

CHAPTER 1

FAME WITHOUT FORTUNE

I'd never thought about false fame until I received some emails about how I'm now famous for a letter I didn't write. It's a letter that may have made me famous, but in my case it's fame that doesn't tell the story, so the metaphor goes, of rags to riches. Rather, I suppose it tells a story of decent clothes to... well, same clothes. Even if I were to publish this as a book and the book were to be wildly successful and sell a gajillion copies—very improbable—it would tell, at best, a story of decent clothes to nice clothes. And that's partly because this would make just a little book, primarily of emails I received about a letter I didn't write. Besides, I'm just not inclined to even try to make a fortune from false fame.

In addition to emails, I've received snail mailed cards and letters, faxes, and phone calls. I've received many more than those I've collected, and they've come to me over a period of nearly a decade.

Let me give you a little warning about the emails and other communications I've printed—like the 3 x thingies and wayward punctuation and misspellings and words you'd probably change. You might see a number where you'd expect a letter, like a 3 in rec3ived and stuff like that. Well, these things are just part of the way I'm going to tell my story of false fame.

First of all, I've Xed out people's names (Xxx) and other identifying information that isn't crucial to understanding the communication so you won't know who helped make me famous, and also so other people won't suffer the indignities of fame that I have.

(No, Xxx does not mean “kiss, kiss, kiss,” it means “a name or other identifying information was here.”) I just hope to respect people’s privacy. If the communication had no name, of course there’s no name, and I didn’t assign one with Xxx.

Second, I’ve added the date I received the communication if it wasn’t included in the original, just so you’ll get an idea of when these things were sent to me. Most of the communications had dates on them. Some didn’t.

Third, I’ve copied the communications almost exactly as I got them. I realize that nearly everyone makes mistakes in typing, and usually the recipient can decipher what the typist intended. The letter might contain missing words, misspelled words, missing or misused punctuation, and so on, but the reader gets the message. I just copied what I got so that you get the message as I did. My intention isn’t to shame anyone, just to show you what I received without any fixing on my part. In fact, it’s quite likely that I’ve made typographical or linguistic errors in what I’ve written.

Some of the emails I got had words in color, and I didn’t reproduce the color. I admit that anything approaching a standard font is just the regular stuff here, but I’ve tried to preserve as much as I can of the original flavor of what I got, sometimes by varying the font.

Here’s an email I got from a professional acquaintance of mine on May 21, 2010. This one prompted me to start writing this stuff up:

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Hate to tell you this- but you are now FAMOUS! For something you didn't write!

Xxx got it from his former room mate when he was at Columbia. who passed it

along from a Parsi friend on Indiana, and Xxx sent it to all his friends- some of whom wrote back to say they had seen it before. Enjoy your fame!

Good to hear from you again.

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The day before, this friend had emailed me about the letter:

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Subject: Dr. Laura

Don't know if you remember me, Xxx- but I recently received a copy of your letter to Dr. Laura. Loved it! Good for you!

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As I said, I've reproduced the communications with all the telling typos, egregious errors, peculiar punctuation, funky fonts, spacey spacing, weird words, and other maddening mistakes my mailers might make. I don't know whether you've noticed that I've gotten deep into alliteration, but it occurs to me that there's always alliteration to fall back on when your fame is waning. Consider old Spiro Agnew, for example. (You may recall that the late Spiro Agnew was President Richard Nixon's first Vice President.) Spiro and his speech writers may have tickled his fans with his comment about "nattering nabobs of negativism," but he was far too restrained with that little alliterative phrase when his fame faltered. (You may recall that he pleaded "no contest" to charges of tax evasion and resigned as Vice President of the United States.) Try "Spiro spat spleenful splatterpunk splendidly!" So, you're worried that lots of people had to look up "nabob" to understand what kind of people were nattering negatively? Well, look up "splatterpunk" and find out that it's just gory details of violence in a story.

“Oh, for goodness sake, Jimmy, you can do better than that!” I hear my friends saying in my mind’s ear. OK. How about “Beetles beat Beck’s bare bum before breakfast?” Or “Beck barely beats bung beetles’ brown bums before belittling best boy” (a “best boy” is a person who works on a movie crew). Ok, ok, so that one has “bung” but the Facebook word was “dung.” Yes, yes, I did get an email on Facebook that made reference to that dung beetle competition in which someone asked whether dung beetles could get more Facebook fans than Glenn Beck. Interesting question, and I don’t really know who got more. But here’s the email:

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May 11, 2010

I do not know when you wrote your letter to Dr. Schlesinger. A friend e-mailed it to me today, and my face still is streaked with tears of laughter. It is a masterpiece and should be required reading for teabaggers and all college frosh, especially those attending orthodox/fundamentalist parochial schools. I'd also recommend it for Glen Beck, but alas I doubt that he would understand since he hasn't yet mastered dung beetles.

Best wishes,

Xxx

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Try “big” in place of “bung” in the alliteration above about beetles and Beck. That’ll work, too, and probably a lot of other b words would work just as well. Dung

beetles are substantial enough that you could call them big. Besides, it's not hard to string alliterative words together. See how long a string *you* can put together.

I admit it's not hard to make fun of Glenn Beck. Or Ann Coulter. Or to make fun of me, for that matter. People forget that words are for fun, not only for serious communication. And sometimes words are both for fun *and* for serious purpose, as humorists like Mark Twain and Garrison Keillor have understood.

Actually, making fun of people clumsily and unfairly is really easy. That's why bullies and comedians are a dime a dozen. Making fun of people cleverly and fairly is very difficult, and that's why true humorists are rare. And some of us never figure out how the bully differs from the humorist, so we don't know when to protest and when to laugh.

But, I digress. Back to business. Dr. Laura. More specifically, the open letter to Dr. Laura, which I didn't write but made me "famous" anyway. Apparently, Dr. Laura Schlessinger (better known on her radio show simply as "Dr. Laura") is reported to have said something to the effect that as an observant Orthodox Jew, she thinks homosexuality is an abomination according to the Old Testament book of Leviticus (sometimes abbreviated Lev or Lev.), chapter 18, verse 12 (i.e., 18:12) and can't be condoned under any circumstance. Whew! Subsequently, someone (just who remains a mystery) wrote an "open letter" to her. Maybe you're among the millions who've seen it on the Internet or someplace else.

As one of my correspondents pointed out, Dr. Laura has denied ever having said such a thing (see <http://www.drlaurablog.com/category/homosexuality/>). Regardless, the letter does point out the absurdity of basing attitudes toward homosexuality on Scripture.

I think that's a point very well taken, regardless of the Scripture (e.g., Old Testament, New Testament, Torah, Koran...) one might cite. Maybe the reasons I think this will become clearer if you read this whole story.

Anyway, here's how the open letter goes (at least in one version, and I think this is pretty close to the "original"):

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Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Law and how best to follow them.

1. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (Lev1:9). The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?
2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?
3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev15:19-24). The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

4. Lev 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?
5. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?
6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Lev. 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?
7. Lev 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?
8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev 19:27. How should they die?
9. I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?
10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together

to stone them? (Lev 24:10-16). Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help.

Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan.

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This letter has been making the rounds on the Internet and other places for at least a decade. Of course, it has been altered slightly from time to time. People have made little changes, but the people who made those changes remain mostly or totally unknown, just like the author. People have added short phrases and made minor punctuation changes in various versions. My name got added as author somehow, as I'll explain later.

But, really, who wrote the letter? Nobody, as far as I can determine, actually knows. Various names have been associated with it, including J. Kent Ashcraft (could it have been former Attorney General, John Ashcroft, ashamed to admit that he questions Dr. Laura and, therefore, not wanting to claim his authorship publicly?). Some people have falsely claimed the Dr. Laura letter as theirs, and apparently some of these false claimants have lost their jobs as a result. In a later chapter I address the issue of the gullible and the skeptical, but here's an example of a reasonably skeptical emailer:

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May 24, 2010

Dear Professor Kauffman,

"An Open Letter to Dr. Laura" , supposedly authored by you, was read yesterday

(Sunday) in our Xxx Church service here in Xxx, XX. I went on the internet and, it seems, there is some controversy, as to whether or not you indeed are the author. About 150 different people have claimed to be the author of this "open letter", and after hearing it in the service, I can understand why. After two hours of searching, most authorities agree that a J. Kent Ashcraft is "the" author of "An open letter to Dr. Laura". I would like to hear your side of the story, since in this country most people just accept things and never question the authenticity of anything.

Did you really author this letter or simple quote it, taking ownership at the same time??

Thank you for your time.

Xxx

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Now, if I went to a church, that'd be the kind I'd find hospitable—the kind that would read the Dr. Laura letter as part of the service. Of course, I don't know what the pastor of this church said about the letter, but I'd suppose it wasn't that the letter is way out of line. And, as I'll mention in a subsequent chapter, some people don't let the letter or bias against homosexuals deter them from their religious faith.

The letter to Dr. Laura has prompted people to get upset for various reasons, some because they feel God is displeased with the letter-writer (and God has not revealed to some of these people that they should be skeptical of my authorship), some because they feel the letter is demeaning of Dr. Laura or of God Almighty or of them. Sometimes it's been run under the question **Wanna Own a Canadian?** and/or with this sign-off: **(It**

would be a damn shame if we couldn't own a Canadian) :). Most Canadians I've heard from see humor in this kind of stuff, and some of the communications I've gotten about the Dr. Laura letter address this issue of Canadian slaves directly, like this one:

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May 19, 2010

Dear Professor Kauffman,

as I expect you are aware, a marvellous letter has been doing the rounds on the internet for at least five years - attributed to you.

It has today reached my inbox for the third time, addressed to a talk-show host called Dr Laura Schlesinger (though I could have sworn that , at one time, it was purportedly to a republican senator, of Christian fundamentalist persuasion, opposed to gay marriage).

Each time, I laugh aloud at overtly guileless questions such as the following:

"I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Laws and how to follow them.

"1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify?

Why can't I own Canadians?"

I would love to know: did you really write this gem of a letter - and was it originally to one Laura Schlesinger?

I think it's a wonderfully subtle challenge to religious intolerance - and I'm barely agnostic, myself.

All the very best to you,

Xxx Xxx

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And some of the communications I've gotten, like the ones that follow, not only attribute the letter to me but add the "damn shame" comment about Canadians as well or turn the idea of ownership of people around with humor and ask whether it would be ok for a Canadian to own an American (notice that my name follows the body of the letter as if I am, indeed, the author):

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May 21, 2010

..... [body of the open letter to Dr. Laura]

James M. Kauffman, Ed.D. Professor Emeritus,
Dept. Of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
University of Virginia

It would be a damn shame if we couldn't own a Canadian J

June 2, 2010

Hello Mr Kauffman,

A friend sent me your post.....I agree.....it would be a damn shame indeed if we could not own an American (just figured it could go both ways.....)!

Xxx

Canadian Reader

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As I mentioned earlier, most Canadians seem to get the joke and laugh about it, but some don't. You can get the flavor in the following set.

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May 21, 2010

Greetings from Sunny Sri Lanka:

I am a Canadian teacher working at an International school in Colombo Sri Lanka in special education. A friend sent me your response to Dr. Laura Schlesinger. I just had to write to say how hilarious the response is. As a Canadian I would welcome an indentured period of time under your tutelage however, not big on the "owning". Keep that sense of humor churning.

Xxx

Elementary Resource Teacher

January 11, 2010

Dear Dr. Kauffman,

Hi! I am emailing you from Canada. How this email got from you to me is quite amazing isn't it? Anyway, just a quick note regarding your email. Thank you for that!! I've often debated with my friends who claim the bible is still "**The Word**" and found this very amusing. Do you have more?

Xxx

Vancouver, BC

May 19, 2010

Hello James,

I was just sent your open letter to Dr. Laura.

It was very good, and provided me a lift as I read it on my blackberry on my way to work this morning! Thank you!

As a person who has worked all my career in community agencies, the work for social change can at times be frustrating and hard, so your humour is well appreciated and will be making the rounds through my address book.

Best regards,

Xxx

June 7, 2010

Dear Professor Kauffman,

I would like to thank you on behalf of all Canadians for your letter to Dr. Laura. I haven't had such a good belly laugh in a long while.

I must ask that you forward Dr. Laura's response to me as I would like to prepare the Canadians for their possible enslavement to the Americans...Oh, on second thought we already are enslaved to the Americans. Well then, we could prepare a list of the preferred slaves by ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class and education.

Regards

Xxx

May 20, 2010

I've seen this a few times. Pretty funny. Did you a) actually write it, and b) ever get a real response?

Also, I'm Canadian, why would you want to own one of us?

Thanks.

Xxx

April 10, 2010

Dear Professor Kauffman;

On March 29th a friend of mine sent me a copy of your "Dear Dr. Laura" letter. As an Evangelical Christian, I can understand your problem with the Mosaic Law and modern Jewry. However, I do not really know your moral and religious views on the issue of homosexuality. I hope you don't mind, but for your interest, I am attaching a copy of a paper I wrote on the biblical view of homosexuality, and also my response to your letter to Dr. Laura.

I hope you will take the time to read them, and then respond back to me.

Sincerely,

Xxx

P.S. How many other people have responded to your "Dear Dr. Laura" letter?

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You think I took the bait on that last one? Do you think I'm that crazy? Now, I've gotta tell you, some of these things came to me with substantial attachments or paper

documents. Like the one I just showed you had *two* attachments. One of those was 17 single-spaced pages, so naturally I won't show you the whole thing. Just the first paragraph gives you a flavor:

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Is homosexuality a sin and sexual perversion? Does the Bible classify homosexuality as a sin? Or, is liberal Bishop John Shelby Spong correct? Was Vice President Al Gore correct when he said at a November 16, 1997 news conference that God creates homosexuals, and He is grieved at their mistreatment? Is our liberal Canadian government correct that homosexuality is normal for some people, and simply a matter of choice? In this essay I contend that homo-sexuality is a moral choice, and a perversion of human sexuality. I will mainly demonstrate from the Bible that homosexuality is clearly a sin and perversion against what our creator God intended for human sexuality and marriage. This issue goes back to creation; it does not just relate to cultural mores. Homosexuality is a moral choice contrary to a recent biased report that believes it is determined before or shortly after birth.

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Oh, you guessed that the writer is Canadian? Good detective work! The second attachment was only 3 single-spaced pages, and it included a lot of explanations about how I do not understand Jewish law, how the sign-off of "Your adoring fan" is a facetious statement, etc., etc. I give you here only point #5 and the references to Sharia law, which were part of the attachment, along with my web site and email address. I suppose someone might issue a fatwa for (or "on" or however they issue it) me, James M.

Kauffman. Do they do this for all infidels, or just those who get famous for letters they didn't write?

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5. Professor Kauffman does not seem to be aware that the Old Testament Jewish concept of slavery is very different to the kind of slavery that went on in Egypt at the time of Moses (see Exodus 1:8-22), and then in Britain and the southern United States some 32 centuries later. The Old Testament concept of slavery was more like our modern employer-employee relationship. Arbitrary beatings were not sanctioned. If I remember correctly, a Jewish person could sell himself into slavery, and then the slave owner had to feed and house his slave. Laws governing slavery in Exodus 21:1-11 and Leviticus 25:8-55 were given in relation to the seventh-year Sabbath and the Year of Jubilee. It is interesting to note that the King James Version uses the words "servant" or "bondservant" for the word "slave."]

-Concerning Muslims and Sharia Law, see the Internet at

http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_adul2.htm and

http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite%3Fpagename%3DIslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE%26cid%3D1119503548032

See info on Professor James M Kauffman at

<http://people.virginia.edu/~jmk9t/VITA.pdf> .

His email address is jmk9t@virginia.edu

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You see, the stones used in Old Testament descriptions of stoning weren't those hard rock-like things that we know as stones today. They were more like... well, more like stale bagels. Yes, it hurt when somebody hit you with one, but they weren't usually lethal. And, although we might prohibit assault with a deadly bagel today, things were different back then. Besides, today we can just do it with the Internet.

But, back to the Canadian take on the letter—well, I should say, the take of Canadians and Canadian sympathizers!

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May 20, 2010

Dr. Kauffman,

Thank you so much for your response to Dr. Laura Schlesinger's comments about homosexuality. It was sent to me by my Canadian cousin, who enjoyed it so much he wanted to share it (and I am so glad he did). Attacking people of her ilk with facts and humor is the perfect response.

I'm going to forward it on to others, who feel that the only abomination is Dr. Laura and her hatemongering views.

Again, thank you.

Xxx

Xxx University

Graduate Student

March 26, 2010

Dear Dr. ??? Kauffman,

Your letter to Dr. Laura has taken a terribly and sinfully wrong turn and gotten lost somewhere in cyberspace.

People find it cutting, cynical and demeaning. There are lots of deeper meanings in the Torah that experts have answers for. I, for one, am not an expert. However, it is clear to me that you certainly do not possess the understanding and knowledge that scholars who spend their entire lives, in study deciphering every word and meaning to make sense of the Gemorrah.

Dr. Laura, I am certain, finds your jokes in very bad taste and so do we all.

Sincerely,

your northern neighbors

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Now, that last letter. Is it serious? Maybe it was written in jest. Trying to be slow to anger, I'll take it as jest, but you may interpret it otherwise. I've got to say that some of the communications I've gotten leave me wondering just what the point is or what perspective the writer intended.

But that's just the Canadian part of my faux fame. Think about the implications of this one.

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May 20, 2010

Hello:

I believe this is an active email address I have located for you.

My sister forwarded me your letter to Dr Laura and I have sent it all around the

world!

Thank you!

An adoring new fan

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And, then, there's this from an attorney:

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May 26, 2010

Dear Dr. Kauffman,

It was with great pleasure that I read your internet request of advice from Laura Schlesinger. The wit and style contained in your open letter is wonderful. Her deaf ears and certitude likely preclude a response. But should there be one, I would appreciate receiving a copy of it.

I also wrote my own letter to Ms. Schlesinger asking her the same questions, copy enclosed.

Again, thank you for doing something extremely well.

Very truly yours,

Xxx

Dear Ms. Schlesinger,

It was with great pleasure that I read Dr. Kauffman's letter to you, posted on the internet, requesting advice. As you will recall, you stated that homosexuality is an abomination and cannot be condoned under any circumstance. Your authority was the Bible.

Based on other biblical observations, Dr. Kauffman wanted to know if he can own Canadians, whether he can sell his daughter into slavery, whether he can have contact with a woman during her period of menstrual uncleanness, etc., etc. He had ten question in all. As luck would have it, I have the same ten questions.

Perhaps you can supply me with a copy of your response to Dr. Kauffman.

Ma'am, I would sure appreciate that.

In case it matters to you, although I am really sure it does not, I am heterosexual and Jewish.

I am glad there is you and look forward to your helping me with my dilemmas about God's law.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Very respectfully,

Xxx

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I really wish I had done something extremely well, which is what this attorney thanked me for—especially I wish that I'd written that letter to Dr. Laura. Dang! Oh, well, I should feel good that people think I wrote it!

I've had to just chill out and try to enjoy the communications I get. Some people are very apologetic about their false assumption when I tell them (and I try to inform all of those who write to me that I didn't write the letter). But I've tried to take a positive attitude toward people's mistake, understanding that for the most part they aren't "out to get me." Now, as to the matter of having received a letter or communication of any kind from Dr. Laura, a matter that comes up in quite a few inquiries, naturally I haven't

received anything from her. Not knowing her personally, not knowing anything about her current whereabouts, and not having written to her in the first place, that's not surprising. What's a little surprising to me is that anyone would think that she did reply to me or respond to the letter, which is pretty obviously not a serious inquiry.

A few of the people who mistakenly assume that I wrote the letter or disapprove of my standard reply have written me rather condemnatory things, and some have even questioned the integrity of my professional work in special education because I'm not a believer in their religion (or any religion, for that matter).

“Standard reply.” I guess that requires some explanation, too. When I first started getting cards and letters (actual paper ones), phone calls and faxes (remember those?) about the Dr. Laura letter, I really didn't anticipate that I'd get inundated with communications. But, after a while, I couldn't keep up with the messages, so I composed a reply that I could just cut and paste into an email or print and mail. I think I wrote up this standard reply sometime in early 2005, although the precise date has escaped me. Even if I wrote a little message of some kind in addition, my standard reply saved me a lot of hassle of constant explanation. Besides, I had fun going to my Bible and composing my own letter in response to the kind of stuff Dr. Laura's statement suggests. So, here's my “standard reply”:

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You contacted me recently about a letter to Dr. Laura Schlessinger. I did not write the letter. Neither do I know who did. I think it is very clever, and I applaud the work of the person who wrote it. I forwarded it to some of my friends, but

apparently someone sent it on to others with my name appearing as the writer. Please check www.snopes.com/politics/religion/drlaura.asp. [On July 1, 2010 I added the following sentence.] If you wish to read more about the misattribution to me of the authorship of the Dr. Laura letter, you may visit my web page at <http://people.virginia.edu/~jmk9t/> and click on the appropriate word.

The Internet can be misleading. Not so, Scripture.

I wish I could take credit for writing the letter, but, alas, I cannot. “Thou shalt not raise a false report” (Exodus 23:1). I obviously need to consult Dr. Laura for spiritual advice, though. I need to ask her, for example, whether, if I took credit, I would be bearing false witness against my neighbor, as prohibited by the commandment of God in Exodus 20:16.

Dr. Laura is without doubt correct in her Scriptural condemnation of homosexuality. But she somehow missed the far more common sin of Onan (Genesis 38:9), for which God slew him (Genesis 38:10). Onanism is nothing to trifle with, and it is undoubtedly the cause of much human suffering. Scripture clearly states that it brings God’s wrath upon guys who practice it. Dr. Laura’s failure to comment on Onanism is a mystery.

I feel certain that Dr. Laura has made an altar of earth, as specified in Exodus 20:24 and regularly burns sheep and oxen on it to obtain God’s blessing, as commanded in the same passage. I’m sure she understands that making an altar of hewn stone is forbidden because putting tools on the stone would pollute it (the altar), as stated in Exodus 20:25. And I am sure she can interpret the last verse of

Exodus 20 correctly: “Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.” I praise Jehovah that Dr. Laura would neither go up steps to any altar nor be discovered naked thereon.

I think we’d all agree that if Dr. Laura bought a Hebrew servant, she would not require him to work for her for more than six years and would free him in the seventh (but would feel free to keep his wife and children as property, given that said servant had married the wife given him by Dr. Laura’s husband and that he had had children by this wife during the six years of his purchased service), as commanded by the Lord God in the opening verses of Exodus, chapter 21.

I could go on. So could you. But what’s the point? We all know that Dr. Laura knows her Scripture and lives by every verse. She would never select a Scriptural statement and use it to confirm her bias while ignoring other Scriptures.

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Some of the paper letters I’ve gotten leave me with no way of replying by email, as they include no email address. Then, if I’m going to try to set the record straight with that person, I’ve got to print my standard reply and mail it. What would you do with something like the following, which I received in the mail (yes, my middle initial on the envelope is M., so I suppose the A. in the body of the letter is a typo):

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June 7th 2010

Dear Mr. Kauffman.

I received an email that was signed James A. Kauffman, the email however was sent to me from a friend who wrote “I just had to forward this one.”

At first, when I started to read your email I thought this was going to be a serious letter to Doctor Laura regarding God’s Law....

It didn’t take me long to realize that it was going to be some sort of humor, mostly about what is written in Leviticus..... I must say that reading and studying “The Old Testament” can be difficult to understand as I have read and reread those chapters. You wrote that you needed some advice from Dr. Laura.....I would like to tell you that I truly believe you might find more answers to your questions in the book of Proverbs.....try to take some time to read Proverb 1 (8) about Wisdom.

If you have the time, it would be so interesting for you to read the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Acts. I believe those words will give you some understanding of our Lord.

In the last days, God said,
“I will pour out my spirit on all people”,
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your young men will see visions,
And your old men will dream dreams.

There is never a need to ridicule the beliefs of other people.....

I don’t know if you will even receive this....I hope you do....I wish you the best.

Blessing to you, as we share the Faith,

Xxx

[mailing address]

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This person seems to believe that I actually wrote the letter. Lots of people are reasonably skeptical of my authorship, and many who receive my standard reply are somewhat chagrined to find that I didn't write the original open letter. Most of the people who write to apologize for mistakenly attributing authorship of the letter to me just made an honest mistake and are sorry for it. For example, I got the following from a neurosurgeon, to whom I wrote that no apology is necessary:

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June 7, 2010

Sorry to have joined the uninformed and unsuspecting multitude. You must grow weary of us.

I did check the URL you referenced in your reply.

I do apologize.

All the best,

Xxx

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And so it goes. You wonder why I get all this stuff? I'm not optimistic about ever being free of this false fame. After all, I was born on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1940 one year before the day that according to President Franklin D. Roosevelt will live in infamy. So I'm no youngster. I remember that Mark Twain said something like "There is

no sadder sight than a young pessimist... except an old optimist.” He also said that at age 50 a man can be an ass without being an optimist, but not an optimist without being an ass. I may well be an ass, but I’m no optimist when it comes to allegations that I wrote the letter. The letter with my name appended has gone, as some of my correspondents have put it, “viral.” Only thing is, fortune didn’t come with my faux fame.

Now, J. K. Rowling—there’s a fame AND fortune story, and whether it started with rags or not it certainly ended in riches! I’ve “met” a lot of interesting correspondents because of the Dr. Laura letter, but one put the fame-fortune story in perspective for me in a rather nice way, just by reminding me of the fact that my initials don’t precede the name Rowling, and that *this* JK isn’t rich as well as famous. A very nice woman who holds both American and UK citizenship wrote:

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May 20, 2010

I feel I'm getting to know you. Can I drop the Prof. Kauffman and use JK? (not to be confused with Rowling).

Are you still in Charlottesville? I've been a few times visiting friends on their farm in [a Virginia community]. Glorious countryside. I'm actually an American who grew up in England and Scotland and has lived here now for the last 42 years. I'm a naturalised Brit. now with dual nationality. Fifteen years ago I moved from Notting Hill (JUST before the movie came out and made it unbearably chic) to Twickenham - bottom left of any London map, just across the Thames and not far from Heathrow. I confess I've never knowingly been to Wales, nor to Ireland -

which is a grave omission considering my grandfather (I never knew him) was an Irish patriot and minor romantic poet. It's on a list 'to do'.

If you and your wife come this way again, I'd be pleased to offer you a meal or light refreshment!

All the best, Xxx

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Once again, I'm a little off the topic of false fame, fake fame, faux fame... whatever you want to call it. Here's another one that reminded me of my undeserved Internet fame, and it brought this together with the Canadian issue, my former place of employment, and the shame of my fame (alliteration and rhyme both intrigue me):

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May 16, 2010

Much of the stuff we see on the internet is falsely attributed, so I just wanted to verify that this is indeed yours, before sending it on to my son Xxx who graduated in [year] from UVa. (he lived on the Lawn) and my daughter Xxx, who married a Canadian (pretty devious, huh?). My brother Xxx may have gotten his graduate degree in your department.

It is absolutely terrific ... if you didn't write it, you should have!

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And from the same guy later the same day, after I'd sent him my standard reply:

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May 16, 2010

Thanks so much, and also for enduring your "fake fame" in such good cheer!

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Yes, I did write my standard reply. For sure. And some people actually appreciate it or think it, too, is funny (or awful). Remember the reasonably skeptical person who wrote me about the letter being read in his church? Well, here's what I got back from that person after I emailed my standard reply:

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May 24, 2010

Professor Kauffman,

Thank you for your honesty and reply. I will forward your reply to our Pastor so he may give the "correction" at the next service on Sunday.

Thank you for not bearing false witness against thy neighbor.

Xxx

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Here's something that presages the next chapter, a message from a physician I don't know, but someone who obviously approves of the letter to Dr. Laura. Just maybe, he'll approve of me, too, even when he understands that the letter brought me fake fame.

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May 27, 2010

LOL & WOW !!!!

BEST,

Xxx

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One thing I find rather amazing is how someone(s) have apparently kept track of my professional status, in that the letter was first attributed to me as a professor of education and now that I've retired (in 2003) my "signature" has me as "Professor Emeritus." Somehow, my status has been updated, but how that's come about is a mystery to me. Somewhere in the chain of forwards, somebody has apparently looked up my web address and made the update. Or the original miscreant who attributed the email to me is still at work.

Be that as it may, in the remaining four chapters I do write some commentaries on various and sundry individuals, institutions, and ideas. But the Snopes web site gives you the straight scoop about the open letter I *didn't* write to Dr. Laura—and about Dr. Laura herself. Of course, some people believe neither Snopes nor me, but some of those who disbelieve Snopes and me do believe Scripture (well, their interpretation of it, anyway).