

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

The Bible in Paprika Is No Prize

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Kids my age in the late 1950s used to look forward to the prize in the box of Cracker Jacks. We dug through the caramelized popcorn to find it. The prize wasn't worth more than a penny, but it was fun to find.

Yesterday, I opened up a bottle of Hungarian paprika to make goulash for a large group of friends, and found inside a piece of "edible potato starch paper" with two biblical citations. I looked up the Old and New Testament passages to see if they were Right Wing Christian anti-gay rhetoric, but they were harmless references. Nevertheless, the citations were no prize, and they didn't belong in a bottle of paprika.

I called the owner of the spice store, with whom I had just spent a pleasant half hour learning about his new enterprise. I took his business card because I wanted to recommend him to friends who are resurrecting a town in the Adirondacks, and who are looking for quality goods to be sold there.

"I found a biblical quote in my paprika," I said. "Do you have those pieces of paper in every spice and herb bottle?"

When he answered, "Yes," I told him that I didn't believe in mixing commerce and religion, and that I couldn't recommend him or his product to others. I was particularly grieved that there was no warning that I was going to be proselytized.

In the newspaper this week, there was a story of an Evangelical Christian graduate student in a counseling program at Eastern Michigan University who refused to work with gay clients. She claimed religious discrimination when she was dropped from the master's program. The university's classes are paid for with taxes rendered by the people, including gay people.

President Obama is being charged with religious intolerance because he is forcing religious institutions that receive tax dollars to provide free contraceptives in their health plan. Catholic Charities in Massachusetts, also funded by the government, has stopped their adoption services because they refuse to place children in gay households.

There are corporate managers, and even corporate human resource personnel, who because of their religious beliefs, refuse to support company policy on valuing all diversity. They give lip service to the company, but they minimize the complaints or needs of their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender employees.

What is it with so-called "People of Faith" who feel free to proselytize their beliefs to people who are only trying to make a good Hungarian goulash?

Why would a professional person, who wants to counsel others to better emotional health, refuse such service to people who don't share his or her religious beliefs? Do Catholic Charities and hospitals feel it is better for an unwanted child to be born, and to stay in foster care rather than be adopted by a loving gay person or same-sex couple?

And worst of all, how can a person being paid good wages by a corporation, fail to do their job because it conflicts with their religious beliefs? Why stay at that company?

All of us are entitled to believe whatever we choose about whether there is a God and an afterlife, but people who decide to force those beliefs down the throats of others on edible potato starch paper, or to ignore their professional responsibilities, need to pay for their arrogance, intolerance, and dereliction of duty.