

Sunday April 13, 2014

Too smart for its own interest?

By Jim Taylor

“What’s in a name?” Shakespeare’s Juliet asked, knowing that the man she loved had the wrong name. “That which we call a rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet.”

Names matter, unfortunately. Romeo was a Montague, and Juliet a Capulet. Like east and west, never the twain shall meet.

This month, the Canadian bank ING Direct changed its name to Tangerine. ING had little choice but to change, after its parent company sold the Canadian operation to Scotia Bank, in 2012, for \$3.13 billion. But I do wonder what kind of creative convulsions Scotiabank’s management went through to choose the name Tangerine.

I can only assume that all other candidates sounded even less bank-ish.

When ING opened in Canada, it promised a new kind of banking with higher interest, no service fees, and no branches. The initials ING made sense. They stood for *Internationale Nederlanden Groep*, International Netherlands Group, the founding Dutch bank.

The colour orange in ING’s advertising also made sense, historically. It recalls the Orange Lion, symbol of the House of Orange. You’ve heard of the Orange Lodge, perhaps in connection with sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland? It derives from William of Orange, who rallied Dutch Protestants to victory against their Catholic rulers in 1581.

Ever since its start in 1997, the colour orange has been a kind of trademark in ING’s advertising.

But you can’t call a bank Orange. I mean, who’s going to invest their savings in an Orange?

Although I’m not convinced that Tangerine is much better. It sounds more like a fruit market. Or perhaps a failed airline.

Heralding a trend?

I don’t have an ING/Tangerine account. But I’m favourably inclined towards them, if only because they got into trouble with the U.S. Department of the Treasury for siphoning billions of dollars through the American financial system to sanctioned Cuban and Iranian entities.

But I shouldn’t mock Tangerine. Who knows -- maybe its naming heralds a new trend in corporate nomenclature. Maybe RBC will go back to being the Royal Bank. Maybe CIBC will return to what everyone calls it anyway, the Commerce. And can anybody tell me what a Beemo is? A Beemo inspires me with even less confidence than a tangerine. Yet that’s how the Bank of Montreal chooses to identify itself.

I know these corporations spent millions redefining themselves as alphabet soup. I just don’t understand why they would want to.

Most of us – with the exception of oil magnate J.R. Ewing – know each other by our names, not our initials. But a few decades back, the corporate world decided that initials conveyed more prestige than real words. So we got KPMG and IBM, AIG and IMF. News reports referred to DMZs and ERs and ETAs. Destinations got known by airport codes instead of city names.

Some initialisms have become so familiar -- NATO, UNICEF, radar -- that they have telescoped into acronyms -- single words, rarely spelled out in speech, let alone fully defined.

I almost felt relieved when RIM – Research in Motion – recently changed its corporate acronym to the name of its product -- Blackberry. Even if it sounds like a fruit market too.

Unintended implications

Perhaps the corporate world decided to move away from real names because they conveyed unintended implications. That the Bank of Nova Scotia only does business with Maritimers, for example.

Perhaps from a corporate perspective, the benefit of initials is that they mean nothing to anybody. So no one has misimpressions to unlearn.

All names convey certain implications. That's why we choose them. In past times, parents defined their expectations for their daughters by giving them names like Faith, Grace, Charity, or even Chastity. William and Kate called their baby George, linking him to a line of former kings. Americans, having rebelled against English aristocrats, emulated them by naming their sons Earl or Duke.

I've spent most of my working life writing about religion. I've learned that every reader has a different understanding of what I mean by "God." Yet each also believes that he or she knows exactly what I mean when I use that name. Even if I don't.

In his *Imager* series, science fiction author L.E. Modesitt Jr. invented a religion that declined to name its deity. Because to name a deity is to attribute certain qualities to him. Or her. Or it. You see, even a simple pronoun sets up presumptions.

Modesitt explained, "When we name something, we assume that we know it. The name becomes the identity, and it is always a limited identity."

Despite Shakespeare's poetic genius, I suggest, names do matter. A rose's aroma does not derive from its name. But would we still stoop to sniff a rose if we called it a zygrnbtfspxneiuw?

And so I wonder if Tangerine will attract a swarm of new banking customers. Or peel them off.

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YOUR TURN

As I expected, last week's column about measles vaccinations got mixed responses.

Art Gans wrote, "I know where that approach to vaccination comes from. It is a very rigid form of Calvinism called 'Double predestination' which most scholars have rejected. Further, it is not even a general belief among Reformed Churches, just a small minority..."

"Like all other constitutional freedoms, religious freedom does have limits. Freedom of speech does not allow you to shout 'Fire!' in a crowded theatre. Freedom of religion does not allow you to endanger innocent bystanders, any more than it allows you to apply 'sharia' law to non-Muslims or to force baptism on a person who does not wish it.

"In fact, I would suggest that Jesus' second commandment of 'love your neighbour as yourself' would indicate that to protect the community as a whole a Christian should follow the vaccination regulations of the health departments, even if he or she generally objects to vaccination. The only exceptions should be provable allergic reactions to a particular vaccine."

Taking the other side, Steve Roney wrote, "Religious conscience trumps government; individual rights trump government; freedom of thought trumps government; and family rights trump government. All are threatened if government sets down some legal requirement here. To allow that, there must be some clear and present danger to the community, and I see none here. If vaccination is effective, the actions of those who do not vaccinate pose no

risk to the community as a whole, only to others who do not vaccinate. One ought to have the right to doubt the value of vaccination, on whatever grounds, and to make such choices for oneself and one's children."

I asked Steve whether he preferred coercion by the government, to protect one from a disease, or by a church, to reject that protection.

He replied, "I would vastly prefer the 'coercion' of the church, since it, unlike government, cannot enforce its will in any way."

Mary-Margaret Boone disagreed emphatically: "This is not religious freedom; it is religious dictatorship. It is not faith based in any way. I grew up in the age that did not have the pertussis vaccine and I had whooping cough every year for several years. Imagine the consequences. Isolation within family and among friends. Loss of school time that has to be made up; if you're not one of the smart kids, repeating the school year. It was life changing.

"I am unsure of why there is this vaccination rebellion especially since the link to autism has been debunked. Do people really know why they are saying no? Using the God talk to deny vaccinations is like saying God expected us to remain in limbo, in one time frame -- and which one would that be?

"We have evolved with brains to think and develop and discover, and every generation benefits from this ongoing knowledge. Sometimes the outcomes are negative, but we learn and then we move forward."

Isabel Gibson shared Steve Roney's viewpoint, sort of: "There are risks to vaccines. In the 1970s, when my children were being vaccinated for the usual things, I asked about a smallpox vaccination, which was standard when I was a kid. Absolutely not, I was told -- they had finally stopped administering them after losing more kids to the vaccine complications than to the disease itself. I could not even choose to take that risk for my children.

"Will you hold healthcare professionals and/or politicians responsible for murdering or disabling a child harmed by a vaccine? I don't suppose so -- they'll be acting on the best medical knowledge of the time.

"As for the parents, well, they'll be balancing the risks. I don't think we want to live in a society where the state usurps that role and responsibility entirely."

Charles Hill challenged Pastor Adriaan Geuze's argument against vaccination: "I don't see any place in the Bible that God told us to leave our brains at the church door. I believe that the more literalist/fundamentalist religious movements (Islam as well as Christianity) suffer from power-seeking leaders. Usually men make these ghastly edicts. Grief is an emotion. Most men I've met wouldn't know an emotion if it slapped them in the face. We have snake-handlers because of one isolated verse.

"One also has to wonder about the intellectual capabilities of those who follow such leaders. There are many who seem to not have the intellectual ability to cope. I get a lot of these in my 'developmental/remedial' college classes. They never question; they just follow."

John Clinton made connections between several recent columns, and with a recent news report that India had been declared free of polio. John's wife had polio as a six-year-old child. "Approximately 300,000 post-polio survivors have to live in the present with the disability of the past. There are no magic wands to remove that 'thing of the past' from their daily existence.

"As you say, there are parents who refuse to have their children vaccinated against measles, or whatever. There are also isolated groups of parents who will not allow their children to be vaccinated against polio. Some in Pakistan & other countries because they think it is a plot by western society to reduce their numbers. Some parents in the US refuse for so-called religious reasons. The U.S. Constitution requires that the U.S. government care for the 'general welfare' of its citizens -- children included. To allow a 'religion' to stand in the way of one's general welfare is dumb, stupid, uninformed -- and probably unconstitutional.

"Rights that are NOT protected are stupidity, uncaring behavior, and down-right harmful decisions."

In the days when I worked for a living, journalists had a saying that any biblical reference was probably wrong. I proved that point, as Irene Stoffer noted: "The bible passage you mentioned in your article, Matt. 6:13, is incorrect. It should be Matt.9:12."

Anyway, the corrected reference says, "Those who are well have no need of a physician." Ted Wilson wondered if that meant that "pastors like Adriaan Geuze have no need for Luke's writings, since Luke was a physician?"

TECHNICAL STUFF

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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

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- 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.
