

AMERICAN HERETICS

CATHOLICS, JEWS, MUSLIMS, AND THE
HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

PETER GOTTSCHALK



American Heretics

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Religious Intolerance

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FOREWORD BY MARTIN E. MARTY



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*This book is dedicated to all the generations of my family
especially my parents
Rudolf and Babette Gottschalk
who taught me
to question
and care*

MORMONS AND INDIANS

The reported alliance between the Mormons and Indians, which forms the subject of Mr. Nara's cartoon, creates great excitement in Arizona and New Mexico. Scouts and other well-informed persons assert that the Mormons are furnishing the Indians with arms, ammunition, provisions, and clothing, and that there is a prospect of a general uprising in the spring. Secretary Knowlton has instructed the United States Indian agents to exercise the utmost diligence to ascertain the exact truth of these charges, and to promptly report any evidence of interference with the tribes under their control.

EXILES FROM RUSSIA

The Jewish exiles from Russia, to which we referred last week, promise to achieve great importance. The number to be no prospect of any abatement in the cruel persecutions to which they are subjected by their ignorant and barbarous hosts, and they are looking toward the West for a new land of promise. A company of three hundred of these refugees from the reign of Czarism, who arrived in Liverpool on the 10th inst., and a portion of the chief rabbi in London affirm that tens of thousands of like exiles will probably seek new homes and freedom from persecution within the present year. He says that constant work will be necessary to assist them in acquiring to keep their heads, and in providing for their immediate wants.

A large number of these unfortunate people, driven from home by the most cruel and relentless hatred, have already found refuge in Gloucester. They have been kindly received by their countrymen here, who have manifested the greatest sympathy in their distress, and aiding them to reach their destination in the West.

THE WATER-COLOR ARTISTS

The landscape artists are particularly well represented in the present Water-color Exhibition, and their work is of unusual interest. With the better knowledge that has been gained of the technical

advances of water-color painting, its scope and best uses, there has been manifested a great improvement in the general direction and purpose of the work. The qualities of water-color that constitute its principal charm—its tenderness and freshness of tint, delicacy of tone, and the finer gradations and variety of atmosphere that are conveyed by the use of transparent color. These qualities are attained only by the most faithful reference to nature herself; they are the result of the most conscientious study in the presence of the objects in nature that it is sought to represent.

the uses of the artist as anything contained in the older countries. The best landscapes in our present exhibition, which contain the best showing of art that this country has yet made, are those that are the most simple in their subjects and the most restricted in their themes. It needs no exhaustive scrutiny to determine this, but it is interesting and instructive to look into the evidence of it that is afforded by the work of A. H. WELLS, J. F. HAYDEN, J. M. SPENCER, D. M. BRYANT, C. WILSON, F. H. SMITH, S. PEARCE, C. VAN BROOKHUIS, A. QUARLES, G. H. SWANER, C. M. DREW, B. CLAY, and others. Among the most successful, vigorous, and effective



"WHEN THE SPRING-TIME COMES, GENTLE"—INDIAN!

POURBAWS BARBARAS. "Much guns, much ammunition, much whiskey, and much kill pale-face."

sent, and in the fullest sympathy with and feeling for the condition under which nature happens to reveal them. The most completely successful in the work of art, where the representation has been faithfully sought, possess a far greater effect than the most elaborate efforts of the self-indulgent artist, however much the latter may delight therein by their decorative charms or by the beauty of composition that they may contain.

With the knowledge acquired of what they could not or might not do, our artists naturally have become less pretentious in their choice of subjects, seeking the picturesque rather than the conventional, and composing themselves with individual receptivity of more intimate study. Once turned in this direction, they have specially become aware of the picturesque value of the material at their very doors, in association with which they have grown up, but of which they had before remained wholly unconscious. There had been exceptions, of course, of some American artists working faithfully at home, unawares of any particular medium, and in the annual displays abroad as their merit. In the present Venice, Milan, and Lyons, where of French art from Britain, and selected exhibitions from the Orient. These were far from deficient in effect and response, indicative instead of original, and in no sense American. After a weary probation of them, it is a relief to find that the wharves, the houses, the streets, and the bay of even a place so near as New York, the woods, meadows, and common haunts of the country land by situated all north to those have a beauty and picturesque interest that are all their own, and that are as valuable for



Mormons, Indians, and Jews, as depicted in Harper's Weekly (February 18, 1882). Courtesy of Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-105116.

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Foreword

Since “heresy” derives from the Greek word for “choosing” or “choice,” we may think of heretics as choosers. Americans in this sense are all choosy, since, however they got to where they are, be it religiously or anti-religiously, they are free to be something else, and millions put that freedom to work. On those terms, every American, even one who chooses to stay put with an inherited, established faith or converts to a new faith community or a non-faith, can be a heretic in the eyes and minds of those who have made other choices.

That word “other” is what gets us heretics into trouble. In this book that other may be a witch or a Quaker, a Sioux who dances the Ghost Dance or the Irish Catholic, who dances to her own tunes. Jews have been the other to American Christians for more than three centuries, so, in Gottschalk’s observation and analysis, they were long victims because they had made the wrong choice of parents. To complete his mini-roll-call of choosers—the author chose his examples well—he focuses on those who *really* upset neighbors who were settled into what they had considered to be sameness. The upsetters *were* different, often apart in their “sects” or “cults”—now politically classified as NRMs, members of New Religious Movements.

To majorities who feared them, wished they would go away, or victimized them, it was usually the intensity of the faith of the other that agitated them. So they were labeled fanatics. Peter Finley Dunne, an Irish-American humorist, defined “a fanatic is a man that does what he thinks the Lord would do if He knew the facts of the case.”¹ Often those who opposed such fanatics took up the weapons of fanaticism themselves.

With myriad examples for a religion-scholar like Gottschalk to choose from, we who read him will judge the book in part by the choices he made and his explanation of why all this matters. His stories are attractive, but the author has a serious purpose and little time to call readers’ attention to it. We re-learn that there is trouble whenever we as citizens are prejudiced and intolerant, especially when we put our prejudices to work at the expense of others. Ignorance and hatred of others are dangerous in our crowded, weapon-filled world.

Just when readers are ready to ask how can we do better? Gottschalk accommodates them with a capital-lettered version of that question: “How Can We Do Better?” It heads the last chapter which the author and many others of us hope can become the

impetus to find new ways to move beyond the suspicion and hatred that plague the republic time and again. To reinforce his point, let's try italics: *We Can Do Better*. And that chapter suggests how.

Martin E. Marty
Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Professor Emeritus,
The University of Chicago

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Introduction

I was raised an Islamophobe.

I was brought up to be scared of Muslims and of Islam. When I imagined Muslims, I pictured men with beards, wearing flowing white garments, sometimes with guns in their hands.

When I write that I was raised this way, I don't mean that my parents instilled these lessons in my head (in fact, they would be responsible for important experiences that undermined my stereotypes). Children are not only brought up by their parents and immediate family, but by larger society as well. The society in which I was raised in the 1960s and '70s saw Muslims through the lens of a series of conflicts: the 1973 oil embargo by OPEC, the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis, and the various Arab-Israeli conflicts. It communicated these negative stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims (usually and incorrectly depicting one as necessarily the other) through entertainment and news media: scimitar-wielding oil ministers in political cartoons, ill-shaven terrorists in television dramas, leering men lusting to add women to their harems in Hollywood films, and perennially violent Muslim-majority countries in newspaper and news reports.

Only by fortuitous circumstances did my views of Muslims gradually change. In my early twenties, opportunities arose both to visit Saudi Arabia, where my parents worked at the time, and to live among Muslims (as well as Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians) for six months during a visit to India. In preparation for these overseas excursions, I took a college course on Islam with John Esposito, one of America's handful of Islamic scholars at the time. All of this primed me for a signal moment that changed how I viewed Muslims. While sparring good-naturedly with a friend about the characteristics of Islam, Steve said, "Peter, do you hear what you're saying? You're saying that more than a billion Muslims are inherently violent." Having my long-held but never fully elucidated belief spoken back to me and held up to the light of reason, I realized how ridiculous it sounded.

Not long thereafter, a stereotype hit closer to home. While a friend, Luke, and I were sharing a conversation, he suddenly said sharply, "Well, of course you would say that, you're Catholic." Stung by the accusation, bewildered at the connection, I just stared at him dumbly. I knew Luke was Lutheran as well as he knew my religious

upbringing, but our topic was wholly unrelated to religion. No one among the solid Protestant majority of my New Jersey suburb in which I had been raised had explicitly directed religious antagonism against me, so this stab of prejudice caught me unaware. Luke came from a part of the Midwest where towns tended to be distinctly Lutheran or Catholic, and stereotypical digs were not uncommon. That he had reduced my views to my Catholic heritage weighed on me, given that our topic was not in any way connected to the Church's teaching, to which—moreover—I was feeling increasingly distant.

This book results from many more moments like these. A great deal has been written and portrayed on film regarding various types of religious persecution. But despite all of these efforts, relatively little is ever said about how oppression has made sense to the people who perpetuated it at the time. Popular representations tend to treat discrimination as though it is some sort of disease that simply requires the inoculation of enlightened education or familiar contact in order to remedy it. In some instances and for some individuals, this may be exactly the right “cure.” However, the fact that—as many of the instances demonstrated in the following chapters show—neighbors have often turned against neighbors suggests that matters more complex and difficult to address have often been at play. Some opine that it is the very existence of religion itself that is responsible. They optimistically suggest that if only religions would disappear, discrimination would evaporate. Too many sad moments in American history (and that of other nations) prove this to be naïve and reflect that religion often serves as the flashpoint for conflicts involving many other ingredients.

Religions are seldom solely responsible for conflict. In most of the instances demonstrated in this book, a variety of political, social, economic, and religious factors contribute to outbursts of intolerance. Moreover, underlying sentiments and sensibilities play a crucial role, especially because they are often beyond the level of intellectualization or thought. Finally, the role of nationalism cannot be underestimated. To be a proper American, it has been assumed, is to abide by certain behaviors and beliefs, which include not just membership in the nation, but devotion to it. These notions of nationalism have changed over the centuries and have sometimes favored membership in particular churches: what used to be called “the Protestant establishment.”

As an American, I like to imagine myself as an individual who makes up my own mind about the world and the people within it. But as I reflect on the Islamophobia that was for so long ingrained within me, I realize that my decisions are not so simple.

Long before I was mature enough to deliberate between arguments and evidence or to explore the wider world, schooling, entertainment, and everyday interactions fashioned in my mind a social world divided into groups, each with particular presumed characteristics. I'm not alone in this experience: many have to actively work backwards from the negative attitudes they considered commonsensical, challenging each assumed presupposition and being willing to buck accepted truths among their family and friends, with possible negative ramifications for doing so.

In the 1960s and '70s, it was common sense that women were worse drivers than men, that blacks committed more crimes than whites, and that all gay men were pedophiles. These received truisms remained widespread even after they were challenged by those they disparaged. Undermining these sorts of sentiments requires more than just people standing up against them; it requires those voices to be broadly heard. Women, blacks, and gays had long protested against their negative stereotypes, but it was not until the media decided to stop perpetuating these baseless portrayals that they could be undermined broadly and effectively.

For years following the 9/11 attacks, non-Muslim Americans repeatedly asked, "Where are the Muslims who protest against these actions?" In fact, Muslim and Islamic organizations like the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Student Association, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations routinely have condemned terrorist acts done in the name of Islam on their websites and in press releases. But until news agencies took seriously their responsibility for not only reporting acts of violence done by a few Muslims but also portraying the protests against these acts by the majority of Muslims, these perspectives seldom aired. Meanwhile, various professional Islamophobes have targeted exactly these types of groups, sowing unfounded suspicion to undermine their expressions of positive Islamic sentiment.

In the effort to open a more honest engagement with prejudices such as these, I hope that readers will not only empathize with those who have suffered discrimination but perhaps identify in some small part with those who have been responsible for perpetuating it. A community cannot progress toward greater tolerance as long as it does not grapple realistically with the dynamics of bias and constructively engage individuals struggling with the presence of bigotry in their own thoughts. However, I hasten to add that this attempt to understand belligerent views should not be mistaken for an effort to justify them, just as the endeavor to explain the worldviews and practices of particular religious groups is not an effort to validate them. Understanding

is not justification.

This volume does not pretend to be a complete account of religious discrimination in America or to wholly describe the conditions of religious minorities. A comprehensive history of religious persecution would both have more material on the experiences of each group portrayed here and include many other groups, such as enslaved Africans whose religious practices were largely sheared away by the terrible blades of slavery. Moreover, it cannot hope to explore the views of all Americans at any one point in time. The book forefronts the voices of Protestant European Americans not because they are more valuable or most genuinely American, but because the book strives to discuss mainstream opinions held by those allowed the greatest say in American culture. Meanwhile, a broad account of religious pluralism in the country would not focus only on oppression and marginalization as this book does, given that even the traditions depicted here have also met acceptance, perhaps for the majority of their history, in North America. The endeavor here is not to overemphasize discrimination but to investigate it so that both its presence in the nation's history—too often celebrated for its successes without conceding its failures—and its social dynamics can be better understood in the hopes of better addressing current instances.



“Mr. John Rogers, minister of the gospel in London, was the first martyr in Queen MARY’S reign, and was burnt at Smithfield, February 14, 1554.” The New-England Primer (1883). Wesleyan University Library, Special Collections & Archives.

As an American, part of me bristles at this focus on the lapses of religious tolerance. Raised with the national creed—imbued by family and school alike—that the United States is synonymous with religious freedom, I feel like a heretic myself bringing out from under the carpet some unpleasant stories that were swept there. Despite their historical uniqueness, these instances often bear some resemblance to one another and

to events today. Living up to one's own ideals is always a perilous process, but one can't start without first accepting the ways in which one has not done so. Fortuitously, these unfortunate narratives also include model moments when some Americans confronted their society's normative inequalities, leading them to publicly hold the line of pluralism and toleration—if not acceptance—despite the dire predictions, loathsome accusations, and provocative actions of their neighbors.

One

Heretics! Blasphemers! Witches!

Quakers in Colonial America

Beneath the unfolding blooms and still-tender leaves of New England's spring of 1660, a band of men led Mary Dyer through the streets. As they walked toward Boston Common, some in the party rapped on drums in order to drown out the possibility of their captive's voice being heard. She had walked this path only the year before, then holding the hands of two fellow prisoners similarly sentenced to death by hanging. On that occasion, her husband's request for leniency had brought her a last-minute reprieve. But now she passed where their bodies lay buried beneath the Common as she mounted the gallows stairs to once again have a noose placed around her neck. As before, she neither resisted nor protested the fate decreed when the General Court condemned her to death. Quite the opposite. Describing her time under arrest as she faced the crowd gathered beneath the gallows, she declared, "Yea, I have been in paradise several days now." This time the authorities ignored her husband's pleas, and Mary Dyer dropped to her death.

What had Dyer done that deserved execution in the minds of the court? Had she murdered? Abused? Stolen? No. Instead, her crime stemmed from publicly declaring a theology different from that of the Puritan majority. Her proclamation of Quaker beliefs earned her a death sentence because they diverged from the faith that had driven her judges' Pilgrim predecessors to cross the tempestuous Atlantic in search of—ironically enough—freedom of religion.

The courage of that earlier generation and their resilience in the face of the perils—human and natural—awaiting them in North America have become a core part of an important American national myth: oppression in their homelands led religious groups, including Catholics, Jews, Shakers, Quakers, and Puritans, to become future citizens of the New World. Then, united by their common experiences of persecution and their challenging new lives, they supposedly forged a bond based on religious freedom that became the foundation of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. Indeed, every year most Americans play out this ideal of religious freedom as they

join their families around the table on Thanksgiving Day. Schoolchildren learn the story of these people in austere dresses and buckle-brimmed hats sharing their harvest with the Native Americans who had made survival possible. However, the image of peaceful pluralism belies the strident theology of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the reckoning brought upon those like the Quakers who had a different understanding of humanity's relationship with God.

A SHARED STEM

The Puritans and the Quakers represented two dissenting movements of a larger stream of protest collectively called—fittingly enough—the Protestant tradition. After the Roman Catholic monk Martin Luther nailed a list of arguments countering Vatican doctrine on the door of his university's chapel in 1517, he became a symbol of the dissatisfaction European Christians felt toward the Roman Catholic Church. Throughout the Middle Ages, the popes' church had dominated Europe's religious and social life, while playing no small part in political and economic matters. But Luther's rebellion helped unleash pent-up forces that had reached a breaking point, fueling events that would permanently alter the Continent's Christian landscape. While some of the emerging denominations took their names from visionaries whose ideas crystalized into movements—Luther and Lutheranism, John Calvin and Calvinism, Menno Simons and Mennonites—others had titles that reflected defining notions of their communion, such as the Anabaptists, who required all their first adherents to take a second baptism.

A myriad of beliefs were behind the Protestant Reformation, but a democratic and individualistic impulse played a particularly important role in the formation of many of the new religions. The Catholic Church relied on a strict hierarchy of authority that largely controlled both the practice of the liturgy and the reading of the Bible, each of which occurred solely in Latin, a language known almost exclusively by the (church) educated. Protestants tended to favor a "priesthood of all believers" that undermined this hierarchy by allowing laypeople to participate in church services and Bible readings conducted in vernacular languages. One of Luther's first and most revolutionary acts was to translate the Bible into his native language of German, allowing a far greater number of his countrymen to read it, especially when the recently invented Gutenberg press made books substantially less expensive. Many Protestants also began to put more emphasis on preaching and reading the Bible and less on the celebration of the Eucharist so central to the Catholic Mass.

Across the English Channel, King Henry VIII overthrew the Vatican's sway in 1533. Although interest in annulling his marriage to a wife who had not borne him a son played a role, various other concerns drove him to found the Church of England. While sidestepping the more severe theological challenges of some Reformation leaders—such as not requiring priests to be celibate and denying the transubstantiation of the Eucharist—Henry ordered an English translation of the Bible for each church and subordinated the church establishment by declaring himself its head. As on the Continent, however, even these cautious opening moves of reform could not forestall a torrent of change driven by a complex interaction of various forces that overturned the position of the Catholic Church in Britain. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Catholics in England were becoming more marginalized and their church increasingly demonized.

In this convulsive environment, various English Protestant movements emerged, each finding varying degrees of acceptance and rejection. One of these, the Puritans, initially gained a solid foothold in England and even achieved a certain amount of political power before falling out of favor. Like many other marginalized groups, this community did not choose the name by which it became most readily known. Initially, some in the Church of England used “Puritan” as a derogatory label for those who believed that the reformation of the English church had not gone far enough in purging Catholic elements. The term covered a range of Protestant dissenters within and outside the Church of England. Some, Presbyterians, sought to remove the church's hierarchy of bishops. Others, who came to be known as Congregationalists, wanted to restructure the church so that there was no overarching organization that could dictate the affairs of local churches. At the extreme end of the Puritan spectrum, others sought to exit the Church of England entirely and establish separate congregations. Spanning these divergences, the various branches of Puritanism all shared a commitment to a highly ethical life, the notion of the priesthood of all believers, and the eschewal of any practice unwarranted by a literal interpretation of the Bible (as they understood it). They did away with ornamentation, crosses, and the emphasis on Sunday services, all of which Puritans alleged smacked of Catholicism's idolatry. Finally, most Puritans viewed themselves as responsible for reforming not only the church, but the nation as well.

The early successes of the Puritans at the end of the sixteenth century brought them political and religious influence beyond their numbers, but ultimately more mainstream forces prevailed, and they slipped into a period of persecution. Looking

for an escape, a group of separatists emigrated to the Netherlands before, driven to desperation by oppression there as well, they suffered the two-month-long passage across the Atlantic's cold, turbulent seas in the claustrophobic one-hundred-foot-long *Mayflower*. Rejected by their fellow Britons—and even their church—yet firm in their self-understanding as God's chosen people, these extreme Puritans sought to redeem the so-called New World. Confident in their witness to the true faith, they established their first settlement at Plymouth in 1620. Although the separatist Puritans represented a minority of a larger movement—most of the adherents chose to remain in Britain—significant numbers followed the *Mayflower's* example. Within a decade of Plymouth's terrible first winter, in which half its residents died, Puritans in the nearby Massachusetts Bay Colony had built the towns of Salem, Concord, Roxbury, and Dorchester, alternately using negotiations and aggressiveness toward local Native American nations to obtain land and resources.

Ten years after the first arrival, as he and his fellow passengers prepared to make landfall after their own crossing, leader John Winthrop expressed Puritan confidence in their community, their god, and their right to their new land:

Wee must delight in eache other, make others Condictions our owne rejoyce together, mourne together, labour, and suffer together, allwayes haveing before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, our Community as members of the same body, soe shall wee keepe the unities of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us.¹

If successful, “the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us,” so that—borrowing a biblical image—theirs would be like a city set upon a hill, a witness to all humanity. Winthrop pressed his companions to imagine themselves as the Hebrews just before they set foot in the Promised Land after their long, dangerous exodus. But God put a condition on this support. Failure would have dire consequences not simply for individuals, but for the community as a whole. Rephrasing Moses's warning to the Hebrews, Winthrop told the Puritans that if they did not love God, care for one another, and follow God's laws, they would perish in the “wilderness” God had given them (at divinely sanctioned cost to its original inhabitants). Winthrop appeared to have in mind the Exodus incident of the dispirited Hebrews worshipping the golden calf when he warned that without steadfast faith and commitment to one another, “our heartes shall turne away soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced and worshipping other Gods our pleasures, and proffitts.”² Part of the Puritan insistence on living together in settlements arose from the conviction that only with the strength and