

All the Evidence

Genesis 6:9-22

Genesis 7:1-3

Job 42:7-8

“All right, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you have heard all the evidence, and it is now my duty to instruct you on the law that applies to this case.”

Those were the words of Judge Ito in the now infamous O.J. murder trial. And to be frank, Judge Ito's remark was not accurate. The jury did not hear all the evidence. It heard all the evidence the judge would allow and all the testimony and evidence the attorneys thought in their best interest to introduce but the jury did not---did not hear every shred of evidence and testimony. Very rarely does that happen in a trial and it definitely didn't happen in the O.J. trial.

Remember the surreal slow speed pursuit of Simpson in a Ford Bronco driven by friend Al "A.C." Cowlings? Well, all the jurors knew is what they saw on TV. Prosecutors dropped a chance to introduce the chase to prove consciousness of guilt. That decision meant the jury was never presented with testimony by wheel-man Cowlings.

And the woman billed in Johnnie Cochran Jr.'s opening statement as the “Maid With the Alibi” gave her testimony on videotape but the tape of Rosa Lopez was never shown to the jury.

The former boyfriend of victim Nicole Brown Simpson who was allegedly spied upon by Simpson through a window as Zlomsowitch and Ms. Simpson had---how shall I say it?----“a friendly encounter” on her couch.-----Zlomsowitch never got to testify about Simpson's apparent stalking habits.

Superior Court Judge Lance Ito also blocked some evidence, most notably dozens of examples of Mark Fuhrman, a retired detective, using the word "nigger" in tape-recorded interviews and boasting about police brutality and misconduct. The judge allowed jurors to hear just one excerpt on tape and another read from a transcript.

I submit to you this morning that the modern Church, the institutional Church by and large, like Judge Ito and the attorneys in the Simpson case----I submit to you this morning that the Church has, for the most part, withheld all the evidence in an attempt to bolster its authority and positions and solidify its creeds. And in the process----reality and truth and honesty have been sacrificed.

Do you what the modern Church reminds me of? It reminds me of a person hiding Easter eggs for the Easter egg hunt. Not those plastic, fake eggs, mind you, but the real ones, real hard-boiled eggs, dipped, decorated and then hidden. And the Church, this person, thinks they have found, recovered, located all those real eggs, every last one of them. Dead sure they've got all the eggs, all the eggs in their baskets, all the eggs in their creeds, all the eggs in their beliefs, all the eggs in their head. I've found, though, that these for sure, for certain Christians have overlooked some of the eggs, and their overlooking some of the eggs has led to a situation that frankly stinks, as much, if not more than old finally discovered, finally retrieved Easter eggs.

Overlooked information. Overlooked data. Overlooked records. Overlooked testimony.

That may be giving some of the Christians the benefit of the doubt because maybe it's not a matter of overlooking, maybe it's a situation of dishonesty. Maybe they've found the un-retrieved Easter eggs but chosen not to pick the Easter eggs or chosen to toss the eggs in a garbage bag to be sent to a dump hoping said eggs will never be discovered.

I wish modern Christians would be more like Job. You remember Job, don't you? Job was honest. Job had integrity. Job was frank and candid and sincere. Job called a spade a spade. Job was forthright even with God.

Read the book of Job and you get a Katrina like impression of death and destruction. Job lost his sons and daughters, lost his fortune, lost his health, lost his security, lost his future, lost his Mayberry existence, lost all that he held dear except his wife. And write this down, Job lost his patience with God. That's right, Job was not patient. Job was about as patient as a teenager waiting to get his driving license. Job was about as patient as a person standing in the tenth position in a long check out line at Harris Teeter. Job was about as patient as New Orleans residents who didn't evacuate. Don't tell me Job was patient or I'll get impatient with you.

Job was mad. Job was angry. Job was let down. Yes, let down by none other than God. And let down by his so-called friends.

Yes, his religious friends who knew it all, who had it all figured out.-----At first they were silent, seeing Job's suffering. But then they opened their big religious mouths and started spouting off about how Job's suffering was due to some sin, some evidence he had yet to discover or was simply unwilling to face. Job's friends, in effect, defended God and attacked Job. Job, though, would have none of it. He declared his innocence and maintained his case against God. Job says, "There is no evidence against me. None. Not a penny's worth. But there is a pile of evidence, a mountain of evidence against God, and you, my friends, are blind to it. Or worse, you, my friends, are simply dishonest."

Read it. Read it, it's in there.

Yes, near the end of the book God shows up on the scene and pulls rank, throws his or her weight around. God shuts Job up. God puts Job in his place. That's right. That's accurate. God says, "Where were you, Job,-----where were you Job when I was creating the world?"

And there is a deafening silence.

But---and this is what the conservative Church misses. Remarkably, in the conclusion of the book God commends Job and chastises Job's so-called friends. God says-----remarkably, God says, "Job has spoken of me what is true, but his friends have not spoken the truth."

Wow. God says Job, who has been giving God down the road, has spoken the truth, and that Job's so-called friends, who have been defending God to the nth degree, God says that they have not been on the up and up. God says they are not people of integrity.

I believe the modern Church could take a few lessons from Job about being honest, and perhaps a good place to start would be with some honesty about the Bible.

The Bible is not inerrant or infallible. Never has been and never will be. How can something be inerrant that has a variety of witnesses which sometimes conflict? How can something be inerrant and infallible when we can't even say with certainty what manuscripts to use or what books to include? Even more to the point, how can the Church mouth off words like inerrant and infallible for a book that contains so many unchristian stories of violence and destruction and hate and prejudice? Some people call it "The Good Book" but the fact of the matter is some parts of it aren't so good.

Here's a little Church History. Around 175 A.D. a fellow by the name of Tatian while studying in Rome noticed that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John had some discrepancies. You'll have to at least give Tatian credit for recognizing the discrepancies. Many modern Christians aren't honest enough to do that. But that's where the credit for Tatian should end. Tatian's solution----- Tatian's solution was to harmonize the four gospels, that is, take out the discrepancies and form one coherent narrative, one gospel which he named Diatessaron. Diatessaron is a musical term designating a series of four harmonic tones.

Well, I'm happy to report that even though in some areas of the early Church the Diatessaron was prevalent, particularly Syria----I'm thrilled to report that in the end Tatian's efforts were rejected. I'm happy to report that today we have in our Bible four gospels, four different gospels that have not and can not be harmonized despite the efforts of Tatian or any fundamentalists who choose to keep their head in the sand. In at least this one instance, the early Church decided to keep all the evidence, that is, all the evidence in the four gospels.

It's time the Church looked at all the evidence when it comes to Biblical interpretation and not just all the nice verses. It's way past time for the Church to quit trying to harmonize that which is disharmonious, quit trying to smooth over that which can't be smoothed over.

Now that's just for starters. I've got a lot more to say.

When it comes to honesty, the Church needs to try some of it with respect to sexual orientation. The Church would have use believe there are only males and females in this world and that God created all males to be attracted to females and that God created all females to be attracted to males, especially the Brad Pitt types. (Gosh, I hate him.) Anyway, that's simply not the case. God created some males who are attracted to females. And God created some males who are attracted to other males. (Are you taking notes?) God, in God's infinite wisdom, created some females who are attracted to other females. God also created some males who are attracted both to males and females and created some females attracted both to males and females. But that's not a full description, and here's where we let fundamentalists make off the hook. God also created some human beings with male bodies but the person feels like a female. And the

opposite is also true. God created human beings with female bodies but the individual feels like a male.

Think that the end of the story? Wrong. We're not finished. And why all these other folk are left out of the discussion I just can't understand. It's as if fundamentalists Christians don't want to count these people but all of God's people count. Amen.

In addition to all of the previously mentioned scenarios, we also have people with testes, XY chromosomes, and some aspects of female genitalia. We have people with ovaries and testes, and we have individuals with XX chromosomes and some aspects of male genitalia.

Finally, God has created some males asexual and some females asexual. These folk simply have no interest in sex or no sex drive.

Did any of these people choose their sexual orientation? I don't think so. We are created the way we are. And it's time for the church to be honest about the great diversity God has put on this earth with respect to sexual orientation.

All the evidence. Every last shred of it. The Church has to, has to, take it all into consideration.

And yet, when it comes to abortion-----and let me say this right off the bat----I've got a lot of mixed emotions about abortion. You can't put my position into a label or even a sentence or a slogan. Abortion, best I can tell, is always a tragedy. But I find it interesting that all of these sure fire no abortions ever Christians----and I do wonder if they would hold to their position if they or their spouse or daughter got pregnant through rape, or if the mother's life was in danger, or if the baby would be severely, and I mean severely deformed, but I find it interesting that these people who are so sure God does not approve of abortions never mention that the existence of spontaneous abortions. Sometimes spontaneous abortions are caused by infection, physical problems the mother may have, hormone factors, immune responses, and serious systemic diseases of the mother (such as diabetes or thyroid problems), but other times spontaneous abortions occur due to fetal genetic abnormalities. It is estimated, and I find this amazing---it is estimated that up to 50% of all fertilized eggs die and are lost (aborted) spontaneously, usually before a woman knows she is pregnant. Among known pregnancies, the rate of spontaneous abortion is approximately 10% and usually occurs between the 7th and 12th weeks of pregnancy. I have to ask, If God is so against abortion why does God allow so many spontaneous abortions?

All the evidence. A-double l. All of it all. If only Christians were like Job and learned to speak even the hard truth.

Permit a final example. Some Christians throughout America are arguing against evolution and for a position when they call intelligent design. They feel science is on the attack against God and that the Bible's version of creation has been replaced.

First a word about God being under attack. God cannot be proved by Christians and God cannot be disproved any scientist. Christianity is a matter of faith. It doesn't matter how many creeds

you have, how loud you say your beliefs or how many times you say your dogma or how big of a Bible you have. Christianity is a matter of faith. We cannot prove God.

Second, evolution. It is possible, and I'm one of the people in this group, for Christians to accept there has been a evolutionary process. Frankly, I don't see how that can be denied. But to accept an evolutionary process does not somehow negate God. It simply means God took a bit longer in creating. And it means, and this is what really riles the fundamentalists, it means the Bible is not a book of science. It means the Bible's truth is of another nature.

Now on this matter of intelligent design, I have this to say. Yes, I agree. I look out at the earth and so much of it seems to work and fit together and is just down right amazing. I look at certain parts, certain aspects of creation and I'm forced to believe in a Creator. But-----intelligent design does not cover all the evidence. The truth of the matter is-----the truth of the matter is there is much on this planet of ours and there is much in our existence that frankly is poorly designed. It should have been left out of creation. We could have done without. And we cannot, we must not ever turn our backs on or prevent our minds from incorporating this undesirable information about all in the world that is undesirable. As a friend of mine, who recently died, always said, "Some days I think God is a mad scientist."

No, no you are wrong, Job's friends said. God is great. The world is good. God blesses those who serve God. Read the Bible, Job. The problem is you, Job.

But God said, "Job has spoken what is true. Job's friends have not spoken the truth."

Yes, there is a rosy picture painted in some of the Bible. Yes, there is a black and white world described in some of the Bible. But there's also, thank God, there's also a counter testimony which is a reminder that the accepted theology, the party line, does not contain all the truth and in fact, sometimes is just plain wrong.

I believe a big part of our mission as a church is to help the larger Church take into account all the evidence.