

# Driving lessons for heretics



## Highland Views

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Columnist

When I loaded up my '64 Dodge Dart ragtop and drove to California for seminary from my home state of Washington, I was warned to beware of "California drivers" — lawless rogues who reign and rage over the roads or carelessly careen their convertibles everywhere at any speed.

I discovered that most of that was myth, though the infamous "California stop" — sliding through stop-signs — was something I learned to do quite well. I became a California driver myself, but thankfully I'd learned some caution and courtesy in the Northwest.

Driving across the country I haven't noticed much difference in the way people drive state by state. There may be "American drivers," but I've driven in Canada, Scotland, France and Switzerland, so I don't think we can generalize too much.

Drivers are people and people are either good or bad drivers, wherever we go. It's also true that people can drive you crazy, and sometimes do.

Take crossing lines. Have you noticed how often drivers cross the yellow lines as they drift into your lane? I frequently have to swerve to avoid a scrape or head-on. Have we become "Carolina drivers"?

When it comes to crossing lines of beliefs, heretics are line-crossers. They can't seem to stay within the prescribed lanes, following the rules accepted by law-abiding believers. And that can be dangerous.

Consider those ancient drivers of sheep, (sometimes talking) donkeys and (sometimes flying) chariots — the Hebrew prophets. An odd bunch — always pushing limits while jabbing at the rules and rulers.

Think of the heroes of faith who've steered the wheels of wisdom and tires of tradition: Moses and Jesus, Buddha and Muhammad. Each a heretic pulled over and charged as an infidel — a holy line-crosser.

Yet, don't they all remind us to put on the brakes and ask some important questions? Such as: Who paints the lines? Who writes and enforces the rules? Who teaches us how to drive (or live) safely? Who says these are the only roads to travel?

The line-painters and rule-writers are the storytellers, the scripture writers and creed makers. And when it comes to the "freeways," of faith they almost dare us to cause infractions, to infringe and "break the terms" of agreements. This is a spark for the question: What if we don't agree with the agreements?

Have you ever wondered who nailed up the very first stop sign or hung the first traffic light? In discussions of ethics I frequently draw attention to the fact that someone somewhere chose to make a sign that said "Stop" because, apparently, people did not know or could not be responsible enough to stop their horse,



Chris' daughter washing the old Dart. CHRIS HIGHLAND/  
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their wagon or Model T.

Wouldn't you think that a person with sense would be aware when they came to a crossroad, to slow down or stop? You would think. But apparently we need signs, lights and lines to tell us to stop and go. Maybe it's just me, but I find that strange.

So, back to heretics. Those who "run by different rules" are hard to control. Therefore our history consists of the scattered wreckage of what we do with those who don't follow the rules.

I am not an advocate of "doing your own thing" when it comes to driving. I don't think that a highway or "freeway" is an invitation to freely choose to drive any way we wish. We certainly need to follow agreed-upon rules and laws of the road.

But when it comes to the mind and choices of belief, it seems we should have a clean windshield (clear vision) and plenty of fuel (courage and strength) to see our way to reasonable destinations.

We may need a rest stop to calm our heads, stretch our legs and rest our eyes — breathe and consider the journey. How so many millions can travel such great distance without a wreck each mile is truly amazing. Yet we do it. Somehow we do it. Enough of us drive responsibly to keep most of us alive. That's the good news.

The bad news is that, when it comes to matters of faith, millions do exactly what the signs and lines tell them to do without ever asking why they do. (And why are lanes so narrow?) Heretics ask, and may signal to exit.

Fasten your seatbelt. This could get bumpy and a bit scary. People are going to cross the lines to make you think it's "their" road. You need to pay attention even when they don't. Sometimes they'll come up behind you as if to say, "Move along! This is my road and you have to go my speed."

Relax. Let them by. Take a different route. Choose your own journey.

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