

## *The Twin Towers of Toleration*

“Two Theories of Toleration: Locke versus Mill” by Adam Wolfson, in *Perspectives on Political Science* (Fall 1996), 1319 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1802.

Many Americans today worship at the shrine of tolerance. They hold fast to the “one very simple principle” that John Stuart Mill enunciated in *On Liberty* (1859): that society should never interfere with the liberty of the individual except to prevent harm to others. But, argues Wolfson, executive editor of the *Public Interest*, there are serious hazards in that libertarian outlook, as an earlier advocate of toleration, John Locke, well knew.

Mill’s expansive view of liberty rests, in most interpretations, on an interest in securing truth through open debate. But Wolfson asserts that “it is not liberty that secures truth . . . but rather, [Mill’s] peculiar, quite relativistic, notion of the truth that secures the widest possible liberty of thought and action.” As depicted in *On Liberty*, Wolfson says, truth is so complex and many-sided that it cannot be grasped by most individuals except at the level of society, where the various contending half-truths and falsehoods are brought into a rough balance. Even the “truth” thus arrived at by society is really only, in Mill’s words, a “fragment of truth.”

By the time Mill is done, Wolfson says, “there is little sense that [truth] is something available, much less desirable.” Instead, fearful that intolerance might

stamp out individuality, Mill calls for “different experiments of living,” “varieties of character,” and “free development of individuality.” Certain that the commonwealth is secure and that moral truth cannot be infallibly established, Mill, like many Americans today, “permits, indeed encourages, the cultivation of opinions and behaviors that are at odds with liberalism.”

Locke, in contrast, in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), largely confined toleration to the realm of speculative thought. “The Magistrate ought not to forbid the Preaching or Profession of any Speculative Opinions,” he declared. But practical opinions, which “influence the Will and Manners,” were another story. Unlike Mill, Locke believed that “Morality is capable of Demonstration, as well as Mathematicks,” and that the state ought to discourage pernicious practical opinions.

In Locke’s view, Wolfson says, “a liberal society could not survive, much less prosper, without a preponderance of morality and rationality existing among the citizenry.” And government, therefore, had “at least some interest” in shaping the character of its citizens. That is a lesson, Wolfson concludes, that modern libertarians, who often claim Locke as a founding father, seem to have forgotten.

## *The Feminized Church*

“Gender & Religion” by Kenneth L. Woodward, in *Commonweal* (Nov. 22, 1996), 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

Is the Christian church a patriarchal institution whose oppression women only lately have begun to overcome? That is not the church that most Americans know, contends Woodward, a long-time writer on religion for *Newsweek*.

“If we look inside Protestant churches on Sunday,” Woodward notes, “we find that most of the people in the pews are women. Although there are no hard-and-fast statistics, pastors I talk to say that women usually outnumber the men three-to-one.” Women also typically dominate the church com-

mittees, the prayer groups, the Bible study groups, and the Sunday schools. And most of those whom a Protestant pastor counsels during the week are women. “The pastoral challenge facing most clergy,” Woodward says, “is to find ways to draw men into active participation.”

Though it might be argued that it is the pastor who has the authority, and therefore the power, in the church, and that most pastors are male, Woodward contends that “the reality of congregational life is more complex than that.” In black Baptist

churches, for instance, the ministers and members of the boards of trustees are male, but women raise the money and effectively determine how it is spent. Power in those churches is wielded by “the Mothers,” a group of older women who dress distinctively in white on Sundays and constitute the heart and soul of the church. As C. Eric Lincoln of Duke Divinity School has written, “woe be it to the minister” who does not have the Mothers on his side.

Within American Christianity, Woodward contends, “the altar and the pulpit represent the last bastions of male presence”—and, within the liberal mainline Protestant denominations, those strongholds are rapidly giving way. Although males still outnumber females by three to one in the mainline clergy, seminary statistics “suggest that the future belongs to women,” Woodward writes. Among Presbyterians, United Methodists, and Episcopalians, male seminarians outnumber

female ones, “but not by much.” Feminist theology is widely taught in the seminaries. Studies suggest that, because of the different attitude toward authority and its exercise that women who enter the seminary have, the ministry is being transformed into a “profession without authority,” one bent on eliminating the distance between clergy and laity. Woodward, however, believes that “congregations . . . require the exercise of authority and demand that some distance be observed between those who stand in the pulpit and those who sit in the pews.”

As the masculine presence in the church diminishes, he writes, “the dialectical relationship of masculine and feminine”—from which, according to Catholic theologian Walter Ong, the church gets “much of its dynamism and energy”—is weakened. That “may be one reason why mainline denominations are in such dire straits” today.

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

### *Dynamic Duo Confronts Refrigerator Menace*

“The Einstein-Szilard Refrigerators” by Gene Dannen, in *Scientific American* (Jan. 1997), 415 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017-1111.

In July 1939, Albert Einstein and Hungarian-born physicist Leo Szilard met to ponder the news that scientists had produced a fission reaction in uranium. As a result, Einstein wrote his famous letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt warning that Nazi Germany might be able to develop nuclear weapons. That, notes Dannen, an independent scholar, was not the first time Einstein and Szilard had collaborated for the benefit of mankind. A decade earlier, they had worked to avert the danger posed by mechanical home refrigerators.

Einstein, who by the mid-1920s was the world’s most renowned physicist, became interested in the problem when he read of an entire family that had been killed by toxic gases leaking from their refrigerator.

Refrigerators then, as now, used mechanical compressor motors to compress a refrigerant gas, which then liquefies as excess heat is discharged. When the liquid is allowed to expand again, it cools and can absorb heat from an interior chamber.

But the early refrigerants were toxic, and leaks were inevitable in systems with moving parts. The two physicists’ solution: a cooling system that did not involve mechanical motion and so did not require moving parts.

Swedish inventors had designed a so-called absorption refrigerator—in which heat from a natural gas flame, rather than the push of a piston, drives the cooling cycle—and the Swedish firm AB Electrolux was marketing it. Szilard and Einstein devised an improvement—and came up with a host of other designs. In early 1926, Szilard began filing patent applications, and by the fall, he and Einstein had decided on the three most promising designs. One, based on absorption, was very similar to the Electrolux machine; a second was based on the principle of diffusion. Electrolux, seeking mostly to safeguard its own pending patent applications, bought both those designs but never developed either one.