

Column

A proverb once acknowledged, at least in principle, said “Speak no ill of the dead”. The phrase goes back to Chilon of Sparta (6th century BC). The observance of this principle, however, seems to have gone the way of the dodo in recent years, especially when it comes to Christian leaders.

The latest to be smeared posthumously is renowned Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias who died May 21, 2020. In recent months, two reputable magazines, *Christianity Today* and *World*, have reported allegations of moral misconduct.

My purpose in this column is not to take on the role of judge and jury in this case. Nor is it to give an opinion as to whether the proverb I have just quoted should be followed in this instance. In cases where there is credible evidence and where victims are involved, surely the concerns and welfare of these victims must be taken into consideration. Fairness and truth-telling must be paramount if we are to be true to our creed as Christians.

On a personal note, over the past 20 years, I have had the privilege of attending three summer schools in Oxford, England, sponsored by Mr. Zacharias’ team. During these events, I met him and I must say I have profited from his ministry.

With that said, my purpose here is not to focus so much on Mr. Zacharias but on Christian leaders in general. What should our response be if it is revealed that one of these has moral failings, especially if this person has had a positive influence on our life and perhaps even led us to Christ? Must we cast aside the good we have received at their hand?

No, God can and does use imperfect vessels. Indeed, that includes all of us, lay and ordained. Whatever is true, just, honourable, of good report, hang onto it, no matter where you received it. It is a gift from God.

Christian leaders have their place in the divine order. They are called to be wholesome examples to God’s people and shepherds to the flock, but they must never be followed mindlessly and uncritically or be made little ‘gods’. Words of the Psalmist come to mind: “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put any confidence in princes” (118:9). Equally true is: “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put any confidence in preachers.” By “any” we should understand “ultimate”.

In that spirit, the apostle Paul in the New Testament, writes: “Be ye followers of me,” but in the same breath adds, “even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11;1). Imitate me as I imitate the Messiah is the thought.

Ravi Zacharias was fond of saying: “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”

Was he wrong? No, right on target. Recognize the weakness of human flesh, the subtilty of the devil, but ultimately the power of God to redeem and save . . . and carry on!

O LORD God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do; Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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