

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Dear Lord, must I smite the neighbours?

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Date: 28/07/2000

Publication: The Financial Review
Section: Weekend Review

Julie McCrossin on those tiny practical problems in taking the Good Book at its Word

The Bible and homosexuality have been in the news again this month. The Uniting Church has decided at its latest national assembly in Adelaide to continue accepting "diversity". There will be no witch-hunts to weed out gay and lesbian parishioners or clergy. Nor will there be open acceptance. Each parish will be left to sort out its own approach. Some churches will be known as "gay-friendly", and some will make it very clear indeed that such "diversity" is not welcome.

This tolerant truce is a far cry from the blunt war cries of US radio guru Dr Laura Schlessinger. This "queen of hate radio" broadcasts to an estimated 20 million listeners. She tells her fans that homosexuality is a "biological error and a sadness that can be cured" and that lesbian mothers are "a devastation to children". Outraged opponents have taken out newspaper ads across the country, including in The New York Times, claiming her "anti-gay commentary is harmful to children" because it exacerbates the problem of youth suicide.

Tap "Dr Laura" into any internet search engine and you'll find scores of websites arguing about this blonde bombshell who has the usual Yankee knack for self-promotion. You might also find the following "open letter", posted on the net from Canada, which says everything that needs to be said about the intellectual pitfalls of selective Biblical interpretation. The letter begins: "Dear Dr Laura, thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate."

"I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them:

a) When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord (Lev 1:9). The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

b) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

c) I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanliness (Lev 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offence.

d) Lev 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighbouring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

e) I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

f) A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Lev 11:10), it is a

lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

g) Lev 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

h) Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev 19:27. How should they die?

i) I know from Lev 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

j) My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them (Lev 24:10-16)? Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws (Lev 20:14)?

``Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging." To visit Dr Laura's web site, try www.drlaura.com.