

Wednesday January 11, 2012

Pedestrian safety

By Jim Taylor

Two more pedestrians died over Christmas week, both in the north Okanagan. Both deaths involved people walking on unlit roadways, after sunset, wearing dark clothing.

One of the pedestrians stepped out into a marked crosswalk. The other was walking with her back to the oncoming traffic.

Typically, after such incidents, the public demands that local governments “do something” to reduce the risks.

Certainly, municipalities can install curbs. They can install street lighting, to avoid blind spots. They can build sidewalks and walking paths to keep pedestrians off the roads.

But my community has – at a guess – about 200 km of roads. Mostly narrow, two-lane roads. Without sidewalks or lighting.

Curbs and sidewalks cost between \$200,000 and \$1 million per kilometre, depending on the quality of construction required. And that doesn't include lighting or gutters.

Would local taxpayers willingly pay \$25,000 per household, to improve pedestrian safety? I doubt it.

Even if you're right, you lose

There's no doubt that cars and their drivers may be at fault. They may be travelling too fast; the drivers may not be paying sufficient attention; they may be momentarily distracted; they may even be impaired. Ultimately, that doesn't matter. In any collision between a pedestrian and a car, no matter who's at fault, the pedestrian always loses.

It's not considered politically correct to blame victims. But in fact it's the pedestrian who can do the most to avoid an accident.

Every pedestrian can do two things.

First, make sure drivers can see you. Dark clothing blends into dark nights. Wear light coloured pants or jackets. Better yet, wear a reflective vest. Highway workers wear them, for good reason – it saves lives.

If a reflective vest offends your fashion sense, at least wear a reflective armband. Or have reflective panels on your shoes.

After Josie Evans was hit and killed walking home from school in a blinding rainstorm, the Rotary Club of Lake Country distributed 700 armbands to high school students. The armbands showed up for a few months. But I haven't seen any since the summer.

Beyond reflective vests and armbands, carry a flashlight. You don't have to use it constantly. But turn it on whenever there's a car coming. Even distracted drivers can see a light shining in the darkness.

Second, make sure you can see the cars coming. Walk facing the oncoming traffic. If by chance a car should swerve, you still have a chance to leap out of the way. Landing in a ditch is a lot preferable to landing in hospital. Or in a morgue.

Ignoring lethal danger

I am shocked at how often pedestrians suddenly materialize in the pool of light cast by my headlights, walking with their backs to me.

Would anyone ignore a loaded gun pointed at them? Would anyone turn their back on an unrushing landslide or an avalanche? Yet a moving car is just as lethal.

Such foolhardiness seems to me to reveal an unshakeable belief in personal immortality. But even if you believe that your immortal soul will survive an accident, are you willing to risk the possibility that your mortal body might spend the rest of its life permanently disabled, in pain?

When you go out walking at night, wherever you live, please, make sure that cars can see you. And make equally sure you can see them.

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YOUR TURN

Not much mail in response to my musings about the good things, and the not-so-good things, that occur to each of us, every year. The only letter – unless I've missed some – came from Isabel Gibson, who wrote, "My husband tells me that nothing is all good or all bad. Maybe maturity means that we see grey as nuanced rather than uniform mush. Maybe the cost of aging is also the benefit - if we celebrate less whole-heartedly, perhaps we catastrophize less dramatically as well.

"Cold comfort? Perhaps precisely that."

Catastrophize?

ABOUT MY BOOKS, ETC.

I have a few copies of a book my father wrote exploring Christian theology through Christian art.

The problem with art, of course, is that it cannot put an abstract concept on canvas. An artist cannot paint an Incarnation or a Resurrection without putting real humans, in real situations, into the picture. The expression, therefore, has to be grounded in a particular culture and society; the infinite and universal has to be represented in finite terms.

My father – who once took art lessons from members of Canada's Group of Seven – spent much of his life after retiring as principal of the Vancouver School of Theology, seeking out the ways artists through the centuries had attempted to deal with this dilemma. I'm probably biased, but I think that in examining the ways art portrays theological concepts, he explained those concepts better than most theological texts.

The book is "Seeing the Mystery: Exploring Christian Faith through the Eyes of Artists," by William S. Taylor, 94 pages. There are only about 20 copies left in the world. Most of the illustrations are in full colour.

If you would like a copy, write to me – Jim Taylor, 1300 6th Street, Lake Country, BC, Canada, V4V 2H7.

Unfortunately, I can't send these out on the honour system, as I do with my biblical paraphrases. I will have to charge \$30 Canadian to include postage, paid in advance.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

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 web links worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;

- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Model T Websites." a simple (and cheap) seven-page website for congregations who want to develop a web presence <<http://www.modeltwebsites.com>>
- 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.

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 Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
