

Big Media Ignorant of Religion

This article is a slightly edited version of a blog I write, “My World—My Neighbour” (post 139). This means you will come across occasional references to that blog. It is easier to explain the situation than to rewrite it all. It is a discussion of an interview National Public Radio (NPR) did with the *New York Times* (NYT).

In the previous post you were told that “The executive editor of *The New York Times* [recently admitted](#) that the New York-based and Washington-based media powerhouses ‘don't quite get religion’ or understand ‘the role of religion in people's lives’.” I checked out that claim and found it to be true. It is found in the transcript of an NPR interview with Dean Baquet, the Executive Director of the NY Times. The URL of the entire interview is given at the bottom of this post so that you check it all out for yourself.

The interview itself was held on December 8, 2016. It started out with Terry Gross of NPR who, due to throat problems, was replaced by Dave Davies the next day. The title of the transcript is: “New York Times' Executive Editor On The New Terrain Of Covering Trump,” while the title of the programme is “Fresh Air.”

Though the entire interview can be read on the first URL below, I have excerpted a few paragraphs from it as a way of highlighting and discussing a few issues in it. In between the quotes I offer my reactions in italics.

GROSS: Have you ever had a president or a president elect—referring, of course, to Trump-- tweet criticisms of you like this, of your paper?

BAQUET: Well, I've never had anybody in my life tweet that much at me. But, no, I've never - this is highly unusual. Part of it is funny. It's filled with obvious inaccuracies. I mean, for one thing, our subscriptions have gone up dramatically since the election and since the president-elect started tweeting. **I've made no apologies for our coverage. I think our coverage was very tough but fair.** No, but this is pretty unusual and creates all kinds of issues that are compelling for us.

Trump's statements are considered partially "funny." And why? Because "it's filled with obvious inaccuracies." Now this is, of course, a typical liberal reaction to conservatives in general. Liberals have such contempt for conservatives that they think they are funny. Well, of course. What else can you say about conservatives? Take them seriously? Don't be ridiculous. We liberals are the only reasonable and enlightened ones. Everybody else is just funny, not much more than a good joke.

*Now it's true, of course, that Trump is a very unique conservative who is not even understood or supported by his own cohorts of the Republican Party. And some of the things he said or did **are/were** funny, no doubt about it. Others would be funny if they were not so serious or even dangerous.*

Filled with inaccuracies—that is the reason our smart Executive Director thought him funny. So, being accurate is obviously important by this media man: It's the only way to be taken seriously. And he did think of his paper as being accurate in their treatment of Trump. He said, "I've made no apologies for our coverage. I think our coverage was very tough but fair." Well, yes, of course, liberals don't apologize to any non-rational conservative. No need for that! The rational apologize to the irrational? Come on, get off the pot! Not in this world.

GROSS: So what is most confounding for you as the executive editor of The New York Times about how to cover Donald Trump's tweets?

BAQUET: You know, I don't find covering his tweets confounding. I actually don't, even though many of them are inaccurate, as we said. I mean, I think that's, like, basic blocking and tackling journalism. The president says something, you fact-check it, you report it and you say whether or not it's accurate. I don't find that confounding. I mean, I find a lot about covering Donald Trump confounding, as we did during the election, but I don't find the covering the tweets so confounding. I mean, I think it's - **journalism is holding powerful people to account.**

Baquet is very aware apparently of the power of journalism. It is "holding powerful people to account." Now I appreciate that and have occasionally written in my blog that the press is a more effective

opposition than those paid to oppose within the government. Sometimes I wonder whether we should not do away with opposition within the government and just make do with the media. As much as I am critical of that spoiled brat we call CBC, I am often intrigued with how they call government and its agency to account. The latter's reaction is frequently to jump to attention and get things straightened out before their persecutors dig deeper and find that things are even worse than already discovered. So, thank you, media, for that function that you frequently carry out very effectively.

*But, of course, power brings responsibility and media power brings the responsibility to do their research responsibly. Find out the facts. Understand the issues and that without a liberal bias. Now, that's another kettle of fish altogether—without bias? Objectively? Neutrally? Well, doesn't that come naturally when you pursue the secular approach? **Secularism and its offspring Liberalism are neutral by definition.** It's all the others who are subjective, partial and irrational! Well, really, are they? Just go back and read through my blog and you'll discover something quite different from those claims. Go through the pages of my website and you'll see another side (www.SocialTheology.com).*

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We're big boys. We have lawyers. We have a whole list of precedents behind us including some precedents created by *The New York Times* and its propensity to defend itself in court. I worry more about the other.

Here's another claim to power. See the bolded sentences above. The media are indeed the big boys along with their lawyers, not necessarily because they have justice on their side so much as that they have the money to hire the most expensive lawyers who are extremely adept at twisting the facts to suit their fancy—or the fancy of their paymasters. So, powerful? Absolutely. Is it always or even just usually used properly? Remember that calls for researching the facts and understanding the issues? Read further, please.

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“And I want to make sure we're set up to cover that. I want to make sure that we are much more creative about beats out in the country so that we understand that anger and disconnectedness that people feel. And I think I use religion as an example because I was raised Catholic in New Orleans. **I think that the New York-based and Washington-based too probably, media powerhouses don't quite get religion. We have a fabulous religion writer, but she's all alone. We don't get religion. We don't get the role of religion in people's lives. And I think we can do much, much better. And I think there are things that we can be more creative about to understand the country.**”

Wow, did you read that? Those powerhouses meddle in religion all the time and frequently misinterpret, even ridicule. Well, why not? Those religious folk, are they not the irrational? They may have their universities and think tanks. They may have their scholars and doctors, often degreed by secular institutions who cannot find any basis for rejecting their “irrational” theses and dissertations, try as they may sometimes.

But all this is covered by media powerhouses who “don’t quite get religion;” “who don’t get the role of religion in people’s lives.” I’m exceedingly grateful for Baquet’s admission. That’s a rare one. But then, how do they dare to write about religion when they don’t understand it? The blind do not see. Those in denial will not see what’s out there right in front of them. Many are the “scholars” who make great anti-religious pronouncements but who have never talked to their religious neighbour across the street; in fact, don’t know a single one! It’s all part of the same culture, the same game, the same tunnel vision.

How does Baquet and his cohorts in the media even dare write anything about religion, when they know how powerful they are and how much destruction they can cause, without even “getting it?” I have the privilege of watching Douglas Todd, the religion writer at the Vancouver Sun, close up and appreciate his output. I have quoted him many times in my writings, both in hard as well as e-books and other e-materials. He knows the religious scene very well, but he has to step very gingerly and basically write in a style

acceptable to the secular establishment. It's there, in his writings, all over the map. But at least, he knows and understands. He's a far cry from the self-called powerhouses who admit to ignorance and lack of understanding. How do they dare to write about what they have not researched properly? What is left of their sense of responsibility? Can you have any confidence in them at all?

But this is not the end of it. It gets worse or, at least, it's much more widespread than the media.

The above transcript, including the above quotes, can be accessed at:

http://www.npr.org/2016/12/08/504806512/new-york-times-executive-editor-on-the-new-terrain-of-covering-trump?utm_campaign=storyshare&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_source=Cultural+Commentary&utm_campaign=16aa8c90a8-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2016_11_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_51f776a552-16aa8c90a8-273012301&mc_cid=16aa8c90a8&mc_eid=b0d9827b5e