1. Introduction: The Cleansing Fire of Religious Liberty

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On December 24, 361 CE, an angry mob broke into a prison in Alexandria, Egypt. The mob was made up of both pagans and Christians, two factions that usually were fighting each other rather than rioting together. Over the previous decade, riots had become disturbingly common in Alexandria, which was one of the most important cities for both Christianity and paganism. The riots were often rooted in religious disagreement, and this one was no different.[1]

The object of the mob's passion was George of Cappadocia, the bishop of Alexandria and an important figure in the Egyptian Christian community. But "important" does not always mean well liked, and although George was the titular head of the Christian church in the area, approximately half of the local Christians despised him. George of Cappadocia was an Arian, which to many Christians was an unforgivable heresy.

Arianism was one of the most significant and common "heresies" in the history of Christianity. Although the word is rarely used now, for most of Christian history the charge of "Arianism" was both extremely common and extremely dangerous. Arians were Christians, just like those who lit the matches to burn them at the stake. Of course, there were many who would deny them the name "Christian"—thus the riots and violence—but, on the most basic level, Arians worshiped and devoted their lives to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Yet unlike "mainstream"

Christianity—an odd phrase because Arians sometimes outnumbered non-Arians—they believed that Jesus was "merely" the Son of God rather than God himself, thus denying the Trinity. And that was regarded as no minor quibble by either side.

Alexandria was in many ways the focal point of the battle between Arians and non-Arians. Only a few years before the mob arrived at the prison, the bishop of Alexandria had been Athanasius, one of the most important figures in early Christian history. Athanasius was an anti-Arian, and during his tenure as bishop, he had used beatings, intimidation, kidnappings, excommunications, and exile to eliminate or coerce into submission the dangerously heretical Arians. But Athanasius had been removed from his position by Constantius, the son of Constantine the Great and an Arian himself. In his place, Constantius put George of Cappadocia, telling the Alexandrians that the new bishop was "the most perfect of beings as a guide for your conduct, both in word and deed."[2]

George hardly fared better than Athanasius. Alexandria's Christians were fairly evenly divided between Arians and anti-Arians, so half the Christian population was sure to be upset by the choice of bishop. In addition, George engaged in a "carefully orchestrated anti-pagan campaign" that "marked a new stage in the official coercion of religious dissent in Alexandria."[3] After being attacked in the church of St. Dionysius in August of 358, George decided to leave the city.[4] During his three-year sojourn, George participated in church councils to try to resolve the "Arian controversy." Those councils declared Arian beliefs orthodox (but their determinations were not accepted by all, e.g., Athanasius), so George decided to return to Alexandria in November of 361. Unfortunately and unbeknownst to him, only three weeks before he arrived back in Alexandria, Constantius, his imperial patron and protector, died. Lacking Constantius's backing, George of Cappadocia was imprisoned, and a short time later George heard the shouts of the mob as they came to get rid of him once and for all.

The mob emerged from the prison with three shackled prisoners in tow—George and two high government officials, Draconitis and Diodorus, both of whom had been disrespectful to some of the city's pagan religions.[5] All three were beaten to death in the prison square, and their bodies were paraded around the city. The mob later burned the bodies to ensure that no saint's relics could be collected from the remains.[6]

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The unfortunate death of George of Cappadocia is not particularly unique in the history of Christianity. In the words of one scholar, "Of all the great world religions past and present, Christianity has been by far the most intolerant."[7] Although some may contest the characterization of Christianity as "by far the most intolerant," it is at least vexing that a religion based on the teachings of a heretical outcast who believed in mutual love and nonviolence could so easily be converted into a religion of bishops being murdered in the streets, auto-da-fés, and burnings at the stake.

Yet it must be equally vexing to consider how Christianity, and the Western world more broadly, became the center of religious toleration—meaning toleration based not just on pragmatic or political reasons, but also on respect for individual autonomy. For most liberals—in the classical sense—the idea of freedom of religion or, as it was often called, liberty of conscience, is a foundational tenet of Enlightenment thought. And for some, such as John Stuart Mill, liberty of conscience was the "first of all the articles of the liberal creed."[8]

In this essay, I will give one interpretation of how the ideas of religious toleration evolved in the West, and how, eventually, liberty of conscience came to be regarded as one of the cornerstones of the Western liberal political tradition. Like many fundamental elements of our post-Enlightenment world—freedom of speech and private property, for example—liberty of conscience is easily taken for granted. Many modern, post-Enlightenment citizens

have difficulties formulating arguments against the liberty of conscience because they regard it as obvious that governments have no legitimate power over the beliefs of their citizens. To argue otherwise is to promote despotism and totalitarianism.

But the general inability to formulate arguments against liberty of conscience means that the arguments *for* liberty of conscience have gone largely untested, if not grown wholly atrophied due to desuetude. While widespread belief in the liberty of conscience is one of the most important developments in modern political history—after all, its popularity offers one of the best protections against would-be despots—the fact that it is so widespread and so unquestionably accepted means that, for many, the provenance of this tenet of liberalism has been forgotten. In a sense, it's like the religious doctrines of old: widely believed and little understood.

Moreover, by exploring the history of religious toleration and the liberty of conscience, we can more broadly explore the history of liberalism in general. After all, the Western world was once a disturbingly illiberal place. Notions of individual rights were subsumed to a theory of overarching power that mixed together theories of religious authority with inchoate views of the "nation." Medieval political debates—insofar as the concept of "political" had meaning—focused on delineating the *sacerdotium* from the *regnum*—that is, the areas controlled by priestly, spiritual power versus the areas controlled by secular, monarchical power. But, in the words of intellectual historian George H. Smith, "it is misleading to view these realms as analogous to church and state in the modern sense, for *sacerdotium* and *regnum* were conceived as aspects of the same universal society—the *Ecclesia*, a single community composed of all Christians."[9]

All power in this system flowed from God. The kings of the *regnum* claimed authority over their subjects (they certainly were not citizens in any modern sense of the word) as either given by God to them or given by God to the people who then passed it on to the ruler. Others asserted that all of that godly power must flow

through the pope, God's chosen representative on earth, and therefore the pope held proper authority over all secular authorities. One thing was certain: whichever theory was preferred, there was very little room to assert a "right" to individual action or belief.

Yet somehow that deeply illiberal world was transformed into a political order in which liberal assertions of individual rights are, at least ostensibly, the cornerstone of modern political discourse. It is worth exploring that evolution further.

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In Geneva, almost 1,200 years after George of Cappadocia met his unfortunate fate, Michael Servetus, another Arian, was bound to a stake and burned alive. Servetus was certainly not the last Arian to be tortured and punished for his views, but he became one of the most famous.

Michael Servetus was born in 1511 in a small town in northeast Spain. A gifted child, he learned Latin and Greek from Dominican Friars, studied law, and eventually became a doctor. Like many Renaissance and Reformation intellectuals, he was a polymath, writing or teaching in areas such as mathematics, astronomy, geography, and pharmacology. In 1531, he definitively announced his Arian views when he published *De Trinitatis Erroribus* (*On the Errors of the Trinity*), followed by *Dialogorum de Trinitate* (*Dialogues on the Trinity*) the next year. Servetus knew he had put himself in danger, and he changed his name to Michel de Villeneuve while he continued to study and write about medicine.[10]

In 1553, Servetus published *Christianismi Restitutio* (*The Restoration of Christianity*). Like many Renaissance and medieval works, *Christianismi Restitutio* is a massive tome that touches on many subjects. At one point, Servetus theorizes on the heart's role in pulmonary circulation—fully 75 years before William Harvey would receive credit for this discovery.[11] Despite its commentary on medicine and other subjects, the book is fundamentally a work of theology, and in it Servetus returned to attacking the Trinity as well as criticizing the ideas of predestination and infant baptism.

These arguments riled John Calvin, the founder of Calvinism and one of the central figures of the Reformation, who began a correspondence with Servetus and eventually developed a near-vendetta against him.

Christianismi Restitutio got Servetus into trouble in Vienne, France, where a follower of Calvin denounced him as a heretic. He was imprisoned but escaped. He then was convicted in absentia of "heresy, sedition, rebellion, and evasion of prison."[12] The tribunal ordered that his possessions be confiscated and, if caught, that he be burned at the stake.[13]

Servetus planned to flee to a group of friendly dissidents in Naples, Italy. En route, in a move that has "puzzled scholars for centuries," he stopped in Geneva, which was essentially a theocracy run by Calvin.[14] His intent was to stay only one day, but unfortunately he arrived the day before the Sabbath, when church attendance was mandatory. In a move even more inexplicable than stopping in Geneva, Servetus chose to attend services at the Madeleine, where Calvin himself would be preaching. He was recognized and captured.

Calvin could hardly believe his good luck. In short order, Servetus was put on trial. At one point during the proceedings, in a scene resembling the courtroom debates of *Inherit the Wind*, Calvin and Servetus went toe-to-toe on the differences between the divine substance and material things. But whether or not he prevailed in a debate with Calvin, even in open court, Servetus's conviction was essentially foreordained: he was sentenced to die.

They wrapped an iron chain around his body and lashed his neck to the stake with rope. On his head, they placed a crown of straw, leaves, and sulfur; and a copy of *Christianismi Restitutio* was tied to his arm. Because he was burned with fresh, green wood at his feet, it took 30 minutes for him to die. True to his beliefs to the last, witnesses reported hearing him scream "Oh Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me!" If he had given up his Arian beliefs, he would have said, "Oh Jesus, Eternal Son of God."[15]

Calvin ordered that all copies of *Christianismi Restitutio* in Geneva be destroyed, and other copies were destroyed throughout Europe. Today, only three copies are known to exist, one of which seems to have been John Calvin's.

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George of Cappadocia was killed by a mob and Servetus was killed by the state—or at least a theocratic tribunal wrapped up in the trappings of the state. The point is significant, because the early Christian church generally eschewed murdering dissidents. Shun, ostracize, and admonish them, certainly, and maybe occasionally subject them to corporal punishment, yes; but the early church generally treated heretics with a lighter touch than later generations did.

The early church, however, was subordinate to a secular power, the Roman Empire, and was often persecuted by it. Without state power, the church was a voluntary organization that lacked either the power or the ability to vigorously persecute those who disagreed or refused to join. Not until the Roman Empire accepted Christianity and then adopted it as a state religion did the persecution of heretics became a more official function. George of Cappadocia was murdered during a unique time in Christian history, a time when a diversity of "Christianities"—an overarching term meaning the numerous religions that focused their beliefs around Jesus Christ—fought over the meaning of "orthodoxy" and, in particular, what that would mean once the Roman Empire was embracing rather than persecuting Christians.[16] In 385, Maximus, coemperor of the western part of the empire, executed Priscillian, an advocate of a strict form of Christian asceticism that avoided churches and formality. It was the first recorded execution for heresy.[17]

In 407, the emperor Arcadius made heresy a public crime. In 510, Anastasius announced that Manicheans would receive the death penalty. And in 529, the emperor Justinian ordered all pagans and their families to receive baptism. State power and church

power had begun to merge, and they would continue to merge, more or less, throughout the Middle Ages.[18]

By the medieval period, killing heretics had become church policy and, by extension, a state policy. At the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the church adopted the following canon:

> The secular authorities, whatever office they may hold, shall be admonished and induced and if necessary compelled [to] strive in good faith and to the best of their ability to exterminate in the territories subject to their jurisdiction all heretics pointed out by the Church.[19]

Aquinas put it even more bluntly: heretics "deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be severed from the world by death."[20]

It was a dangerous time for anyone to entertain thoughts that went against church doctrine, which is why Martin Luther's nailing of 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenburg had significance beyond a mere religious, doctrinal dispute. Such independent thinking was a seed of a revolutionary idea: liberty of conscience. In many ways, liberty of conscience is the cornerstone of the Reformation. To deny the Catholic Church's sole and unimpeachable authority to interpret the Bible, to assert that individuals had both the ability and the duty to make up their own minds on scripture, was a radical assertion of liberty of conscience. Luther's famous words in response to the Diet of Worms (1521) said it all: "Here I stand; I can do no other."[21]

In a Europe that was being slowly upended by the Reformation, Michael Servetus's death and Calvin's revenge-based motivations sparked a prolonged controversy among intellectuals. In the words of Stefan Zweig, "it was immediately recognized that the burning of Servetus had brought the Reformation to and beyond a parting of the ways."[22] Zweig continues, "Throughout the centuries, among numberless atrocities, it has always been one, which might have seemed no worse than the others, that pricked apparently

slumbering consciences."[23] Theodore Beza, one of Calvin's closest allies and essentially an inerrantist when it came to the ideas of his superior, wrote, "The ashes of the unhappy man were not yet cold when acrimonious discussion arose on the question whether heretics ought to be punished." In Geneva, Calvin had to call in police to stifle dissenters, including a woman imprisoned for declaring Servetus a martyr.[24] Even Edward Gibbon, writing more than 200 years later, said that he was "more deeply scandalized by the single execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which have blazed in the Auto da Fés of Spain and Portugal."[25]

Why did Calvin do it? Did not Protestants, more than anyone at the time, stand for an individual's right to rethink and question dogma?

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The most remarkable of Servetus's defenders was Sebastian Castellio. Castellio was born in 1515 in Dauphiné, France. A voracious learner who was highly regarded by his peers, he became a Protestant missionary in 1540 after seeing Protestant martyrs burned in Lyon.[26]

For a time, Castellio had Calvin's esteem, and he was even appointed as rector of the College of Geneva at Calvin's request. But Castellio's tendency to contradict Calvin, if not outright argue against him in public, soon rankled Calvin. When Castellio was unanimously appointed to the priesthood by the town authorities, Calvin strenuously objected. When asked to state his objections in public, Calvin cited two trifling theological differences—that Castellio regarded the Song of Solomon as a profane rather than sacred work and that Castellio described Jesus's descent to hell differently than Calvin did—as sufficient reason to withhold Castellio's appointment. Given the chance to adjust his views on these matters to secure the position, Castellio refused, citing his inability to go against his conscience.[27] At one public meeting, Castellio asked whether punishing those who hold different views made any sense given the fallibility of even the most exalted priest.

Calvin made sure that Castellio was charged with undermining "the prestige of the clergy," and he was suspended from his small preaching position.[28] Soon after, Castellio left Geneva.

When he heard about Servetus's fate at the hands of his old adversary, Castellio was understandably mortified. In a small tract, *Against Calvin's Book*, written shortly after Servetus's death, Castellio questioned Calvin (in dialogue form): "Since he opposed you in writings, why did you oppose [him] with iron and flame? Do you call this the defence of the pious magistrate? To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man."[29]

But Calvin's crime against Servetus demanded a deeper discussion, so Castellio published a remarkable little book: *Concerning Heretics: Whether they are to be persecuted and how they are to be treated; a collection of the opinions of learned men, both ancient and modern; a most timely book in the view of the present turbulence and highly instructive to all and especially to princes and magistrates to show them their duty in a matter so controversial and dangerous*, which is usually shortened to *Concerning Heretics*. Given what had happened to Servetus, Castellio was smart enough to publish the book under a pseudonym, "Martinus Bellius," and to change the city of publication printed on the title page from Basel (where the book was actually published) to Magdeburg.

As the book's lengthy title describes, it is mostly a collection of opinions of "learned men" on the issue of toleration. Included are selections from Martin Luther, Erasmus, the early church father John Chrysostom, and even John Calvin himself. Surely with a smile on his lips, Castellio threw Calvin's words back at him. Calvin wrote in the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

> Although ecclesiastical discipline does not permit familiarity and intimacy with the excommunicate, nevertheless we should try by every means, whether by exhortation and teaching, clemency and mildness, or by our prayers to God, to bring them to a better mind that they may return to the society and unity of the Church.[30]

Castellio dedicated *Concerning Heretics* to Christoph, Duke of Württemberg, and used the dedication to express his own views on religious tolerance, all the while asking the duke rhetorical questions such as "would you condemn such a citizen? I do not think so."[31]

Castellio wonders why heretics are singled out for such harsh treatment given that "today no one is put to death for avarice, hypocrisy, scurrility, or flattery, of which it is often easy to judge, but for heresy, of which it is not so simple to judge, so many are executed."[32] What is a heretic, after all? Castellio tried to arrive at a definition, but, "after careful investigation," he could "discover no more than this, that we regard those as heretics with whom we disagree."[33]

In some ways, heretics seem to be "those who are obstinate in spiritual matters and in doctrine." Thus, they are like "Hananiah, the false prophet whom Jeremiah avoided when he could not recall him from his error." But Jeremiah did no more than "predict[] to him his death in accord with the command of the Lord, not of the magistrate." This story tells us "how heretics of this sort are to be treated."[34]

Castellio also touches on the fundamentally contentious element of religious beliefs because "to judge of doctrine is not so simple as to judge of conduct." Bad conduct that is contrary to social order is easily perceived. Even "a Jew, Turk, Christian, or anyone else" can recognize that a "brigand or a traitor" is "evil and should be put to death." After all, "no controversies are raised and no books are written to prove that brigands, etc., should be put to death. This knowledge is engraved and written on the hearts of all men from the foundation of the world." Even St. Paul admitted that "the Gentiles have the law written on their hearts."[35]

Castellio thought that Christianity would stand a better chance in the "marketplace of ideas" (not his words) by softening on heresy: "Let not the Jews or Turks condemn the Christians, nor let the Christians condemn the Jews or Turks." Instead, "teach and win them by true religion and justice, and let us who are Christians, not condemn one another, but, if we are wiser than they, let us

also be better and more merciful."[36] Because "who would wish to be a Christian, when he saw that those who confessed the name of Christ were destroyed by Christians themselves with fire, water, and the sword without mercy and more cruelly treated than brigands and murderers?"[37] Castellio wraps up on this point, and by making a specific, if oblique, reference to Servetus calling out to Christ from the flames:

> Who would not think Christ a Moloch, or some such god, if he wished that men should be immolated to him and burned alive? Who would wish to serve Christ on condition that a difference of opinion on a controversial point with those in authority would be punished by burning alive at the command of Christ himself more cruelly than in the bull of Phalaris even though from the midst of the flames he should call with a loud voice upon Christ, and should cry out that he believed in Him? Imagine Christ, the judge of all, present. Imagine Him pronouncing the sentence and applying the torch. Who would not hold Christ for a Satan? What more could Satan do than burn those who call upon the name of Christ?[38]

Concerning Heretics is a remarkable book that stands out as one of the most significant arguments for religious toleration of the pre-Enlightenment period. But Castellio does not argue for a modern view of religious toleration, nor does he go beyond religion and advocate for a general liberty of conscience. Jews and Turks and various Christians should not be persecuted, argues Castellio, because neither they "nor any other nations entertain a doubt whether there is but one god." Regarding monotheism, "all agree with the Christians." But Castellio's tolerance ended there. Anyone who "denies the Lord God" such as the "infidel and atheist," is "deservedly to be abhorred in the eyes of all."[39]

Similarly, although we may want to champion George of Cappadocia or Michael Servetus as martyrs for religious toleration, they were nothing of the sort. Before he fled Alexandria,

George devoted considerable energy to persecuting pagans and Trinitarian Christians. And throughout his trial at the hands of John Calvin, Servetus continually said that it should be Calvin, not he, to burn at the stake. Merely finding oneself on the losing side of a theological dispute—the side often bound to a stake—does not automatically make one a champion of religious tolerance. Thus, we discover a "recurring problem in the broader story of religious freedom, namely, that the victims of intolerance were often intolerant themselves and would not have recognized the rights of those whom they regarded as the real heretics."[40]

John Milton, a great champion of toleration, defended Protestant sects, "Lutherans, Calvinists, anabaptists, Socinians, Arminians," as groups that "may have some errors, but are no heretics." Protestants must tolerate their fellow Protestant groups because "who himself maintains the same principles, and disavows all implicit faith, would persecute, and not rather charitably tolerate, such men as these, unless he mean to abjure the principles of his own religion?" But did Milton think Catholics should be tolerated? Absolutely not. The popery "is not to be tolerated either in public or private." And if, in removing their idols, they claim "we violate their consciences," Protestants should say that "we have no warrant to regard conscience which is not grounded on Scripture."[41]

John Locke reached a high-minded conclusion in the *Essay on Toleration* (written in 1667, before the more famous *A Letter Concerning Toleration*):

> No man ought to be forced to renounce his opinion, or assent to the contrary, because such a compulsion cannot produce any real effect to that purpose for which it is designed. It cannot alter men's minds, it can only force them to be hypocrites, and by this way the magistrate is so far from bringing men to embrace the truth of his opinion, that he only constrains them to lie for their own.[42]

But would he extend that tolerance to Catholics? No. Catholics believe "doctrines absolutely destructive to the society wherein they live, as is evident in the Roman Catholics that are subjects of any prince but the pope." Because Catholics blend "such opinions with their religion," they "ought not to be tolerated by the magistrate" unless "he can allow one part, without the spreading of the other," which Locke supposed "is very hard to be done."[43]

In fact, only a few thinkers of the early Enlightenment, most notably the English Levellers and Roger Williams (the founder of Rhode Island and the subject of a chapter in this book), advocated for full, across-the-board toleration of both religious and nonreligious ideas. For these thinkers, such as Leveller William Walwyn, "no man ought to be punished for his judgment."[44]

Walwyn and his fellow Levellers stand out as some of the truly revolutionary thinkers of the Enlightenment. The group emerged during the English Revolution and criticized the lack of reforms and protections of religious liberty in the wake of Parliament's victory over the king in the civil war. John Lilburne and Richard Overton were also prominent Levellers who wrote brilliant defenses of liberty, but it was Walwyn who most skillfully advocated a broad view of toleration that exempted no religion or ideology. Moreover, Walwyn understood that comprehensive toleration would create peace and harmony among the people because so many of their problems arose from the constant attempts to impose religious commands on everyone. In his "New Petition of the Papists" (1641), Walwyn made a "humble petition" to the "afflicted brethren." His radical suggestion? Stop the madness and leave people alone:

> That whereas there are so many different Religions now professed in England; as your Honours well know, and that with griefe no doubt, casting your eyes upon the great confusion that thereby ariseth in the commonwealth; every one hoping and expecting that theirs alone shall be received and established by this present and

> powefull high Court of Parliament and all others to bee cast forth abolished and prosecuted, which certainely would cause (if it be once Decreed) a farre greater confusion and discontentment.
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> For the timely prevention of which danger many hold it necessarie, and humbly desire, that you would take it into your deepe considerations and profound Judgements, whether it were not more convenient for this State, and more gratefull to the subjects to tollerate all professions whatsoever, every one being left to use his owne conscience, none to be punished or persecuted for it.[45]

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Walwyn's words weren't the final pronouncement on liberty of conscience, of course, but they indicate the infancy of a radical idea that would soon become a keystone of Enlightenment liberalism. In Walwyn, we see the idea of religious toleration becoming the broader "liberty of conscience." This shift was important. Some Enlightenment thinkers actively resisted the idea of "toleration" because, to them, it implied control. To "tolerate" something implies that toleration is a gift that can be taken away. Toleration implies jurisdiction, as in the original Latin meaning, the right to "speak the laws" that must be obeyed. When the state claims jurisdiction over something, it might leave it alone, or it might change course and decide to interfere. In 1785 in *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of Making It a Benefit to the World*, Richard Price wrote the following:

> In Liberty of Conscience I include much more than *Toleration*. Jesus Christ has established a perfect equality among his followers. His command is, that they shall assume no jurisdiction over one another, and acknowledge no master besides *himself*.—It is, therefore, presumption in any of them to claim a right to any superiority or preeminence over their brethren, Such a claim is implied,

> whenever any of them pretend to *tolerate* the rest.—Not only all *Christians*, but all *men* of all religions ought to be considered by a State as equally entitled to its protection as far as they demean themselves honestly and peaceably. *Toleration* can take place only where there is a civil establishment of a particular mode of religion; that is, where a predominant sect enjoys *exclusive* advantages, and makes the encouragement of its own mode of faith and worship a part of the constitution of the State; but at the same time thinks fit to *suffer* the exercise of other modes of faith and worship. Thanks be to God, the new American States are at present strangers to such establishments. In this respect, as well as many others, they have shewn, in framing their constitutions, a degree of wisdom and liberality which is above all praise.[46]

Although the state's permitting liberty is a step in the right direction, liberalism demands more. Liberalism does not lay claim to freedom that exists only at the sufferance of the state and its agents. Liberalism is an assertion of *self*-sovereignty—a claim that the state lacks jurisdiction—over your life, your thoughts, your speech, and your property. After the seeds of liberty of conscience were established in the form of religious toleration, Enlightenment thinkers created a broader edifice of freedoms that individuals could demand as a matter of right, not as a concession. The first radical idea was to claim that unjust laws cannot be passed. The next radical idea was to say that *no* laws can be passed. In the words of historian Guido de Ruggiero:

> At first, freedom of conscience is considered essential to [man's] personality; this implies religious liberty and liberty of thought. Later is added all that concerns his relations to other individuals: freedom to express and communicate his own thought, personal security against oppression, free movement, economic liberty, juridical equality, and property.[47]

In many ways, the movement from religious toleration to liberty of conscience and to the broader freedoms of property, economic liberty, and equality before the law is more important than other aspects of post-Enlightenment liberalism that are more often championed—namely, institutional innovations like democracy, republicanism, and the separation of powers. Ancient Athens had something resembling a democracy, at least for free, male citizens. Similarly, republican Rome, some medieval and Renaissance city-states (particularly in northern Italy), the Netherlands, and parts of Germany were well versed in theories of civic participation and various iterations of institutional limitations on rulers. These institutional arrangements helped provide some people in history with a "Liberty of the Ancients," in the terms of the famous taxonomy of Benjamin Constant, meaning the ability of citizens to participate in the decisionmaking of their political institutions. "Liberty of the Moderns," however, was the true innovation: establishing civil liberties, the protections of the rule of law, and broad freedoms from state interference. Indeed, Liberty of the Moderns is a direct consequence of the struggle for religious toleration.

This introduction explains why the stories of George of Cappadocia, Michael Servetus, and thousands of others who suffered for their beliefs should not be forgotten, and why the lessons that were learned from their struggles helped produce a radical new idea: freedom. Not just freedom in your thoughts and religious practices, but a broader freedom that guarantees your ability to live your life according to your conscience.

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We live in an increasingly secular age, with religion often treated with either a sneer or outright contempt. For many, religion is an outmoded, stone-age construct that outlived any usefulness it may have once had. Better to put away childish things and move on to a worldview based on science and reason.

But every age has its pieties, its ideas that cannot be challenged without encountering contempt, shouts, insults, and occasionally

the pitchfork-bearing mob or, as is increasingly the case today, the sign-waving, belligerent college student. Despite emerging from the struggles of freethinkers who tried to live their lives according to their consciences, modern "liberalism" too often resembles the inquisitors that their laudable progenitors once resisted.

We seem to be locked in an unending cycle: those who once asked for tolerance become intolerant when they acquire power. Modern "freethinkers," often atheists and secularists, demand that Christian bakers be forced to bake for same-sex weddings, that Christian businesses be forced to provide abortifacient contraceptives to their employees, and that Christian children be forced to learn evolution in school. In so doing, the freethinkers betray their heritage. Those who were once burned have become the burners. But we do not burn people at the stake anymore, of course. Instead we immolate people's jobs and careers, and we pillory them on Twitter.

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In the wake of Donald Trump's election, it has become clear that America is a deeply divided nation: red versus blue, Republican versus Democrat, Christian versus atheist. We fight, a lot. But, historically, it was in times of intense conflict between ideologically divided people that calls for religious toleration and liberty of conscience were most needed. The Thirty-Years War was an unimaginably bloody conflict that arose largely from attempts to impose religious doctrines on the unwilling. The resulting Peace of Westphalia was a type of toleration, a truce that let countries pursue their own religious goals. The English Civil War was likewise partially rooted in conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, and it was during that tumultuous decade that the wisdom of the Levellers was most needed. William Walwyn knew that liberty of conscience was the only way to find peace between the warring factions:

> It may be objected that this Tolleration would breede a greater confusion, but wee which know wee have the

> Spirit, beleeve the contrary; for the establishing of onely one, and suppressing all others, will breede, in all a generall discontent, jarring, rayling, libelling, and consequently must needs follow a mighty confusion, where contrarywise, if all were permitted, all would bee pleased all in peace, and their obligation and love would be farre greater to the King and State for so great a benefit as the freedome of conscience, which to all men is the most gratefull thing in the world.[48]

Toleration and liberty of conscience is one method—perhaps, ultimately, the only method—by which people with deep commitments to different values can live together cooperatively rather than combatively. Given our national discord, perhaps it is time to re-learn the history and the ideas that I have briefly and imperfectly summarized here and that are further discussed in the pages that follow.

Now, more than ever, the ideas of religious toleration and liberty of conscience should not be put to the flames.