

June 25, 2012

Dear Friends

While visiting a church in the Westman Islands in Iceland last week we were told that local custom invites the congregation to stand while Scripture is being read. This reminded me of a story of a lapsed Jew who decided to become observant. During each visit to a synagogue, orthodox and reformed members began to shout at each other when the Torah was read so he decided to solicit an explanation from the Rabbi.

When the Torah is read should the congregation stand?,	"No" said the Rabbi, "this is not the tradition"
When the Torah is read should the congregation sit?	"No" said the Rabbi "this is not the tradition"
When the Torah is read will we always argue?	"Yes" said the Rabbi "this is the tradition"!

The point of which attaches to Jonathan Haidt's : The Righteous Mind – Why Good People are divided by Politics and Religion, a book I discovered while travelling this month.

Why do the righteous argue?

Though Haidt does not credit scripture as the source of morality, he observes that "*we are born to be righteous, but we have to learn what, exactly, people like us should be righteous about.*" He notes that in most instances moral norms are formed in response to visceral aversion and fear rather than rational learning.

Haidt further researches the difference between left and right wing politics/religion and observes that for those on the left, care for the hurting, and fairness prevail as their dominant social values. On the right, respect for authority and order are given more attention.

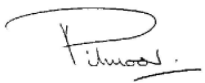
In a separate trend of thought he observes that extremists tend to presume that, 'behaviour is contingent on belief' and tend to espouse their belief and impose their behaviour personally. They know what is right for them and believe that others should share their world view. He attributes this ethic to a minority of world society he defines as WEIRD – Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich and Developed. Majority cultures by contrast, exhibit far stronger communal bonds. He suggests that we cannot understand a bee hive by just studying a bee! We need to understand the interplay between Belief, Behaviour and Belonging. He holds that morality only makes societal sense when we acknowledge and embrace the hiving instinct.

In conclusion, he likens elements of public rectitude to the six taste buds on our tongues, he argues for public discourse to be based on pillars from the left and right and further includes liberty and sanctity as centralising qualities.

While he argues for a time developed source, he acknowledges that morality learned in the great religions, gives such societies an advantage. Faith communities build social capital by creating a basis for trust. For God has shown us... what is good; and what does the Lord require: to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

Indeed Haidt's six qualities are adequately encompassed in the job description prescribed by Isaiah for covenant people. Sadly, while some of us latch on to one or two value streams at the expense of the others, our bickering will persist. Thank you for binding the cornucopia of moral flavour that finds its blend in Christ Jesus the host of our eternal banquet, to which we are invited as faithful stewards

Yours, with sugar and spice and all things nice,



Victor

The Righteous Mind	Isaiah 61 – The spirit of the Lord is upon you -
Care – Harm	To preach good tidings to the poor – To heal the broken hearted.
Liberty – Oppression	To proclaim liberty to captives and the opening of prison to those who are bound.
Fairness – Cheating	To proclaim the acceptable year of our Lord, the day of vengeance of our God.
Loyalty – Betrayal	To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified
Sanctity - Degradation	They shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. Strangers shall feed your flocks...
Authority - Subversion	You will be priests of God, servants of the Lord...Instead of your shame you will have double honour. Instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion... Everlasting joy shall be theirs.
	For, I the Lord – Love Justice; Hate Robbery for burnt offering, I will direct their work in truth and make them an everlasting covenant.