

What Ilhan Omar Doesn't Understand About the Christian Origins of American Tolerance and Freedom

Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who professes to be Muslim, provoked a storm of controversy when she tweeted her displeasure at Christians – apparently on Resurrection Sunday – singing Christian worship songs while in flight. We probably should not be surprised by her criticism since her country of origin, Somalia, is listed by Open Doors as the third most difficult country in the world to be a follower of Jesus.

Ilhan grew up Muslim in Somalia before immigrating to America with family members when she was 13. Persecution of Christians in Islamic Somalia is common, and only Afghanistan and North Korea are listed as more difficult places for Christians to live. Seeing Christians exercising such freedom is, understandably, difficult for one reared in that sort of intolerant culture.

She obviously does not realize that it is the values of New Testament Christianity that made America a shining light of tolerance and freedom, and allowed her to come to this nation and become a member of Congress.

Indeed, no one with knowledge and integrity can deny that America has been a very open and tolerant nation, opening its arms to people of many different races, cultures and religious beliefs. The Statue of Liberty and the freedom it represents is why people of all races and religions risk their lives and the lives of their family members to come to this country.

But make no mistake – this tolerance is rooted in the radical Christianity of its founders, who looked to Jesus as their

example and the New Testament as their guide. It was Jesus, after all, who taught, *"Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you"* (Matt. 5:44, MEV).

The people who founded this nation were "dissenting Protestants." They opposed the Constantinian form of Christianity that developed after the fourth century, which relied on political force rather than the power of truth for its success. State churches, supported by the government, persecuted those who did not adhere to the official lines of doctrine and practice put forward by the state church.

However, groups such as the Separatist Puritans, Baptists, and Quakers, who sought a return to the faith of the New Testament, opposed this intolerant approach to faith. They insisted that there should be no compulsion in matters of conscience and no coercion when it comes to one's sincerely held religious beliefs.

These "dissenting Protestants" brought these ideals of faith and freedom to America, where they were further developed on American soil. These ideals were reinforced by the Great Awakening and burned into the consciousness of the American populace. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, differences were melted and a remarkable unity among the churches emerged that was centered in faith in Christ.

At the same time, an amazing tolerance and friendliness toward other religions was manifest. For example, Benjamin Rush, a devout Christian and signer of the Declaration of Independence, in describing a parade in Philadelphia, said:

"The rabbi of the Jews locked in the arms of two ministers of the Gospel was a most delightful sight. There could not have been a more happy emblem" (Hyatt, *America's Revival Heritage*, 96).

During George Whitefield's ministry in Philadelphia, city

leaders decided to erect a large building to accommodate the massive crowds. According to Benjamin Franklin, the building was available for the use of “any preacher of any religious persuasion who might desire to say something to the people of Philadelphia.”

Franklin went on to say, “Even if the Mufti of Constantinople (Istanbul) were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us, he would find a pulpit at his service” (Hyatt, *America’s Revival Heritage*, 96).

The founders’ tolerance toward people of other faiths and religions was based not only on the words of Jesus and the spirit of the New Testament, but on their belief in the inherent power of the Christian message. They believed that on a level playing field, the truth of Christianity would prevail. They agreed with John Milton, who declared, “Let Truth and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?”

Thomas Jefferson echoed this same belief in the inherent power of Christian truth:

“Truth can stand by itself. If there be but one right religion and Christianity that one, we should wish to see the nine hundred and ninety-nine wandering sects gathered into the fold of truth. But against such a majority we cannot effect this by force. Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these, free inquiry must be indulged; and how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves” (Hyatt, *America’s Revival Heritage*, 97).

The First Amendment created a free and open marketplace of religious ideas because the founders did not fear open debate. Compare this attitude to Marxist and Islamic nations where opposing views are violently suppressed. The same is true of the new left-wing groups in modern America who seek to cancel anyone who disagrees with them. They fear free and open

debate.

Sadly, Ilhan grew up in this kind of intolerant political atmosphere and it has obviously shaped her thinking. We should pray that her eyes will be opened to the truth that is in Jesus and to the Christian roots of the American Dream of which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., so eloquently spoke.

We should also be praying for another Great Awakening that will turn the hearts of the American populace back to the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament. This would do more than anything to restore tolerance in modern America for, after all, it was Jesus who said:

“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ... And just as you want men [people] to do to you, you also do to them likewise. ... Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:27-28, 31, 36, NKJV). {eo}

This article was derived in part from Dr. Eddie Hyatt's latest book, America's Revival Heritage, with the subtitle, How Christian Reformation and Spiritual Awakening Led to the Formation of the United States of America. The book is available from Amazon and his website at .

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