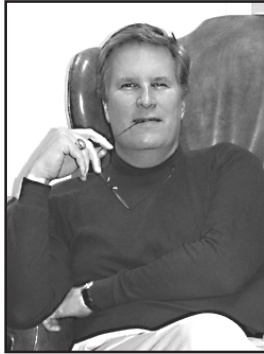


GRAND TOUR

Bully Pulpit

By Bruce W. Cook



FORMER U.S. SECRETARY of Education William Bennett, presently a best-selling author on moral issues along with reaching a national radio audience, shares with his public that the avenue to crime reduction in America is “to abort all black babies.” Bennett added that the idea was reprehensible; nevertheless, he chose to make

the statement.

Reverend Franklin Graham, successor to the national pulpit of his father Billy Graham, personal minister to President Bush and a voice of mainstream American Christian ideology expressed unapologetically that the ravages of hurricane Katrina, and then Rita on New Orleans were, “God’s punishment for the sins of the people.”

Recently, yet another powerful voice, Pat Robertson, televangelist and leader of millions of church-going Americans publicly advocated the assassination of a South American left-wing leader with anti-American leanings and a huge oil reserve.

Americans are not the only ones with big mouths. Not long after the destruction of the American Gulf region due to hurricanes Katrina and Rita, an al-Qaeda spokesman credited Allah with the death and destruction leveled against the American South. Nature’s harsh blow was labeled as punishment from God against the American infidels. Perhaps this al-Qaeda voice had been secretly meeting with Franklin Graham. What then, is the al-Qaeda response to the 7.6 quake in Pakistan killing thousands of Muslims?

People don’t think before they speak; they just blab. It’s the age-old “shoot from the hip” school of communication. Call it honest reaction if you must. I call it thoughtless, foolish, and harmful. What’s the old expression, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Wrong. Broken bones heal. Harmful words never diminish.

William Bennett will forever be known as the white man who advocated aborting black babies to reduce crime in America. What a legacy. Bennett knows better. He also knows that crime in America is largely tied to drug abuse, and that drug abuse is disproportionately rampant in low-income, inner city neighborhoods, predominantly black. How about advocating major drug reform in America to reduce crime?

In the case of Pat Robertson, he just expressed “what many

Americans are thinking” about being pushed around in a world of manipulated corrupt governments. Corrupt or not, Americans cannot stand for murdering world leaders. Further, Christians must not advocate such a stance. It is anathema to the core of the religion.

Graham’s comments, which I have compared to those of al-Qaeda oddly enough, are most serious. Why? Because all too many people goose-step inline with the belief that God brings suffering to people as punishment. Ok, if you’re a caveman, I suppose you have the right to this supposition. As a contemporary human citizen, this belief is unacceptable. Does God give AIDS to babies as punishment? Does God take the lives of young people through cancer as punishment? Does God drown beachgoers with a tsunami in Indonesia as punishment?

I realize it’s judgmental on my part, and perhaps I have no right, but I dare say that blaming or assigning human suffering, either at the hand of nature or human creation, as the will of God, is too simplistic. If Americans suffered and perished in New Orleans as a result of hurricane force trauma, perhaps human beings should consider that living below sea level is a dangerous proposition. God did not force man to live below sea level as a setup for future punishment.

The thoughtless words of people in high public regard do tremendous damage to society in the same way that mean spirited dialogue between everyday people tears lives apart.

As a parent, be ever mindful of words expressed to your children. They last a lifetime, and they resonate throughout the years. Likewise you can be certain that your spouse, or your co-worker will not soon forget your last tirade of verbal abuse.

Words spoken in anger, or out of frustration are not excused. Apologies are never fully accepted. Will people living in New Orleans ever forget Franklin Graham’s assessment of their pain?

Words can be weapons, or they can be instruments of healing. Think before you speak, or don’t speak at all. Your spouse will thank you, your children will thank you, your co-workers will thank you – and the planet will thank you. God may even thank you. **GT**

Bruce Cook is the creator of Grand Tour Magazine. He is a twice-weekly columnist for the Los Angeles Times/Daily Pilot, and serves as Editor of the prestigious Bay Window Magazine. Cook has been heard on San Diego radio for the past five years, and is an Emmy-nominated television writer and producer responsible for such programs as Entertainment Tonight.