concern for an individual's eternal well-being.

## **The Tolerant Society**

What are some benefits that a society that has learned the virtue of true tolerance enjoys?

First, true tolerance understands that there are always limits to what should be tolerated, and that moral judgment is involved in setting these limits. Even those who endorse moral skepticism, arguing that there is no such thing as moral truth, seem to agree that society must not tolerate everything. They are quick to note their intolerance of slavery, genocide, and other violations of human rights. It is common sense that if tolerance is in fact unlimited, it becomes self-defeating. It would fail to limit the actions of those who are devoted to the destruction of tolerance itself. Muslims who insist on using the tolerance of Western nations to impose Sharia or Islamic law are an example. The defense of a tolerant society requires that it not tolerate certain behaviors, that it learns when to be intolerant.

It has become commonplace in America to label people as intolerant for simply having strongly held beliefs and for defending them against those who hold to contrary opinions. Actually, the "person [who] never disagrees with anyone about anything even when they know that the other person is being

incoherent or dishonest or simply false is not being tolerant but instead is a coward.”<sup>{7}</sup> When we confront people who are dishonest or merely wrong, especially when we do so with gentleness and respect, it shows that we take them and their ideas seriously. It also recognizes that they have real moral agency and that individuals should be held responsible for reasonable moral behavior and for the ideas that they endorse. In their book *The Truth About Tolerance*, Stetson and Conti write, “Confronting people with their own destructive behavior is not a sign of intolerance but is the sign of true compassion.”<sup>{8}</sup> The same can be said for confronting ideas that are false and perhaps even dangerous to society.

While true tolerance encourages open debate, it expects people to defend their views within certain guidelines. Each person is encouraged to defend his or her beliefs about what is good for humanity by using rational arguments; true tolerance expects people to try to persuade others that their views are true. However, that doesn’t mean that others are expected to accept their understandings as true prior to being convinced by their arguments.

Finally, democratic governments allow or tolerate a broad spectrum of behaviors and self-determination rather than imposing totalitarian control. They tend to encourage the open debate of public policy issues like abortion and euthanasia, even by those who hold deep religious convictions about the topic. However, democratic governments are also clear about the behaviors that they do not tolerate by establishing clear legal codes and punishments that correspond with illegal behavior.

## **Is There a Christian Foundation for True Tolerance?**

True tolerance is built into the very fabric of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although it is popular to believe that tolerance



is a modern secular concept, perhaps original to the Enlightenment thinker John Locke, political philosopher J. Budziszewski argues that it is a Christian innovation. Even though Christians are not always obedient or even aware of their heritage, the Christian tradition represents “the source of the very standard by which their intolerant acts could be judged wrong.”[\[9\]](#)

As we mentioned above, true tolerance depends on positive beliefs, not moral skepticism in order to function and make sense. Does Christianity provide a foundation for true tolerance? Actually, it provides the necessary beliefs on a number of levels.

First, Christians are called to imitate the model that Christ Himself gave us. God incarnate came to earth as a humble child giving us the perfect picture of love and tolerance on God’s behalf. The perfect and holy God who created the universe stepped into time and space among sinful and rebellious humans to show His love and to win theirs. Both believers and unbelievers have been moved by the humility and mercy Jesus displayed towards others. His instruction to love your neighbor as yourself and the fact that He offered God’s love to those considered sinful and not worthy of forgiveness sets Him apart from other religious teachers. Jesus didn’t demand moral perfection to gain God’s approval; He offered reconciliation based on His perfect sacrifice. Biblical Christianity recognizes the persistent human aptitude for self-centered behavior, and calls mature believers to battle against it. Paul writes, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”[\[10\]](#)

Secondly, Christianity offers a universal message to every tribe and nation. No distinction is made based on gender, race, or ethnicity. God is calling all people to accept His gift of salvation, and the church should reflect that

multicultural reality. The Judeo-Christian tradition teaches that all people are made in the image of God and are not only important to Him but are redeemable through Christ's blood.

Finally, Christians can be tolerant of both the actions and beliefs of their neighbors because of their worldview or ultimate concerns. The task given to us by God is not to enforce a set of laws or style of worship, but to offer the message of reconciliation in Christ. Instead of separating from the sinful and dangerous culture that God has placed us into, we are sent into the world by Christ to be salt and light so that many might hear the good news and respond to the offer of grace and forgiveness by trusting in Christ's payment for sin.

## Notes

1. Teresa Whitehurst, "The Intolerance of Christian Conservatives," *CounterPunch*, [www.counterpunch.org/whitehurst01252005.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/whitehurst01252005.html).
2. *True Tolerance: Liberalism and the Necessity of Judgment*, J. Budziszewski (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 7.
3. *The Truth About Tolerance*, Brad Stetson and Joseph G. Conti (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 141.
4. Budziszewski, xi.
5. Ibid., 10.
6. Ibid., 7.
7. Stetson and Conti, 144.
8. Ibid., 145.
9. Ibid., 39.
10. Philippians 2:3-4

# Multiculturalism

*Multiculturalism is a politically correct attempt to over-correct cultural bias by elevating all subcultures to equal status.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## What is Multiculturalism?

A few years ago the campus newspaper of a major university published an essay written by two professors titled *The Statement of the Black Faculty Caucus*.<sup>{1}</sup> The purpose of the essay was to define how the University might become a truly multicultural institution. It spoke of empowerment, authority, Western culture, and transformation. The objective of the Black Faculty Caucus was to create a critical mass of empowered “minority people” at all levels of the university system. The essay argued that “Euro-Americans teaching the materials of people of color cannot make the University multicultural because multiculturalism demands empowered people of color as well as empowered areas of knowledge.”<sup>{2}</sup> At the end of their essay the authors wrote, “What we are talking about here is no less than transforming the University into a center of multicultural learning: anything less continues a system of education that ultimately reproduces racism and racists.”<sup>{3}</sup>

Racial reconciliation should be a top priority for every Christian, of any race or cultural background. But will this demand for a “multicultural center of learning” produce a less prejudiced society? Multiculturalists insist on greater sensitivity towards, and increased inclusion of, racial minorities and women in society. Christians should endorse both of these goals. But many advocating multiculturalism go beyond these demands for sensitivity and inclusion; here is where Christians must be careful.

One of the difficulties of accommodating multiculturalists is that defining a multicultural society, curriculum, or institution seems to be determined by one's perspective. A commonly held view suggests that being multicultural involves tolerance towards racial and ethnic minorities, mainly in the areas of dress, language, food, religious beliefs, and other cultural manifestations. However, an influential group calling itself NAME, or the National Association for Multicultural Education, includes in its philosophy statement the following: "Xenophobia, discrimination, racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia are societal phenomena that are inconsistent with the principles of a democracy and lead to the counterproductive reasoning that differences are deficiencies." [\[4\]](#) NAME is a powerful organization composed of educators from around the country, and it has considerable influence on how schools approach the issue of diversity on campus. The fundamental question that the folks at NAME need to answer is, "Is it always counterproductive to reason that some differences might be deficiencies?" In other words, isn't it possible that some of the characteristics of specific culture groups are dangerous or morally flawed (for example, the culture of pedophilia)?

It is not uncommon for advocates of multiculturalism like NAME to begin with the assumption that truth is culturally based. It is argued that a group's language dictates what ideas about God, human nature, and morality are permissible. While Americans may define reality using ideas from its Greek, Roman, and Judeo-Christian heritage, Asian or African cultures see the world differently based on their traditions. Multiculturalists conclude that since multiple descriptions of reality exist, no one view can be true in any ultimate sense. Furthermore, since truth is a function of language, and all language is created by humans, all truth is created by humans. This view of truth and language has a spokesperson in Dr. Richard Rorty, humanities professor at the University of Virginia, who argues that truth that transcends culture is not

available because “where there are no sentences there is no truth, and sentences and their respective languages are human creations.”[\[5\]](#)

Finally, if all truth is created by humans, it is all equally true. Cultural ideas or institutions, like human sacrifice or welfare systems, are equally valid if they are useful for a given group of people. In other words, we live in a universe that is blind to moral choices. We are the final judges of how we shall live.

As Christians, we believe that ideas do have consequences. While being careful not to promote one set of cultural rules over others simply because we are comfortable with them, we acknowledge that Scripture reveals to us the character and nature of God, humankind, and our need for a savior. These truths can be communicated cross-culturally in a sensitive way, regardless of the people-group involved. If we didn't believe this to be true in a universal sense, then Christianity can't be true in any real way. In other words, in order to be what it claims to be, Christianity must transcend culture in a way that many multiculturalists argue cannot occur.

## **Language and Sensitivity**

In recent years, America has been attracting over one million immigrants annually. This has resulted in a country that is religiously, racially, and linguistically more diverse. Conflict arises, however, over the question of how our nation's institutions should respond to this diversity. Until recently, it was argued that America was a melting pot society, that regardless of an immigrant's origin, given a generation or two, his family would be assimilated into American culture. Multiculturalists have challenged both the reality and advisability of this view.

Multiculturalists brand our culture as white, Western, male,

Christian, middle-class and heterosexual. They declare that our schools have forced on students a curriculum that promotes only that perspective. The books they read, the ideas they consider, the moral and ethical standards they are taught, explicitly or implicitly, tend to be those of dead white European males. The problem, they argue, is that this leaves out the contributions of many people. People of color, women, homosexuals, and various religious traditions are ignored and thus silenced. As a result, they contend, what passes for knowledge on campus is biased. Their goal is to correct this bias.

This charge of bias is not a groundless one. Even though many feel that Western culture has been very open to outside ideas, all majorities—in any society—will tend to seek cultural dominance.

The resulting multiculturalist agenda includes three demands on American society. The first is that the white Americans become more sensitive to minorities. This demand has resulted in what is referred to as “politically correct language.” Speech codes enforcing sensitivity on college campuses have attempted to protect oppressed groups from having to endure words and ideas that might ostracize them. At the center of this issue is the individual’s feelings or self-esteem. The multiculturalists argue that if a person’s self-esteem is damaged, he or she cannot learn in school.

Christians ought to be the most sensitive people in society. If calling people handicapped, Black, or Indian makes them feel diminished in importance or somehow less human, we as Christians need to be empathetic and make changes in our use of language. This sensitivity should grow out of a sense of biblical humility, not for political or economic reasons.

But another question still must be answered. Will the enforced use of certain words really benefit the self-esteem and thus the learning of minority students in schools, as some have

suggested? Dr. Paul Vitz, professor of psychology at New York University, argues that this is a far too simplistic view of human nature.<sup>[6]</sup> Self-esteem itself cannot be tied directly to any behavior, positive or negative.

Some contend that enforcing “politically correct speech” is an attempt to redescribe our society in a manner that changes the way we think about issues. If the concepts of personal and family responsibility become labeled as hate speech towards those on welfare, an entire way of looking at the issue is forced out of the dialogue.

Unfortunately, language can also be used to legitimize behavior that Christians believe to be morally wrong. Homosexuality has progressively been referred to as a sin, then a disease, a lifestyle, and now a preference or sexual orientation. Just by re-describing this activity in new terms, an entirely different connotation is given to what homosexuality is. This has not occurred by accident.

Hebrews 12:14 tells us to make every effort to be at peace with all men. As we articulate truth, our language should lean towards gentleness and respect, for the sake of the Gospel. When we believe that every person deserves to be shown respect because we are all created in the image of God, our attitude will result in language and tone that is sensitive and gentle—not because political correctness demands it, but because out of a heart of love flow words of love.

## **Inclusion and Truth**

A second demand being made on our schools and society is in the area of inclusiveness. Multiculturalists contend that marginalized people need to be brought into the curriculum and the marketplace of ideas on campus. No group should ever have to feel left out. One example is the recent set of standards offered by UCLA’s National Center for History in the Schools. As originally offered, the standards greatly increased the

voice of both minorities and women in the telling of our nation's history. However, many charge that they denigrated or ignored the contributions of white Americans in order to be inclusive. In fact, some complained that the overall picture of America produced by the standards was of an oppressive, WASPish empire. Even the U.S. Senate denounced the proposed standards by a vote of 99 to 1. One Senator voted against the resolution because it wasn't strong enough.

The standards declared that the U.S. is not a Western-based nation, but the result of three cultures. These cultures—Native American, African-American and European—are not seen as moral equals. In fact, the European contribution was one of oppression, injustice, gender bias and rape of the natural world. Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, responded to the standards by saying that “No other nation in the world teaches a national history that leaves its children feeling negative about their own country—this would be the first.”[\[7\]](#)

In fact, U.S. history textbooks have been moving toward inclusion for some time. In order to make up for the neglect of women and people of color in past texts, some historians and publishers have gone a bit overboard in their attempts at finding the right balance. In one text, *The American Nation*, of the 13 religious leaders mentioned in short biographies, only two are non-Hispanic white males—Brigham Young and Ralph Waldo Emerson.[\[8\]](#) Often women and minorities are injected into the text in odd ways. In this book, Senator Margaret Chase Smith is cited for challenging Senator Joseph McCarthy. While she was an early critic of McCarthy, she had little to do with his eventual political demise. Another example is Native American chief George Crum, noted for making the first potato chips in 1853.

The writing of history is a delicate task, and is probably impossible to accomplish without bias. But as Christians, we would prefer that truth—what really happened—at least be the



goal, rather than political or racial propaganda, even if this goal will never be perfectly accomplished. This notion of truth demands that students be taught as much U.S. history as feasible. To leave out the experience of Native Americans, African-Americans or women would be a tremendous failure. But writing our entire history from their perspective is unfair as well. One answer to this problem is to have students read more primary historical documents and depend less on history textbooks. Unfortunately, multiculturalists see all texts as primarily political. They argue that only one view prevails: either the empowered majority's or the oppressed minority's. This belief that all knowledge is political results in turning schools into battlegrounds where representatives from every group, from Hispanics to gay rights activists, go over the curriculum with a magnifying glass, looking for the proper amount of inclusion or any derogatory remarks made about their group.

## **Tolerance as a Worldview**

Many multiculturalists insist that we embrace multiculturalism in our schools not just in the way we teach, but in the way we think. Multiculturalists have specific ideas about the notion of truth; paramount is the belief that no truth transcends culture, that no idea or moral concept might be true for every cultural group or every human being. As a result, multiculturalists demand that we give up our beliefs in moral absolutes and become moral relativists.

This worldview model has been the litmus test for college professors on many campuses for quite some time, particularly in the humanities. Evidently, in some programs it is now being applied to college students as well. In 1992, St. Cloud (Minn.) State University made it known that if students were to be accepted, those who desired to enter the social work program must relinquish specific notions of moral truth. While acknowledging that many students come from religious

backgrounds that do not accept homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle, these very students were required to go beyond "hating the sin and loving the sinner." Students who had predetermined negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians were told to look elsewhere for a major. In other words, one must, at the level of faith commitment, find no moral aversion to homosexuality in order to be admitted to this program. This removes a majority of our population from consideration right off the bat.

Part of the problem with multiculturalism is that it allows for a broad definition of cultural groups. There is both a gay culture and a feminist culture in America. In fact, any group can identify itself as a marginalized culture group. The homeless become a cultural group, as do single mothers on welfare. Should their perspectives get equal treatment in our schools? Are their moral values as valid as all others? The problem is that to be considered multiculturally sensitive, one must be able to place oneself into the perspective of the oppressed group completely, at the metaphysical level, not just to sympathize or even empathize with them. This means that one must be willing to compromise faith-based beliefs about God, human nature, and reality itself. For instance, if the gay community, being an oppressed minority group, believes that being homosexual is natural and every bit as normal as heterosexual relationships, Christians should ignore what they believe to be revealed truth about homosexuality's sinfulness.

Christians are called to have mercy and compassion on the poor and less fortunate, but not at the expense of recognizing that some lifestyles result in the impoverishment of people regardless of their race or cultural heritage. What is being asked of Christians is that we give up our view of a universe governed by a moral God who has established a moral universe, and replace it with a morally relativistic one. Tolerance becomes the only absolute. To be exclusive about truth, or to argue that some action might be morally wrong for all people

all the time, violates this new absolute of tolerance.

Ultimately, this current enforcement of tolerance is really a thinly veiled pursuit of power. The only way certain groups, such as homosexual activists or the more radical feminists, can get recognition and the ability to spread their views, is by establishing tolerance as an absolute. Eventually, they win affirmative action concessions from universities and public schools, which enforces their viewpoint. Recently, the state of Massachusetts passed legislation recognizing the difficulties of gay elementary and secondary students, forcing all public school teachers to be educated and sensitized to their plight. This recognition and re-education of teachers further legitimizes and enhances the power of the gay rights movement.

Without losing sight of our calling to reach out and minister to people caught in lifestyles and cultures that vaunt themselves against the knowledge and standards of God, we cannot become moral relativists in the process.

## **Justice and Truth**

While multiculturalists occasionally refer to justice, it cannot be the foundation of their movement. This is for the simple reason that justice is not possible without truth. In order to claim that someone's actions or words are unjust, one must assume that a moral order really does exist, a moral order that would be true for all cultures and at all times. Injustice implies that justice exists, justice implies that moral laws exist, and moral laws imply that a lawgiver exists.

One college professor, explaining his plan for a liberal ironist utopia, says that a liberal is someone who thinks that being cruel is the worst thing that one can do. He argues that this moral standard can be used to create a utopia on earth. But he admits, being a good moral relativist, that he cannot give any non-circular arguments for why being cruel is the

worst thing one can do. He is inventing a moral law, but admitting that its foundation lies only in his preference for that law.

Even if we accept his moral standard as useful, it leaves us with many questions. The first is, what does it mean to be cruel? Is it cruel to encourage people in their gay lifestyle given the short life span of male homosexuals, even without AIDS?[\[9\]](#) If pain is part of our definition of cruelty, should all operations be banned because even if successful, pain might result? How can he know that being cruel is the worst thing one can do in a morally neutral universe? Without truth, without knowledge of right and wrong, justice is impossible, as is any notion of a good life. The word “cruel” becomes an empty word.

By declaring tolerance an absolute, multiculturalists are consistent with their view of reality. They see all human cultures as morally equal because of their faith in a naturalistic world view. This view argues for a godless universe, and recognizes chance as the only possible cause for what exists. If this is true, absolute tolerance is the best we can hope for. Christians seek sensitivity and inclusion for a much better reason.

We believe that every human being was created in God’s image and reflects God’s glory and majesty. We were created to have dominion over God’s creation as His stewards. Thus, we are to care for others because they are ultimately worthy of our care and concern. We are not to be cruel to others because the Creator of the universe made individuals to have fellowship with Him and He cares for them. This does not discount that people are fallen and in rebellion against God. In fact, if we really care about people we will take 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 seriously. First, that God has made reconciliation with Himself possible through His Son Jesus Christ, and as verse 20 says, “..he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were

making his appeal through us.”

True sensitivity and inclusion will not be achieved by making tolerance an absolute. They occur when we take what people believe, and the consequences of those beliefs, seriously. When you think about it, what could be crueler than failing to inform people of the Gospel of redemption through Christ, leaving them to spend eternity separated from the Creator God who loves them?

## Notes

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3. Ibid., 257.
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6. Guinness, Os & Seel, John, ed. *No God But God*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 96.
7. Leo, John “History standards are bunk” *U.S. News & World Report* February 6, 1995, 23.
8. Ibid.
9. Dr. Paul Cameron, *Family Research* (Newsletter of the Family Research Institute, Inc.), April-June 1991.

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# The New Absolutes

*William Watkins' book The New Absolutes says that Americans are not relativists, we're actually absolutists. Rather than abandoning absolutes, we're adopting new ones in place of the old.*

## Reality in the Balance

When Christians take a stand on a given moral issue—on abortion, for instance—what are some typical responses? Someone might say, “What right do you have to push *your* morality on the rest of us?” Or, “Abortion might be wrong for you, but it's not for me.”

What these people are implying is that such beliefs are *relative*; that is, they are related to something else—an individual's desires or circumstances, for example. Because people change through time, however, something that is true or good for a person today might not be so tomorrow. Nothing is true or good for all people at all times.

Have you noticed, however, that many of the same people who claim that truth and morality are relative can be found denouncing certain political views, or actively pushing the social acceptance of a formerly rejected lifestyle, or fighting for new rights in one area or another?

Author William Watkins *has* noticed, and he's recorded his thoughts in a new book titled, *The New Absolutes*. Watkins believes that despite the rhetoric, Americans are in fact *not* relativists; we are in reality *absolutists*. He says that, rather than *abandoning* absolutes, we are simply adopting *new* ones to replace the *old*.

It is now believed, Watkins says, "that truth and error, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, normal and abnormal, and a host of other judgments are determined by the individual, . . . circumstances, or . . . culture. . . . There is no transcendent God or universal natural law we can point to that can inform us about who we are, what our world is like, and how we should get along in it."

What is the source of this thinking? Watkins points to three elements: a loss of belief in absolute truth, a strong belief in tolerance, and a detachment from people and institutions as a result of pessimism and distrust.

If Americans have concluded that ideas and morals are relative, however, why does Watkins say Americans are really absolutists? We are betrayed, he says, by our behavior.

Evidence that Watkins is right is seen in the glut of lawsuits in the courts, calls for law and order in politics, moral outrage over various offenses, cries for human rights, and the spreading of liberal democratic ideas to other countries. Americans have an idea of what is right, and we think others should agree with us. This is not relativism.

More significant, though, is how an absolutist mentality is seen in those who typically espouse relativism. For example, those who scream the loudest for *tolerance* often restrict others to saying and doing only what is politically correct. In the name of *pluralism* secularists push religion out of the public square. And *multiculturalists* condemn the West for its cultural practices. It seems that what is sauce for the goose is *not* sauce for the gander.

The average American who has come to accept relativistic notions of truth and morality might fairly be accused of being only inconsistent. But those who are real activists in the current fight for cultural change must bear the charge of blatant hypocrisy.

# Old Absolutes vs. New Absolutes

In his book *The New Absolutes*, William Watkins contrasts ten traditional beliefs (old absolutes) with the ten beliefs that are replacing them (new absolutes). Though these new beliefs might not be “absolutes” in a strict, philosophical sense, they *function* as absolutes in contemporary society.

In this essay I'll look at three issues Watkins discusses—pro-life versus pro-death beliefs, religion in the public square, and political correctness and tolerance—to see if, indeed, the social activists mentioned earlier are really the relativists they claim to be. As we consider these topics, I think you'll come to agree with Watkins that the culture war is not being fought between absolutists and relativists, but between two groups of absolutists.

## Death: What a Beautiful Choice

First, let's consider the pro-life versus pro-death question.

According to Watkins, the *old* absolute was: “Human life from conception to natural death is sacred and worthy of protection.” The *new* absolute is: “Human life, which begins and ends when certain individuals or groups decide it does, is valuable as long as it is wanted.”

Two issues which bring this new belief to the fore are *abortion* and *physician-assisted suicide*. Few practices are as fiercely opposed or defended as abortion. Opponents say abortion is morally wrong for all people. Proponents say it is a matter of individual choice. Physician-assisted suicide draws similar responses.

It is easy to overstate the thinking of those espousing the new absolute of the value of life. Probably very few would say that they “love death” or would think of death as a “good” thing ranking up there, say, with riches and great health and freedom. Rather, death is more often thought of simply as the



lesser of two evils.

Nevertheless, there *are* many who think of death as a positive thing, as something to be embraced, as the best answer to suffering or to certain hardships of life that many people experience.

Whether they think of death as a good thing or not, however, they think of it as a right not to be tampered with. It is rooted, they say, in a Constitutional “right to privacy.”

In claiming this right, however, any foundation in relativistic thinking must be abandoned. For the very “right” proponents claim is itself an *absolute*. They are saying that the right of individuals to decide for themselves should be observed by everyone else. When they say it is wrong for pro-lifers to try to press their beliefs on others, they are stating an absolute. If they say that the value of human life is a matter of its quality rather than of intrinsic worth, they are stating another absolute.

Some relativists will try to wriggle out of the charge of absolutism by saying that their position might be right for now but not necessarily for all times and all places. Nonetheless, their ideas about the value of human life and the option of death as a solution to human suffering function as absolutes in our society today.

Watkins is correct. The stubbornness of abortion advocates and assisted-suicide proponents in defending their “rights” is good evidence for the claim that Americans, despite all the talk, are not relativists after all.

## **Freedom From Religion**

It used to be held that “religion is the backbone of American culture, providing the moral and spiritual light needed for public and private life.” Now, according to Watkins, we have a *new* absolute: “Religion is the bane of public life, so for the

public good it should be banned from the public square.”

Certainly there are those who are this adamant about the place of religion. These are the ones who raise a fuss when a prayer is uttered at a public school graduation ceremony or who complain when a nativity scene is set up on public property at Christmas.

Probably the majority of Americans are not this combative about the issue. However, for a variety of reasons many believe religion should be kept separate from public life .

One reason is a misunderstanding of the First Amendment. We have been told over and over again that the separation of church and state requires that the government must not be involved with religious matters in any way. The new absolute is this: religion and public policy should be kept separate.

We don't often notice, however, that strict “separationists” do not talk much about our nation's beginnings. A study of our founding documents shows that religion was an integral part of Americans' lives; references to the Bible and Christian beliefs are often cited in the construction of our new government. Amazingly enough, the writers of the Constitution did not see in it the “wall of separation” current interpreters do.

Another reason people think religion should be kept a private matter is a misunderstanding about religion itself. Having been “schooled” in relativistic thinking, many (perhaps most) Americans believe that whatever they believe is true *for them*, but not necessarily for other people.

But this cannot be so. Religions provide an explanation of what is ultimately *real*. Either there is one true God or there is not. Either there is salvation through Jesus, or there is enlightenment through meditation, or there is some other way to find fulfillment. Not all of these can be true *in reality*.

This issue gets really tangled up when we bring in the matter of rights. The idea that everyone has the right to worship as he or she chooses has been transformed to mean that each person's choice of religion is true. "I have the right to believe as I wish" becomes "My belief is as true as yours." The fact that I believe something makes it true.

But is that how things work in other areas of life? If I believe that I am a millionaire, does that make me one? With respect to religion, does believing there is a God put Him there? Or does believing there is no God produce a god-less universe?

The new absolutism with respect to religion is a very real concern for many Americans. As Christians we are taught that our beliefs have meaning for all of life, not just for the prayer closet, yet bringing such beliefs out into the public arena has brought some Christians great difficulty.

It is ironic that, in a nation which began with a strong desire for the free expression of religious beliefs, people are now being forced more and more to leave their beliefs at home.

Does this sound like relativism to you?

## **The Politically Correct Life**

The hypocrisy of the new absolutism is seen more clearly than anywhere else in what is now called "political correctness" or PC for short.

To be politically correct is to be in line with certain ideals promoted by the new cultural reformers, ideals such as abortion rights, multiculturalism, gender feminism, and homosexual rights. To say or do anything which goes against these ideals is to be politically incorrect.

It is easier to understand PC if we think of it as the end of

a chain of thinking.

First is the acceptance of relativism, the idea that there are no absolutes. This belief, taken with our democratic idea of equality, results in the belief that everyone's beliefs and choices are equal or equally valid. There should be no discrimination against other beliefs or lifestyles. This is the *new tolerance*, the prime virtue of the new reformers.

When history is viewed from this perspective, it seems clear that history is the story of the strong taking advantage of the weak. The weak—or disadvantaged—are victims who now require extra help to attain their rightful place of equality. Merely belonging to a victimized group is enough to expect this extra help regardless of whether a given individual has been victimized. The advantaged must now be sensitive to the "needs" of the disadvantaged to avoid making them feel any more victimized and must work to protect their rights. Finally, the advantaged must not do or say anything which could be interpreted as differentiating the disadvantaged, of showing them as different in a negative way. Being sensitive to the plight of the "oppressed" and avoiding doing or saying anything which might make them feel marginalized or inadequate or looked down upon . . . this is *political correctness*.

It is certainly true that there have been and are people who oppress others. This must be opposed. The problem with political correctness, however, lies in over-correcting the wrong.

For example, in *The New Absolutes*, William Watkins lists some words some real estate agents learn to shun in an effort to avoid offending potential buyers. *Executive* has racist overtones since most executives are white. *Sports enthusiast* might make the disabled feel left out. *Master bedroom* creates images of slavery. *Walk-in closet* could offend people who can't walk.

Author Stan Gaede [pronounced Gay-dee], in his book *When Tolerance Is No Virtue*, says that “the overt goal of PC . . . is to enforce a uniform standard of tolerance, regardless of race, gender, cultural background or sexual orientation. The problem is that the items on this list . . . are not precisely parallel to each other. Though each is the basis for discrimination in our society, they involve very different kinds of issues. So the question immediately becomes: What does it mean to be tolerant *in each case*? . . . PC allows each group to define tolerance for itself.”

We have now come full circle. The relativism which purportedly undergirds the new tolerance gives way to exactly what it was trying to be rid of, namely, absolutes. That is, the reformers make their own ideals the new guidelines for society. We are all expected to abide by them. These are the new absolutes.

How should Christians respond to all this? Next, we’ll look at how the new absolutes are promoted, and we’ll think about how we might respond.

## **Absolutely For the Common Good**

It’s a myth that America is a relativistic society. The truth is, Americans are a very moralistic people. What is alarming, however, is how cultural reformers are seeking to establish new absolutes which go against traditional ones. Watkins shows how these reformers are setting up new rules we all must follow.

How shall we understand the contradiction between claims of relativism on the one hand, and the imposition of new absolutes on the other? Watkins believes the claim to relativism is an attempt “to rationalize . . . misbehavior and disarm . . . critics.” For example, individuals might fall back on relativism to justify sexual activity once held to be deviant. However, the supposed relativist quickly becomes an absolutist when he wants *others* to agree with *him* on a given

idea or issue.

But if everything is relative, how are relativists able to convince others of the rightness of their own beliefs? They can't appeal to a foundation of unchanging realities and objective truths and be consistent with their relativism.

So how do they do it? Calling opponents names, "fundamentalist" is a popular term, or repeating simplistic clichés—"safe, legal abortion" for example—are a couple of their favorite means. The media play a strong role in this process, especially television. Captivating images, clever writing, strategically placed laugh tracks, and other elements persuasively convey ideas without logical reasoning.

It is crucial that we step back to see what this situation sets us up for. If we are conditioned to be persuaded by sloganeering rather than by rational discourse, we are prepared to be taken in by any smooth talker. All our clamor for rights and for the authority of the individual has the unexpected result of preparing us to lose our freedoms at the hands of charismatic tyrants.

What can we do to turn things around?

First, Watkins believes that reality itself is on our side. The new absolutes go against the way the universe is. Many women who opt for childlessness, for example, find themselves late in life confronting their own maternal instincts. We can point out these facts to those who believe we can do anything we want and get along quite nicely.

Second, we can learn to recognize sloganeering and insist that the cultural reformers use sound reason when promoting their ideals.

Third, we can point to the hypocrisy of so-called relativists. Homosexuals who barge in on church services demanding tolerance for their lifestyle must see how intolerant *they*

are. Those who demand freedom of thought and expression cannot reasonably exclude religious beliefs from public discourse.

As strange as it might sound at first, William Watkins calls us to a renewed *intolerance*. He says, "We must violate the new tolerance and become people marked by intolerance. Not an intolerance that unleashes hate upon people, but an intolerance that's unwilling to allow error to masquerade as truth. An intolerance that calls evil *evil* and good *good*."

To reestablish the old absolutes, Watkins calls for the acknowledgment of certain beliefs, such as: all life is precious; relativism is false; the moral law is real; and, religion is essential. A return to these basics will return us to sound public policy-making, to greater civil order, and to moral progress.

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