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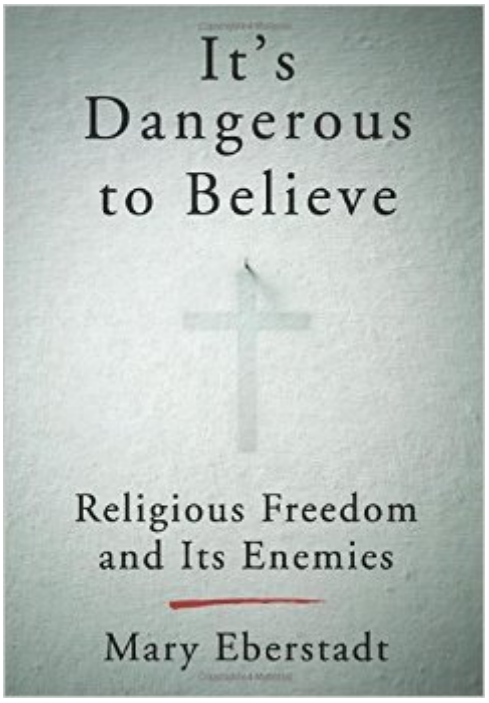
It's Dangerous To Believe: Religious Freedom And Its Enemies



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Synopsis

Mary Eberstadt, â œone of the most acute and creative social observers of our time,â • (Francis Fukuyama) shines a much-needed spotlight on a disturbing trend in American society: discrimination against traditional religious belief and believers, who are being aggressively pushed out of public life by the concerted efforts of militant secularists.In Itâ ™s Dangerous to Believe, Mary Eberstadt documents how people of faithâ ”especially Christians who adhere to traditional religious beliefsâ ”face widespread discrimination in todayâ ™s increasingly secular society. Eberstadt details how recent laws, court decisions, and intimidation on campuses and elsewhere threaten believers who fear losing their jobs, their communities, and their basic freedoms solely because of their convictions. They fear that their religious universities and colleges will capitulate to aggressive secularist demands. They fear that they and their families will be ostracized or will have to lose their religion because of mounting social and financial penalties for believing. They fear they wonâ ™t be able to maintain charitable operations that help the sick and feed the hungry.Is this what we want for our country?Religious freedom is a fundamental right, enshrined in the First Amendment. With Itâ ™s Dangerous to Believe Eberstadt calls attention to this growing bigotry and seeks to open the minds of secular liberals whose otherwise good intentions are transforming them into modern inquisitors. Not until these progressives live up to their own standards of tolerance and diversity, she reminds us, can we build the inclusive society America was meant to be.

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Customer Reviews

It’s Dangerous to Believe is an extended meditation on secular progressivism’s Ã¢Â Âœsoft

persecutionÃ¢Â Â• of Christians and religious freedom. First comes a tight recounting of the history of this new intolerance. She then begins amassing the evidence by presenting case after case of discrimination, financial bullying, legal warfare, harassment, social media shaming, and all forms of intimidation used by secular progressive activists to shut down Christians. Mary Eberstadt is a superb analyst. The hypothesisÃ¢Â Â”carefully demonstrated, and ringing trueÃ¢Â Â”is that secular progressivism is not just a political ideology; it is a competing faith, a religion. Although Mary Eberstadt brings up the Ã¢Â ÂœBenedict OptionÃ¢Â Â• that some advocate as a way for Christians to cope with the cultural hostility they experience, this is not the answer she is championing. And this is where Eberstadt's wisdom really shines, she does a commanding job justifying a strategy of active, hopeful, patient engagement. I don't want to give away the whole book so I'll stop here.Mary Eberstadt's It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies is an excellent and timely book. It's tone and intelligence make it an especially perfect book to give to open minded secular friends. It's a book which deserves a wide audience, and the argument serious thought.

Mary Eberstadt would acknowledge that it's not as dangerous to be a Christian in the U.S. as it is in, for instance, ISIS-controlled regions, where terrorists cut the heads off Christians. Nevertheless, as she points out in It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies, American Christians are increasingly being pushed to the margins of culture, academia, and politics.Eberstadt writes of "the mounting toll of a widespread and growing effort to shame, punish, and ostracize people because of what they believe." The root of the issue is a new form of Puritanism. The first commandment of the new secularist orthodoxy "is that no sexual act between consenting adults is wrong--possibly excepting cases of adultery." People who hold traditional Christian views of sex "are seen as a threat . . . [to] laissez-faire sexual morality."Like their Puritan forebears in Salem, the orthodox secularist Puritans are on a witch hunt. Their standard of proof and quickness to judge and accuse offenders also resembles the Salem witch trials. "'You're a bigot if I say you're a bigot' is today's equivalent of 'you're a witch if I say you're a witch.'" For all their talk of diversity, the new secular Puritans have no tolerance for "traditionalists and non-progressive scholars."Eberstadt's book is chock full of examples, some of which I had seen wide coverage. Traditionalist Christians are faced with the daunting task of figuring out how they fit in among the secular Puritans. Just try to get a teaching position at a major university if you don't support gay marriage. For their part, "Secularist progressivism must find a way to coexist with affronts to its own orthodoxy, not suppress them." Eberstadt offers a couple of glimmers of hope, but I'm not particularly hopeful. When a professor at a Catholic university can be chastised for defending a traditionalist view of marriage,

when a Baptist university seemingly softens its prohibition of homosexual activity, when religious expression is continually excluded from public spaces, it’s easy to start feeling like Christians have no option than to pull away from society.Eberstadt breaks down the societal divide cleanly between those who say anything goes sexually and those who uphold traditional, heterosexual, marital monogamy. The witch hunt will continue until further notice.Thanks to Edelweiss and the publisher for the complimentary electronic review copy!

Though the Ã¢Â Âœsoft Ã¢Â Â• persecution of traditionalist Christians in the modern West is nothing new, Mary Eberstadt Ã¢Â Â™s timely book, It Ã¢Â Â™s Dangerous to Believe, marshals plenty of evidence to show that it is clearly getting worse, and she makes a strong argument that such intensifying persecution is the result of a Ã¢Â Âœnew puritanism Ã¢Â Â• stemming from an emerging secular religion rooted in the sexual revolution. Eberstadt attacks this new puritanism with all the heavy ammunition she can muster. She thinks genuine religious pluralism should be affirmed and defended rather than suppressed.Eberstadt argues the persecution of traditionalist Christians is illiberal, irrational and socially destructive. It is illiberal because philosophic liberalism originates with a defense of the rights of conscience. It is irrational in that the current persecution mirrors aspects of both literal and ideological witch hunts from the past. (Great power and malevolent designs, for instance, are hysterically attributed to the already marginalized intended victims. And standards of "proof" for determining guilt are incredibly bogus: traditional Christians are often deemed Ã¢Â Âœhaters Ã¢Â Â• and Ã¢Â Âœbigots Ã¢Â Â• for no more than simply adhering to their faith, for instance, and stigmatized as theocrats, even though their aspirations to be treated as more than second-class citizens are decidedly more modest, and despite the fact the emergence of religious liberty in America crucially depended upon a Christian historical context. Also, of course, a mob mentality enables much irrational excess during a witch hunt, and today Ã¢Â Â™s social media environment greatly assists the creation of this type of mentality.) And such persecution is socially destructive, fraying the ties that bind us together and entailing plenty of collateral damage, since the poor and needy are penalized as important and often irreplaceable Christian charities that refuse to surrender to the new secular pieties are crippled and destroyed.Although traditionalist Christians will surely appreciate her book, perhaps Eberstadt Ã¢Â Â™s most important audience consists of the broad number of readers who are neither persecuted Christians nor committed witch hunters. She provides an eye-opening account of what traditional Christians are enduring, and says that if the dismal situation she describes is to change for the better, if in fact traditional Christianity is not to be driven underground, it will require others to lend their traditionalist Christian fellow citizens a helping

hand, standing with them against the new puritans in the name of liberality, rationality, social welfare, common sense, and the common good.Eberstadt seems cautiously optimistic about changing the trends she describes in this book. Though she acknowledges things may get worse before they improve, she hopes that the current witch hunt will die out rather suddenly, much like in Salem or in the days of Joseph McCarthy. I hope she is right, and that with some pin-pricking the balloon of persecution soon bursts. However, I am inclined to be a bit less optimistic. For instance, since (as Eberstadt points out) the commitment to religious freedom emerged in a historical context that was overwhelmingly Christian, the increasing secularization of society might well mean that many people will simply have little to no inner commitment to sustaining a society that values the conscience rights of others, even as people like Eberstadt sound the alarm. Relatedly, another result of secularization is that for many individuals, their Ã¢Â Âœunderstanding Ã¢Â Â• of Christianity and of Christians consists mainly of perpetuated stereotypes, and so it becomes easier for them to passively go along with the persecution of a despised Ã¢Â Âœother.Ã¢Â Â• Also, it would seem important to remember that the persecution of traditionalist Christians means, in practice, the enhancement of centralized authority. The new puritanism is thus intertwined with and hard to disentangle from a broader and older politically progressive agenda, which means that attempts to end it will likely meet with the full resistance of the progressive political establishment.This is a timely, brave, humane and thought provoking book, and I am very curious to see how it will be reviewed by the mainstream press.

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