

Sunday October 20, 2013

Canada stands with the rapists

By Jim Taylor

An Open Letter to Ron Cannan, Member of Parliament for Kelowna-Lake Country

Dear Ron,

I know you to be a caring father and a decent, principled, and compassionate man. But the government to which you belong has recently done something that is neither caring nor decent, principled, and compassionate.

On October 4, International Development Minister Christian Paradis announced that the Canadian government will not fund international agencies whose programs might allow war rape victims and child brides to obtain an abortion.

Just a few days before, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird told the UN General Assembly that Canada condemns sexual violence against women and girls, including forced marriage and systemic rape.

"Forced marriage is rape," Mr. Baird said. "It is violence against women. Early marriage is child rape and violence against young girls."

I applaud his stand.

But then, just a few days later, Mr. Paradis placed the government of Canada on the side of those committing violence against women and children. He said that Canada will not support the victims as they struggle to recover from their trauma. The violators get a free pass; the victims must cope on their own.

War on women's bodies

You may recall former Safety Minister Vic Toews challenge to a critic: "to stand with us or with the child pornographers." With this announcement, Mr. Paradis clearly declares that Canada chooses to stand with the rapists, not with their victims.

In Canada, abortion is a matter of informed choice. You and I may disagree on the merits of that choice, but it is a choice. In most of the world, it is not.

According to a UN Report cited by the Ottawa *Citizen*, between 250,000 and 500,000 Rwandan women and girls were raped during the Hutu uprising, resulting in a lifetime of torment and about 20,000 pregnancies. During the Bosnian war, about 50,000 women were raped.

The author, Mohammed Adam, a member of the *Citizen's* editorial board, called the Democratic Republic of Congo the current "heartland of war rape." International agencies estimate about 200,000 surviving rape victims in the eastern Congo alone.

Admittedly, not all of those victims will require abortions. Some are too young to conceive. Zainab Bangura, UN envoy on sexual violence in conflict, told the Security Council of visiting a community where "11 babies between six and 12 months old were raped."

In the same area, Bangura stated, 59 children aged between one and three, and 182 children between 5 and 15 years old, were raped last year alone.

Many adult rape victims will not need abortions either. The rapists have so devastated their bodies – with spears, branches, bottles, gun barrels – that they will never have babies again.

Long-term effects

The world was horrified when six young men in Delhi killed a young woman by ramming an iron bar up her vagina. The same brutality is happening every day in the Congo.

“For me, the war never ended, and it never will,” said one rape victim quoted by the *Citizen*.

Said another, “I am a woman without value, they look down on me, are disgusted with me. I am a woman without a future.”

Speaking to the U.N. General Assembly, Foreign Minister John Baird claimed, “Our interest is the dignity of humankind.”

This is dignity?

“According to Save the Children, which has documented the atrocity across continents,” Adam wrote in the *Citizen*, “the most vulnerable are adolescent girls, and pregnancy has become a leading cause of death among girls aged 15 to 19 because of unsafe abortions...”

Take a stand by sitting

Ron, on your website you champion October as Women’s History Month. You praise students who promoted the International Day of the Girl. And you identify yourself as the father of three daughters.

Since you raised the issue, I have to ask you – could you honestly tell a woman of your daughters’ age that her rape is her problem, that you expect her to live the rest of her life raising a daily reminder of her humiliation and degradation?

I would hope not. But that is exactly what your government is telling raped women in war zones.

“Safe abortions,” Mohammed Adam concludes, “are a necessary part of the range of services that war rape victims need. It is not an ideological issue, but a life-and-death issue for many young girls.”

On television, I see you sitting behind the prime minister and senior cabinet ministers. You regularly rise to applaud their policy statements.

I don’t expect you to reverse government policy singlehandedly. But I challenge you to remain seated when government ministers stand to defend their decision not to fund international agencies who may include abortion in their services to women raped in war.

Stand with the victims by not standing.

I’ll be watching.

Your constituent,

Jim Taylor

(A copy of this letter was sent to MP Ron Cannan by e-mail prior to publication.)

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YOUR TURN

The notion of voting with different levels of enthusiasm which I outlined in last week’s column really appealed to some readers.

Isabel Gibson, for example, wrote, "The 'How many fingers do you see?' approach to decision-making -- I don't like it, I love it! How do we amend our constitution? Oh, oh, we might need to vote on that first...

"But truly, this is a simple method that could help even at home.

"As for veto power, I don't see it as arrogance necessarily. I think it originates in a real-world acceptance that the support (or at least not the active opposition) of some people (or organizations, or countries) is necessary to a solution's success. In effect, if the solution doesn't yet address their needs, it still needs work."

John Willems wrote, "In this age of entitlement everyone thinks they have a veto right which tends to escalate hostility in some form.

"I did chuckle at your Hell's Angel swipe but then it turned to embarrassment. Just maybe if we decide, by consensus, to live by the gospel we would raise one fingers in support of hosting the picnic. Did not Jesus mix with some very interesting characters?

"The sad thing would be that the one finger some would raise would be their middle finger."

Laurina Tallman noted that rational consensus depends on having rational people: "It would seem that the world is deadlocked in diverse directions. In a world composed of rational people, consensus would be possible. Probably also anarchy would suit a peaceful society (in the highest meaning of that problematical word "anarchy.") Of course, people capable of learning rationality have not achieved rationality along all dimensions. And many people are physiologically prevented from learning much rationality and others have fallen into traps that perpetuate a downward spiral out of what rationality they began with. I think before your model of consensus is feasible you will have to go about healing weak and damaged ears."

James Russell chose to comment on the Tea Party group in the Republicans: "'If you don't like it, get out' might well be the Tea Party motto. Problem is, their views tend to be of the Old South variety. (Big owners get their way; the others know their place, or will be taught it -- violently, if necessary, and the g'mint be damned.) Not sure that secession is far off what they would like, or that I would be sad to see them go. But I don't think it would be fair to the people they'd take with them. (Much my view of the direction the Parti Quebecois is taking.)

Bob Stoddard in Nebraska took issue with Ted Swart's letter, last week, on climate change. He challenged Ted "to prove that 'the leading skeptics [of global warming] have no funding from the oil companies'." Meanwhile, Bob noted, "many research scientists do study the overwhelming evidence of climatic change as scholars seeking answers without benefit of 'gobs of government funds'."

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.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send me an e-mail message at the address above. Or you can subscribe electronically by sending a blank e-mail (no message) to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca. Similarly, you can un-subscribe at sharpedges-unsubscribe@quixotic.ca.

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

- 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 "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.
