

Reason for God: Chapter Three: Christianity is a Straitjacket

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Absolute Truth & Freedom

- Is absolute truth the enemy of freedom? Many think so.
- Many churches bar no-conformers to Christian doctrine – leading observers to believe these churches are anti-freedom.
- Christianity is also seen as culturally constrained and intolerant of diversity of thought.
- Finally some see Christianity – especially in its more “cultish” forms – effectively enslaving people.

The Nature of True Freedom

- Freedom means finding our own way in life.
- Freedom is discovering each of our purposes.
- Freedom is individually creating our own meaning.
- To some observers, Christianity is a threat to freedom because it:
 - Requires following “the way” of Christ – not “our way.”
 - Involves discovering God’s purpose for us and
 - Discovering the meaning of our lives as creatures of God.

All Truth is a “Power Play”

- Truth is a metanarrative constructed by the elite to control people.
- Truth is used to exert power over other people.
- If you eschew the pursuit of truth as illegitimate - since “truth” is just a tool for power - then the very statement “All Truth is a Power Play” becomes your truth and is or is not illegitimate depending on your perspective.
- To see through everything is to not see at all.

Requirements of Christian Community

- Christian community can't be completely inclusive (as far as shared beliefs are concerned).
- Church as community requires a proscribed set of beliefs and values.
- The concept of the modern progressive or “liberal” democracy postulates a completely inclusive society for which there is little room for “exclusive” groups or organization.
- The problem is that the concept of “inclusive” defined by proponents of such democracies is in fact a highly defined and “exclusive” of values (like Christian values) that contradict their definition of “inclusivity.”

Corporate Identity

- “Any community that did not hold its members accountable for specific beliefs and practices would have no corporate identity and would not be a community at all.”
- Christian communities should ask of the larger secular society which community exhibits better values for the inclusion and well-treatment of people than Christianity?
- They should also ask which communities do more to demonized, separate and marginalize people?
- Christian communities can be found that both elevate and include and demonize and exclude.
- We like to think that Christian communities grounded in the theology and ethics of Christ serve as welcoming and enabling communities.

Enemy of Pluralism and Multiculturalism?

- Is Christianity the enemy of pluralism and multiculturalism?
- Sometimes “yes” and sometimes “no.”
- Christianity, however is multicultural to a remarkable degree as it is growing worldwide in many diverse cultures.
- Kellor thinks in part this happens because Christianity is inclusive of supernaturalism – something spurned in more rationalistic societies but valued in many, many other cultural settings.
- Redeemer Church in NYC is an example of Christian community attempting to adapt and explain itself in a very rationalistic, highly educated community

Diversity At The Council of Jerusalem

- Acts 15: ² And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brethren, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written,
- ¹⁶ *‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up,¹⁷ that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,¹⁸ says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.’*
- ¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood.

Cultural Diversity is Built Into the Christian Faith

- From the outset Christianity has been expansive to all people and all cultures.
- Biblical text such as Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21-22 depict a world where we are one but still retain our cultural differences.
- Christianity is not a Western religion that necessarily destroys local cultures (although in its worst forms (e.g. America's Indian schools) it has).
- Christianity assumes more culturally diverse forms than virtually any other religion.

Freedom Isn't Simple

- Ostensibly Christianity constrains our freedom to choose for ourselves.
- Does it “constrain” or is it a value system that helps us “discriminate” in our choices?

Freedom Or Antiauthoritarian?

- Contemporary society seems to resist the forces of social and religious authority.
- Freedom to believe and act for ourselves is touted as the necessary cure for runaway authoritarianism.
- Yet.. Is it really that simple?
- Freedom can't simply be defined in negative terms (what it objects to).
- Freedom must also be defined affirmatively in terms of what it embraces and those values embraced serve to constrain and define social order.
- Ultimately there is no escaping social and arguably religious mores.

Freedom: The Absence of Restrictions or Embracing the Most Liberating Ones?

- Values that “fit with the reality of our nature and the world produce greater power and scope for our abilities and a deeper joy and fulfillment.”