

GRAND TOUR

Bully Pulpit

By Bruce W. Cook



I take this column very seriously. Ideas come to me at 3 a.m. and I stare at the ceiling hashing through the point and purpose endlessly until dawn breaks. Generally I wait until the last minute before publishing to submit my rant so that I can be as current as possible for a bi-monthly magazine, not a daily paper.

My pulpit for this month, written and re-written over the last few weeks has just been discarded, which will be to the chagrin of my talented art director who will justifiably curse me for the re-do on layout to come at the final hour. Nevertheless, here's why.

My original column centered on my taking issue with what I boldly referred to as the triviality of athletes praying to God for strength and guidance prior to a game. "How can people abuse the grace of God asking to win a game when prayer should be used to halt wars, heal the sick, feed the poor." How noble. "God has no time to listen to such selfish prayer," I wrote feeling rather high and mighty.

Then, two things happened. A good friend who happens to be a devout Christian and a very conservative soul stopped in my office and I brought up the subject of my article. This person took offense at my platform, assuming that perhaps my view was anti-Christian since the vast majority of praying athletes, including their fans, friends and relatives, pro and amateur, tend to be Christian. This was not my purpose at all. I only wanted to make people think that we are all too selfish with our prayers. We need to embrace the bigger picture, the world view, and ask God to help us heal.

In defense, this individual replied with a remark that hit me in the gut, "Your rabbi probably prays when he invests in the stock market." I was dumbfounded, horrified, and angry. I couldn't believe that anyone, especially a friend, someone intelligent, successful, and decent and kind, could think, let alone speak such anti-semitic remarks.

Over days I thought about this constantly, playing it forward and backward, analyzing and dissecting, putting it in the context of the moment in relation to my thoughts on prayer. Perhaps I had unwittingly solicited this reaction. The stereotype that Jews only care about money persists, regardless of the truth. Some people, of every creed, only care about money. Then there is the equally false notion that all Jews are rich. Maybe that's what my friend meant.

Then, on the following Friday evening I attended a men's fraternal event which I helped to emcee in Newport Beach. It's one of the great social/charitable events of the summer season on the California Riviera, attended by very successful

men who raise significant dollars to benefit college scholarships for local youth. Pretty high and mighty stuff.

In fairness, before I hit you with the next zinger, there's plenty of drinking going on. Remember Mel Gibson's DUI arrest in Malibu? Here we go. A prominent local figure came over to my table and was bantering with the man sitting next to me, and out of his mouth came, "I'm going to do to you what the Jews did to Christ." Oh my God.

I'm ashamed of myself for not getting up and punching him in the nose, but he wasn't talking to me and he had been drinking. Is this an excuse for speaking such hatred? Worse, for believing such mythical nonsense propagated over 1,700 years of religious division fostered by prejudice. While there were Jews in the ancient world who did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah and may have been involved in his arrest and trial, it was the Romans who executed him and it was the Romans who 300 years later under the rule of Constantine, elevated Jesus to the state of deity and savior. Finally, while there were Jews who did not believe in Him, His followers were all Jews who did. They were the early Christians, who were also persecuted and many killed, sacrificing everything for their beliefs.

The Holy Roman Catholic Church today has come to terms with the historical context of Jesus. In recent modern times the Vatican has rebuked the prejudice and hatred that underpinned the faith for centuries. Yet ignorance and bigotry persist.

All of us, everyone who feels like they have a righteous purpose on this planet, in this life, with or without a connection to a religion of any denomination, must stand up for the greater good and speak out against hatred whether it comes out of a drunken mouth or from a friend not thinking.

Enough is enough. Thousands of years of war over religious precepts must end now. Can't we see this more clearly than ever over the so-called war against terror?

Anyway, back to my initial thoughts on the triviality of athletes praying to win a game and the subject of using prayer for a higher, greater good, I have to take it back. Otherwise, I would be the biggest hypocrite of all.

Yesterday, while I was driving I was praying that the refrigerator wouldn't give out because it was making really loud noises. So much for the greater good. We all pray for our own selfish needs, some trivial, some notably more humanitarian. Let's pray for more truth, more justice, more righteousness in our world. **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 is the host of "Inside Southern California"—a TV talk-format on Time Warner, and is an Emmy-nominated television writer and producer responsible for such programs as Entertainment Tonight.