

Sunday January 6, 2013

Rape has nothing to do with love

By Jim Taylor

It was just one rape. Just one of thousands that happen every day. But it has galvanized public opinion as no other rape seems to have.

Warning – some readers may find this column disturbing. I certainly hope so.

The available facts are brief. On December 16, a 23-year-old medical student in Delhi was returning home with her boyfriend after seeing a movie at a mall.

Six men on a bus gang-raped her. For an hour. They beat her and her male companion with an iron bar. Then they threw the injured pair off the bus, into a ditch.

After ten days of intensive care in Delhi's best hospitals, she was flown to Singapore in a last-ditch attempt for a medical miracle. It failed. Her injuries were too severe. She died December 29.

Additional details

My first reaction was to ask, "Where the hell was the bus driver while this was happening? Why did none of the passengers do anything?" Because in India, there is no such thing as an empty bus.

Details were hard to come by. Later news reports offered snippets of additional information. Apparently the couple had been waiting some time for a regular bus. An out-of-service bus came by and offered them a ride. They accepted.

That's why no one intervened. There was no one else there.

Five of the six men involved have now been formally charged with murder. The sixth claims to be a juvenile. Under India's laws, persons under 18 cannot be charged with murder.

Protest rallies have demanded the death penalty – a punishment reserved, in India, for only the most extreme crimes.

Personally, I consider death insufficient punishment. They should have to spend the rest of their lives running naked through Delhi with their genitals chained to the back of an in-service bus. Fortunately, for me and for them, I'm not their judge.

Cultural attitudes

But I'd like to think that the protests may mark a turning point in India's patriarchal culture. Because in that culture, shame attaches to the victim and her family, not to the perpetrators.

No, not just India's patriarchal culture – the world's. Because rape is endemic, everywhere.

U.S. police records document over 80,000 rapes every year – almost three times as many as shooting deaths. But like the gun, the penis is employed as a criminal weapon mainly by men. The few rapes committed by women make headlines; male rapes are largely ignored.

Statistics on rape, unfortunately, are notoriously inaccurate. Google searches suggest that Canada has either the fourth highest rate of rape in the world, or the sixth lowest.

The U.S. Justice Department estimates close to 200,000 rapes or sexual assaults a year, with 60 per cent going unreported. In England, a government report similarly estimates "that between 75 and 95 per cent of rape crimes (officially around 15,000 a year) are never reported."

Statistically, Sweden has the highest rate of reported rape in Europe -- twice as high as the UK, four times higher than other Nordic countries, almost 30 times higher than India.

No female traveller, however, would agree that she's 30 times more likely to be sexually mistreated in Sweden than in India. In India, it's taken for granted that men are entitled to grope women. Crowded streets and buses make it easy.

Women hesitate to report such personal invasions, because police treat them as if they had "asked for it" by their clothing or behaviour.

A weapon of hatred

I don't expect the Delhi victim's rape and death will end rape. But I hope it might change attitudes to rape. Because rape is not an act of passion, let alone of love. It is an act of desecration, of vandalism, of domination.

The civil war in the Congo, for example, has cost five million lives -- more than any conflict since World War II. Rape has been a primary weapon of this war -- 400,000 women raped a year. Over 1,000 rapes a day. Forty every hour!

A Congolese social worker called rape "a cheap, simple weapon ... more easily obtainable than bullets or bombs."

Rape becomes a way of humiliating the enemy, of expressing contempt for their weakness.

Hospitals report that when soldiers can no longer commit rape themselves, they violate their victims with sticks, pop bottles, even gun barrels.

The hospitals perform surgery to repair abdominal organs ripped apart by repeated assaults. "The savagery is beyond imagination," a surgeon said.

That's exactly what happened to the Delhi medical student. After exhausting themselves, the six men rammed their iron bar up her vagina. The victim's brother told the Indian Express newspaper that damage was so severe the hospital had to remove her intestines.

Contempt. Hatred. These are the emotions that drive rape. Not love. Not even lust.

Nothing will bring back the Delhi woman. But if her death finally forces a few more people to realize that there is no excuse for rape, ever, her death may not have been a total waste.

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YOUR TURN

My protest against apathy, in last week's column, prompted this response from Lyle Phillips: "I was going to reply to your article but couldn't be bothered."

Fortunately, many others did bother to respond.

Dave Rattray in Windsor, Ontario, asked for permission to link my column on his blog, and went on, "In my 80th year, I'm appalled (yea, outraged) by so much which goes on in this world ... we have become too apathetic."

Larry Joose was willing to take up the challenge: "It is our collective responsibility to improve our world, I am not waiting for Christ to return, but since we are the body of Christ I hope that we can serve him as he lives through us

and that the world will be a better place because of our faith demonstrated through words and actions. There are events that constantly discourage us as evil still exists but we need to rely on God's strength to help us carry on."

Florence Driedger wrote, "Thank you for your passionate plea to all of us. I hope to not be in the middle of the lethargic, and will continue to do what I can. No one can do it all, but each of us can love our God, our neighbor, and ourselves...."

"My hope continues to be for all of us to pray and act to fulfill the prayer 'Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.' It can happen. It did for us this past week when a person now in the community who had been in prison for many years said to us 'I love you.' A huge step! Five years ago this would not have happened. Love gave him the freedom to express his anger, lack of trust, and acceptance of himself. He is a changed person. God does make things happen through the lives of us imperfect mortals."

John Thomas in Penticton offered another example of how things can happen: "I give you one man in Kamloops, Dick Dickens, a retired teacher from Kamloops Secondary School, a music teacher. He was so incensed over the Campbell Liberals' attempt to 'sell' the rights to the tolls of the Coquihalla Hwy. that he assembled protestors, promoted discussions, led rallies, etc., that the deal was quashed. Yes, the majority just want to let things happen to them, but fortunately there are the few who do take leadership roles."

Warren Harbeck liked my concluding line: "The pages of the new calendar are not blank, after all. They're filled with invisible invitations. To make this a better world."

"It closely parallels something I once wrote," Warren continued, "about a shelf filled with blank artist's canvases -- I referred to the canvases as 'invitations to imagination.' Applied to your statement, I'm asking myself, 'What kind of a better world can I imagine, and what shall I do about it?'"

I think Warren's insight is crucial -- if we can't imagine it, we can't cause it to happen.

Isabel Gibson recalled the old saying, "Each one, teach one." She wrote, "I Googled it to see its origin. Turns out it's an African-American proverb from the days when slaves taught each other to read, to keep the chain of literacy going (no one else was going to do it, after all)."

From that, Isabel extrapolated the message: "I don't have to do everything -- I do have to do something."

In a similar vein, Don Schau suggested, "We should stop saying 'You can make a difference'. Instead we should be saying, 'You DO make a difference. What difference do you choose to make?'"

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.

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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...

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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.
