

Why are Christians able to embrace the First Amendment (i.e., disestablishment of religion and religious freedom) and democratic process?

According to "Faith and Public Issues" (1:7 f.), Christians are able to embrace the First Amendment and democratic process because they believe that the Christian vision of justice and mercy is true—indeed, is precisely the "great truth" that can and will prevail wherever democracy based on the way of persuasion—and thus on appeals, finally, to the deepest experience and moral conscience of all people—also prevails. In other words, Christians agree, tacitly or openly, with Thomas Jefferson that "truth is great and has nothing to fear from conflict unless disarmed of her natural weapon, free argument and debate." Believing that their vision of God's purpose is true, Christians commit themselves unhesitatingly to the free argument and debate by which its truth cannot fail to be vindicated.

I entirely agree with this answer. But it seems to me that it necessarily presupposes a very definite understanding of religion generally, and thus also of Christianity in particular, that is—to say the least—theologically controversial.

Briefly put, it presupposes that religion generally, and thus Christianity in particular, is the primary form of culture, or "cultural system," through which our existential question as human beings is explicitly asked and answered. As such, Christianity, like any other religion, claims to be the authorized representation of the answer to this question. Because from its standpoint, the understanding of existence it represents is true, in the sense of being appropriate to, or authorized by, the very structure of ultimate reality, its own representations of this understanding have decisive existential authority for any and all self-understanding. In other words, Christianity, like religions generally, expresses or implies a claim to decisive authority because it at least implicitly claims to be the true religion, in the sense that it is the formal norm for judging all other religious—indeed, all other existential—truth.

Whether or not this claim is valid, however, is as dependent, finally, on appeals to common human experience and reason as any other claim to

truth. But, then, the truth represented by a religion, insofar as its claim is valid, can only be the truth originally presented in and with human existence simply as such and therefore more or less adequately represented by any other religion just insofar as its own claim to truth is valid.

In short, religion generally and Christianity in particular are understood in accordance with a pluralistic inclusivism for which there at least can be not only one, but more than one, formally true religion.

So far as I can see, some such understanding as this is necessarily presupposed by the whole argument of "Faith and Public Issues" (1: 7 f.). Implied by this understanding, of course, is the systematic distinction between the one claim of religious praxis to be appropriate and its other claim to be (theoretically as well as practically) credible.

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