

Lots of reading but no column

Sorry, folks, you don't get an opinion column today. Grandchildren took priority this past week. Lacking my usual newspaper fix – and not even able to watch the TV news because the children prefer *iCarly* and her ilk – I don't even know what significant events took place in the real world that I might write about.

However, you sent lots of letters about recent columns, and there's more than enough wisdom in them for this mailing.

First, about the WARPED LOGIC column, in which I attempted to extrapolate the NRA's vision to other industries.

Ralph Milton asked, "I'm curious. Did the paper reject the column because of its content? Are you being censored? I sure hope not because this needs saying, and loudly.

James West had a similar comment: "You're definitely on to something if the local paper doesn't want to publish it! It could definitely hurt advertising revenue."

James then added a reaction to the suggestion that the cure for smoking was more smoking: "I always wondered how second hand smoke could be more dangerous than first hand smoke. I remember a country legend that pipe smokers on average live longer than non-smokers. With the Hobbits back in town, pipe smoking really looks inviting."

I can see where I left an incorrect impression that the newspaper had refused to publish that particular column. Not quite so. Conversations with various managing editors, over the years, have helped me understand that the paper prefers that I deal, whenever possible, with issues that have local relevance – that's where their readers are, after all. They don't encourage me to keep harping on U.S. issues, such as the Tea Party, the NRA, and/or Arizona's reaction to almost anything.

I had written about the NRA just weeks before, and had already sent in a column for my regular weekly slot.

If I submitted the column to the paper, I would force them either to reject it, or to reject some other regular columnist to make room for my extra submission.

So I decided to send this "Warped Logic" column out only to my private mailing list.

Okay, on to the rest of the comments you sent in.

Steve Roney likes to take a contrary viewpoint. I had written, "If misuse of alcohol can harm our youth, the obvious solution is to install a bar in every school, staffed by a trained bartender."

Steve responded, "Not all that bad an idea. Remember how well Prohibition worked. If you ban alcohol, we discovered, you just put it into the hands of organized crime."

Steve also argued that arms sales are not necessarily a bad thing: "Such balances of power have a strong historical record of maintaining the peace, in fact. Up to and including the MAD doctrine, which probably kept the Cold War cold. On the other hand, if one side suddenly acquires guns, and the other side doesn't have them... look out! Ask the Koreans. Ask the Hurons. Ask the Aztecs..."

Vern Ratzlaff called the column "An incredibly insightful piece; thanks, Jim."

Kevin Smith reported, "There is going to be a mass rally of (against?) the NRA in Buffalo today. If Obama is successful, this will be a landmark transformation of the USA. I hope this is the signature change of this term."

Jim Henderschedt doesn't like the NRA any more than I do: "The NRA has shown its true colors in its pitiful response to a horrible event. Instead of doing the noble thing (seeking a constructive way of being a part of the solution) they continue to do the ostrich approach (shove your head in the sand and continue to be a part of the problem). It is too bad that the NRA isn't open to finding the win/win solution. It is like something I recently read....'How much are you willing to lose to be right'(or think you're right)?"

Ray Shaver “particularly enjoyed the last sentence, which I won't call ‘the punch line’ because the whole issue is anything but a joke. Jim, gifted with your creative writing, I would be interested to know what word you might invent to describe the NRA members' sickness. Whatever that descriptive word might be, the NRA's cure for the disease would most certainly be to make sure more people become infected!”

Ray makes an interesting connection. The NRA lobbies to have mentally disturbed people either locked up or kept on a surveillance list. But perhaps they're speaking about themselves....

Laurina Tallman believes that one's ears are a key route to one's mind – particularly to the rational left brain: “Nice try, Jim; but Wayne and his ilk have permanently damaged their right (and left) ears with the noisy reports of weapons and will become even less rational as their left brains continue to erode, just like Charlton Heston's.”

Bob Walker wrote from Lacey, Washington state: “Your column, marvelously full of irony, communicates the truth about the insanity of the NRA's theme that carrying guns will enable us to kill the bad guys, and never mind if the dead guy turns out to have been a good guy. As soon as the NRA executive latched onto that ridiculous slogan I was telling others that the fellow is deafer and blinder than I am, in that he offers no clues for being sure we're killing the right people.

“Further, given that I actually am hard of hearing and blind, how will I ever know if someone has a gun trained on me, let alone find my gun, see if it's properly loaded with bullets, and then fire it at the right person?”

“Incidentally, a news story is out that a dealer in one of those gun shows accidentally wounded himself in an arm and a leg... Obviously, there's no guarantee that even the gun sellers are ‘safe’ users of weapons.”

David Gilchrist had his own flash of insight: “If you let your mind wander as you read this column, it's easy to forget where it started. All of a sudden I was thinking: ‘What preposterous nonsense!’ And then the penny dropped; I realized: ‘Exactly! Just as preposterous as multiplying guns to solve the problem.’

“After every one of these incidents, I found myself surprised that there would not be a single person in the vicinity with a weapon to stop the horror, since so many people in the States seem to own them.

“The bottom line for me is this: If I were the teacher, and had a gun ‘for protection’, where would I carry it? Even if it were in a holster near my right hand, how would I know when to get it out and at the ready? Do these psychos give you a warning, as in the old knightly tradition of duelling? It seems to me that these are always surprise attacks; and no matter how fast I might be on the draw, the villain would be unlikely to give me the time to do it.”

Mervyn Flecknoe in England picked up on a similar theme: “It seems to me, Jim, that the main argument against armed guards in every school, apart from cost, is this: This guard has been on duty for five years, nothing has happened. He has stopped expecting an armed intruder. Perhaps he makes himself useful helping kids to read, in which case he definitely does not have a gun in his hand. As an armed intruder, I would know every school has an armed guard, so I go in looking for him all innocent like to ask directions and shoot him first while he is distracted.

“The same argument would apply to armed teachers. The value of a defense gun is only if the intruder does not know you have one. Thanks for making us all think a little more deeply.”

Gwynne Harries didn't relish too much thinking: “I think I'll walk the middle road and get half shot.”

On the second column that week, about JUSTICE DELAYS, I got these responses:

Cliff Boldt: “Talk to judges, police, prosecutors, coroners, lab staff, medical examiners, court staff and you get the message: fiscal cut backs have restricted their ability to respond quickly. Tax cuts = service cuts! People need to remember this when they enjoy [or demand] reduced taxes.”

Isabel Gibson: Yikes -- 7 years! Hard to see how that delay can be justified or even explained. I'd love to hear from a criminal lawyer without a stake in this case as to why this one took so long to come to trial, as well as how long they usually take.”

Dale Perkins applied the delaying tactics of the court system to his own church processes: “I thought the column really could have targeted our bureaucratic United Church of Canada system. We have long ago jettisoned the notion of justice in the way we conduct business in the good ship Lolli-church. The most important thing is to follow

the book and keep to the established code that somebody, somewhere has established. To hell with justice concerns; we know what is prescribed and mandated -- that's what is important...

"Can the system be reformed, which means, can we re-establish a relational culture in place of the bureaucratic culture we've embraced? Can the Sadducees and Pharisees be restrained inside our church?"

"Jim is kind to us, because he's focused on the Justice System in our country. He might have focused on our church system with equal alarm. Again, does anybody care, and can substantive reform happen?"

HYMNSIGHT

My friend Ralph Milton, who published his Rumors newsletter for many years, has something special for you. It's called HYMNSIGHT, and it's for any church that currently projects the words of hymns and prayers, or plans to.

Ralph writes, Since retiring, I have rediscovered my old love of photography, and found creative use for my pictures in the life of First United where Bev and I worship. Our entire liturgy is projected, so that people read responses and sing hymns from screens. I use my photos to add color, vitality and depth to all the hymns and most of the liturgy.

In the course of this, I have developed slide sets to go with 600 hymns, plus about two thousand slides, in both the standard screen and the newer wide screen shape. You can use all of them, in any way you wish, without permission, and absolutely free, as long as it's non-profit and church related.

All you need to access the website is go to: <http://www.hymnsight.ca>

In addition to all that visual material, there's a comprehensive "how-to" manual for using projected visuals in church.

HymnSight provides a set of suggested visuals to go with each hymn, but the words to the hymn are not there, mainly for copyright considerations.

Please take a look at this service. If you think it's worthwhile, please let some of your colleagues in ministry know about it. And if you know of a website that could benefit from a link to HymnSight, why not add it?

Blessings,

Ralph Milton

TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at jimt@quixotic.ca.

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca

PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com

- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.