

ANDREW T. WALKER

*Foreword by* ROBERT P. GEORGE

# LIBERTY FOR ALL

*Defending Everyone's  
Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age*



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# *Introduction*

## You Get to Decide What to Worship, Not Whether to Worship

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2018**, marked the tenth anniversary of David Foster Wallace's tragic suicide. Wallace is not typically well known by Christians, but he was one of his generation's most unique and extraordinary writers. He was also a deeply troubled individual, as revealed in portraits of his life. Though not a professing Christian, he seemed respectful at times toward Christianity, especially Catholicism. Some speculate as to whether Wallace was on the verge of converting at one point, but a life wracked by depression and addiction kept him from the altar, as far as we know at least.

When one reads Wallace, one finds someone grappling with existence, someone trying to assemble meaning through the brokenness of addiction and severed relationships. But in some embryonic form, his dalliance with religion and his comments on at least one occasion provide a launching pad for further discussion of the contested issue of religious liberty.

Wallace gave a now-famous 2005 commencement address at Kenyon College titled "This Is Water." For a long time, I had

heard how this commencement address had gained cult-like status in underground pop culture. When I listened to it a couple of years ago, I was awestruck at what I heard and instantly became a Wallace fan. On the verge of tears, I sat on my bed and listened to a YouTube recording of the speech given what seemed like a lifetime ago.

By his own admission, Wallace was a man of “faith,” even if he did not come to a conclusion about “the faith” (Jude 3). Still, a sincerity that punctuated his comments drew me in, and I heard a man wrestling with the surrealism of his existence. In the address, Wallace says that education is designed to help individuals pursue the examined life.

Twenty years after my own graduation, I have come gradually to understand that the liberal-arts cliché about “teaching you how to think” is actually shorthand for a much deeper, more serious idea: “Learning how to think” really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience. Because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed.<sup>1</sup>

But further on, Wallace appeals to the purpose of education to go even deeper, to the purpose of life itself.

But if you’ve really learned how to think, how to pay attention, then you will know you have other options. It will actually be within your power to experience a crowded, loud, slow, consumer-hell-type situation as not only meaningful but sacred, on fire with the same force that lit the stars—compassion, love, the sub-surface unity of all things. Not that that mystical stuff’s necessarily true: The only thing that’s capital-T True is that you get to decide how you’re going to try to see it. You get to consciously decide what has meaning and what doesn’t. You get to decide what to worship.

Because here's something else that's true. In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. . . .

Look, the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful; it is that they are unconscious. They are default settings. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that's what you're doing. And the world will not discourage you from operating on your default settings, because the world of men and money and power hums along quite nicely on the fuel of fear and contempt and frustration and craving and the worship of self.

Wallace is calling people to take hold of their lives, to reject the “default setting” of monotony and spoon-fed distraction. He knows that at the core of every person is a driving force, and for Wallace, true living is being aware of that driving force, being able to evaluate it and harness it toward critical awareness, becoming, and meaning. This is not run-of-the-mill motivational speaking. His argument is given the fullest color when the people he is calling forth to live intentionally understand themselves to be made in God's image, to be creatures of meaning ordering their lives according to the pattern of creation. But this sincerity—this awakening from the “dogmatic slumber,” to borrow a phrase from Immanuel Kant—requires a certain freedom. We need space to test the maxims and ideals we want to live by to determine whether they are delivering what they promise.

What Wallace argues for shares the architecture for how Christians ought to understand religious liberty, a not-so-popular and now-misunderstood topic. As I will explain, authority, adoration, and authenticity are at the center of what it means to be human. We are wired to anchor our quest for fulfillment and truth in something that we believe possesses the rightful authority to unlock

this journey. We end up adoring what we give authority to in order to design our lives. Beauty, security, sex, money, power—each of these can become a focus of adoration. In the most generic sense, the authority we live by and the worship we give this authority are driving each of us toward the goal of finding our true self, our authentic self. Of course, as Christians, we do not believe that all quests for authenticity are equal. But as beings created in the image of God, we crave authority, adoration, and authenticity. As Wallace says so poignantly that it could have issued from a biblical prophet, “Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” How true.

What do Wallace’s observations have to do with religious liberty and the pursuit of truth in a secular age? As Wallace drives at, we humans are truth-seeking creatures. I argue that these three concepts—authority, adoration, and authenticity—explain why religious liberty matters to Christians, but not just to Christians. We Christians should extend religious liberty to everyone, because everyone is pursuing truth, even if incorrectly. In a secular and increasingly pluralistic age, we need to allow falsehood a space to be wrong in hopes that individuals will “come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). This does not mean we refrain from naming moral wrongs or fall captive to empty-headed relativism. It means we do not seek to criminalize, persecute, or marginalize people whose beliefs are sincere and are animating them toward lives of purpose, meaning, and goodwill (and there are checks and balances to consider when convictions pose risks and harms to civil society). This is not a world where limits and authority are cast off; instead, within properly understood limits, people are allowed to act in accordance with what they believe is choice-worthy and will produce flourishing.

What Wallace describes, Christians can affirm: a sense of agency in our personhood and a humility in our awareness of our need for personal reform. Religious liberty requires both. We humans are



often wrong about the things we perceive, because we are fallible. No human is a perfect arbiter of truth. This means we cannot impose truth on others; truth must be discovered after thorough, rigorous examination. We plead and persuade. And this means we need to leave room for people to search for truth, to err, to self-correct, to realize the possibility, as finite beings, that each of us is incapable of possessing absolute truth. We Christians believe the Word of God declares the truth; we have confirmation of the Spirit's work inside us; but we are still imperfect creatures who "see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12). This, in so few words, is why religious liberty is so important. Religious liberty, and liberty itself, exists to allow people to align themselves with truth, even if some align themselves incorrectly. Humans crave the space to make meaning of their existence, rightly and wrongly. Again, in Wallace's words, "The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day. That is real freedom."<sup>2</sup>

Religious liberty is not about relativizing truth claims or treating all religions as equals. That, as I will explain, is actually the opposite of true religious liberty. From the perspective of fallible humans, religious liberty is about giving individuals space to figure out for themselves who God is. From a theocentric perspective, religious liberty is about the era of unfolding history—an "in between" age—in which the church lives with anticipation that Jesus will judge every conscience because he and he alone is truth itself (John 14:6).

It is so fascinating to me how a postmodern prophet like Wallace could so beautifully and powerfully articulate echoes of truths so central to Christianity. Christians would certainly disagree with a great deal of what Wallace believed, but I am thankful for a sliver of common grace that shows up in his "This Is Water," which

teaches Christians a little bit about how we as humans were made to worship—and why freedom is essential to give breath to what we believe is true.

## A Road Map

*Liberty for All* offers a public theology of religious liberty. Religious liberty, tragically, is now a casualty of culture wars in the West. I will talk some about cultural challenges toward the end of the book, but that is not what this book is primarily about. Rather, this book is about acknowledging a few essential truths: (1) because humanity is made in God’s image, each human is religious and truth seeking in nature, regardless of whether they understand themselves as “religious”; (2) we live in a pluralistic era, and the biblical story line expects religious difference to occur in this temporary “secular” age (I will explain what “secular” means later); (3) religious liberty and freedom of conscience promote human and societal flourishing; (4) the Bible does not command any formal, institutional union between a religious body and government; and (5) Christianity is the best arbiter for religious liberty because it has theological resources to help us grapple with some of the most difficult societal challenges. To make this argument, I will show why eschatology (the kingdom of God), anthropology (the image of God), and missiology (the mission of God) all point toward a public theology of religious liberty. An underlying point of this book is to explain why an idea like religious liberty is intelligible and choice-worthy for a society to organize itself around.

A word about the intended audience of this book is necessary. I am writing this as an in-house explanation for how Christians ought to understand religious liberty. I am not writing to persuade the convinced skeptic. I hope Christians will walk away from this book with an appreciation for how religious liberty functions in-

tegrally in Christian thought. What I will argue later is that if Western culture cuts itself off from its Christian roots, religious liberty and freedom of conscience will be public goods less recognizable and less valued. If the West hopes to remain politically and religiously free, it must appreciate and retrieve a principled account of religious freedom that owes its most secure foundation to Christian social thought. Secularism does not have the explanatory power within itself to make sense of religious liberty, and, in fact, without the checks and balances offered by a transcendent worldview, will prove to be inimical to religious liberty.

My hope for this book is simple: I want Christians to come away with a greater understanding of the reality of diversity and how we as Christians are expected to confront such diversity in light of the gospel. A key part of the answer is religious liberty.

## **Last Things First**

The intelligible good of religious liberty exists on the grounds of eschatology, anthropology, and missiology. First, the person and work of Christ provide the eschatological orientation for why Christians should promote religious liberty and defend others' freedom of conscience—even the freedom of those with whom we disagree. Second, the fact that we are God's image bearers portends something about our nature and how we are made to flourish. Last, Christians should prioritize religious liberty as a pillar of public theology, because religious liberty gives shape to the church's mission in a secular age while fostering conditions that make the common good attainable.

Religious liberty is not an accident born solely from liberal democracy or Enlightenment rationalism. Religious liberty did not start with John Locke. It originates with Christ's authority over creation. Christianity on the margins of an oppressive empire birthed a revolutionary idea that created the freest civilization the

world has known (though abuses of Christianity, tragically, have also been a source of oppression as well).

Jesus Christ is the king and judge over history. The questions then become, What era of history is the church in? and, How do Jesus's kingship and judgment manifest themselves now?

# 1

## Religious Liberty as a Christian Social Ethic

### **The Importance of Religious Liberty**

“A belief in Christian ethics is a belief that certain ethical and moral judgments belong to the gospel itself; a belief, in other words, that the church can be committed to ethics without moderating the tone of its voice as a bearer of glad tidings.”<sup>1</sup> So remarks Oliver O’Donovan, who notes in his seminal work on Christian ethics that the gospel of Christ must be tied to any study that purports to be Christian. It follows, then, that every task of Christian ethics should be done within the horizon of redemption and the unfolding of God’s kingdom.

Religious liberty is of supreme relevance to Christian social ethics and public theology, but as it is often framed in public discourse—even among professed Christians—it is not clearly tied to the gospel. The present fear is that religious liberty is merely an accident of history, a social construct, or a settlement born of pragmatic need. In a time when religious liberty has been sadly

situated as a culture war issue, what religious liberty needs is an apologetic arising from Christian conviction.

How should we define religious liberty? I contend that religious liberty is the principle of social practice wherein every individual, regardless of their religious confession, is equally free to believe, or not to believe, and to live out their understanding of the conscience's duty, individually and communally, that is owed to God in all areas of life without threat of government penalty or social harassment. It is nothing short of grasping truth and ordering one's life in response to it. From this angle, religious liberty is an enterprise of both worship and ethics. As a person submits their whole life to God, religious liberty gives them agency to express their convictions about God through their actions and choices. Nothing less than personhood is at stake. Religious liberty is a juncture where one's duty to God intersects with one's obligation to live out duties and moral commitments for the sake of personal authenticity. It enables individuals, and individuals gathered in communities, to respond to their understanding of divine truth and to manifest the obligations of that divine truth in every dimension of life.

As a topic of immense value to Christians, especially Christian advocacy groups, religious liberty is taken for granted but insufficiently explained on biblical and theological grounds. More often than not, religious liberty is situated as an answer to political controversy.<sup>2</sup> Or religious liberty takes its cues from politics, whether of liberal or conservative varieties. And if not seen as a matter of political philosophy, it is often situated as a sociological paradigm concerned about forging cultural détente.

One important goal of this book is to more clearly connect religious liberty to eschatology, anthropology, and missiology in contemporary Christian discourse. When one reviews Christian literature surrounding religious liberty, one finds few resources that provide systematic Christian accounts of religious liberty. Moreover, when surveying topics within Christian ethics, especially in

textbooks, one finds that the literature is replete with books and chapters on abortion, capital punishment, homosexuality, marriage and family, euthanasia, and the like, but religious liberty does not receive proportional emphasis. If treated at all, it is tucked under an umbrella category, such as church-state relations. But religious liberty is much broader than just church-state relations. Religious liberty reveals how temporal authority understands its relationship and jurisdiction in relation to eternal authority. Religious liberty is thus revelatory and presuppositional in deciphering how religion and politics relate to one another in a given context. By my reading, not a single volume by a Christian scholar attempts to offer a systematic or comprehensive account of religious liberty's theological origins and purpose within the biblical story line.<sup>3</sup> This absence is a problem because religious liberty ought to function as a preeminent foundation for Christians' understanding of their entry into the public square as religious individuals embedded within religious communities that exist in particular social contexts.

Consider the manifold ways that religious liberty addresses key aspects of social ethics and public theology. First, religious liberty supplies the justification for religious persons to act freely at the behest of a religiously motivated ethic. Second, religious liberty implies delineating between the church and the world and how the church and the state ought to relate to one another. Third, religious liberty facilitates ethical duties that consciences owe a Creator and how those obligations are discharged. Consider also the implications of religious liberty for theology and ethics: exercising one's conscience is related to moral agency, which demands that there be a horizon for this agency to occur. The conscience responds to truth that demands obedience. Among other ways it is important, religious liberty informs our understanding of the kingdom of God and how the kingdom's mission advances in society: Does it advance through voluntary acts of faith, by proxy, or by coercion?

Religious liberty is thus a pillar of Christian social ethics; every other topic within the public square presumes it. For example, advocating for the unborn—whether praying in front of an abortion clinic or casting one’s vote in a referendum on the issue—assumes some framework that makes such activity possible. The collective action of a Christian advocacy organization working to dismantle sex trafficking networks relies on unstated assumptions about the freedom guaranteeing such activity and the public expression of its convictions. We might be tempted to see each of these as a mere right of basic political liberty, but more deeply, political liberty exists to allow the exercise of convictions born of religious foundation. (I would contend that the underdeveloped theological aspects of religious liberty in American Christian social ethics is the result of the fact that the American context focuses almost exclusively on matters related to religious exercise and religious establishment debates found in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. American Christians often find themselves held captive to a culture that engages in debates on religious liberty more out of pragmatic concerns to negotiate among competing claims of power than out of theological conviction.)

The freedoms Christians ought to enjoy in society and how the church relates to the state are paramount to any Christian public theology. As a result, religious liberty should be a *doctrine*, not just a constitutional device. Moreover, how Christians understand the reality of divergent religious systems occupying the same social space is critical to their mission. Dismissing or overlooking the centrality of religious liberty in Christian public theology demonstrates a failure to establish first principles that are necessary for the church’s mission.

Religious liberty helps Christians recognize the era in which the church’s mission exists—a time when Christ’s kingdom has been inaugurated but awaits consummation. In this intervening period, religious liberty reveals the nature of religious difference,



what mission entails, and how people come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Religious liberty, then, is of deep eschatological concern, as it helps one understand the church's mission and expectations in society. It is also central to a proper understanding of Jesus's kingship over consciences that are to be held accountable to future judgment and the manner in which individuals come to apprehend the gospel (John 5:27; 2 Cor. 5:11; 2 Pet. 3:9–10).

Both religion and government are forced to reckon with the authority claims of the other. Religious liberty is a crucial cipher to unlocking the underlying statecraft of the political community. As one scholar has commented, "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it is in its posture toward religion that a nation most fully and clearly defines itself."<sup>4</sup> These words capture the gravity of religious liberty, and they are doubtlessly true. How a state understands the nature of its own power and how that power is distributed testify to whether that state is acting biblically (Rom. 13) or as an antichrist (Rev. 13). As Robert H. Mounce writes about the state's self-aggregating power tendencies, "The worship of a Satanically inspired perversion of secular authority is the ultimate offense against the one true God."<sup>5</sup> And indeed, the greatest struggles of Western history take place against a backdrop of conflict over religion and political authority attempting to unite or compete.

## **A Biblical–Theological Basis for Religious Liberty**

How can religious liberty become an issue of Christian preeminence and focus when the phrase "religious liberty" is nowhere in the Bible? As Baptist missionary and scholar John David Hughey notes, "Religious liberty is implicit in Christian theology, and theologians, eager to lay solid foundations for freedom already achieved or still to be won, are giving serious attention to it. Several major Christian doctrines have implications for religious liberty."<sup>6</sup> Hughey's observation begs that an explicit connection be

made between religious liberty and basic Christian theology. A. F. Carrillo de Albornoz similarly observes that religious liberty “is not in single passages in the Bible; it is God’s whole way of approaching mankind that gives us our lead.”<sup>7</sup> Carrillo de Albornoz goes on to state that “our prime question is, therefore, to investigate this ‘nexus’ or to see exactly how religious liberty is implied in the Christian revelation.”<sup>8</sup>

Recent Christian scholarship, in both quantity and quality, has failed to provide a robust account that makes religious liberty intelligibly Christian.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there is no Christian consensus for developing a framework or conceptual paradigm around religious liberty that incorporates essential elements of Christian theology. Religious liberty is mostly seen as a concern about preserving religious identity and religious exercise in pluralistic societies. Biblical arguments (e.g., the rich young ruler was given a choice to follow Christ) are crafted piecemeal or merely implied. Indeed, in contemporary Christian scholarship, religious liberty is discussed in the context of debates about pluralism and negotiations concerning cultural conflicts rather than being shown to connect to biblical reflection. With religious liberty left almost exclusively to the province of legal theory and political philosophy, Christians lack a key component of Christian social ethics.

A consensus regarding religious liberty is foundational for Christian social ethics because “authentic Christian faith necessarily means, for the Church as well as the individual Christian, involvement within an historical context.”<sup>10</sup> The more that Christian leaders develop a concept of religious liberty, the better they will grasp the church’s identity and mission at a time when history is replete with competing claims of authority and allegiance. Religious liberty is a form of self-conscious reflection by individuals and organizations to decipher their engagement in society. As long as the church lacks a Christian framework for religious liberty, it will fumble about in its interactions with the world, unable to

ground essential truths necessary to its social witness that are integral to its theology and mission.

The remedy to an anemic or underdeveloped biblical-theological basis for religious liberty is to anchor religious liberty to biblical motifs. Indeed, by not doing so, Christians leave a vacuum to be filled by constitutionalism, humanism, or secularism. Carl Emanuel Carlson comments:

Now if humanism is the fundamental basis of our movement, then we are involved on the horns of a quite different dilemma. . . . The concern for liberty might be disassociated from the redemptive work of Christ. It may have nothing to do with Christology or eschatology or with much more that is traditional Christian theology. . . . If the authority of the lordship of Christ in the church and in the experience of the person contravenes our understanding of the nature of man as expressed in the doctrines of religious liberty, the future of liberty is not bright at the present time.<sup>11</sup>

The quest to connect religious liberty to biblical theology is the central and driving concern of this book, and tethering religious liberty to areas such as eschatology, anthropology, and missiology forms central planks in its overall argument.

To be clear, several academics have shown the connection between Christian ethics and religious liberty, but their approaches are piecemeal and do not consider, generally speaking, key themes in biblical theology. Christian reflection concerning religious liberty is informed more by vague theisms and the United States Constitution than by explicit theology. By contrast, an approach to religious liberty should be centrally concerned with recognizing Jesus's kingship over the conscience and his absolute and exclusive right to execute judgment over it. Religious liberty is best understood when built on the foundational biblical motifs of the kingdom of God, the image of God, and the mission of God. The

reality of Christ's already/not-yet kingship is the ground on which religious liberty ought to be intelligible for Christians.

Think of a three-legged stool. We might think of religious liberty resting on the three legs of the kingdom of God (eschatology), the image of God (anthropology), and the mission of God (missiology). Each leg supports the overarching and uniting reality of Jesus's kingship. This threefold strategy is deliberate and based on a schematic framework seen in J. Budziszewski's *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action*.<sup>12</sup> Budziszewski says that any "adequate political theory" has at least three elements: (1) an orienting doctrine, "or a guide to thought"; (2) a practical doctrine, "or a guide to action"; and (3) a cultural apologetic, "or a guide to persuasion."<sup>13</sup> While this book is not a work of political theory per se, Budziszewski's framework supports the method taken here. The kingdom of God is the orienting doctrine, the image of God is the practical doctrine, and the mission of God is the cultural apologetic.

The kingdom of God functions as the orienting doctrine because it serves as the primary locus for guiding this book's argument concerning religious liberty. Think of the orienting doctrine as the vertical relationship between God and humanity (the "what"). The image of God functions as the practical doctrine because it offers guidance for understanding how religious liberty applies to persons in historical-political contexts (the "how"). Think of the practical doctrine as the horizontal relationship between persons existing in community. Finally, the mission of God functions as the cultural apologetic because every horizon where religious liberty occurs is embedded in cultural matrices that are either hospitable or inhospitable to the claims of religion. Think of the cultural apologetic as the engine of momentum that gives force to religious liberty in society (the "why"). We will look briefly here at these themes before laying them out in turn in the three parts that follow.

### ***The Kingdom of God (Eschatology)***

Religious liberty begins not with jurisprudence, legal philosophy, or even questions about state authority over religious affairs but with a central question that the kingdom of God answers: “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).<sup>14</sup>

Religious liberty is concerned with the means and ends of salvation as it focuses on how one is genuinely converted and the outworking of that conversion. It asks a fundamental question: Who holds ultimate judgment over the sincerity of a person’s religious faculties? Is one saved through good works? By proxy? Or through the operations of the individual conscience brought to faith through repentance? And moreover, if salvation is received through an individual’s conscience grasping religious truth, the conscience’s agency has immense consequences for lesser authorities or mediators who would attempt to disrupt or thwart one’s active response to God. If religious liberty is a matter of conscience, who has the ability to execute judgment on redeemed or erring consciences? If salvation is experienced personally and communally through membership in the church, what boundaries distinguish the church from the rest of the world—and the church from the state? And central to these questions is one overarching question: How does inaugurated eschatology play into the current role of the state and the mission of the church in society? This book answers the question by arguing that the kingdom of God is the standard of measurement by which the authority of the state in a secular age of contestability is determined.

### ***The Image of God (Anthropology)***

A Christian approach to religious liberty must determine the nature and purpose of the person as made in God’s image. The doctrine of the image of God offers the best foundation for questions related to anthropology and the conscience because it securely

anchors the inviolability and integrity of the reasoning conscience as ordered to God's moral law and held liable to judgment. The image of God is the best place to locate a doctrine of human rights that makes religious liberty practical and relevant to Western political order.<sup>15</sup> The image of God makes noncoercion and voluntary assent foundational for religious liberty. Understanding the image of God and its meaning for humans as being rational and free creatures confers dignity on the conscience.<sup>16</sup> The conscience is the vehicle by which people are held accountable to Christ and liable to judgment by Christ (Acts 17:31).

### *The Mission of God (Missiology)*

Religious liberty is needed in order to advance the gospel. I offer this cautiously, not wishing to imply that absent religious liberty, God's mission will advance no further. Rather, a Christian account of religious liberty, driven out of concern for a proper understanding of missiology, must determine the relationship between the mission of God, the mission of the state, and the existence of erring belief in light of the current era of redemptive history.<sup>17</sup> A Christian understanding of mission, religious liberty, and the era of history in which the church's mission is located should allow for divergent religious and ideological viewpoints and foster a cultural milieu that prioritizes religious liberty for the sake of the common good and the church's moral witness in society.

## **Conclusion**

Carlson explains why religious liberty is "an integral part of Christian thinking": "If it stems from our religious presuppositions, then we have an obligation to make these relationships clear so that this modern confused world can understand. If there are such relationships, they should become clear in our preaching

and teaching.”<sup>18</sup> This book takes up Carlson’s charge. A tradition aware of its own internal views on religious liberty is obligated out of concern for social witness to see such views publicly articulated for its own good but also because articulating them might lead to society’s flourishing.

Carl F. H. Henry wrote that “if the Church fails to apply the central truths of Christian religion to social problems correctly, someone else will do so incorrectly.”<sup>19</sup> Henry’s message is a call to arms, reminding us that Christianity rejects gnostic religion. It is a religion of the here and now and of the future. Christianity offers a comprehensive critique of secularism and modernity. The Christian religion believes not only that it properly understands humanity’s problems but also that it has the message that can restore humanity. A Christian understanding of religious liberty can never be severed from this central truth. From the New Testament onward, Christianity has impacted kings, empires, and modern nation-states with a message of competing kingship (Matt. 2:1–18; Acts 9:15; 17:7; Rev. 2:26–27). How people have reckoned with the claim of Jesus Christ’s kingship has been a driving force in world history ever since a once-and-former corpse walked out of a grave and claimed to be a king (Isa. 9:6–7; Acts 13:30; Rev. 15:3).

The proclamation that Jesus is Lord has worked itself out in varying political contexts. Some people have received such news with glad acceptance. Others have sought to distort this message for political gain. Others have rejected the message altogether. Christian teaching on religious liberty demands greater explanation because the gospel impacts people who inhabit particular places at particular times in history with the announcement that the kings and governments of the world do not possess absolute authority.

This book argues for consensus, because a lack of consensus means there has not been a constructive way to understand religious liberty comprehensively. This book aims to synthesize

existing arguments into a better conceptual framework, to provide the connective tissue between ideas related to religious liberty that have previously floated independently. It attempts to take existing arguments about religious liberty and unite them into a thematic system more amenable to Christian thought. The argument of this book is not that Christians have failed to reason or argue persuasively about religious liberty; it is, rather, that religious liberty has not been given the sustained reflection, treatment, and prominence it deserves as a crucial foundation for Christian social ethics and public theology.