

May 2010

"But, Father Wheeland, the Bible Lies!"

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Recommended Citation

Woodward, Stephanie (2010) ""But, Father Wheeland, the Bible Lies!,"" *Verbum*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 6.
Available at: <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol7/iss2/6>

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"But, Father Wheeland, the Bible Lies!"

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: For thou art with me..." We sit and recite these words that we know by heart, which seem to mean absolutely nothing to us right now. I look to my sister on my left; she looks back at me for reassurance. I give her a strong, stern look: We can do this. As the psalm, which does no justice in representing the reason we are here, is ending, my sister and I stand up in anticipation of Father Wheeland inviting us to the pulpit. He introduces us to all the people who already know us very well before stepping aside. My sister, although three years older, is just not strong enough to go first, so I step up."



Stephanie L. Woodward

***** "But, Father Wheeland, the Bible Lies!"**

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"I would like everyone here to stand up... now put your right arm in... and now take your right arm out..."

The church erupts with laughter as I smile.

"Yes, now put your right arm back in and shake it all about!"

More laughter echoes from the pews.

"Now everyone do the Hokie Pokie and turn yourself around..." Surprisingly, they all do as they are told without objection. "Cause that's what my dad was all about..."

I see a church full of my father's family, friends, employees, tenants, acquaintances, and admirers all nod and smile, agreeing with me. Every person in the church recognizes my father's qualities in me and knows that this is the part of the funeral service where they will truly get a glimpse of the man they are here to honor and mourn.

The usual eulogy that simply summed up the better aspects of a person's life to coincide with the rest of the "respectable" church service would have been fine for any other person, but not for my daddy. My dad did not fit the mold of the average Catholic man; so of course, my family did not turn out to be the average Catholic family.

Yes, we were all baptized. Yes, we all made our first communion. However, it was only my dad and I who made our first reconciliation and Confirmation. My sister and brother, along with my mother, chose not to pursue any more religious endeavors after eating their first "Jesus Cracker." My father did not have a choice, or at least he did not feel like he had a choice; he was raised in a very structured Catholic family. And me? Well, I suppose I just enjoyed going to religion class every Monday night.

I liked feeling closer to God, though my daddy always told me that I did not need to go to church to be close to Him. Even so, I liked learning and even more so, I liked disputing the teacher. One particular night I was sitting in my 8th grade religion class when I decided to interrupt the lesson by blatantly stating, "But Father Wheeland, the Bible lies!" Father Wheeland, who had known me since birth, and had been my dad's priest growing up, looked at me, without any surprise, and said with a wide smile, "I'd like to hear what you have to say, Stephanie. Please, elaborate." I liked Father Wheeland; he never forced me into believing everything the Bible said, but rather, he embraced my rebellion and used it to teach the class. I started to give him examples of all of the "lies" in the Bible.

"Well Father, you take everything so literally! But it's not! Do you really think God made a man shove thousands of animals on one boat? Come on, it's a story that's trying to teach you a lesson. There are a million of them in the bible. And let's think about this: We don't know who wrote the Old Testament. So sure, that could be God's book, but the New Testament was written by four guys! And these four guys were probably biased and influenced by their leaders and social situations."

Father Wheeland calmly replied, "Stephanie, you make good points and I think we should spend our next class discussing these issues, and thank you, as always, for sharing your outspoken opinion." He smiled down at me as he pat my back and dismissed class. Father Wheeland was not a typical priest; he was used to my objections, and even expected them. He told me all the time how much I reminded him of my father and how he appreciated the new views I brought to the class. We would laugh and talk as he walked with me to the door where my dad was waiting for me. Father Wheeland would always reminisce with my dad for a couple minutes about "back in the day" when my dad was an altar boy, breaking all the rules, and yet still respecting the church. Then it was usual to expect Father to tell my dad about all the similarities he saw in us.

On the way home my dad and I would talk about the class and what I disagreed with in the Bible. It was not that I did not respect the church; it was that I thought that it was looked at the wrong way. My dad told me countless times, "You read in between the lines kid, not many people think you can do that when it comes to God. You've got an open mind. Don't ever close it."

Having an open mind about religion was easy when I had an open minded Father and an even more open minded dad. Our family would barely ever attend church, but talking to God was an everyday occurrence for all of us. We did not need church to be close to God. We did not need to designate one place to talk to God once a week; we could do it anywhere at any time. Church seemed like keeping God in a cage, where people only went to see him when they were wearing their best clothing and on their best behavior. That is not the relationship any of us wanted with "The Big Guy." We thought of God as more like a friend who was always around to talk to, no matter the circumstance. He was a great guy and a best friend.

But now we are standing up here. Talking about our dad who lies in the casket in front of us, with flowers sitting on top like an unusual centerpiece, instead of standing beside us with his amazing, lively smile; I start to wonder, "What kind of best friend would take away such a great man from his family?" If God was such a great friend, who was always there, where was he when our daddy, our hero, was being murdered? It is a bittersweet feeling to hate a best friend, but in exchange, I am now absolutely positive that there is an afterlife. Before, afterlife was slightly questionable, but now, it is impossible for a Heaven not to exist. There is no way that a man with such a loving, strong and brilliant essence could just stop existing. It is not possible. So, now, I wholeheartedly, without a single doubt, believe in God and Heaven because without God, there is no Heaven. There must be a Heaven though, because that's where my daddy is. Perhaps it is not the best idea to base most of my religious beliefs on the sole fact that my dad must be in Heaven, but for now, that is all I have.