

A matter of the heart

More to holiness than “keeping up appearances”



Thomas Froese
ChristianWeek Columnist

The thing about marijuana is that it stinks up the joint and brings images of barefoot hippies and stoner movies and general rebellion, none of which is very attractive to the clean-cut religious crowd. The thief on the cross? A pot smoker no doubt. Probably a dealer.

But the times, they are a changin’.

In a country like Holland, it hasn’t been hard to get a joint with your espresso for some time. What’s new is that in plenty of other countries marijuana is being let out of the bag as an acceptable drug increasingly safe from criminal charges.

Some countries are relaxing laws to stem violence between military police and drug cartels, places where growing and moving marijuana has for too long been a lucrative and violent trade. Uruguay, for this reason, is about to be the world’s first country to

fully legalize pot.

Other places, including Canada, are debating laws on small-time possession that seem both harsh and unenforceable. Even conservative Russia allows possession of up to five grams. In Australia, it’s 50 grams. South of our border, Washington and Colorado have legalized recreational pot with more states to surely follow.

What are people of faith to make of it all?

What if you could get that joint into a bottle and pour it into a glass, a glass otherwise for red wine. It’s good for you, you know? Or what if that joint was in the form of an innocent little pill? Then you’d avoid the appearance of evil. And isn’t this what matters?

I’ve actually never really bought this sort of reasoning because it strikes me as what motivated the Pharisees more than anything. And we know the ringing endorsement Jesus gave their version of holiness.

No, the truth is that plenty of us have crutches and escapes whether they involve substances or not. And our faith need



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not hinge on what people think about us as much as on what God does.

That is to say, this is all a matter of the heart. Jesus said as much when He stressed that it’s not what goes into your mouth that makes you unclean, but rather what comes out.

This isn’t to condone the abuse of marijuana or anything else. Nobody wants to get killed by a stoned driver any more than a drunk driver. It is to say, though, that Christ followers should carefully consider how to respond to global culture with some thought and nuance.

Some years ago I tried to explain this to an Ontario church. I was a member of its mission committee and one day I opposed the committee’s decision to end its long-time support of a family serving in France.

The committee learned and couldn’t stand that this couple, in their home near Paris, served and

drank wine. Even in a cultural context. Missionaries from this church were expected to have a so-called higher standard, so the rule for their missionaries was made: no alcohol, period.

I pointed out that Christ—who interestingly enough was called a drunkard—was probably more concerned about other things than a bottle of wine on the kitchen table.

Like the pain those missionaries felt, having their work and their very personhoods demonized by fellow believers who were, in fact, meant to care for them. Years later, the wife expressed this pain to me in person at a funeral at that very church. All I could do was apologize.

Now I’m an overseas missionary myself. Writing about drink. And pot. It’s a strange world.

Thomas Froese writes about international issues. Follow him at www.thomasfroesecom or www.dailydad.net.



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