

The balance between freedom and truth- a dialogue

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The balance between freedom and truth- a dialogue On November 06, 2009, God arranged for a discussion or dialogue among five randomly chosen individuals (long dead) to be telecast live by practically every TV network in the United States and the rest of the world. It is believed that the purpose behind this act was an attempt at bringing a relative sense of truth that needs to be imbibed into practical politics in the twenty-first century. The technicalities on how God managed this worldwide telecast is beyond the comprehension of this writer, but the net result is that it happened on the above mentioned date. The randomly chosen participants are as follows:

John Winthrop - Puritan and Governor of Massachusetts (1588-1649).

Christopher Columbus - Well, every American has heard about him.

Ioann (John) Veniaminov- Russian missionary in Alaska (1797-1879)

Roger Williams - Founder of Rhode Island and religious seeker (1603-1683).

Jean Nicollet - French fur trader (1598-1642).

The participants in the dialogue were introduced by President Barack Obama. Christopher Columbus, as the discoverer of America, started the dialogue.

Columbus: I need not remind anyone here that I was the one responsible for the colonization of this land. The native people of this land were pagans and the only way to bring about a change was through enforced rules that made them see the truth of our religion. I presume, everyone here agrees with the statement that religion is concerned with truth - and hence the true religion should be enforced by the state: those who do not believe or deviate in their beliefs, from what the state says is the religious Truth ought to be punished, as severely as necessary to convince them of the errors of their ways.

Veniaminov: Glory to God our savior. I agree with this illustrious gentleman. I believe from my experiences with Aleut Indians that Christianity, as a unified religion, is the best way to govern a state. I have, with the grace of God, been able to bring about a civilized society for those people without damaging their culture and language. The truth in the teachings of Christ also helped to bring about peace and harmony between the native Indians and the white settlers. What more could an administrator, king or politician wish for? But I am for a more moderate approach. I believe that punishment be less severe and a change be brought about through love and patience and not through fear.

Williams: Could both of you expand a little more on what you have opined. I do agree wholeheartedly that religion is concerned with truth. But there are many religions in the world and they are now present in this modern world. When you say that religion should be enforced by the state, which is the one that should be enforced.

Veniaminov: As for me, there is only one religion and it is the one that I have taught my Indians.

Columbus: I agree

Winthrop: With due respect, all of you may be aware that Judaism and Islam are also exist in this world. It is a fact that the followers of these two religions along with others like Hinduism may outnumber those who follow Christian faith.

(Both Veniaminov and Columbus express surprise at this statement)

Nicollet: Gentlemen, I am but a layperson in this regard. I was a trapper and a clerk and do not have much knowledge in this area. But could someone

explain in simple words, what you mean by the word 'truth'?

Columbus: Well, truth means 'not telling a lie'.

Veniaminov: To me, truth means standing by what a person believes (to be true).

Williams: But this brings up further questions. The honorable Winthrop brought up the names up two other faiths. They believe in different Gods, but does that mean that their followers are liars. They have different practices and beliefs, but are fundamentally similar to our faith in the sense that both Islam and Judaism also adheres to principles like love, piety, and charity.

Nicollet: I have interacted extensively with the Native American Indians during my fur trade days. These pagans as described by Columbus had their own beliefs and practices. For one, they worshipped nature in many of its manifestations. The Algonquin, for example, worshiped a fire dragon. From their explanations, the fire dragon was a meteor. Is there something wrong in this? Is it falsehood for these people to follow their beliefs?

Columbus: They are not living truthfully as far as their beliefs go. The state should intervene and force them to change their beliefs. Those who refuse should be punished.

Veniaminov: If I was in your place, dear Nicollet, they would have been made to see the truth.

Nicollet: Sorry, I was a fur trader and not a preacher. Anyway I do not see them to be untruthful in any way. They led a peaceful and loving life and had good relationship with the white settlers and other tribes.

Columbus: I stand by with what the Saint says. Spain conquered many parts

of the world and had converted many pagans by force or other means.

Williams: Gentlemen, it appears at this stage that truth is relative. Yes, it does involve not telling lies and standing by one's beliefs. But it does not entail a forceful acceptance of beliefs and practices of a particular religion.

The world of today is not the one that you saw in your times. It is too globalized. That is the word being used today. Some people also refer it to as a global village. Truth should be limited to goodness, honesty and patriotism which can be enforced through statutes. An enforcement of truth through religion in my eyes is persecution. In 1644, I had written that " the permission of other consciences and worships that a state professeth, only can (according to God) procure a firm and lasting peace, (good assurance being taken according to the wisdom of the civil state) for uniformity of civil obedience from all forts" (Gaustad and Schmidt 156).

Winthrop: You have just expressed my view on the topic, Mr. Williams. The constitution of our country is based upon the teachings of Jesus Christ, but we allow religious freedom and do not see other faiths as not following the truth. It might come as a surprise to all of you that modern day statesmen like Michael Dukakis and Ronald Reagan have quoted my views on this. Freedom and truth should go hand in hand.

Nicollet: I agree with Mr. Winthrop and Mr. Williams

President Obama (n his concluding remarks): Well, a democratic vote shows that the argument for freedom to practice any faith along with enforcement of truth through statutes wins. Good night and thank you gentlemen.

(Columbus walks out in a huff, Veniaminov smiles and the other three clap heartily)

References

Gaustad, E S & Schmidt, L E. The Religious History of America. Harper, 2002