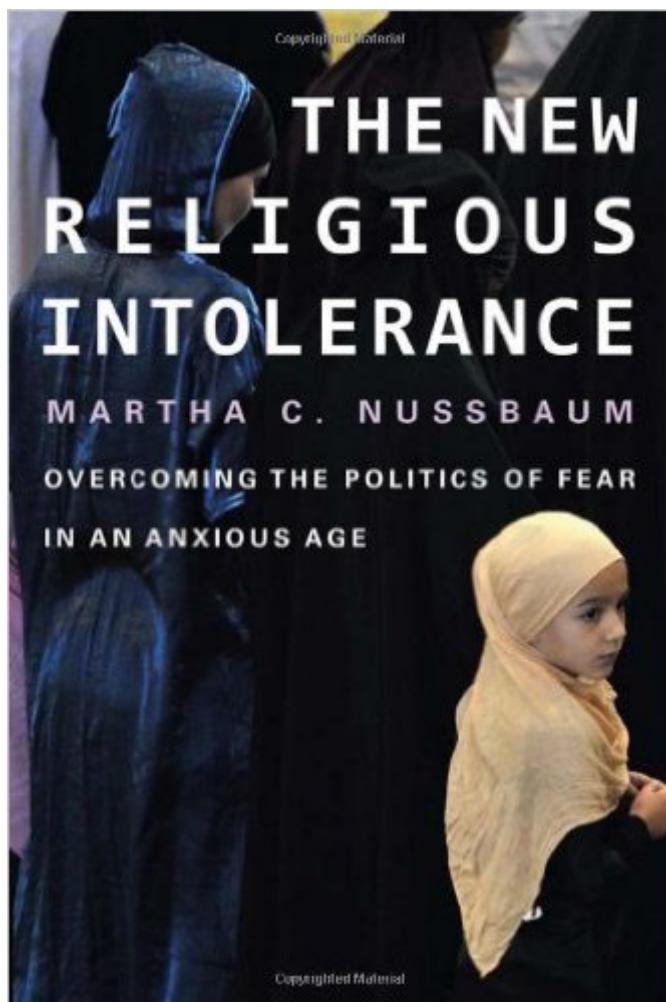


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The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming The Politics Of Fear In An Anxious Age



Synopsis

What impulse prompted some newspapers to attribute the murder of 77 Norwegians to Islamic extremists, until it became evident that a right-wing Norwegian terrorist was the perpetrator? Why did Switzerland, a country of four minarets, vote to ban those structures? How did a proposed Muslim cultural center in lower Manhattan ignite a fevered political debate across the United States? In *The New Religious Intolerance*, Martha C. Nussbaum surveys such developments and identifies the fear behind these reactions. Drawing inspiration from philosophy, history, and literature, she suggests a route past this limiting response and toward a more equitable, imaginative, and free society. Fear, Nussbaum writes, is "more narcissistic than other emotions." Legitimate anxieties become distorted and displaced, driving laws and policies biased against those different from us. Overcoming intolerance requires consistent application of universal principles of respect for conscience. Just as important, it requires greater understanding. Nussbaum challenges us to embrace freedom of religious observance for all, extending to others what we demand for ourselves. She encourages us to expand our capacity for empathetic imagination by cultivating our curiosity, seeking friendship across religious lines, and establishing a consistent ethic of decency and civility. With this greater understanding and respect, Nussbaum argues, we can rise above the politics of fear and toward a more open and inclusive future.

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Customer Reviews

The title is somewhat inaccurate. It would be better stated as "The New Religious intolerance toward

Muslims mostly in Western Europe and to a lesser degree the United States." No small irony that someone who talks so much about multiculturalism ends up writing what amounts to a book with an extremely narrow cultural, geographic and religious focus. The book brings up popular controversies in the west such as burqas, minarets and the so-called "ground zero mosque". Then it makes a bunch of really obvious philosophical arguments in favor of religious tolerance. There is a certain amount of ugly American triumphalism in the book. A tendency to see the American model as somehow being superior in the context of religion. She wants to present the American ideal of Nationalism as some sort of cure to the problem. And suggests Europe should adopt it. But (also ironically) the multiculturalism she represents utterly rejects that sort of shared national belonging on its face. And the idea that the strength of America these days is "shared political ideals" deserves a skeptical look in the face of all the deep political divides in America today. She holds out the idea that the only limit on minority religious expression should be considerations of public order and safety. Of course in saying that, she avoids the long and complicated history of restrictions on *majority* religious expression which have gone to the supreme court many times. She pushes the idea of secular civil culture as a solution. But doesn't see that for many people, the establishment and promotion of such a culture effectively becomes a state religion by another name.

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