

## Living biblically

Mike Sweitzer-Beckman | Aug. 4, 2011

Somewhere along the way, I got added to the mailing list for a group called Catholic Answers. They send out periodic e-mails with a series of common questions with hyperlinks that you click to get your answers. An example might be something like, "How do I know if I'm Catholic enough?"

The organization is not affiliated with any diocese and maintains a post office box in San Diego. It was started in 1979 in response to leaflets that were left on the windshields of cars in a Catholic church's parking lot by what the founder, Karl Keating, describes as a Fundamentalist group spreading misinformation about the Eucharist.

The following weekend, Keating (an attorney) had opened the post office box and wrote a counterpoint leaflet that he placed on the windshields of the cars in the Fundamentalist church's parking lot. Fast forward to the 21st century, and they have a gold mine of a Web site URL: [www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com) [1].

Usually I read their e-newsletters because they provide me with humor. The answers aren't always that well-written, nor well-researched. They are usually one Catholic guest writer's opinion.

A couple of weeks ago one of the questions was about whether it was OK for Catholics to be prejudiced against homosexual people. One of the answers posted was something like, "Yes, because it's living biblically!"

That's it. No scripture citation. No exegesis. No historical context.

Maybe I should have just let it go. It's easy enough to fire up a Web site and start posting stuff. But it's a common train of thought. When I read scripture I don't come away with the same conclusion that it is OK to discriminate against gay and lesbian people. However, a literalist could take it that way. In my mind, as long as a literalist is willing to not enjoy a shrimp cocktail (Leviticus code prohibits homosexuality as well as the consumption of shellfish) and goes on soapboxes with equal time and resources to state this, then I feel better about the argument not being hypocritical.

This led to a book recommendation from a colleague: *The Year of Living Biblically* [2] by A.J. Jacobs. Jacobs is a secular Jew living in New York City (he describes his Judaic upbringing as "Jewish in the same way the Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant") and has always thought that religion would be a phase that passed in our culture. However, it never did, so he decides to explore the Bible to see if he's been missing anything. As the title suggests, he wants to live by the rules of the Bible for a year.

It's a refreshing read for me because it is almost like reading the Bible and trying to make sense of it from the eyes of someone from a secular perspective. The questions that Jacobs asks could be asked by anyone living in an urban area who is trying to make sense of a book that has stood the test of time.

To begin his yearlong quest, Jacobs sits down and reads the Bible from cover to cover, noting every rule that is detailed in the text. In the end, he comes up with 72 pages of rules in a Microsoft Word document. His next task

is coming up with some sort of priority to give various rules, such as how much time and resources to invest in each.

Jacobs has a refreshing sense of humor but enough seriousness to know that he is taking the book and the Judeo-Christian traditions seriously. He approaches the book from a middle-of-the-road point of view -- interested in both the passages that the right and the left take literally -- and showing over and over again the complexities and contradictions of trying to live out the 72 pages of rules from the most popular book in the world.

[Mike Sweitzer-Beckman helped launch the blog <http://www.youngadultholics-blog.com/> [3] in 2008. He also blogs at <http://sweitzer-solutions.com/> [4] about technology.]

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.catholic.com/>

[2] <http://www.ajjacobs.com/books/yolb.asp>

[3] <http://www.youngadultholics-blog.com/>

[4] <http://sweitzer-solutions.com/>

[5] <http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup>