

Jacob Neusner & Bruce Chilton (eds.), *Religious Tolerance in World Religions* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 396 pp., ISBN 978-1-59947-136-5, \$39.95

The term ‘tolerance’ has fallen on tough times. People who prefer intolerance, policies of ‘zero tolerance,’ or claim not to tolerate the intolerant or the intolerable are only partly responsible. They share culpability with those who call for moving *Beyond Tolerance* (as Gustav Niebuhr and others have titled several recent books) to deeper and fuller attitudes of acceptance, affirmation, respect, and celebration of all myriad, manner, and variety of diversity.

Yet some religious and nonreligious people balk at what they see as indiscriminate approbation of ideas, activities, or worship they deem false or improper. It may be difficult, if not impossible, to celebrate features of faiths or ideologies that perceptibly contradict or oppose one’s own. When communities have experienced decades, centuries, or millennia of discord, ambivalent or tolerant coexistence could be “as good as it gets,” at least for a time. Where affirmation is impracticable, toleration and coexistence for adherents of differing or conflicting religions and ideologies should be considered indispensable in a spiritually diverse world.

Jacob Neusner, Bruce Chilton, and other contributors address such dissonances in *Religious Tolerance in World Religions* by inspecting political, scriptural, historical, theological, and ritual resources for tolerance (and to a lesser degree, intolerance) in ancient Greece, Rome, and Israel; classical and contemporary Judaism, Christianity, Mormonism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Neusner and Chilton define tolerance as the capacity to live alongside different religious traditions, including possibilities for nonbelievers to be “accorded an honorable position within the social order” (p. vii). They preface by acknowledging that American, British, and Canadian expressions of religious tolerance owe a special debt to Christianity.

Religious Tolerance in World Religions collates sixteen essays and an “Ancient Sources” index. It continues Neusner and Chilton’s longtime collaboration in related compendiums such as *Jewish-Christian Debates* (Fortress, 2000), *Altruism in World Religions* (Georgetown, 2005), and *The Golden Rule: Ethics and Reciprocity in World Religions* (Continuum, 2008).

In part one, “Questions about Religious Toleration,” Judaism scholar William Scott Green analyzes present-day religious tolerance in South Korea, Peru, the United States, India, Israel, and Saudi Arabia as reported by Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. Green appeals to “religious exclusivism” as his criteria, integrating assertions like, “my religion offers the one true path to God and success in the next life,” with levels of approval for interfaith marriage and views on whether people of different faiths are “equal” (p. 4). Green’s inquiry does not appear to delineate specific conceptions or standards for equality.

Parts two and three probe ancient Israel, Greece, and Rome. Baruch A. Levine focuses on the Hebrew Scriptures. Carolyn Dewald delves into myth and literature in the *Illiad*, the writings of Herodotus, Aristophanes, and Greek Philosophy. Robert M. Berchman explores “Roman political tolerance of foreign cults” (p. 64). Kevin Corrigan scans Greco-Roman religious ritual, magic, and “philosophy as ritual” (p. 117) drawing parallels with classic and later writers from Philo to Gregory of Nyssa, and Jacques Derrida. Corrigan exhorts that we “allow ourselves to be *transformed* by superior practices of other religions and other ages” (p. 121, italics in original).

Parts four through seven interact with Christianity (including Mormonism), then Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Bruce Chilton looks at Jesus’ radical love juxtaposed with ostensibly dissonant passages in the Gospel of Matthew and compared with the second-century Christian, Justin Martyr. William Reiser presents modern Catholic tolerance through the lens of the Vatican II Council. Danny L. Jorgensen works to reconcile tolerance with “exclusivity” in Mormon theology, designates levels of bliss and punishment in the hereafter, and advocates for seeing all people as “embryonic gods” (p. 187). Neusner appeals to Jewish Biblical and rabbinic sources where he discerns no tolerance for false religion, but significant potential for the salvation of “ex-Gentiles” who recognize the one true God at the end of time (p. 218). Alan J. Avery-Peck outlines Jewish prescriptions for tolerance in Jewish-Gentile relations.

Regarding Islam, Ibrahim Kalin and Ismael Acar examine harsh and positive Qur’anic portrayals of the “People of the Book” (Jews, Christians, Sabians, and Zoroastrians), attributing tensions within the Qur’an to political and other factors in the assorted contexts and time periods in which Muslims believe various portions of the Qur’an were revealed. Kalin distinguishes the sometimes favorable depictions of “People of the Book” with Meccan pagans and polytheism, “which Islam rejects *in toto*” (p. 264, italics in original). Vincent J. Cornell insists that Islamic legal sources and Hadith (the “second scripture of Islam,” p. 281) enliven this conversation.

In part seven on Hinduism and Buddhism, Kristin Scheible investigates “The Case of King Ashoka” as a Buddhist exemplar of tolerance. Bradley S. Clough conveys how Buddhists can conversely descend into intolerance and militancy in, “The Case of Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism.” Richard S. Davis concludes by scrutinizing Jawaharlal Nehru in the twentieth century and literary portrayals of Hindu deities Krishna and Siva as models of tolerance.

Neusner and Chilton assemble an astute selection in *Religious Tolerance in World Religions*, yet future editions and compilations could be improved in the following ways. First, a conclusion bringing the material together would extend and complement the short two-page preface as well as the book as a whole. An aphorism for composing essays, sermons and other speeches is apropos: “First, I will tell you what I am going to tell you. Then I will tell you. Finally, I will tell