



Every time I sit down to write this column, I'm obliged to contend with the devil on my shoulder... and the angel on my other one. The former is forever jumping up and down, vying for my attention – *"Pick me, pick me! Write something controversial! Get 'em all riled up!"* – while the latter sits quietly, with her secret smile, trusting me to do the right thing. She doesn't know me that well.

The drama usually goes something like this...

Me: "What should I write about this time around?"

Devil: "Oooh, I know! It's that's time of year, again. Talk about the school uniform policy! You're always going on about how *cruel* it is to make preteen girls – already so awkward and insecure – tuck in their shirts and wear belts. Some of the parents actually

like

this policy. Let's get a big argument stirred up!"

Angel: *Smiles sweetly.*

Me: "What good would that do? The policy is the policy. I've been griping about it for two years. It's not likely to change and it's really not that important. Let's move on."

Devil: "Wimp! Okay, here's another idea. Let's kvetch about pre-election cable news coverage! MSNBC is yammering about birth control, abortion and "legitimate rape" 24/7, as if these were actually key election issues! Meanwhile, Fox News is hardly mentioning these issues at all, as if they didn't exist. (How proud am I of these channels?! Some of my finest work!) Oh, and you could mention that Dana Perino's face looks like an ice sculpture. 'Step away from the botox, Dana...' (Hysterical laughter.) "Man, I'm good with the vanity thing, huh?!"

Angel: *Smiles sweetly.*

Me: "Again with the cable news and the botox? You need some new material..."

Devil: "Picky, picky. Those are classics! Okay, anyway... how 'bout the GOP Convention? By the time your readers see this, we'll be halfway through it. Let's make some predictions! Who will make an ass of himself? Who will do surprisingly well? How will MSNBC manage to spin "did surprisingly well" into "made an ass of himself," and how will Fox manage the opposite spin?! Come on! This'll be fun!!"

Me: "Well, it *does* sound kinda fun..." "

Angel: *Smiles sweetly... and coughs.*

Me: "I don't think so."

Devil: "What's happened to you? You've become such a drag! You used to skewer pop stars, politicians and pundits in your sleep. You were the master! You reveled in it! What changed, for God's sake?!"

Me: "Um... me. I changed. For God's sake."

Angel: *Smiles sweetly.*

Devil: "Oh, please. Not *that* again! You and your imaginary friend in the sky. You lost half your readership when you went all woo-woo on them. Started listening to that simp on your other shoulder. Ha! Talk about making an ass of yourself..."

Me: "I don't expect *you* to understand."

Devil: "Damn right I don't understand! We had it all, baby! We had those readers in the palm of our hand. We knew how to make them laugh. We knew how to make them *mad*. We could whip 'em up into fits of righteous indignation like nobody's business! Most important, we knew how to make them feel smug and superior. People

love

feeling smug and superior. Get back to that approach, and you'll own those readers. They'll be yours forever.

Me: "But... I don't want to own my readers. That's not what writing's about."

Devil: "Oh, geeze. (Or *Jeez*, in your parlance.) Get over yourself. Of course you want to own your readers. Writing's your business. It's what you do for a living. Enough with the "reach out and touch someone" idealistic crap. Let's get the show on the road and churn out something provocative and entertaining. Time's a wastin'! Chop, chop!"

Me: "But, I still don't have a topic."

Devil: "Then get on the freakin' Google and find one! How about ripping into 'Toddlers and Tiaras'? You know you want to! Or, maybe Lance Armstrong. 'The mighty hath fallen...' blah blah blah..."

Angel: *Smiles sweetly.*

Me: "Actually, I was thinking of writing about something I heard in church the other day..."

Devil: (Rolls eyes.) "Good grief. Here we go again. You might as well just save your time and energy, because nobody wants to read about something you heard in church. Nobody cares, capiche? It's Boring. With a capital B. And weird, too. How can something so weird be so boring?! If you have to get all 'spiritual,' at least keep it vague and New Agey. Quote Deepak. Talk about your inner child or yoga or something. Why must you trot out your quaint, old-time religion? It's embarrassing."

Me: "Inner children are like that. And, incidentally, yoga is old-time, too. Ancient, in fact."

Devil: "Yeah, but it's hip. Everybody's doing it these days. Religion's on the way out..."

Me: "Well, that may be. But we have another columnist who writes about yoga. And, this thing I want to write about? It's exciting! It's compelling! It deals with nothing less than the meaning of life."

Everybody cares about the meaning of life!"

Devil: It *is* a stubborn little myth, isn't it? That life has meaning? It can be useful, too. Okay, I'm listening..."

Me: "It's from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, written in 1647..."

Devil: "Yawn. You're losing me..."

Me: "Apparently, a bunch of English and Scottish theologians got together and asked, 'What is the chief end of man?' They studied and pondered and debated and finally came up with this answer – 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.' How great is that?!"

Devil: "Hmmm.... Well, despite the silly God reference, it *does* have potential. I like the phrase "chief end of man." MAN, get it? Not woman... just man. That should really bug the feminists!"

Me: "Uh, 'Man' means Mankind. Humanity."

Devil: "I know what it means and you know what it means. Even the feminists know what it

means. But that won't stop 'em from getting all worked up about what it says! I'll see to that!"

Me: "You're missing the point."

Devil: "There's a point? Besides getting the feminists worked up?"

Me: "In 1 John 4:8, we're told that 'God is love.' *Love!* It's so simple yet so profound. This passage from the Catechism could actually be translated, 'The main purpose of every human life is to glorify LOVE and enjoy it forever.' I don't think the yogis would argue with that. Or Deepak. Or the feminists. I don't even think the atheists would argue with that."

Devil: "I don't get it."

Me: "No, I don't suppose you do. But I hope they will."

Devil: "You just lost me, again."

Me: "I wish."

Angel: *Smiles sweetly.*

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