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Making Religion Safe for Democracy: Transformation from Hobbes to Tocqueville

J. Judd Owen

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Making Religion Safe for Democracy: Transformation from Hobbes to Tocqueville J. Judd Owen Does the toleration of liberal democratic society mean that religious faiths are left substantively intact, so long as they respect the rights of others? Or do liberal principles presuppose a deeper transformation of religion? Does life in democratic society itself transform religion? In Making Religion Safe for Democracy, J. Judd Owen explores these questions by tracing a neglected strand of Enlightenment political thought that presents a surprisingly unified reinterpretation of Christianity by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Thomas Jefferson. Owen then turns to Alexis de Tocqueville's analysis of the effects of democracy on religion in the early United States. Tocqueville finds a religion transformed by democracy in a way that bears a striking resemblance to what the Enlightenment thinkers sought, while offering a fundamentally different interpretation of what is at stake in that transformation. Making Religion Safe for Democracy offers a novel framework for understanding the ambiguous status of religion in modern democratic society.

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