**In my opinion**

**Tim Tebow’s prayers on field: the personal versus public consumption**

**By Leonard Pitts Jr. The Miami Herald**

Really? Seriously?

In the history of pro sports, men have done all sorts of things to commemorate their feats on the field or the court. They have flopped like seals, walked like gorillas, head-butted like bighorn sheep. They have high-fived, low-fived, dog-piled, chest-bumped, wept, kissed their own biceps. They have breakdanced, riverdanced, jitterbugged and otherwise tripped the light fantastic.

Yet Tim Tebow becomes a figure of national fascination, consternation and controversy because he takes a knee and bows his head in a gesture of Christian faith?

The latest example of the enduring interest in that ritual came Saturday on the NFL Honors program on NBC as host Alec Baldwin imitated the quarterback’s signature pose. Baldwin’s mimicry was a gentle poke in the ribs — Tebow, who was in the audience, even came onstage to help him get it right — but not all the commentary has been so mild. Many of the professionally snide — like Comedy Central’s Daniel Tosh, and the inexplicably self-satisfied Bill Maher — have been notably vicious in their lambasting of the Denver Broncos playmaker.

It is amusing to imagine the outrage those same folks would (rightly) spew if some Muslim player were attacked by the Christian right for genuflecting to Allah during the game. Many in this country — perhaps more accurately, many in the media — seem nonplussed and discomfited by any expression of faith. Fart jokes are fine, and grisly violence is still as American as apple pie, but God talk makes people nervous. That speaks volumes.

Of course, there is another side to that state of affairs. Take this neither as criticism of Tim Tebow nor as exoneration of Bill Maher, but organized religion bears some onus for that hypocrisy. To the degree faith is seen as synonymous with the aforementioned Christian right, it becomes a thing to be brayed by conservative extremists for political gain. It becomes a crowd gathering on courthouse steps to bemoan the removal of a rock bearing the Ten Commandments, becomes a school board trying to use the Book of Genesis in high school science classes, becomes a justification to abuse Muslims and gays. It becomes license for regrettable behavior.

Moreover, it becomes a whirl of God talk and God iconography, a cross as fashion statement, a WWJD bracelet, a football player kneeling on the field.

But that is faith externalized for public consumption, faith that runs the risk of being shiny and superficial. It doesn’t speak to the decisions we make, the people we are, when despair comes creeping into the midnight hour. Nor does it speak to any obligation toward the scabrous, the lost, the unwashed, the impoverished, the disgusted, the detested, the detestable. Indeed, those whose faith is most loudly externalized are often the ones most silent on that obligation.

Reputation, it is said, is about who you are when people are watching; character is about who you are when you are alone in the room. There is a similar duality in modern faith, a tension between faith externalized for public consumption and that which wrestles despair in the midnight hour.

Each has its place. But only one will see you through till the morning comes.