# Columbus’ Death as a Cultural Hero: Tinkering with Humility

Christopher Columbus is not a hero but possibly one of the worst villains in human history. In “Columbus and Coyote,” Tinker (1992) argued that Coyote, a Native Indian mythological character, is a more convincing cultural hero than Columbus as he is aware of his flaws and willing to change them, while the latter is a romanticized hero with an immoral personality and inhumane misdeeds. Through this paper, I explored if the distinct viewpoints which Tinker (1992) expressed are compatible with mine. Tinker’s (1992) worldview of humility towards a balanced perspective in life and readiness to expose one’s deepest sins are congruent to my moral beliefs and goals for we must never forget how we wrongly idealize heroes in order to learn the truth and become better people in the process.

I agree with Tinker (1992) that to have a balanced way of seeing the world, I must be prepared to be humbled including accepting how Columbus is not a hero but a villain who founded America on Indian land and blood. Columbus’ greed for power and gold influenced the discovery of the Americas and drove the genocide of the Indians. He pursued power over spreading the Word of God when he spent years convincing different monarchs to support his oceanic explorations (Tinker, 1992, p. 1). Columbus wanted to go around the world not for God but for his own glory. Furthermore, Columbus’ materialism drove his inhumane treatment of the Indians to the extent of conducting genocide. His demand for gold included brutally punishing Indians who did not meet their gold quota (Tinker, 1992, p. 1). Wealth mattered more to him than human life and his own dignity as a Christian. I am now humbled in that I see Columbus for the villain he truly is and not as a hero we should celebrate and defend. Thus, we should stop seeing him as a pure-hearted protagonist and revise our history books for the next generations to be aware of his genuine interests and genocide of the Native Americans.

Besides siding with Tinker (1992) regarding the nullification of Columbus as a hero, I also believe that if we are to take the gospel seriously, we must stand in the light and embrace the exposure of our sins. Tinker (1992) argued that we must confess our sins by realizing the mistakes in our past (p. 3). I wholly agree that we must be courageous in accepting the history of bloodshed and deceit which founded our nation. I remember the meaning of mindfulness which, according to St. Ignatius, is a disciplined approach to contemplating about our inner and outer worlds which would result in awareness that can bring us closer to God (Fontana, 2014). I can only be close to God if I can stand in the light and acknowledge not only my sins but also the sins of my ancestors. Columbus is not a hero but a mass murderer. He shall not be commemorated as an ideal father of the United States as he hindered its growth when he enslaved and killed Indians in tens of millions.

Heroes should not be perfect or idealized for they must validly represent humanity with strengths and flaws. Tinker (1992) invites us to eradicate the "all-American cultural hero" in the persona of Columbus (p. 6). I heed his call. My hero is not a murderer. He/she may be imperfect but he/she would not rest on the backs of the dispossessed. My cultural hero is flawed like Coyote but willing to learn and grow without hurting anyone. My cultural hero is Coyote who saves, not kills, people. My cultural hero is anyone like Coyote who is unafraid to criticize himself and his misdeeds.

I have had a hard time before when I first read about what Columbus actually did, after all, I once imagined him as a perfect Christian. Thankfully, Tinker and other books that I have read shook me out of this fantasy. Presently, I realize not only the wrongs of seeing Columbus as a hero but also the downsides of idealizing any hero. Romanticizing them sanitizes their mistakes that we can learn from. From now on, I shall put all cultural heroes as well as myself under a bright light for we are all equally sinful yet capable of learning, changing, and achieving continuous spiritual and moral growth.

## References

Fontana, R. (2014, October 16). Mindfulness as taught by St. Ignatius and practiced by Robert. *Catholic Life Ministries*.

Tinker, G.E. (1992). “Columbus and Coyote.”