

Danville News Column  
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"Religion in the News"  
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I love it when religion hits the news. It gets even juicier when religion blends with our national idols. I'm referring, of course, to the Tebow controversy. Now, I must confess, when I first heard the word 'Tebow' I thought it meant either a piece of plumbing or a western movie title from the 1950's.

Those who know me probably know that I'm not much of a football guy. The last football game I viewed was back in fall at the High School stadium. You football fans can keep your NFL playoffs.

Our North American football is (forgive my blasphemy) bloody tedious. Unlike soccer, of course. If you want religious fervor, there's the sport for you. When Europe hosts a particular tournament, every match begins with their holy anthem. You expect all of Valhalla to descend.

I take teasing pleasure in reminding everyone that the Danville High School stadium is the sports stadium, not the football stadium. We take evil delight that the very first sporting match to christen the field was girl's High School soccer, where, it just so happened, that a certain daughter of a certain pastor received the very first red card ever awarded on that field. She was not giving thanks to Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior.

Unlike this Tebow fellow.

If you didn't catch it, please check out Fran Tarkenton's column in the Wall Street Journal about Tebow and this fuss over him taking a knee in prayer during games. Hey critics, chill out.

Tarkenton applauded Tebow as a man of character, suggesting he's the best story of this football season. I paraphrase Tarkenton's conclusion, for isn't it refreshing we're having a conversation about a praying Tebow rather than some idiot football star who gets arrested for carrying a pistol, raping a date, or who's being sued again for patrimony.

Prayer at sports always has intrigued me. During my Princeton Seminary days, my softball coach gave us team caps with PTS imprinted across the front. Curious was how the middle letter was shaped as a cross. It seemed a tad too precious for me so I clipped off the top part of the cross. Coach also insisted on team prayers before we batted. No harm in that. Could even do some good, so

long as what we prayed for wasn't to win. God does have bigger things to deal with than boosting batting averages. Besides, Abraham Lincoln solved this question for me in his second inaugural address when he confessed how one day he realized his Presidential foe in Richmond was, like him, praying for victory. Whom would God choose? How often we screw prayer up, treating prayer as persuasion, bribing God's favor to get what we want.

Which brings us to our second religious controversy. Should decent, Bible-believing Christians vote for a Mormon? Some refuse, alleging Mormonism as a cult. They vow they only will vote for a godly man or woman (i.e., Christians). Which tells me they really aren't Bible-believing. Look in the Bible at those whom God used to achieve God's purposes. We've got David, great King of Israel, whose personal life was terribly ungodly. He also raised some lousy kids. And if it weren't for the heathen Persian King Cyrus, there'd be no Israel today. Oddly enough, the prophet Isaiah quotes God as anointing Cyrus his messiah. In fact, throughout the Bible the pious ones usually are the problem. They tend to think God works for them rather than the other way around.

And now, another fine mess. Religion and war. A mess is exactly what happens when we go to war confident God is on our side. Real soldiers despise war and name it ungodly. Sure, war can bring out the best in us: honor, sacrifice, loyalty, courage. But that's only because the alternative is war bringing out the worst in us. Which is exactly what war prefers to do. Guys from my High School mailed home to younger brothers ears they collected from Viet Cong they killed. Oh, what a lovely war. Now we have a video circulating around the world of Marines urinating on corpses of Taliban soldiers. Not all veterans are honorable nor come home as heroes. This was crude, disrespectful, not nice. Disgraceful, yes; yet hardly an atrocity. The Taliban, voicing their moral outrage, regard this act a desecrating sacrilege. As stupid as was our Marines' behavior, I wonder which is the greater sacrilege: urinating on corpses or blowing up children?