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■ In my opinion

Following the *Word*

It seems to be open season on "Christian fundamentalists" because of their so-called narrow-minded and unsophisticated practice of taking the Bible literally. One myth I want to clear up first is the notion that Christians who take the Bible literally are dangerous wackos, completely out of touch with mainstream Christianity.

In a special episode of "The West Wing" made in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Bradley Whitford's character resists an attempt to compare Islamo-terrorists to fundamentalist Christians. The character makes a good point when he argues that comparing mainstream Islam's relation to Islamic extremism is more like comparing Christianity to the Ku Klux Klan because that's how badly these people have to distort scriptural integrity and sound theology in order to justify their horrific actions.

People who interpret the Bible literally are not the same people who bomb abortion clinics and kill in the name of religion. The domestic terrorists who claim to kill in the name of God are drastically distorting the Bible, not taking it literally.

What really shocks me, though, is that people write off those who take the Bible literally as uneducated rubes who don't approach the text with any sophistication. In broad strokes they paint those who take the Bible literally as if they leave no room for interpretation, which couldn't be further from the truth.

Taking the Bible literally is not immune to interpretation. In fact, pure literalism makes interpretation an absolute imperative. Think about it. To take the Bible literally means to realize, for instance, that the Pentateuch is God speaking through Moses to the Hebrew people at a specific time and



GABE BRADLEY
THE WRITING ON THE WALL

a specific place in a particular social, cultural and historical context. Literalism also means to realize that the Gospels are God speaking through particular people, to particular people, in unique circumstances.

Taking the Bible literally means realizing that when God told the Davidic Israelites to kill the Philistines, he meant just that; he wasn't telling you to kill anybody.

In an e-mail that's been forwarded countless times over the last several years, an anonymous author lambastes Dr. Laura for her use of Scripture to support her controversial opposition to homosexuality. Now don't get me wrong, I hate Dr. Laura just as much as the next guy, maybe more, but this e-mail demonstrates a shockingly inept reading of Scripture. The e-mail points out and ridicules certain portions of the Torah that seem to be out of place if applied in today's culture.

Few would be so foolish as to read a few sentences from Aristotle and claim to know exactly what he says about motion. Few would be so foolish as to read a paragraph from Adam Smith and claim to understand the breadth and nuance of his classical capitalism. Why, then, do so many people — Christian and non-Christian alike — approach the Bible with a narrow-minded, totalizing point of view?

The literalist understands that these laws were not prescribed for us. They

were prescribed to a certain people in a certain set of circumstances. The laws and rules are not what count. Understanding the underlying principles given the specific social, cultural and historical context is what counts.

Taking the Bible literally means going way beyond face value. It means employing exegesis and hermeneutics in order to mine the text for its original meaning in its original context so that the transcendent personality of God can be revealed throughout. Though the personality of God doesn't change throughout the Bible, the rules that he plays by do change — a lot.

This is why so many lazy Bible readers shy away from the Old Testament. The cultural context is so far removed from our own that it requires even more interpretation than the New Testament in order to access the underlying truths.

Taking the Bible literally is not the dull-witted, unsophisticated approach to scripture reading. It is an almost unrivaled intellectual challenge that requires an intense academic rigor and a highly sophisticated textual reading. Bending and breaking the text to make it mean whatever one wants in current social circumstances and political realities is the unsophisticated approach that ignores academic rigor and intellectual honesty.

I'm not worried about the Christians who take the Bible literally; I'm worried about the ones who don't. There's nothing more dangerous than someone who claims to believe the Bible is the word of God without knowing what it says. These are the ones who substitute their judgment for God's and commit terrible atrocities.

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■ Editorial

Fabricated news damages journalistic credibility

Imagine this: former Michigan State players Mateen Cleaves and Jason Richardson at the April 2 Michigan State-North Carolina NCAA semifinal, sitting in the stands, in their Michigan State clothing, "rooted on their alma mater."

That's exactly what Detroit Free Press sports columnist Mitch Albom did — except his imagination got carried away. When Cleaves and Richardson never showed up to the game, Albom's April 3 column stating that they did was quickly revealed as fiction.

Journalists have no right to tell the future as though it is fact. So when Albom decided to depend on interviews about what the players were planning to do at the game and write a piece about what happened at the game before it occurred, he disappointed many. Not only fans of his two decades of Detroit Free Press work, but also fellow journalists, still reeling from large-scale accuracy foul-ups in The New York Times and USA Today, to name a few.

However, we have to note Albom's circumstances: According to The Associated Press, the Detroit Free Press required Albom to file the column the day before the game, a Friday, even though it was due to hit print on Sunday, because the section was printed before the game. We have to wonder if this schedule made Albom feel pressure to fabricate a story that would be "current" when printed.

Albom, and the four other Press employees who were responsible for catching the errors, will continue to work at the Press after facing unspecified disciplinary action, according to the paper. Albom apologized to his readers in an April 7 column, and rightly so. Unfortunately, all it takes is one fabrication to discredit years of work and cast a shadow of doubt over others in the profession. We deeply regret yet another breach in what is, overall, an ethical profession.

Media should remain wary of frivolous speculation

The recent fiasco at a Wendy's restaurant in San Jose, Calif., where suspected con artist Anna Ayala claimed she bit into a finger in her bowl of chili, has underscored the dark side of the litigious society in which we live and the often detrimental effects of certain types of media.

Primarily, this situation shows how easy it has become to manipulate the whistle-blower's role, twisting it from virtuous to vicious.

The Editorial Board sees great value in the interaction between whistle-blowers and the media, but the abuses of these frivolous charges by citizens, and the media outlets' subsequent sensationalism, are too much to handle. Cable news channels saw the events in California as a sunny day, and shamelessly made hay for hour after hour and day after day. After police and Wendy's investigated, the inconsistencies in Ayala's case proved more suspicious than convincing, eventually leading to her arrest Thursday.

The San Jose Mercury News has now reported that following the initial publicity from Ayala's scam, Wendy's received "about 20 complaints in the last month — much more than usual — from diners about foreign objects in their chow."

In these situations, media should aspire to give the American public solid information, not speculation.

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■ Guest commentary

Playboy applicants recharacterize the meaning of being a feminist

I would like to express my appreciation to all of the women who had a little pride in their image, themselves and their power for applying to be in the Playboy layout. As a student in this extraordinarily protest-happy student body, wading through the picketers and speakers espousing ludicrous and often contradictory messages gets pretty old.

I would also like to offer my congratulations to the current feminists on campus for recognizing the prerogative of women to model their bodies however they choose.

In his guest commentary last week ("University activists fail to react to pornography," ODE April 14) Mr. White argued that pornography

objectifies women and degrades them into objects of lust. That is inherently incorrect. Men (and more often than not, other women) objectify, label, and degrade women. It is not the nudity that does it. A huge nude statue stands in the window of Mother Kali's Bookstore on Hilyard and East 13th Avenue; art books teem with nude paintings, breasts have frequently adorned the cover of National Geographic; characters in the fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel are naked. No one is protesting them. Why? Because it's intent, not content.

The difference between the ceiling of the Sistine and the pages of Playboy is the intent with which one looks at them. What is degrading is

the insistence that women should feel bad about choosing to take pride in their beauty. One of the great failures of the American feminist crusade is its failure to encourage women to recognize and revel in the great power they have by simply being female.

The great triumph of that crusade, however, is in the manipulation of American women into believing they are catering to men (which is apparently bad) should they choose to live their lives as wives, mothers or perhaps Playboy models. So thank you to all the women who applied to appear in the magazine, for redefining what it means to be a feminist.

Allie Senger, junior

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