Literature Of Puritan Essay, Research Paper

Political Morality

In Webster’s dictionary, morality is defined as “principles of right and wrong in conduct; ethics.” The principles of morality have countless times evolved over the ages. In earlier times, death was an easy penalty for many crimes. These crimes today are considered minor and are penalized with a slap on the hand. Is this considered wrong? Who is the correct authority to consult on what is right or wrong? In today’s society, two major factors concern how the way members of society act and behave. The first is our national government.

Members of our government in positions of authority decide everything in our lives in the form of laws which determine our behavior. One of the most important documents written by our government is the Declaration of Independence. The monarchy was taking away power from the colonists and putting more demands on. In return, the colonists declared their freedom from their tyrant. In this document, it states, “All men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The great men who wrote this down had a strong sense of morals. They believed that men were given rights by God that no one could take away. This is essential to the issue of morality because it determines the rights- that are agreed upon all- are wrong.

This brings us to religion. Religion is a major contributor to how we think and act because it mirrors our beliefs in what we hold as right or wrong. An example of this is the native tribes of africa and South America where a number of tribes practice cannibalism. While this is considered a sin in most christian religions, the tribes have evolved into cannibalism as a way to survive in life and have no objections to their eating habits. The problem arises when the line between government and religion is crossed. While religion does not have to power to punish one physically, but rather soulfully of one has sinned. The government has the power to sentence punishment, yet should have no power concerning God.

Many different religions have evolved all over the world and in the process, have people have been prosecuted in their faith. The first settlers in the new world came here to avoid prosecution from the powerful church/government of that time. Specifically, the Church of England headed by the king. Puritan leaders led their followers to a place where they could express their religion with no fear of other faiths. One such leader was John Winthrop.

John Winthrop was a powerful Puritan governor in the colony of Massachusetts Bay. He believed that this was a calling from God for him to lead the new religious experiment-a covenant with God to built a model for mankind. “We shall be a city upon the hill.” declared Winthrop. As governor Winthrop held considerable power. He distrusted the commoners and thought democracy was the “meanest and worst” forms of government. Anyone who brought trouble or had indifferent thought were severely punished to “save their soul.” As one of his extensions of his powers he banished Roger Williams, a popular Salem minister with radical ideas and an unrestrained tongue, and Mistress Anne Hutchinson, A strong willed women who challenged the authority of the clergy by stating the truly saved need not bother to obey the laws of God or man.

Several problems arise throughout this banishment. I am for a democratic society in which one can express his or her thoughts without the fear of prosecution. They did not have the luxury of this. The need for the expressment of ideas is essential for a growing environment. If no growth is made, then expansion of the community is halted to a standstill. The limit of new idea’s must have a point, though. In recent news, the Unabomber has issued a ultimanium with his manuscript. In the past, such a request would have been rediculous. In his manuscript he expresses his view on the evils of technology. While a citizen is entitled to free speech and press, threatening murder is not such an option. There must be limits set. In colonial times these limitations were set by John Winthrop. Total obedience was required and disobedience was not tolerated; therefore, Williams and Hutchinson were banished. I understand the reasoning behind his motives, but his limits were set too low. There was no room for free speech and thinking.

Morals today have been declining and declining. As independant thoughts have now been tolerated, so have thoughts against basic humane rights. More today than any other period murders and rapists are being convicted and released from jail. Attendance at churches pail considerably from the height of it’s popularity. The people have better things to do and church is just not the thing to do these days. The government is a mess of bureaucracy and misuse of power. In two words-Bob Packwood. The national deficit is at trillions and shows no signs of improvement. Money is spent in needless ways with lobbyists bribing officials for personal causes that have no implications with the common people. The cause of representing the common people is practically non-existent. These are just some of the examples of how the morals in today’s society have declined in the cause of “personal rights.”