

Sunday May 6, 2012

No column today

Sorry, dear hearts and gentle people, but there's no column today. I started to write about Barack Obama finally coming out (not intended as a double entendre!) in favour of same-sex couples having the same marriage rights (and rites) as heterosexual couples. And I found myself getting to irritated at the standard rebuttal – "But the Bible says..." – that I could not get my thoughts organized sufficiently to turn out a coherent 800 words.

So, instead of a column of my own, I'm forwarding on to you a letter that has circulated on the Internet for some years now, in response to Dr. Laura Schlessinger's condemnation of homosexuality on the basis of Leviticus 18:22.

There's no known author for the letter, although Snopes.com suggests it may have been written by a Kent Ashcraft.

Here's the letter, for those who may not have seen it before.

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Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination ... End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighbouring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness -- Lev.15: 19-24. The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord - Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

5. I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?

6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there degrees of abomination?

7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?

8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

9. I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev.19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev.24:10-16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I'm confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

YOUR TURN

Several of the comments responding to last week's column about a mining CEO lobbying for special treatment in the federal environmental review panel felt that I had been unfair to aboriginal people's spirituality.

For one example, Diane Robinson wrote, "It's the phrase 'whether they live up to them or not' that I'm stubbing my toe on as I read your otherwise fine column. I wonder how well those who aspire to 'Christian' spiritual

ideals live up to ‘their’ ideals? (Not too well, at least at times, if my observations mean anything.) Perhaps those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, or as Jesus once said: ‘Those without sin? Feel free to cast the first stone.’”

Taking the other side, Steve Roney wrote, “The notion that native North American religions, or those of other hunter-gatherer societies, were more respectful of nature are purely an invention of 19th century European Romanticism. That such claims are often eagerly adopted by the descendants of the hunter-gatherers themselves shows that they are in fact unaware of what their own traditional religion was.

“But we know from a lot of anthropological evidence that they had far less respect for nature than European civilization traditionally does. Hence Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, hence the Neutrals in Ontario burned entire forests to catch game until they ended up destroying their own habitat.

“In world terms, European Christian civilization has always been an outlier in this regard, far more interested in nature than anyone else. This is, for one thing, why natural science appeared in Europe, and not elsewhere.”

Steve also wondered, “What happens if the panel acts as though the mine were on Tsilhoq’tin land, and then a court or agreement rules it is not?

“The Tsilhoq’tin should probably be consulted, but it is wrong to portray them as the property owners. It is proper to allow them to submit a brief to the panel. Having an aboriginal representative on the panel, though, looks a bit like having them judge their own case. They could force a favourable land settlement, for example, by blocking all development.”

Isabel Gibson wondered what century Russell Hallbauer was living in. “It is incomprehensible to me,” she wrote, “that a business today would try to exclude Aboriginal players where there are or might be land claims issues. The businesses I work with ‘cooperate with the inevitable’ not just as a matter of course, but usually also with some grace.”

Hanny Kooyman homed in on the economic argument: “Not everything can be expressed in monetary terms, but is therefore not less valuable nor should it be ignored. My question is still: How are we going to reintroduce the ‘non-economic’ into the equation of decision making while ‘business’ is king?”

Historian Art Gans cast some light on that derogatory term “hookers”.

“A little note from my large supply of American trivia,” At wrote. “The term ‘hooker’ dates back to the American Civil War and was used by soldiers to refer to the bevy of ‘ladies of the evening’ who customarily followed Gen. Joe Hooker, a cavalryman of some repute during that conflict. Gradually it took over as a generic term, just as Kleenex became a generic term for facial tissue.”

As an aside, I should note that Kleenex, Aspirin, and Google are all trade-marked terms, and although they are often used generically, you can get into legal troubles in some circumstances if you fail to capitalize the name.

PSALM PARAPHRASES

I have started including a psalm paraphrase for the coming Sunday with my Soft Edges column, on Wednesdays. Why not on Sunday, you ask? Well, partly because psalms seem to me to fit better with the general mood of Soft Edges, which is more likely to deal directly with faith-related matters than these Sharp Edges columns. And partly because Soft Edges is about 250 words shorter than Sharp Edges, and so including the paraphrase on Wednesday won't make the e-mailing quite as long.

That does mean that if you want to receive the paraphrase, and are not on the Soft Edges mailing list, you'll need to subscribe. No charge, just send me a message, jimt@quixotic.ca. Or you can subscribe automatically by sending a blank e-mail to softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca.

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