

EAST VALLEY OPINIONS

COMMUNITY COLUMNIST

Let the milling masses mill

Today we take our reading from the Book of James (son of Lawrence the Dentist, brother of William of Erie, as opposed to the Bible guy).

Specifically, we take up the matter of "intolerance," which is so much in the news here these days. And our text is: "Thou shalt not shout about thy God to captive audiences."

This would seem to be simply a matter of common courtesy if it weren't that some religious groups take it as a strict matter of doctrine that they must tell others their good news.

(I guess you can see where this is going, so if you're of the evangelistic persuasion, this might be a good time to flip over to the Billy Graham column.)

What prompted this epistle is, of course, the recent commotion in Chandler whereby a group from the Door Christian Center shouted and bullhorned sermons to people waiting in line for shuttle buses after Fourth of July fireworks.

Interestingly, *Republic* columnist Art Thomason, in an otherwise sensible commentary, called it an instance where "very different groups failed to be tolerant of each other."

I'm all for tolerance, but when someone's whacking you upside the head with a pig bladder, I don't think it's intolerant to ask him to cease and desist. (By the way, according



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to the Door's Web site, it is only proper to be tolerant of fellow Christians. It also says its members believe "in the immorality [sic]" of the soul, so perhaps we shouldn't put a lot of credence there).

In fairness to religions, they can't help it. Be they Mormons on a mission, tract-wielding Jehovah's Witnesses or amped-up Doorists, they are literally required to spread the word.

The issue comes down to tolerance vs. religious mandate.

I have to admit that I sort of liked seeing that guy in downtown Tempe who used to stand on the corner calling out verses from the Bible. I don't know how much good it does to stand there witnessing to the unsaved masses on Mill on a Saturday night, but at least they could ignore him and keep ... um ... milling.

Same goes for speaking in tongues. I've never understood the benefit of using an inchoate patois that appears to be a conglomeration of grunts and moans peppered with Finnish diphthongs to folks who don't speak the lingo. Even St. Paul advised against it.

But as long as you don't call

me up at dinnertime, I reckon you can go about your business.

However, we now see the local Hindus, one of the most harmless and self-effacing outfits you can find, being harassed during a Ratha-Yatra festival in Scottsdale.

Come on, people! Let's take a break from noisily hectoring our neighbors with our placards and diatribes (this column excepted, naturally).

I happen to know that you can't mosey into Nepal, say, and start proselytizing the locals in Katmandu. You can do good works, and if someone comes to you and wants to know more about your religion, you can certainly show him the light.

I'm not sure we want to go that far here, but I rather like the idea that you can't just go around willy-nilly trying to undermine your neighbors' 4,000-year-old theology.

In fact, a bit less shouting all around wouldn't hurt, eh? If you're enjoying the house rockers at your favorite club ... OK. But less needless honking of car horns. Less blasting of car stereo subwoofers. Less loud talking in movie theaters. Less allowing dogs to bark at every falling leaf.

And save your bullhorn for the family picnic.

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