

Separation Anxiety

Is morality being held hostage by religion?

When crafting public policy and electing public officials our decisions are driven by our moral principles, as well they should be. The debate should be focused on what's right and what's moral, not what's Christian. Unfortunately that's not the case. The harsh reality is that many Americans continue to believe that morality is exclusive to their religion. It's nearly impossible to win an election in the U.S. unless voters think the candidate believes in "God." So we find ourselves with an evangelical in the White House and a Congress that is governing based on religious ideology.



A war has been waged on non-heterosexuals, tax dollars are being poured into "faith-based initiatives," Oregonians' right to die with dignity is under attack, and creationism is finding its way into science classes. It's time that we ask some serious questions about morality.

Why should not believing in "God" be perceived as a moral weakness rather than a sign of intelligence? Why are religious leaders, rather than environmentalists among others, automatically granted moral authority status? There's nothing in Webster's definition of morality that infers that one must be religious to be moral. What makes us moral? Does religion have a monopoly on morality? Recently I spoke with several local church leaders and asked them questions like these. The answers were disturbing.

According to the ministers I spoke with, the answer to every moral question is found in the Bible. No ifs, ands, or buts. It's a one-stop shop for right and wrong.

When questioned about what the most significant moral threats to our nation are, one issue clearly stood above the rest: Homosexuality. Apparently, it's not corporate greed or government corruption we should worry about. It's those damned gay people.

As a result of the good work that many Christians do, Christianity receives a great deal of credit while the enormous problems that come with this fundamentally flawed, narrow philosophy are largely ignored.

To begin with, the idea that one book, one person, or one institution should be the ultimate guide for how one lives is absurd. Basing your moral principles on a single source of information goes against basic common sense and is a recipe for disaster.

Catholicism actually has a morality loophole called Sacrament that is particularly detrimental to accountability. Sacrament makes it possible for people to commit horrific atrocities in the morning and by nightfall be cleansed of their sins. All that's required is that you confess your sins to a priest and pay penance to God. As long as you're sincerely sorry for what you did and you say your prayers, God will forgive you.

Historically, religious ideology has fueled endless hatred and violence from the Crusades to Oklahoma City and 9/11. The most dangerous and destructive homegrown terrorists have been Christians. Timothy McVeigh and Eric Robert Rudolph were both followers. Despite the Bush administration's efforts to demonize environmentalists and non-human animal rights groups, right-wing Christian organizations such as the "Army of God" remain one of America's top terrorist threats. We cannot place all the blame for terrorism and bigotry on religion but, we must recognize that it is a common link that plays a major role.

Former biology and geology professor Frank Zindler is an internationally renowned science writer and linguist, director of the American Atheist Press, and editor of *The American Atheist Magazine*. In an essay titled "Ethics without Gods," he said this about morality: "Our ethics can be based neither upon fictions concerning the nature of humankind nor upon fake reports concerning the desires of the deities. Our ethics must be firmly planted in the soil of scientific self-knowledge. They must be *improvable* and *adaptable*."

Chapman Cohen, the third president of the National Secular Society had this to say about morality: "The religious theory of morality simply will not do. It turns what is fundamentally simple into a "mystery," and then elevates the mystery into a foolish dogma ... Morality has nothing to do with God; it has nothing to do with a future life. Its sphere of application and operation is in this world; its authority is derived from the common sense of mankind."

Morality should be about empathy, decency, and compassion. It should be about ending suffering. It should be about living peacefully with all forms of life. As long as morality is being judged with draconian methodology rather than sound rational logic, the possibilities for progress will continue to be suffocated.

Joshua Welch is a local free-lance writer and political activist.

TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN

BY SHANNON WHEELER



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GREATER THREATS

The FBI claims the Earth/Animal Liberation Front to be the *number one* domestic "terrorist" threat in the U.S! Surely our government doesn't expect the American people to be cowering in fear of a handful of vandals who have never hurt, nor even threatened to hurt anyone. While I am not condoning these crimes, and believe that arson should be a punishable offense, isn't it true that there are greater threats out there to the safety and well-being of the public?

What about the violent anti-abortionists who have committed seven murders, 17 attempted murders, multiple bombings, assaults and kidnappings? What about the Ku Klux Klan or the Aryan Nation, groups that openly advocate for hatred and violence towards African Americans and Jews? What about the people who sent anthrax through the mail to government officials in 2001? Aren't these groups more likely to harm my loved ones and me than the ELF, which targets only specific large corporations with property damage? Why are those other groups not the focus of nine-year investigations?

It's clear that our government is more concerned with guarding property owned by the wealthy than protecting the physical safety of its citizens. Even if one insists on using the term "violent" to describe these vandals, shouldn't there be a distinction made between violence against *property*, and violence against *people*? One of them threatens my life, the other does not.

With a limited amount of resources to combat "domestic terrorism," shouldn't we be arranging our priorities more carefully?

*Regina Rogers
Eugene*

OUTRAGEOUS WRITER

Sally Sheklow's "Boulder Holders" piece (12/15) had to be the funniest thing in a long time. She is an absolutely fabulous writer.

A friend read it out loud at our Christmas party and had everyone in stitches. My sweetie (Bob) made a bunch of Xerox copies,

and I found it on the Internet and shared it with my friends all around the country.

When my sister read it the next night, she laughed harder than my sweetie had ever heard her laugh before. She could hardly read out loud — it cracked her up so.

When I looked her up on the Internet, I found out Sally stirs up a bit of controversy. Good for her to be able to be herself, a wonderfully outrageous, creative, amazing writer.

*Cleone Lyvonne
Bandon*

BALANCING ACT

Sally Sheklow's last column (12/15) brought me such laugh-out-loud enjoyment and later, read aloud, it was the joy of a gathering I attended. In fact, it reminded me to tell you that I appreciate all of her columns. She brings insight and new "food for thought" whether the subject matter is downright funny or more thoughtful. In these intense days, I appreciate her lighter touch that still has impact. She brings terrific balance between humor and seriousness that invites and provokes contemplation. Doesn't get better than that in my opinion.

By the way, her last column brought new attention to *Eugene Weekly* for those not regular readers! Happy holidays and thanks for the work you do. Onward!

*Judy Moseley
Eugene*

EDITOR'S NOTE: We received more letters on the topic of Sally's brassiere adventures than we have room to print.

IDLE CHATTER

Could it have been your mechanic who told you that warming up your car's engine in the morning (by idling) is a good idea, or just your own preference for a warm steering wheel? It's very bad practice, either way. Idling the car to warm up its engine has technically only drawbacks: The engine warms up very slowly, running for a long time in "enriched mode" (very incomplete combustion), which generates much more of the hazardous air pollution. The air pollution is not