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A Documentary Series
with Nadine Strossen

Discussion Questions Episode 2 - One True Faith

Full Program Discussion Questions:

- What are the cultural forces that have pushed France towards proscribed secularism? What are the cultural forces that have made Americans more likely to want to protect the right to open religious expression?
- What are the arguments that suppressing/forbidding the wearing of head coverings is good for society? What are the arguments against it?
- How does the French government's ban on Islamic face coverings and headscarves in public spaces affect Muslim women's freedom of expression and religious practice, and what are the potential consequences for social cohesion of this restriction?
- To what extent do the debates around secularism and the wearing of Islamic headscarves in France reflect broader questions about the relationship between religion and the state, and what are the implications of these debates for other religious minorities in France and beyond?
- How do the experiences and perspectives of Muslim women who choose to wear the niqab or burqa challenge dominant Western narratives about Muslim women's oppression and the compatibility of Islam with modernity and democracy?
- What role do media representations and political rhetoric play in shaping public attitudes toward Islam and Muslims, and how do these narratives perpetuate or challenge stereotypes and discrimination?

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- How can societies balance the protection of individual freedoms and religious rights with the promotion of social integration and the prevention of extremism, and what are the ethical and practical implications of different policy approaches?
- In what ways does France's commitment to state secularism challenge the First Amendment's protections for religious expression in the United States?
- Is it important for media outlets to publish provocative content to challenge societal norms and beliefs, or should they refrain from publishing content that might be offensive to certain groups?
- How do societies balance the right to free expression and the need for respect of the cultural or religious beliefs of minority groups?
- Is it fair to criticize someone for expressing their thoughts and beliefs even if they may offend or be disrespectful to certain groups? Whose rights should be honored, and whose should be negated? Who gets to decide?
- Is there a right to not be offended? If so, who should decide what is offensive and what is not?
- To what extent should governments regulate free expression to prevent harm or hate speech towards minority groups?
- In what ways can self-censorship limit freedom of expression and creativity?
- How did Galileo's discovery of the satellites of Jupiter inspire a complete rethinking of astronomy?
- How did the church attempt to silence Galileo, and what was the outcome of their attempt?
- What might have happened if Galileo had been allowed to argue his case before the public without fear of reprisal?

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- How important is the ability to disagree with dogma in scientific progress?
- In what ways did Galileo's experiments and discoveries challenge the existing construction of knowledge?
- What role do pharmaceutical companies play in either promoting or deterring research to find a cure for an illness? What does the saying "follow the money" have to do with it?
- Who benefits from continuing the current/routine treatments as the standard for medical conditions? Who loses when the medical community overlooks new or different treatments?
- How did the Scopes trial reflect broader cultural and political tensions in America during the early 20th century?
- How did the Epperson v. Arkansas case reflect broader changes in American society and politics in the 1960s and 1970s?
- How have the debates and legal battles over the teaching of evolution evolved since the Scopes trial and Epperson v. Arkansas, and what do they tell us about the ongoing tensions between science and religion in American public life?
- In what ways can public school curricula be designed to encourage critical thinking and open-mindedness? How does this relate to the freedom of speech and academic freedom?
- To what extent can freedom of speech be limited in the context of public school education? What factors should be taken into consideration when determining what speech is appropriate for public school classrooms?
- To what extent should schools be allowed to teach controversial subjects without fear of censorship or persecution? How does this relate to the concept of academic freedom?

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- How has the Enlightenment era's emphasis on free and open discourse influenced our modern-day understanding of the relationship between science and religion?
- How did the Encyclopedia challenge the prevailing intellectual and political order of Diderot's time, and what impact did it have on the Enlightenment?
- What are the dangers of politicizing scientific research, as demonstrated by the Lysenko episode and the Great Chinese Famine?
- In what ways can scientific research be biased or influenced by ideology, and what can be done to prevent this from happening?
- How can we prevent dogma from getting in the way of scientific progress and ensure that scientists are open to changing their views when new evidence emerges?
- What role do scientific journals and peer review play in ensuring the quality and accuracy of scientific research?
- What ethical considerations should be considered when conducting scientific research, and how can we balance the pursuit of scientific knowledge with the need to protect human and animal subjects?

Segmented Discussion Questions Based on Topic:

Science - Stomach Ulcers & Galileo

- How does the story of Barry Marshall's discovery of the cause of stomach ulcers exemplify the potential for dogmatism within the scientific community?
- In what ways did censorship and opposition to free speech impede the progress and acceptance of Marshall and Warren's discovery?

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- Nadine Strossen argues that "free speech is essential for exercising every other right." In what ways do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- Considering the story of Socrates, how can the silencing of differing views or ideas impact a society or culture?
- Despite significant opposition, Socrates continued to question and challenge existing beliefs. Why do you think it is important to maintain the freedom of expression in spite of societal backlash?
- How did Galileo's discoveries challenge the established religious and scientific beliefs of his time? How did the repression of his findings impact the advancement of scientific understanding?
- Jonathan Rauch discusses the concept of fallibilism – the principle that we might always be wrong. How is this principle important for the exercise of free speech and scientific advancement?
- Steven Pinker mentions that "most ideas are bad ideas, but unless you have the ability to voice ideas, you'll never hit on the correct ones." Do you agree with this perspective? Why or why not?
- How does the tension between religion and science illustrate the importance of free speech and open discourse?
- How can societal or cultural progress be hindered when free expression is not safeguarded? Can you provide any examples?
- Considering the program, in what ways can dogmatic thinking in both religion and science impede social progress and free expression?
- How might the narrative around scientific discoveries and discourse change if the principle of free speech was universally upheld?

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- In the program, various scientists faced opposition due to their groundbreaking ideas. How might the world look different today if their ideas were not eventually accepted?
- Nadine Strossen mentions the importance of free and open discourse for progress. How do you think free speech enables progress and innovation in various fields?
- Reflecting on the film, discuss the potential dangers of suppressing free speech and expression in society.

France - Diderot - Free Speech & The Enlightenment

- Diderot's work with the Encyclopédie was a monumental project that required a free and open exchange of ideas. How has the concept of free speech evolved since then, and how has it influenced the spread of information on the internet today?
- How does the concept of a "hive mind," as described by Jonathan Rauch, resonate with our modern internet culture? Do you think this culture promotes free speech and open exchange of ideas?
- What role did the democratic and scientific revolution play in shaping the concept of free speech? How has this concept been instrumental in fostering innovation and discovery?
- How important is the freedom to be wrong in the development of new ideas and knowledge? How does this freedom contribute to our understanding of free speech?
- Reflect on the statement by Diderot about political authority, "No man has received from nature the right to order others." How can this be interpreted in relation to free speech and censorship?
- The Encyclopédie faced censorship from both the church and political system. Are there parallels to this in the modern era? How is free speech threatened or protected today?

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- Madame Du Pompadour held a copy of the banned Encyclopédie in her residence in the palace of the King. What does this tell us about the power dynamics surrounding the control and dissemination of knowledge?
- The program suggests that the Enlightenment may be misunderstood, particularly in relation to the concept of free speech and knowledge acquisition. Discuss this misunderstanding and its implications.
- Jonathan Rauch suggests that freedom of speech allows for errors, which he argues are the raw material for learning. Do you agree with this sentiment? How does this perspective impact our understanding of free speech?
- Reflect on the role of free speech in preventing "a world of ignorance and oppression." Can you provide modern examples where a lack of free speech has led to such conditions?
- Looking at the collective effort put into the creation of the Encyclopédie, do you see any parallels or contrasts with the collaborative information platforms of today (like Wikipedia or open-source projects)?
- Considering the concept of "freedom to experiment," how do you see this applying to free speech in the digital age, where ideas and speech can spread at an unprecedented speed?

Soviet Union - Lysenko - Agriculture

- The film highlights the danger of a government basing policy choices on ideology-driven science rather than evidence-driven science. Can you think of contemporary examples where governments have adopted such approaches, and what were the implications?
- How does the story of Trofim Lysenko and his influence on Soviet agricultural policies illustrate the potential risks of suppressing free speech in the scientific community?

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- Reflect on the phrase "Which science is the right science – which science is 'politically correct'?" How do you interpret this statement? What implications does this have on the relationship between politics and science?
- What role does free speech play in promoting the free exchange of ideas in scientific discourse? How can it help in the prevention of the propagation of 'junk science'?
- The program talks about Stalin's agreement with Lysenko's views because he saw parallels with the social philosophy of Karl Marx. Can you discuss the dangers when political ideologies begin to dictate scientific discourse?
- The film also states, "The problem with politicizing knowledge is you wind up creating dogmas which people are not allowed to challenge." Can you elaborate on this? How does politicizing knowledge hinder the progress of society?
- Reflect on the impact of "Lysenko-ism" not only in Russia but also in China. How can one man's false scientific theory lead to such widespread disaster?
- The program ends with a note on disagreements between religion and science, as seen with Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. How should such disagreements be handled in the public sphere to maintain freedom of speech and thought?
- How can we ensure that governments and policymakers make decisions based on scientifically sound evidence rather than ideology or politically convenient science?
- What measures can be put in place to ensure a more transparent and open scientific discourse, thus promoting free speech and preventing the propagation of pseudoscience?
- How can society strike a balance between the necessity of free scientific discourse and the potential for the spread of dangerous or misleading scientific theories?

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Tennessee - Scopes - Freedom of Religion in Public Schools

- What role does freedom of speech play in the teaching of controversial theories such as evolution in schools?
- How do you interpret the statement by Tony McCuiston that "these gentlemen have no other purpose than ridiculing every Christian who believes in the Bible"?
- Do you think the Butler Act was a violation of academic freedom and freedom of speech? Why or why not?
- Should public education cater to specific religious beliefs or provide a broad, inclusive education?
- What responsibilities, if any, do publicly funded institutions have towards the religious beliefs of their students?
- What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of celebrity lawyers taking part in high-profile cases like the Scopes trial?
- In situations where science and religion appear to conflict, how can we encourage respectful, productive discussions?
- Should legal cases like the Scopes trial be re-enacted for educational purposes? What might be the benefits or drawbacks of this?
- How do you think the Scopes trial has influenced the discussion around freedom of speech in the classroom today?
- How should the balance between religious freedom and scientific teaching be managed in public schools?

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France - Freedom of Public Religious Expression

- How do the First Amendment's religious freedom guarantees in the U.S. differ from the secularism principles in France?
- Is there a "good" and a "bad" freedom of expression, as suggested by one of the women in the short film? Why might she have said this?
- How does the ban on the public wearing of Islamic face coverings in France align or conflict with the concept of freedom of religious expression?
- How does the decision to wear religious clothing or symbols relate to individual freedom and personal choice?
- Is the French approach to secularism discriminatory, as suggested by Agnes de Feo, or is it a legitimate way to maintain neutrality in public spaces?
- How does political Islam factor into the conversation about religious freedom and freedom of speech?
- How do you interpret the statement, "If you don't like the rules and the habits of this country, I'm sorry, this is a social convention. This is a social pact. If you breach the social pact, go elsewhere and live how you want to live."?
- How do you reconcile individual rights to freedom of religious expression with societal expectations or rules?
- How do you think freedom of expression and freedom of religion should be protected in a diverse society?
- Is tolerance an inherent aspect of freedom of speech? Why or why not?
- What are the implications of proposing to ban women who wear headscarves from chaperoning school field trips or even picking up their children from school?

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- How do the politics of freedom of expression play out in the political sphere, as demonstrated in the 2022 presidential election in France?

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