



Stones fly in Largo; society is thus saved

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Steve Stanton stood in front of the world to announce he would become Susan, and the world replied: You're fired.

So much for loyalty and ability. After 14 years as Largo's city manager, Stanton went from trusted chief executive to ex-employee in a week.

Out of the din of the past few days, and the comments from Tuesday night's meeting of the Largo City Commission, three alleged justifications for firing Stanton emerged:

- (1) Being a transsexual is a sin.
- (2) Being a transsexual is disgusting to society.
- (3) Being a transsexual is too disruptive for a city manager in a leadership position.

As for the first claim, "sinner" had better not be a disqualification for employment, or else we are all in trouble.

I want to see these headlines:

City fires

confessed coveter

False-witness bearer canned

Official fails to honor Sabbath, is removed

Well, why not? After all, those sins rank right up there in the Judeo-Christian top ten, along with idolatry, adultery and the rest. Heck, "transsexual" isn't even listed in the original instruction manual.

But those are sins that even people sitting in church pews commit. Better to focus on somebody else.

Phooey. Let's reject the idea that "sin" gets you fired, even if one preacher in the crowd Tuesday night confidently declared that Jesus himself would have been leading the charge for Stanton's job.

Next comes the "too disgusting" part, which is an evolving standard. Other people at times in America also have been considered too disgusting by the majority to be allowed among decent people:

Divorced women.

Unwed mothers.

People in wheelchairs or with other physical differences.

Ethnic minorities.

Gays and lesbians. Whoops, that one's still partly in effect. (I wonder, though, if Stanton had announced "merely" that he was gay, if he would have been fired quite as quickly.)

This brings us to the "too disruptive" claim, and yet even here we ought to be careful. We also have used "too disruptive" to justify racial segregation, educational and professional barriers against women and lots of other ills.

The test of "disruptive" ought to be whether someone's status actively interferes with his or her job, period - not whether somebody else finds it distasteful to work with a divorcee, a Protestant or a left-hander.

So if Stanton stayed, but proved himself unreliable, unstable, unable to do his job, then the City Commission would have grounds for removing him. As it was, such actual track record was not needed: One commissioner "sensed" Tuesday night that Stanton had lost his ability.

It is a tough line of work, being a city manager, and make no mistake - the City Commission did not need any grounds at all to fire him.

City managers are hired guns who serve at the pleasure of their bosses. In his time in charge, Stanton fired plenty of people himself. As somebody said in a movie once, it's just business.

Still, I keep picturing him making that announcement, a mixture of dread and hope in his face. Dread won, as it turned out. Society is thus protected. How righteous we all are.

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