At the intersection of beliefs, Bibles and bullying



Highland Views
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Guest columnist

It's not easy holding a serious conversation on the sidewalk by a busy street, but that's where we were standing. The young preacher approached to tempt me into a Bible discussion. I said I wasn't there to debate.

As he went on quoting the Bible, I told him I know what the Bible says. He pushed the issue: "Well, you don't know what it really says." I turned and said: "You don't know me, and I don't know you. How can you say that?" That was his opportunity to judge me a lost sinner, before I looked him in the eye to tell him: "I used to believe those things, now I don't. I was a born again Evangelical and Pentecostal, and preached on the street like you do. I left that self-righteousness behind when I left the faith." Another door opened for him. "Then you never truly believed." Shaking my head, I replied: "That's the tired old argument: 'You weren't really a Christian.' It doesn't hold water."

He and his noisy group were protesting, and I was quietly counter-protesting. Actually, I don't think of myself in that way. I merely stand to take a stand "for" rather than "against" — to make a positive statement in the midst of the intrusive ruckus of the righteous. I try to be a welcoming presence when others are shaming, judging, harassing and intimidating, all in the name of their God.

This encounter on the street reminded me, as I reminded the young preacher, that the Bible is a very old book that can be used like a weapon. "Hitting someone over the head with your book doesn't show love." I asked if he remembered the Greatest Commandment spoken by Jesus. He repeated it with me: "Love God and love your neighbor." I stated firmly: "What you're doing here doesn't seem loving to me." Isn't it interesting there can be debate and disagreement over what love is?

My further observation of those who take their Judging Jesus to the street to shout their "loving faith" at others, is that it's bullying — plain and simple. Bullying beliefs. Firing verses and prayers and personal attacks in the name of God reveals several things. These folks have been taught a bloody-bad brand of theology, picking and choosing whatever Bible passages suit their strict theology, and they conveniently believe God is on their side and they are on His. The street preacher assured me he didn't like Pentecostals, and I heard him say Catholics are led by Satan. At the same time, he claims to be a "follower of Jesus." I told him I didn't see that in his actions and words. That's my honest opinion.

I left him with this thought: "One day perhaps you will come to reason." What I meant was I hope someday he looks back on what he's doing now to see the harm he caused in the way he proclaimed his faith. I said this to him because I could see a bit of myself in him, in his fervent evangelism. After he told me they were "spreading the good news as Jesus commanded," I replied: "I don't see that. This isn't good news, it's bad news." Oddly enough, he agreed. "It's bad news for the people who hear it." Such a strange justification for bullying others.

There's a lot of "Hell" in what these believers preach. It's almost as if they're proud of the threats. "If you don't believe like us, and do what we say, you are following Satan into the fires of hell!" A wonderful message?

As I told the preacher at one point in our conversation, "If heaven is full of people like you, I sure wouldn't want to go." Maybe that's harsh, yet someone has to firmly stand up to God's Bullies. And, I was merely stating what I've thought for a long time. Listen to the way some believers describe (or hammer out) heaven and it can sound quite hellish. An eternity with the bullies of belief? No thanks.

One of the other preachers came up behind me on the sidewalk and whispered, "I don't hate you." Without turning around I responded with a sarcastic tone, "Oh, that's comforting." I know from past experience, beliefs can blind, and stuff our ears, so we no longer wish to listen and learn anything from anyone — we're confident that we know the truth, and we'll assault you with it; we don't really care to listen to you, or learn something about your life.

God's bullies now have bullhorns. I wonder if Jesus would stand for that.

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