

## But I Digress... Kelly Lamrock

Pity poor Lady Justice. It always seemed to me that if you walk around blindfolded and carrying scales, you're going to trip now and then. When I was young, it was explained to me that the blindfold was to ensure that justice was doled out without an eye to race, color, gender or religion. Sometimes, though, in the darker moments of our legal system, the blindfold seems to represent the debilitating biases of the day that impair the sight of the courts.

Into this badly overwrought metaphor, let us introduce New Brunswick's own Madame Justice Myrna Athey.

The learned judge recently removed a father's right to most of his visits with a daughter he clearly loves. The man's only stated shortcoming was his unfortunate choice of gender.

Men, according to the judge, don't care about spending time with their children. Therefore, she saw no reason why this father should continue to visit his daughter every Wednesday.

Just hold the comments for a second. Let it go. Let's fast forward down to the United States, where another family drama is playing itself out in a courtroom.

The Supreme Court will soon hear from a woman who had her custody of her daughter simply taken away from her and given to her ex-husband's new wife. Period. Those nine months of pregnancy, the hours of childbirth, the sleepless nights with baby, forget 'em. They may as well have been a movie. You were her mother, now you're not.

Why? One reason. She is a lesbian. And the fact that the loved and cared for her child without fail or failure couldn't overcome the court's view that lesbians are not the parents that heterosexuals are. These decisions can, and have, inspired many sanctimonious columns pointing out their perniciously flawed logic.

This will not be one of those columns. It's too easy.

Suffice it to say that it seems to me that in a world that produces so many broken marriages, broken homes and broken hearts, that when you see genuine love, be it parent-child or the consenting adult variety, for God's sake



encourage it. And any time you judge an individual not by who they are but your assumptions about a group they belong to, that's reprehensible.

What I want to talk about is how commentators on these two cases have been awfully selective in applying those principles.

Conservatives, those who claim to believe in the right of the individual and the family to be free from the state, have been falling over themselves to defend the American decision. And while more right-wing types have held Judge Athey up as a case of feminism gone mad, progressives and women's advocates, those who should best know the sting of being dismissed because of one's gender have been strangely silent on the New Brunswick incident.

Is the world full of hypocrites? No, I don't think so. The problem is that our political discourse is too much about choosing sides and not enough about defending principles.

The result is that we break society into groups and decide each particular case as a microcosm of what we want to believe. So we get left-wing groups with a blind spot for anti-male sexism, anti-white racism; unions who make unreasonable demands; and demonstrations that turn violent. And we get the right-wing talking heads who refuse to accept that some businesses treat their workers badly, that welfare recipients can be lost in bureaucracy, and who assert that every case of affirmative action is unnecessary because there's never a systemic bias.

The result is that we all talk past each other, because our responses become predictable. Clarence Thomas - Anita Hill? People decide their political interest and brand the other party a liar. The O.J. Simpson trial? Polls showed that most blacks decided OJ was a

victim of a racist system before they even heard the evidence. And most whites were so busy criticizing the blacks for that view that they never even considered the notion that continued mistreatment breeds mistrust.

And if we talk past each other long enough, then we begin to believe that we can't ever understand each other. That's when people who should know better start preaching the nonsense that there is no subjective truth and that everything we perceive is merely a function of our gender, colour or other characteristics.

That's the single most dangerous bit of nonsense going around today.

Some things are objectively wrong. Those judges were objectively wrong. It's wrong to take a 30% tax cut when people don't have enough to eat. Rosanne Skoke's views on gay rights are wrong. And if something's wrong, then something's got to be right.

Most people who argue that truth is subjective are those who believe too few people have too much power. Well, if everything's subjective, what principle would we enlist to convince the rich to share power with the poor, for men to share opportunity with women?

We fight for these things because they are right. Not our subjective view, but because it is the truth. Who we are affects how we see things, but these are biases to overcome, not to base solutions upon.

And people who want a fairer world have to realize that, while it's easier to blacklist those with different interests, to say it's all subjective and relative, the only way to achieving real justice is to believe that there are universally true principles that will win out, not because others were crushed by a change in power, but because they were convinced on principle.

That father loves his daughter. He should visit her like he always did. That mother loves her daughter. She should remain her mother. Those judges were wrong. Not subjectively, not relatively, they were just wrong.

Let's say it once more, together.

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Metanoia  
John Valk

## Fundamentalist Christians?

I heard it on CBC Radio. The Supreme Court of Canada had just denied public funding, as a Constitutional right, for the "religious schools" of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and "fundamentalist Christians." Fundamentalist Christians? Just who are these? And why does CBC Radio chose to call these Christians fundamentalists?

Fundamentalist Christians, in the minds of many, are narrow-minded, bigoted, intolerant, and exclusive. Who in their right mind today would identify with this group, let alone support their schools? But how much is this a caricature, a broad brush used to write off those who do not in fact fit it?

The public funding of so-called "religious schools" is a contentious issue, no less in Newfoundland as in Ontario. It involves religious education itself. In Ontario, where the Supreme Court case originated, it involves public funding of schools outside the current public system.

Some feel only public schools should be publicly funded. Others feel their tax dollars ought to be allocated to schools of their choice. CBC Radio gives the impression that public funds should not be used by Christians (Muslims, Jews and Hindus) for "religious schools." To support its case, CBC simply identifies these Christians as fundamentalists, and their schools as religious. Case won!

Is it not the case, however, that the term "fundamentalist" is used by the media as derisive, even dismissive? Is there not underlying this portrayal considerable distortion and dishonesty? Further, one might ask regarding the origin of this distortion and dishonesty.

To assume that schools operated by Christians, Muslims, Jews and Hindus

are "religious" and public school are not simply a falsehood. Religion is so central to humans, and what they do, that it is impossible to be religiously neutral. No one can leave their religious beliefs (or baggage) at the classroom door, whether that be Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, agnostic or whatever. What then of public schools? If they cannot be religiously neutral, are they religiously inclusive or exclusive, tolerant or intolerant?

If something is not taught overtly, then it is taught by default. That goes for religious beliefs, values, morals, even business practices. By not teaching about religion, one is teaching (by default) that religion is not important. To teach such a view is really to teach a distortion.

It is not a question of whether or not schools should teach about religion (or even morals and values). It is really a question of whose or what religious beliefs (and morals and values) should or will be taught. If a public system is to be open to all Canadians, ought it not to teach about the religious views which have informed so many Canadians (and others) past and present?

There are Canadians who feel the public system does not teach sufficiently about religion. Others feel it is closed to their religious beliefs, even derisive and dismissive of them. That these Canadians stand up and say so, and ask that their tax dollars be directed to schools which are more in line with their own beliefs, is simply being honest and requesting due (democratic) process. To be dismissed by the media as fundamentalist, and so identified with all negatives associated with the term, is simply a gross distortion, and a misuse of public radio.

I personally know a number of individuals who spear-headed this case all the way to Supreme Court. They are involved in the Ontario Multi-Faith Coalition for Religious Equity. Two in particular are also involved in Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), a national social justice organization. Both organizations take the free expression of religion seriously.

CPJ encourages governments on all levels to ensure that justice is done for all people. It insists that the needs of all people — not just the powerful — are to be considered when governments enact socio-economic policy. And yes, both these individuals involved with CPJ and the Ontario Multi-Faith Coalition are committed Christians. They take very seriously the words of the Hebrew prophet Micah (6:8): "And what does the Lord require of you, but that you do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before God." But they are not fundamentalists, in any stretch of the imagination. One would only know that, however, if one was sufficiently open, educated, and honest about such matters to be able make such distinctions.

It is my guess that the CBC reporter, or those who wrote the script, are university educated people. But have they been taught about religion? Does their resorting to distortion and misinformation have anything to do with the education they received? Are they sufficiently knowledgeable about Christian beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to detect differences great or small? Are they familiar with the words of the Hebrew prophet Micah, and other great religious figures, that have so impacted people past and present? It is these people who have given their lives to increase tolerance, justice and the freedom of expression for others.

Business and industry have partnered with public education, especially the university, in part because they are concerned about the education students receive. Is it time that churches, synagogues and mosques also partner with public education? Perhaps this will help end the distortion and ignorance regarding religion.



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