

Our mind as our church

To live a decent life doing what we deem right and avoiding the blunders is what a person usually wishes for. When thinking about how many choices and decisions people have to make in their lives, it is understandable that they consider it to be a difficult task. It is natural for people to search for advice and instructions in complicated situations, and life, being the most complex one, surely makes most of us wish there were guidelines on it. The easiest way to find ones is to consult the Bible. However, blindly following the advice given we might commit the biggest mistakes in our lives by abandoning voice of reason and common sense – that’s how Thomas Paine would have commented on the Petersons’ situation and that’s how I comment on it as well.

Knowing Paine’s attitude towards the principles of Christian church, which he describes as “...fable, which, for absurdity and extravagance, is not exceeded by anything that is to be found in the mythology of the ancients.” (“Age of reason”, 29.), he would have started with the absurdity of Rock of Ages Bible Church creation. According to him, the Bible is an unreliable source as it is the compilation of anecdotes, pamphlets and poetry written by different people (“Age of reason”), therefore the doctrine that rests on it only and dedicates itself to its interpretation denies all the principles of logic. People don’t believe in what is written in fantasy books or shown in movies because our logic says that events described are not credible. Impartially, isn’t the Bible an ancient and respected fairy-tale book? None of the people living have witnessed those events taking place, it possible that those who have written them down hadn’t witnessed them and noted what have been told by the third, fourth, fifth etc party. It is not trustworthy positive. Even if it was, researcher should always see underneath the underneath, which is not on good terms with the literal interpretation. Let us imagine what would happen if, for example, faithful Hebrews strictly followed everything

written in the Talmud – unfortunately, it would not correspond with the norms of modern life, because we know that, for example, sometimes people are forced to work at Saturday. The Bible is not better than the Talmud, just like one faith cannot be better than another and we should always listen to the voice of reason, no matter what is the name of our God. We should think about what we believe and what accordingly influences our decisions. The Petersons should consider as well whether they believe in God or in the Bible.

However, there are many teachings and churches in our world and some of them might defend values that are virtues for one kind of people and vices for the other, so what to believe in depends on person, especially considering that the freedom of religious beliefs is proclaimed in the American Constitution (“Bill of rights”, Amendment 1, n.p.). The Petersons are free to choose whatever religious community they find acceptable, just like any citizen of the USA, however, they should always believe in common sense as well. Do they believe in it? It would be reasonable to think that Todd and Mark are nice people that treat others with tolerance and respect, are intelligent and well-behaved, besides, Mr. and Mrs. Peterson are in desperate need for money, therefore, there should not be any problem with letting them rent the apartment. Listening to the voice of reason, we should also take into account Mark and Todd’s peaceful, thoughtful and kind behavior and remember how blood may be spilled on the pages of the Holy Writing. Despite being indirect, there is a comparison between the kind and the cruel, peace and war and in this case the Petersons were the ones who declared war, which would be detested by such a thoughtful person as Thomas Paine, since it denies common sense as liberty that should be granted to everyone.

Nevertheless, people cannot always have their actions directed by common sense and there should be room left for the religious feelings of this family that should be respected; this respect, however, depends on whether these beliefs are sincere or are “prejudice... that arises

from ...pride" ("Common sense", 7). Religious freedom has to be granted for sure, but prejudice that doesn't have any traits in common with logic and reason and exaggerated pride, which has brought a lot of suffering through the history, won't do. Twenty-six years of following the teaching of Rock of Ages Bible Church show how faithful and dedicated the Petersons are. But they might as well be the cause of pride, combined with success of their children and the general view of community. According to "Common sense", prejudice by no means can be considered a right deed (8). Born in the state of natural liberty, one person does not have a right to execute judgment over another basing on the difference of their beliefs. Followers of the Rock of Ages Bible Church might think that their doctrine protects the society from evil. However, it resembles how Britain protected America before the revolution as described in "Common sense" – for its own reason and its own pride. Distinguishing people in kings and servants, states in parent state and colonies, just like dividing people in those who are to kindly talk to and those who are to be thrown out of the house is not natural and goes against moral and the conception of equality our country is so proud of. Even if Great Britain was the mother country for America, Paine argues that mothers don't harm their children; if Petersons know how to lead the right life they should not despise and harm those who don't. It is always hard to step over the prejudice but if we don't than it might lead us to violence, misery and cruelty, which is not what Jesus Christ gave his life on the cross for. People are equal and equals should not judge each other as it destroys the natural liberty given to us by Creator. God is the one that judges, it is not for his servants to take this obligation upon themselves.

Being fair, we should, however, think about the situation with respect to Mr. and Mrs. Peterson's religious beliefs and we should definitely not accuse them of prejudice. In this case, we should return to the laws of common sense, proclaim justice and freedom, again and remind ourselves about the leitmotiv of New Testament, which undoubtedly is respected by

the followers of Rock of Ages Bible Church. Isn't it love and mercy towards other people? There is no doubt that the Petersons were trying to do what they considered to be right according to the Bible. It is questionable, however, what is actually right – to follow the letter of law or its spirit.

I wouldn't like to sound too accusatory regarding Mr. and Mrs. Peterson's behavior, though. As for me, I probably would not agree to rent apartment either, if it was against my strong religious beliefs. Abandoning 26 years of being the part of religious community for money seems low and unfaithful, while being faithful to ourselves is the most important. In declaring my refusal, however, I would try to be tolerant and not offend the feelings of others, because even if people live in sin, God will give them judgment; a person should not give anything but mercy.

All in all, considering the situation given and after studying both of Thomas Paine's works "Age of reason" and "Common sense", it is possible to say that he wouldn't agree with the radical manner of the Petersons' behavior as their views arise not from common sense but from blind following of the Bible and go against the general concept of equality. Let us be sensible and no matter what church we attend and whatever is the name of our God, let's not allow prejudice to stand in our way – this might be the best guideline in our lives to follow.

References:

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