

Opportunity or Dilemma

From the time Parliament voted the four bills for change in our constitution to bring total equality between the sexes, the voices of support, disagreement, confusion, and anger have been raising their loud strains of opinion. It is great to know this is a free society, and we are free to share our thoughts and opinions. This freedom, however, does not automatically translate into rightness or fairness. Too many of the voices are painting a distorted picture of human rights, religious freedom, and fairness. It is disconcerting to realize that far too many are not grasping the great opportunity we have to create a bright future for the generations to come. We are coloring the future of our country with our fears, ignorance, prejudices and bigotry. We are turning an opportunity into a dilemma. Too many of the contributors to the debate are unnecessarily injecting doubt, dishonesty, and even frivolity into the discussion. This is sad.

It is somewhat surprising to me to see how many learned people are voicing their negative opinions about the bills. This is why each person must be able to think independently and critically. When lawyers, pastors, politicians, teachers, and other leaders are speaking, we must listen but also be able to filter what is not right and form our own opinion. Just because it is a noted person speaking does not make that person's view automatically right.

During my twenty years of experience as a counseling psychologist and marriage and family therapist, and 38 years as a minister of the gospel, I have discovered that all of us filter what we hear and read through our own life experiences. Even definition of words can change their coloring depending on our life's journey. It is as though we have our own lexicon and encyclopedia in our brains. This is not wrong within itself. What is wrong is that some of our life experiences are negative and have led us down the road of pain and disappointment, and we sought not to deal with the pain. The pain or negative experiences soon become embedded in our thought processes and behavior. In other words, this pain or negative experience causes us to filter everything we see, hear, or encounter through our own dictionaries, crippling us or freezing us into a life of confusion, pain, or overly critical spirit.

I would not be surprised that some people are interpreting these bills through their own filters of pain and frustration. It then becomes a dilemma and not an opportunity. Even lawyers, judges, pastors, medical doctors, and politicians can have this negative experience and outcome. I am not suggesting that everyone who disagrees or even agrees with the bills is not thinking clearly. It just is always amazing in life to see how different people can read the same thing and come to different conclusions. I suppose this is freedom of thought.

This brings me to the point of how many different views people can glean from reading the same sacred scripture. The views might be due to contextual observation and criticism, language evaluation, cultural knowledge, or theological exegesis. Exegesis means to take "out" of the text. However, it is also clear that some interpret their sacred scriptures based on sociological and cultural biases, and not by critical examination of the text. This

is called “eisegesis” which means reading “into” the text. This is obvious in the Christian, Muslim and Hindu worlds, etc. One way it is manifested is in the teachings of the role of men, women, and children. It is also in the treatment of homosexuals, lesbians, and now transgenders and intersex persons. The views vary strongly across all of these religions. One might ask, “Which view is correct?” Thus the terms liberal, conservative, extreme fundamentalist and centrist are used to refer to individuals, depending on one’s views. I think of myself as a centrist with sometime a dose of liberalism, and then other times with a hint of conservatism.

It is my view that all sacred scripture (from all religions) has more humane, loving, balanced approach to life than many have been taught and believe. Far too many teachers of faith have used their sacred scripture, knowingly or unknowingly, to create a toxic faith. In 2008, I wrote these words: “Toxic faith prevents one from searching deep into the word of God (all sacred scripture) and one’s life with an open mind. It makes one depend on someone else to guide one’s life more than the Creator.” In 2011, in my article “Identifying Poisonous Teachings,” I quoted Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton from their book “Toxic Faith, Experiencing Healing from Painful Spiritual Abuse.” They list the forms and variations of toxic faith. They are: compulsive religious activity, laziness, giving to get, self-obsession, extreme intolerance, addiction to a religious high.” Interesting, isn’t it. I must hasten to say that what is also contributing the subject of toxic faith is the very dilemma I wrote about earlier in this article—negative life experiences.

There have been a few persons who have voiced their opinions against passing the fourth bills by referring to the reasons God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This is a classic example of filtering the text through one’s cultural and sociological bias. They would say that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of homosexuality. This is not entirely true. But it is a way to read a passage to support one’s view. Here are the reasons these two ancient twin cities were destroyed. It is found in Ezekiel 16:49-50: “Sodom’s sins were pride, gluttony, and laziness, while the poor and needy suffered outside her door. She was proud and committed detestable sins, so I wiped her out, as you have seen.” Need I say any more? Yes, one of the “sins” was homosexuality. However, Sodom, like The Bahamas today, was focused on selfish gains, material wealth, and became a much laid back country to the point they even neglected to take care of the needy and those who were physically and emotionally wounded. I must remind our people of faith that whether or not the Bible condemns a particular behavior there is still an underlying attitude expected by everyone. Here are two texts that express this attitude: John 15:12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” And 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.”

Dear friends, it is time we think critically and objectively. Let us not allow personal pain, sociological biases, and frustration, to color the future of our nation. We want freedom,

respect, justice and fairness for every single resident of our land. That includes men, women, children, the blind, the deaf, the physically disabled, transgender, intersex, homosexuals, and lesbians, fat skinny, tall, short, white, black, religious, non-religious, atheist, agnostics, illiterate and literate. Let us work together to make this an opportunity and not a dilemma.

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