

David's Heir: Negative Volition; Carson's "Intolerance of Tolerance": the Parable of Gotthold Lessing: "Nathan the Wise" and the Three Opal Rings; All Rings Are Equal therefore, All Belief Systems are Equal; Foundational Elements of the Progressive Concept of Tolerance, 1–18

9. In his book, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, Dr. Carson relates a parable from eighteenth-century German playwright Gotthold Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (*Nathan der Weise*):

In 1779 appeared the "dramatic poem" in iambic verse *Nathan der Weise*. This is a didactic play of a theological and philosophical nature, combining ethical profundity with many comic touches, and is a work of high poetic quality and dramatic tension. *Nathan der Weise* symbolizes the equality of three great religions in regard to their ethical basis, for the play celebrates man's true religion—love, acting without prejudice and devoted to the service of mankind. Among the representatives of the three religions—Islamic (Saladin), Christian (the Templar), and Jewish (Nathan)—only the Jew ... lives up to the ideal of full humanity; he alone is capable of complete self-abnegation and has the courage to speak the truth even to the mighty.¹

10. Carson cites an excerpt from *Nathan the Wise* beginning with a question posed by Saladin to Nathan:

"You are so wise; now tell me, I entreat, what human faith, what theological law has struck you the truest and the best?" Instead of answering directly, Nathan tells his parable. A man owned an opal ring of superlative beauty and extraordinary, not to say magical, powers. Whoever wore it was beloved by God and by human beings. He had received it from his father, who had received it from his, and so on—it had been passed down from generation to generation, from time immemorial. The man with the ring had three sons, each of whom he loved equally, and to each of whom he promised, at one time or another, that he would give the ring. Approaching death, the man realized, of course, that he could not make good on his promises, so he secretly asked a master jeweler to make two perfect copies of the ring. The jeweler did such a magnificent job that the rings were physically indistinguishable, even though only one had the magical powers. Now on his deathbed, the man called each of his sons individually to his side and gave him a ring. They began to argue about which one now possessed the original magic ring. In the play, *Nathan the Wise* describes their bickering and comments:

[The brothers] investigate, recriminate, and wrangle
all in vain
Which was the true original genuine ring
Was undemonstrable
Almost as much as now by us is undemonstrable
The one true faith. (pp. 7–8)

Wanting to resolve their dispute, the brothers ask a wise judge to settle the issue, but his ruling refuses to discriminate:

If each of you in truth received his ring
Straight from his father's hand, let each believe
His own to be the true and genuine ring. (p. 8)

The judge urges the brothers to abandon their quest to determine which ring is the magic original. Each brother should instead accept his ring as if it were the original and in that conviction live a life of moral goodness. This would bring honor both to their father and to God. (pp. 8–9)

¹ Joachim Müller, "Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010), 7:300.

Lessing's parable resonated with his eighteenth-century Enlightenment readers. The three great monotheistic religions were so similar that each group should happily go on thinking that their religion was the true one, and focus on lives of virtue and goodness, free of nasty dogmatism, the dogmatism that was blamed for the bloody wars of the previous century. What was called for, in other words, was religious tolerance. There is no harm in believing that your monotheistic religion is best, provided you live a good life and let others think that their religion is best.

Small wonder the parable retains its appeal to readers in the twenty-first century. Today, of course, the parable would have to be revised: instead of three rings, we would need dozens of them, if not hundreds, to symbolize the mutual acceptability of the many religious options, whether monotheistic, polytheistic, or nontheistic. And, of course, we would not concede today, as Lessing could, that one of the rings really is the original.² (p. 9)

11. From Lessing's parable we are able to discern several foundational elements of the Progressive concept of tolerance:
 - (1) All religious belief systems are considered valid to its proponents, but none of them possesses any resource for verifiable absolute truth.
 - (2) It is therefore unacceptable for any proponent of any religion to assert superiority of his belief system over others.
 - (3) Tolerance recognizes that in the eyes of the beholders, every religion assumes it possesses the "magic ring."
 - (4) Tolerance does not recognize that any religion has access to truth, but that all are equally right as far as its followers are concerned.
 - (5) Therefore, it is intolerant for any one religion to assert superiority over the others or to claim possession of absolute truth.
 - (6) This same attitude is expanded into every aspect of human life. Tolerance is considered the ultimate problem-solving device, but it is only to be applied by those with the Progressive worldview.
 - (7) Progressive ideology assumes superiority over traditionalism. It does not recognize that traditional standards are absolutes but are simply opinions much like the belief systems of religions.
 - (8) Therefore, the absence of absolutes allows room for any thought, decision, or action with the exception of intolerance.
 - (9) This grants general approval of any opinion because it is as legitimate as any other; likewise any behavior.
 - (10) What follows is permissiveness which is in opposition to traditional standards.
 - (11) The basic standard governing traditional attitudes toward those with differing ideas is "live and let live."
 - (12) I don't agree with the theology of the churches that subscribe to five-point Calvinism, but I do support their freedom and right to that opinion.
 - (13) At the same time I contend the doctrine of limited atonement cannot be biblically supported and therefore brings their salvation into question and endangers that of others influenced by it.
 - (14) Progressives insist that it doesn't matter what they believe and each camp must not be intolerant of the other's views.

² D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 7–9.

- (15) In essence, the demand for tolerance removes discussion, debate, and analysis from the table. All opinions must be regarded as just that; there is no established truth and therefore no one is qualified to discredit any other system of thought different from his own.
- (16) Following this line of reasoning, the requirement for tolerance has been expanded to include what traditionalists refer to as moral standards.
- (17) A culture's insistence on basic morality is designed to protect the divine institutions of volition, marriage, family, and nation.
- (18) Tolerance taken to its present extreme is a threat to each of these and this is where the Dark Side has concentrated its most aggressive and sustained assaults.