

Wednesday August 28, 2013

Hate letters hide behind anonymity

By Jim Taylor

People who write anonymous letters have less guts than an intestinal parasite.

I've received some hostile letters. But most of my critics have the courage to sign their names. I have nothing but scorn for those who write hide behind anonymity.

Particularly for the person who described herself as "One pissed-off mother" in a letter to Brenda Millson, grandmother of a 13-year-old autistic boy named Max. "You selfishly put your kid outside every day and let him be nothing but a nuisance and a problem to everyone else," the woman wrote. "When you feel your idiot kid needs fresh air, take him to our park, you dope! Crying babies, music, and even barking dogs are normal in a residential neighbourhood. He is NOT!"

(As a compulsive editor, I've deleted most of the 118 exclamation points the writer stuffed into 26 sentences.)

The writer continued, "Take whatever body parts are non-retarded and donate them to science.... Do the right thing and move or euthanize him!"

The anonymous writer writes Max off: "No employer is going to hire him, no normal girl is going to marry/love him.... What good is he to anyone!"

To say that I'm offended by such a letter is an understatement.

I believe that if you won't put your name to it, you shouldn't say it.

What constitutes a crime?

The Crown Attorney's office in Ontario says that the letter "falls below the threshold for a hate crime," according to a CBC report.

The Crown Attorney is wrong. The writer herself states, "I HATE people like you, who believe just because you have a special needs kid, you are entitled to special treatment!"

I take that attack personally. My wife and I had a special needs child; he died of an incurable genetic illness. Our adopted grandson's emotional disorder also qualifies him as special needs. Advocating euthanasia for any human who doesn't fit "normal" strikes me as criminal incitement.

Saskatchewan farmer Robert Latimer served ten years in jail for doing exactly what the letter writer recommended. He asphyxiated his daughter Tracy, who had spent all of her 13 years in constant pain. She couldn't walk or talk, had recurring seizures, repeated operations.

She was far worse off, by any measure, than Max.

Would the writer would be willing to serve Latimer's sentence for him, for following her instructions?

I wonder how the Ontario Crown Attorney would respond if the views expressed in her letter had been directed against blacks, Jews, gays, or women?

Try reworking a few sentences:

- "Your black kid scares the hell out of my normal children."
- "A woman is a hindrance to everyone and will always be..."
- "No employer is ever going to hire a gay person."
- "MOVE! Go live in a trailer in the woods with your Jew kid!"

The Criminal Code specifies "willful promotion of hatred towards an identifiable group, or... public incitement of hatred that could conceivably lead to a breach of the peace."

According to University of Alberta law professor Steven Penney, “identifiable groups” are limited to “colour, race, religion, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.” Apparently mentally handicapped young people don’t deserve the law’s protection.

The anonymous writer concluded: “Nobody wants you living here and they don’t have the guts to tell you!”

Look in your mirror, lady, and take your own advice.

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YOUR TURN

Pat Brush in Ottawa homed in on the element of experience shaping our theology, in last week’s column: “I have used exactly this argument about our experience colouring our perception of God when in discussion about what the Bible says. I have had some frustrating times with people who have an absolute understanding that never changes. Sometimes I feel like someone told them what to think when they were a child and they have never felt the need to think any further.

“The way we read the Bible or any other text is coloured by what society we grew up in and how we were taught to read and what our experiences have been, not to mention our personality. I can read a passage and get a different meaning from it than you. I can read a passage this week and get a different meaning than a month ago because I have experienced more and learned more in that month.”

James Russell focused on human friendships: “Keeping connections to friends alive is, indeed, a fundamental part of keeping ourselves alive. [and btw, it has been demonstrated that it’s as vital to long-term health as good food, exercise and sleep!]”

Frieda Hogg shared her own experience of friendship: “There is a lady with whom I have been friends for at least 83 years. When her family moved to our little village and my mom told me to go and ask the girls if they would play with. One of the girls became my friend. They moved to Victoria in wartime and we were apart but did write occasionally, she married and moved back to a close-by community, and our friendship resumed. While we were busy raising our families on farms we didn’t get together very often but did meet up while in town or elsewhere and the ‘closeness’ continued -- I guess you could say we were on the same wave length. We were eventually widowed, and our friendship continued in a closer way. She now lives about five hours away but we do get together once or twice a year for a few days and we are as close as we have ever been, a very special friendship. She is 90 and I am 88.”

Charles Hill wondered, “What is the magnetism that attracts a friend? Are there boundaries that one cannot cross to obtain a friend? Gender? Age? Religious/Political beliefs? Available time to cultivate the relationship? Regional culture?

“Making new friends as an adult is much more arduous.”

Laurna Tallman commented that “I am tempted to wax long and strong on friendship, for example, the friend who seemed such a difficult responsibility when I was young but who has become a tower of strength in our mature years. However, I want most to talk about memory loss and Alzheimer’s disease, which I now have further reason to believe may be treatable or even reversible.”

Laurna then expanded on how aural stimulation can revitalize parts of the brain. The letter is too long for me to include here, but Laurna's e-mail is rtallman@explornet.ca if you wish to follow up with her directly.

Carla Gilbert "especially liked your Psalm paraphrase about 'bullying'...I've just heard on the radio that in Lexington KY they have put posters in the school buses and cafeteria: 'Bullying--Not in our School' along with a note to "get help here" with phone numbers of the police department. Hopefully that will begin to raise awareness of the cruelty imposed by bullying, as well as offer someplace to report that connotes that seriousness of that 'violation' of human dignity."

PSALM PARAPHRASES

The Revised Common Lectionary calls for Psalm 81:1, 10-16. But when I paraphrased this psalm, I put it in the context of a parent celebrating a child's graduation from university. I told verses 1-6 from the parent's viewpoint: the sense of achievement, the lament over the hardships and sacrifices that had to be accepted. Then I used 8-16 as God's response:

- 8 In your celebration, where is there room for me?
In your joy, what credit do you give to me?
- 9 You have made your goal an idol;
you have let it take over your lives.
- 10 I am the one who has watched over you.
I am the one who sustained you through the tough times.
I fed you and nurtured you and kept you going.
I am the one; I am God.
- 11 But you were obsessed by your own concerns.
- 12 So I left you alone, to do it your way.
I did not interfere.
- 13 If only you had paid as much attention to me as to your goals.
- 14 I would have given you many more times to rejoice along the way.
- 15 It would have been much less of a struggle.
- 16 This moment would be just as sweet, with no trace of bitterness.

For this and other paraphrases, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publications, info@woodlake.com.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

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For other web links 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 "SeemlikeGod" page, www.seemlikegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- 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.

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