

Danville News Column
Robert John Andrews
“Weird Bible Stories”
29 October, 2010
Word Count: 750

Last week a colleague and I joked about Biblical texts we never use for children’s church school. There’s many a weird text. Some are pretty nasty, salacious, disturbing even. Fat Eglon. Genocide. Talking mules. Jael’s tent peg. Onan. Bald Elisha’s attack bears. These curious texts make creepy Halloween movies seem lame.

After returning home, I googled “weird bible stories” on a whim. There were over seven million web search results. I shouldn’t have been surprised by what I read when I opened several, but I was. The initial sites I toured were hardly models of scholarship. Instead, they were rife with mockery and ridicule for those who look to the Bible for inspiration. Nothing new there. But, boy, were these sites smug. One brilliant wag wrote, “The bible must have been written by someone stupid or stoned.”

I welcome a challenge. Sane criticism isn’t personal. Let’s, please, make it based on something more than juvenile scorn and intolerance. Why are these website contributors so bitter and defensive, so filled with smarmy vitriol about the Bible?

Another complaint offers a more rational argument against religion: “When you look at the evil done in the name of religion, I don’t want any part of it.” Okay, you have a point. But may I ask: is it really religion, theology, that causes evil? If it’s done in the name of religion, it isn’t religion that’s guilty. Hidden forces are just manipulating an excuse. This complaint is comparable to saying, “I don’t want to belong to any nation because of the harm nations have done.” It’s similar to saying, “I don’t want to belong to family because the heartache family causes.”

Let’s sweep out cob-web thinking. What causes these evils? Religion? No, religion just becomes an effective means, a galvanizing expedient, for the real source of real evil: our greed, ignorance, pride, our willful lust for power. Besides, those who are religious (when we’re on our game) are usually among the first to die in humanitarian opposition when the stone of evil starts rolling and the mob starts snarling.

Sure, those of us who are religious can portray the worst of caricatures. So what else is new? What I like about my faith is that we’re usually pretty willing to admit we’re messed up hypocrites. You may have heard the adage about someone who said he disliked church because church folk were just a bunch of hypocrites, to which the witty pastor replied, “Well, there’s always room for one more.”

Author Kathleen Norris offers a fly reply to those who reject organized religion. She giggles sympathetically because the last thing on earth her church is, is organized. Church represents the most disorganized grab-bag of wounded souls you’ll find anywhere. We know how messy we are, how wrong we can be. How messed up are you? How wrong are you?

Hey, don’t you judge me, he says judgmentally.

The issue isn’t judgment. I have no qualms judging others any more than being judged by others, provided the judgment is fair and informed. We’re supposed to judge behavior. Behavior is a choice. Do people do bad things because they’re malicious? No, they do wrong convinced they’re doing right.

Lamenting an increase in unwed mothers isn’t tantamount to branding and shunning them.

Disapproving vulgar behavior displayed at Gay Pride Parades isn't the same as condemning homosexuality.

Critiquing the Qu'ran or voicing anxieties about Islamists doesn't make you some bigot condemning Muslims.

Opposing or endorsing gay marriage, the war, health-care changes, entitlements, doesn't make you stupid, demonic, prejudiced, intolerant, or anti-American.

Challenging those who flaunt packed pistols at Tea Party rallies isn't the same as denying second amendment rights (though I wonder how loudly they'd howl if liberals started toting rifles to rallies). Well, I'm a patriot too; do you think I should stock up ammunition should right-wing crazies end up controlling government? Don't you tread on me either!

Inverse snobbery. It's funny how smug are those who condemn others for being smug. Whoops, we all run the risk.

To those who scoff at the weird stories in the Bible and use them as a pretext to disparage religion, the choice is pretty simple: either denounce in ignorance or else learn and think. Assuming you're gutsy enough to be open-minded, the facts about the Bible might surprise you. Same for politics. Respect should silence noisy insults. Listening should shame assumptions. Facts should speak louder than sanctimonious opinion.

The problem isn't judgment but a condemning spirit and contemptuous pride.