

# Without the Power of Debate, Mankind Will Suffer

*Shôn Ellerton, June 23, 2023*

*We must be able to debate on important issues, including those which are sensitive or taboo, without fear of reprisal.*



The art and power of debate. It is the foundation stone of civilised man yearning to live in a free and democratic society. Without debate, man will always be subjugated to the whims of the tyrannical through ideology, either to satisfy one's vested interests or over some enthusiastic bout of religious zealotry.

Many will agree that the abuse of personal and civil liberties often sprouts its hideous wings from unchecked and excessive practices of ideology, usually that from political and religious views. More egregious is the practice of transgressing the rules and tenets of an ideology by that very same person who attempts to force that ideology to others. In the political sphere, those that preach communism and hold high office, no doubt, take far more than their share from those who are forced to adopt the ideology. In the world of religion, temperance is often a virtue bound to many faiths; however, those who denounce, or even punish others that do not show absolute allegiance to their god or gods, are, without a doubt, not exhibiting any values of temperance.

Ideologists do not and will not debate others, and I put it to the reader, that this behaviour has caused so much despair and even bloodshed in the case of when ideologists hold power over the people. Will we ever learn? I fear that we will not. History, time and time again, repeats itself. It is the lack of debate which, ultimately, causes war and suffering with mankind. War, of course, is the precursor to such horrors like famine, disease, and poverty. And this is the problem. Those that hold the reins of tyrannical power or hold the keys to the

instruments of wealth, such as some of those individuals or groups owning or steering our major industries, view any form of debate as threat to their ideologies. And yes, I would consider the plutocrats or the excessively wealthy to have the ideology of greed.

But what really sparked me off to write this piece is a series of disturbing interchanges I have recently been having with an old friend who has transformed into an evangelist of the Christian faith. And when I mean evangelist, I am talking hardcore. Being an old school friend and sharing many fond memories, he will always be a friend to me. We had been out of communication for many years after we parted our ways after high school, but when we did, I had discovered that he had fallen on hard times, and, has since, found his new true path through Jesus Christ.

At first, it seemed benign enough. We had talked about old times and haunts, food and drink, and generally, what has been happening in our lives. But then his conversations very quickly turned to Scripture which became the centrepiece of every little topic we embarked upon. There was an answer to everything, and it was in Scripture alone, and those that did not abide or heed Scripture would essentially be treated as a pariah not worthy in the eyes of God and therefore be consigned to hellfire for all eternity. Truly frightful stuff, but what makes this particularly scary, is that it was *meant* to be frightful and threatening. The ultimate ultimatum if you will. You better do this. Or else!

On many subsequent conversations, I dared to counter these views employing logic and reason. I later learned that logic and reason hold no ground with the fundamentalist. I attempted to engage in a discussion about other faiths scattered around the globe, the tenets and tolerance of good principles, morals and virtues, and other values which distinguish man from beast. However, I found myself against a proverbial brick wall separating me from my friend. It was, as if, he was unable to hear me. Instead, I would be subjected to another hailstorm of preaching and Scripture. I held my reserve of tolerance to the best of my abilities and made best efforts to talk about anything *except* religion, but this became an impossibility to my friend. He took the '*silence is violence*' approach, a mantra which became unfortunately quite popular during all the mania around the Black Lives Matters movement during 2020. Not wanting to talk about religion was akin to being a devil worshipper. At least, that is what it felt like to me.

My tolerance snapped; however, when he told me the story when he went to a restaurant and found it morally repugnant to find out those running the restaurant were proud that they were accepting to all faiths or those without. Being a private person about my own faith, I found the ethics promoted by the owners of the restaurant to be perfectly reasonable and of good standing. I was a little shellshocked at my friend's response. So much so, that I might have said a few hurtful things which I later became to regret. He blocked me from all his communications.

A few years had lapsed, and we reconnected. I apologised for some of the hurtful things I said and he, likewise, pledged he would not be as zealous in his preachings. He seemed much the same but, like the rest of us, getting a bit older. He still posted Scripture and preached incessantly on Facebook, although, the key difference is that his audience had dwindled to nearly zero, and judging by his rhetoric, had probably scared them all away. At first, we did not talk religion, but this was short-lived when a torrent of Scripture came my way through direct messaging and in response to some of my social media posts and writings which had nothing to do with Scripture, faith, or religion. I daresay, this article may elicit a prompt or two should he, perchance, stumble upon it.

I did have a bit of chuckle when I posted something about an interesting development of a doctor refusing to take part in a debate over the controversial vaccines during the pandemic. Forthwith, my friend posted some Scripture unrelated to the topic and, in frustration, I narrowed down the audience. Somehow or another, my friend couldn't find the post and asked why I deleted it and said that others would benefit from the 'wisdom' of my post. But what really tickled me was when he wrote in these very words immediately after. "*...and besides, I was going to post Scripture*". Priceless! Truly, I will always love him as a friend but even as an old friend, he adamantly refuses to debate over religion.

Leaving religion aside, whilst writing this, an interesting memory came back to me from a time I used to wake up from bad dreams being chased around by shadowy creatures roaming through endless corridors. The creature's agenda was different from mine. His agenda was to, presumably, eat me, or maul me, or whatever. My agenda was to get away from it. However, being fed up with having this same dream, I walked up to it in a casual way and said, "*OK. Let's talk about this.*" The creature was taken aback and simply muttered, "*Uh? Well, I....*", followed by some peculiar conversation which I can't remember. But it did put a stop to those bad dreams and introduced me to the power of lucid dreaming,

which I have done ever since. One could simply put this down to confronting their fears, but I think it's more than that. It's the ability to appease the situation through talking and debate. If we refuse to debate or talk to each other, how on earth can we live harmoniously with each other?

Unfortunately, this sort of so-called non-debateable ideology has staunchly reared its ugly head through the recent pandemic years. Through various podcasts and videos, much has been written or talked about over the refusal by political ideologists, corporate demagogues, and social activists to debate *anything* that might upend the narrative they are protecting. Climate change, transgender issues, Ukraine, vaccines, indigenous rights, Trump, Biden, and BLM-related issues have all generated a religion of sorts, in which, once indoctrinated with the single orthodox-minded way of thinking, it is nigh impossible to have the ability to be able to debate, let alone think rationally. Those few that do, or those attempting to bridge the gap through debate and thinking in a heterodox manner are often vilified by both sides.

Robust debate and heterodox thinking are prone to being censored by those who have command of the platform; however, times have changed since the days of The Spanish Inquisition or during those brutal bloodthirsty times between the Catholics and the Protestants in which mere mortals had debased themselves to kill or torture one another over differences on how the *same* Holy book is interpreted.

It was during the Age of Enlightenment, a time when debate could be conducted without fear of being burned at the stake, when mankind was finally freed from the shackles of tyranny and fear from the State or the Church. During times of religious intolerance, debate was often considered the tool of Satan. Imagine that! And history shows us time and time again, when the Age of Enlightenment ends and debate is no longer allowed, it is the tell-tale sign of the return of tyranny and control which our two worst World Wars of the twentieth century have amply illustrated.

We must have the power to debate at all costs regardless of the sensitivity of the topics or the overarching narrative of the day. Otherwise, we will never be able to live in a harmonious and peaceful society.