

Sunday August 19, 2012

No column today

Sorry, folks, I'm taking a holiday this week. Back again next week. But there is mail about last week's column, on why we find it easier to leap to the defence of animals than of children.

Jim Taylor

YOUR TURN

Christa Bedwin wrote to say that I had "the perfect last sentence."

It was, 'Where does that line lie? No one ever knows for sure. The only thing I'm absolutely sure of is that being unwilling to intervene at all is always the wrong side of that line.'

Diane Robinson wrote from Regina, Sask., "We humans think we have evolved so remarkably over the eons. While I am not in disagreement that humans have learned and done amazing things in the time we have walked the earth, there are days when my faith in the human creature is challenged by what I see and hear around me.....instances of abuse, disrespect, and an apparent utter lack of compassion and caring. I am appalled that some of us humans still believe that anything or anyone living/animate (as opposed to non-living/inanimate) is mere property, to be used and abused as our whim and/or desire dictates. Perhaps I am naive, but I believe that humans have a moral obligation (indeed, a calling) to care for his/her fellow creatures."

Diane offered a few quotes in support of her view: "A few quotes (I hope I am quoting correctly) from well-known persons would seem to indicate that they think so, too. From Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 'The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.' From Mahatma Ghandi: 'A nation's weakness is measured by how it treats its weakest members.' And from Cardinal Roger Mahoney: 'Any society, any nation, is judged on how it treats its weakest members -- the last, the least, the littlest.'"

The Bible, you may recall, summarized the same message by enjoining the freed slaves to care for the "widows, the orphans, and the aliens in your midst."

Isabel Gibson thought that our compassion, or lack of it, was a "tough question. Why do we pour forth offers of help for individuals whose calamities make the news, but not for the mass of the poor?"

"Well, we do both as a society. Collectively, we pay taxes to jointly fund welfare, income-assistance programs, health care and low-income housing. Some of us contribute to food banks and street missions. And some of us respond with direct offers of help to individual situations.

"So why does our societal response to animals in jeopardy seem disproportionate to that for children in jeopardy? I don't know. Maybe we do better at funding policing and social welfare agencies than at taking on the individual challenge. Never having had to challenge someone on child abuse, I don't know the inhibitors first-hand. Uncertainty? Shame? Fear of confrontation? Fear of some other loss (money/reputation/power, as apparently the case at Penn State)? Or that old stand-by in human behaviour, inertia?"

"If a body in motion tends to stay in motion, maybe we can make the inertia work for us: to start having action be the default state when it comes to children. When you figure out how we can do that, let me know...."

I've quoted this story before, but it's worth repeating. When he was the Roman Catholic bishop in Saskatoon, Ron Rolheiser wrote something like this:

"If one person prays ardently for something, and works hard for it, not much will be accomplished. But if a whole congregation is unified in praying ardently for something, and they all combine their efforts, something will happen. If a whole denomination is united in praying and working together for a common goal, a great deal can happen. If all churches could get their act together, could speak and work and pray with a unified voice, there's no limit to what could happen."

Perhaps the abuse of children is a subject on which we might generate some such unity.

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 "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, isabel@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.
