

Let Me Hold You Very Closely

BY CLAUDE DUCLoux

I just love this new power. It's brilliant. It's unassailable. It should be called "the Religion Card." You respectfully decline to do what you don't like or don't want to do with "closely held religious belief." Oooh... talk about your slippery slope. Let's all jump on this cultural bobsled together. Hold on.

In many ways throughout my life, I could have used this to promote my peace, tranquility, and personal enjoyment. Now, I have always been Catholic, as well as an altar boy who had to memorize the various prayers in Latin to recite during my three-year tour of duty in pre-Vatican II days. *Ad deum qui laetificat juventutem meam*, if you get my drift. I was able to mumble through the *Suscipiat* in my sleep during the 6:30 a.m. weekday masses. Although Catholicism has had a rich history of embarrassments (the Inquisition comes to mind), our catechisms provided scant instruction on the use of religion to discriminate (except of course for our proud prohibitions against women in the priesthood). Now, thanks to inspired legislation that's all the rage, the government is now in the religion business. Sadly, a bit too late for my purposes, but I can at least fantasize, re-live those tense episodes of my life, and consider how I could have used religion more effectively.

NOVEMBER, 1964
EIGHTH GRADE (Los Angeles):

Sister St. Bruise: Mr. Ducloux, you have not turned in your 300-word theme on "Martyrs of the Pleistocene." What is your excuse?

Me: I was prevented from doing homework last night by my religion. It was the Feast of St. Koufax.

Sister: Who? What religion?

Me: I'm a "No-hittarian."

Sister: Huh?

Me: We're not allowed to work after the Dodgers have a no-hitter.

Sister: Very well then. Your assign-

ment is excused. But make sure you do tonight's math problems.

Me: Ohh. During the Novena of Drysdale? I don't think so.

FEBRUARY, 1969
SENIOR YEAR (McCallum High):

Mr. Bizzell: Mr. Ducloux, please come forward and recite the Shakespearean sonnet you were assigned.

Me: I'm sorry sir, that will not be possible, and I'm frankly surprised and disappointed you would ask me on a day such as this.

Mr. Bizzell: Huh? What day would this be?

Me: It's the Octave of Ash Wednesday, and I'm mentally fasting.

Mr. Bizzell: That's not even a thing.

Me: Sir, it is, and I can point it out to you in the book of Saint Stephen of Stills. It is a closely held religious belief. If you'll check this liturgical event is followed by the Festival of Zappa, and of course, no meaningful memorization is permitted until Maxwell's Silver Hammer Sunday.

Mr. Bizzell: And just when is that?

Me: We don't know yet. The Angel Moab has not yet revealed it.

JULY, 1972
US ARMY BASIC TRAINING
(Ft. Polk, Louisiana):

Drill Sergeant Boxie (may he R.I.P. ...please!): Company C, 4th Platoon, fall out with your web-gear for a 5-mile hike.

Me: Drill Sergeant, that's not going to work for me today.

DS Boxie: Izzatso, Private? Why is that?

Me: We're in the Triduum of Patton. No marching is allowed by infantryman.

DS Boxie: Well, Ducky, you ain't an infantryman for five more weeks, SO GET YOUR WEB-GEAR ON AND GET DOWN AND GIMME 50!!

Me: Yes, Drill Sergeant! [okay, so maybe it wouldn't work perfectly, even in my daydreams.]



Deeply held religious beliefs are ethereal, evanescent, and by their very nature, not subject to any verifiable context or proof... we are taught to use logic to criticize. But logic depends upon proof. And religion depends upon faith.

Now, I know what you critics out there are saying. "How dare you make light of deeply held religious beliefs!" But before you step away from where the lightning is certain to strike me, consider this: Deeply held religious beliefs are ethereal, evanescent, and by their very nature, not subject to any verifiable context or proof. And that drives folks crazy. See, we are taught to use logic to criticize. But logic depends upon proof. And religion depends upon faith.

Where does that leave us?

To many people, using logic to bash religion is unfair, but it is undeniable that using religion to bash logic (at least as it applies to public policy) is equally untenable.

The brilliance of our founding fathers was to ensure church and state remain separate. We are still strongly influenced in this country by our religious traditions, but instead of chapter and verse, we rely on universal "values." And

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I think examining values is a legitimate exercise. And while the government is forbidden to impose specific religious beliefs, it is clear the values of our religious roots are reflected in our desire for laws that should be fair and provide protection for all citizens, including those who help us succeed, and those who need our help.

Every single day, we continue to make numerous small choices about our values, which are reflected in how we treat people, what we choose to accomplish, and how our legacy will be defined. Our culture may change for many reasons: From technology, resources, or even family. But values shouldn't change.

I desperately want to believe I will respect every citizen's right to worship in accordance with his or her faith. I cringe, however, at those who would directly suggest a specific religion, rather than a value of that religion, should guide statutory or public policy.

One of our greatest American heroes saw this same danger of allowing special religious accommodations, and railed against the use of religion to restrict legislation as follows: "*Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these, free enquiry must be indulged; and how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves?*" – Thomas Jefferson, (Notes on the State of Virginia.)

Let me offer a solution: Why don't we all just act in accordance with the equanimity and understanding we desire that others accord to us, and I doubt we'll ever need to argue about religion.

Which is a shame, because I deeply believe we should have a devotional every Friday to honor Saint Margarita (no salt). **A**

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