

A Sermon on Due Diligence

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for June 5th, 2022 (and beyond)

This sermon is inspired in part by Soren Kierkegaard and specifically his work titled “Fear and Trembling”, Problema III (beginning on page 98). The version of “Fear and Trembling” referenced is published by the Penguin Group in New York, NY with a copyright of 2006 from a 1985 translation by Alastair Hannay.

Kierkegaard postulates in Problema III that the main source of tension/stress in any given narrative is a result of concealment juxtaposed to revelation/disclosure where reason and intention leave room for discretion. Kierkegaard goes on to state that the purely universally ethical person conceals nothing and discloses everything. Such a person Kierkegaard regards as a Knight of Faith where one exercising discretion or concealment is the Tragic Hero.

As many reading this likely know, my work at the HEAL Mission of COPE Ministries is one of consumer advocacy. Being aware of the manipulative marketing strategies employed in the free market, I amplify the risks associated with products and services that downplay or fail to expressly disclose those risks often because amplifying the risks themselves would end their endeavor. Some products and services prefer the disclaimer to any meaningful disclosure believing the disclaimer implies the risk and who is assuming it.

I’m not just a consumer advocate, I’m also clergy, an author, and an artist. I recently joined the Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA) in Seattle. My professional artist membership fee is \$95/year. CoCA is a licensed nonprofit in good standing in the state of Washington and has been since 1981. Since registering, I’ve been invited to participate in the Spring Show (2022) and a Show Wall in January, 2023. I submitted Tire Flap #45 and it is in the Spring Show right now. In the event CoCA sells any paintings shown at their events, they receive 30% and the artists receive 70% of the sale of their/our individual works. With for profit galleries, they take between 30-60% of the sale as their commission. See: <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/direct-consumer-art-sales-2035421#:~:text=However%2C%20most%20commercial%20galleries%20operate,percent%20of%20the%20selling%20price>. So, I do most of my sales myself in person or online through www.beyondbusiness.net when it comes to my paintings.

What would Priest John Ball and Wat Tyler say about 30% and an annual tithe of \$95 to CoCA? As you know Priest John Ball is a postmortem cofounder of COPE Ministries. If you don’t know that, see <https://www.cope.church/fellowship.htm>. The peasant revolt of 1381 spearheaded by Priest John Ball and Wat Tyler with Priest John Wycliffe’s mentorship was a result of being forced to pay taxes and tithes to state and church (charity) in the amount of 30% while being paid \$0.60 (medieval value) or \$20.25 with inflation at today’s value of the same per year. I’m a member of CoCA at my own volition and free to discontinue my membership. I also do not have to participate in their shows to continue to be a member, though I do still have to pay the annual membership fee/dues as long as I wish to support their work. And, in the USA, “Taxpayers who earn

less than the standard deduction — \$12,550 for single filers in 2021— don't have to file a tax return.” Source: <https://www.cNBC.com/2022/04/08/why-you-should-file-a-tax-return-even-if-you-dont-need-to.html> So, the free market capitalist system doesn't tax those in Wat Tyler or Priest John Ball's income category nor are those in the income category forced to tithe to any church/charity. I think the jury is out on whether or not it is worth it for cross-promotional considerations. I've sold 6 of my paintings myself directly to local art enthusiasts. The Spring Show is my first arguable third-party event. According to the article linked above from artnet.com, it isn't worth it. Even though nonprofit, the annual membership fee is not tax-deductible nor is the 30% commission CoCA retains if they sell one of my paintings at one of their shows. Does CoCA draw the buyers or the artists? How much marketing is involved? And, why a for profit commission margin from a nonprofit?

I'm aware of all that I've stated above and still choose to continue my membership with CoCA at this time. Am I choosing feudalism or medieval economics as a result? CoCA does disclose their fee structure, membership levels, and the commission structure to member artists that participate in their events. Was the only issue for Wat Tyler and Priest John Ball that failing to pay tithes/taxes of 30% even when living way below the poverty line regardless of perspective (\$20.25 a year before taxes, think about it, that's today's equivalent of their \$0.60 a year before taxes) would result in prison, indentured servitude/slavery, and/or the death penalty? And, would they laugh at a complaint from a party who voluntarily chose to participate in such an economy when they have every right to directly market themselves? What a fool believes may be a result of willful blindness, which is when one conceals the whole truth from him/herself.

I've been validated as a professional artist through direct sales of my own work. So, I don't need CoCA's validation in terms of listing as a professional artist. And, whether or not it is economically worth it is yet to be determined by both parties even if artnet.com has determined it isn't worth it for the artist.

As you know, June 2nd is Wat Tyler and Priest John Ball Day, an official COPE holiday. I believe they would feel they too are founding fathers of the USA and help inspired the US Constitution as well as the Bill of Rights within it which history bears out because they are known to have inspired both the French and American Revolutionary Wars. Both would be happy to know I'm a free person who is not taxed due to my low income (vow of poverty in terms of my role as clergy of COPE) at this time nor forced to tithe, though free to volunteer and donate at my discretion, as are you.

MEDITATIVE QUESTIONS

Have I exercised due diligence regarding doing business with CoCA? Do my actions and the facts suggest the affirmative?

If in my position, in consideration of all facts revealed/disclosed above, would you continue your CoCA membership?

Would you do the same amount of research on any business, whether for profit or nonprofit, before financing it or purchasing goods or services from it?

Do you expect the government to be omniscient and have a literacy test or poll tax of some sort before someone can participate in the free market? Do you want the government to have absolute authority so you don't have to exercise due diligence nor assume any risk as a result of forfeiting your freedom (and everyone else's freedom) for what some refer to as a "nanny state"?

Would you have supported the peasant revolt in 1381 spearheaded by Wat Tyler and Priest John Ball? If not, can you please stay out of politics? Thank you.

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

For More About COPE and the HEAL Mission, see:

<https://www.cope.church> and <https://www.heal-online.org>