

# THE EVANGELICAL OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE

## **A Millennial's Lament:**

### **What Ever Happened to my Right to Disagree?**

When one considers all of the offenses one *could* commit, one immediately thinks of such things as murder and theft. Logically, such deeds are indeed serious. To Millennials, however, the most serious offence of all is to disagree with their viewpoint.



It does not take long for a human being to go around in the world and find a person with a different viewpoint. As shocking as this may sound to some, that is okay. The bedrock of democracy is the ability to bring to the table all the various viewpoints and discuss them using logic, rhetoric, and reason – most often coming to a compromise somewhere in the middle. Beyond this, the rights to freedom of thought and conscience are foundational pieces to this process because they allow each person to form their own viewpoint

based on their knowledge, beliefs, and experience.

The biggest political hot topics of our time are social issues: abortion, sexuality, gender, etc. As everyone knows, there are some passionate opinions on these topics, which, once again, is okay. The best debates have always been between parties that truly believe in their viewpoints.

So long as these topics are approached with respect and open-mindedness, both sides can come away enriched by the exchange – even if they still continue to disagree.

Yet, it is precisely this fact that so many in my generation just don't seem to understand— that it is okay to disagree with someone. Just because disagreement exists, doesn't mean one cannot love the other person, be civil to the other person, or even associate with the other person. And contrary to the popular Tumblr-user's and teenage blogger's/vlogger's belief, just because various people disagree with your viewpoint doesn't mean they hate you. And it *definitely* doesn't mean they are persecuting or oppressing you.

It just means they d-i-s-a-g-r-e-e!

Somehow, in my generation, the very act of disagreement has become synonymous with bigotry. So, for the sake of clarity, here are the Oxford English Dictionary's (OED) definitions of the words:

- Disagree: “to differ, to be unlike” or “to differ in opinion; to dissent.”
- Bigotry: “The quality or condition of a bigot; obstinate or unreasonable attachment to a belief, practice, faction, etc.; intolerance, prejudice.”

Now, I do not profess to be a linguist, nor do I considered my command of the English language to be vastly superior to the majority of my fellow human beings. However, in my estimation, it takes neither a linguist nor a philologist to recognize the innate difference between the denotations of these two words. Nevertheless, when confronted by a view differing from the one they hold, Millennials are quick to launch their limited vocabulary of epithets to counteract this heinous crime, namely: BIGOT, HOMOPHOBE, RACIST, SEXIST, XENOPHOBE, CLOSE-MINDED, INTOLERANT.

To quote *The Princess Bride*, “I do not think that word means what you think it means.” This is especially the case wherever the word

“intolerant” is used, mostly because to be “tolerant” effectively means to agree to disagree. Thus, to be “intolerant”, a person must be unable to do this (in other words, they must be on the *Huffington Post*’s editorial committee).

Truly, what hope can anyone have against the Millennials’ and Facebook commenters’ commanding authority in the discipline of rhetoric? I tremble in the awe of such argumentation – but I digress.

The fact is, there is a war being waged against freedom of conscience and thought, and everyone who enjoys the freedoms of democracy better start paying attention before their rights are taken away.

One of the key battlegrounds is dialogue— more specifically, its recent death. Healthy dialogue necessitates the presence of at least two viewpoints, and is the place in which democracy ultimately has its origin. Yet a person need not spend much time on the internet before they find a dialogue that benefits neither side— one filled with emotion and marked by an overall inability to engage with and argue against a different viewpoint.

Unless we can recapture the art of healthy and constructive dialogue and educate Millennials in proper rhetoric, this generation will be the death of democracy and all the rights we have come to know and love. A generation that is unable to take into consideration different views and is unable to compromise will find itself unable to govern our increasingly diverse society.

And that’s bad news for *all* of us.