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THE CHURCHES' OFF-PUTTING STRUGGLE WITH HOMOSEXUALITY

by Jonathan Wilson

Pay a visit with me back to the First Century. Back in the good old days when the world was flat and would remain so for about 1500 years. Back when the earth was the center of the created universe, heaven was "up" where it belonged, and hell was "down." The sun and moon revolved around the earth. Disease was caused by evil spirits and, lo and behold, virgins could get pregnant. A simpler time for sure.

Recall also there was slavery, endorsed by the Biblical writers and presumed as an institution in the parables of Jesus. Remember the status of women - common chattel, mere property. A vagina doomed these children of God to having no say at home, in the synagogue, or in government, and no choice about their marital partners or when they did or didn't have more children.

And marriage. Those were arranged as often as not as property transactions the vestiges of which linger still today. It was always within the same race (inter-racial marriage wasn't fully legalized in the United States until 1967 -- when I was 22 years old). Marriages were also within the same religion, and, generally, within the same social class. Multiple wives were a common occurrence, and love . . . well, love had nothing to do with it. Our detractors today who insist that marriage is a static institution ordained by God Almighty in a single mold are mighty poor students of fairly basic, undeniable history. And, with the passage of time and growing enlightenment, they are less and less believable liars on the subject.

But in this article I want to focus on all of those First Century "givens" against the backdrop of which the Biblical writers, inspired by God no doubt, authored the Holy Scriptures. You know, the inerrant Word of God as we're told to know it today. And just when you think inerrancy is, and maybe should be, pretty special and reserved to God, heck, on a good day, even the Pope claims inerrancy. Whatever.

Transport yourself forward to the present age and imagine, if you will, a modern-day church "conscientiously struggling in 'Christian' love" to decide whether or not the Biblical writers were right on all those subjects. Imagine a pastor occasionally preaching on the subject of the role of women in society and suggesting that there are honest, *legitimate* differences of opinion on the subject among faithful Christians. Imagine that pastor organizing small group discussions on the subject and encouraging men to get together to sort it out in respectful Christian love (the women would be welcome to listen in, of course, but their input would be tainted by obvious self-interest). Imagine tiresome recitations of what the Bible supposedly says on the subject.

Or imagine that pastor shepherding his flock through "serious" discussions on the pros and cons of slavery, as if there were two, *legitimate* Christian views on the subject between those who think they believe that every word in the Bible is literally true, on the one hand, and those who hold fancifully to a post-Civil War view on the subject, on the other. Or imagine that pastor sponsoring church forums to debate whether someone -- let's call him Columbus -- sailing west, would fall off the face of the earth.

Just imagine. Just imagine how long it would be before that pastor was "called" elsewhere.

Now imagine a gay child of God being invited to attend a church that is, in Christian love, "working" on the subject of whether or not every human being is straight, as the First Century Biblical writers undeniably believed, and whether or not same gender intimacy is therefore

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, March 5, 2010 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Speaker is Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie.

▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday March 2 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

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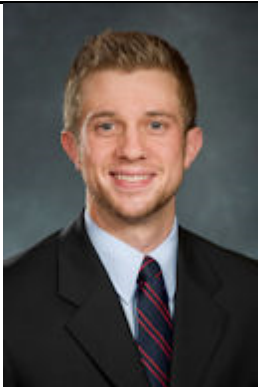
always an unnatural abomination. Imagine having to endure deferentially a debate in your house of worship over whether you even exist. Imagine having to listen to the competing resolutions carefully wordsmithed successively to make incremental progress without offending the diehard First Centurians among the congregants.

Struggling with the subject of homosexuality is a necessary, even laudable exercise, I suppose, but it's time to pick up the pace, go ahead and offend a few First Centurians, marginalize their misguided medieval notions, and get on with more important topics. Until that time, well-intentioned, "welcoming" congregations should not be surprised to find few self-respecting gay children of God flocking to their doors.

Schlock Theology: God Bless (anything) American.

Speaker for February: Patrick McAlvey

By Bruce Carr



Our speaker on February 5 was twenty-something-year-old Patrick McAlvey, who described to us his own strange encounter with so-called reparative therapy during his coming-out process in Lansing, Michigan. Patrick, who grew up in a very conservative family in an extremely conservative Christian church, recognized his attraction to males before he was a teenager, but he guiltily re-

pressed it for years. Finally, when he was 19 (and had got himself kicked out of a missionary camp), he called the only person he thought he could be honest with: a self-styled counselor named Mike Jones, who ran a program called Corduroy Stone--an affiliate of the nation's largest "ex-gay" organization, Exodus International--that promised him some hope in his struggle.

Well, dear reader, it didn't work.

Eventually Patrick made contact with Truth Wins Out <truthwinsout.org>, whose founder/director Wayne Besen last summer arranged for him to make a video describing his time in the care of Mike Jones. You can watch Patrick tell his story on a Youtube site that by now has had tens of thousands of hits: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViaMczTmrkA (though

you'll miss the full fascination of his sly humor as he recounted the bizarre details to us over breakfast!)

As Richard Schneider Jr. wrote in **The Gay & Lesbian Review** last fall, describing "another scandal from the septic depths of the 'ex-gay' movement".

This time, a refugee from Exodus International, Patrick McAlvey, revealed what goes on in the group's "reparative therapy" sessions, and it's not a pretty picture. McAlvey disclosed to Wayne Besen of Truth Wins Out the details of his sessions with counselor Mike Jones: "He asked how large my penis was. He asked if I shave my pubic hair. He asked what type of underwear that I wore. He wanted me to describe my sexual fantasies to him and the type of men I'm attracted to. On one occasion, he asked me to take my shirt off and show him how many push-ups I could do, which I did not do." He would also initiate a technique known as "touch therapy," which involves lots of caressing and lying in one another's arms—but no sex! It turns out Mike Jones is himself an Exodus alum who admits on his website that he's still "sexually attracted to other men." So this ex-gay thing would seem to be a pretty good gig for Mike, who suddenly finds himself in a power relationship with vulnerable gay youths struggling with their sexuality. Apparently Exodus is using the AA model of having recovering alcoholics sponsor those entering the program. The trouble is, alcoholics aren't addicted to each other but to a substance that's kept far away from the meeting room. Instead, these ex-gay groups are starting to look more like an all-male priesthood or cult with a divine mission and an undercurrent of homoerotic desire and sublimation—all under the guise of exorcising their members' homosexual urges. Yeah, that's gonna work.

After Patrick (who holds a degree in social work from Michigan State University and who recently ran the successful re-election campaign of Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero) went public with his personal story about what he now calls The Ex-Gay Industry, Exodus International quietly severed its ties with its Lansing affiliate.

And now, says Patrick McAlvey, "there's no Corduroy Stone, and Mike Jones is just some guy. He's not a mental health professional. He's not a pastor. He's just some guy with made-up theories and outlandish techniques claiming he can help people change their sexual orientation. He is dangerous and I hope people steer clear of this predator."

The greatest threat comes not from the acts of our enemies, but from the silence of our supposed friends. M.L. King, Jr.

Time heals almost everything. If it possibly can, let it.

A Single Man

Review by
Gary Kaufman

A Single Man, the directorial debut by Tom Ford, is a film that shows the agony a gay man goes through after losing his lover of 16 years during an era in which the relationship had to be invisible. It is 1962, America is experiencing the Cuban Missile Crisis, and fear permeates society. Are we all about to go in a thermonuclear blast? During this era George and Jim have a very intimate relationship living in a glass house surrounded by thick brush and trees. Inside this house they can cuddle up naked together, read books, and enjoy each other. But this private, personal world is shattered when Jim dies in an auto accident.

Outside their world, the other world does not recognize that the relationship even exists. George is told on the phone of his lover's death the day after it occurred, by his lover's cousin. Jim's parents had asked that George not be informed, but his cousin thought otherwise. George is also told that the funeral is "just for family members." He would not even be afforded an opportunity to say goodbye to his lover. Jim was gone. To the rest of the world, the relationship never existed. The color went out of George's world; after 8 months, George decides that today is going to be different.

One of the more interesting film techniques in the film is the use of color intensity. When I said the color had gone out of George's world, this is literally true. In almost all the scenes which show George's current world the film is done in faint sepia tones – in extreme washed-out color. At first I thought it was an attempt to show the film as if it were captured in Kodak prints of that era whose view would be washed-out colors today. But colors magically appear on the screen when there is a little color brought back into George's life. When he notices a lady's well-done eye work; when he sees a lady's luscious bright red lipstick; when he observes the abs of men playing tennis, or when smelling a dog, the color is brilliantly brought back into his life literally by increasing the intensity of the film color. There is also color when he remembers his lost lover. Eventually, some color returns when a student (beautifully played by Nicholas Hoult) shows an interest in George.

The film is also good at reminding us that it was not all that long ago that gays were invisible. There is a wonderful discussion by George while lecturing his English literature class at the university. George describes the era as an era of fear. He discusses minorities in general and how their definition is based in fear of the minority that grips the majority. He points out that politicians use this fear to move us in particular directions – for in-

stance, are there "commies" everywhere amongst us? And George notes that the fear is greatest when the minority is invisible. You don't know where they are. And, in George's case, the fear of gays was so great he could not publically acknowledge that his relationship with Jim even existed. The film also reminds us of what now seems to be ancient terminologies in referring to gays – such as someone who is "light in his loafers," or someone who is a "poof."

It is an era not all that long ago. And an issue that is very real today as society debates whether gay relationships should be honored with the sanctity of marriage. Can we now make public what used to be hidden? The pain of living in a society in which it is hidden is well and clearly illustrated in this film. It is highly recommended.

The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance. -- Viktor Frank

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the March 5 meeting no later than March 2. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie.



Thanks to Allen Vander Linden for his introduction of our February speaker, Patrick McAlvey.



The Valentine Red Party February 5 was a great success in raising funds for the FFBC Scholarship Fund. Thanks to all who volunteered their time to make this a memorable evening.



Regularly we get requests from college and graduate students seeking participants in a variety of surveys. Currently we have a request for people involved in same-gender marriage, and a request for participants in a survey focused on gay and lesbian end of life issues in central Iowa. If you'd be interested in participating in either of these, or would like to be included in a new, separate listserv created for providing notice of similar requests, please contact Jonathan Wilson.

FFBC

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News & Views
Des Moines, Iowa*

MARCH 2010

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Iowa Clergy Unite in Affirmation of Same-gender Marriage

Just steps away from the former chamber of the Iowa Supreme Court, in the majestic State Capitol rotunda, Rev. Matt Mardis-LeCroy, minister for spiritual growth at Plymouth Congregational Church, Des Moines, emphatically proclaimed his affirmation of the State High Court's decision, rendered nearly a year ago. "I do not support marriage equality *in spite* of my Christian faith," Mardis-LeCroy said. "I support marriage equality *because* of my Christian faith."

Organized by Interfaith Alliance of Iowa, the press event, held on Feb. 16, was initiated with the goal of delivering one key message to Iowa legislators. Flanked by a diverse coalition of fellow clergy who gathered to express publicly their support of same-gender marriage, Mardis-LeCroy eloquently articulated their united position on the issue.

"We stand here today – Christian, Jewish, Unitarian Universalist – faith leaders from all across our state, to deliver one simple message," Mardis-LeCroy said. "There is more than one religious perspective on marriage. Our traditions and practices as religious entities should never be used to deny equal protection from anyone. If you honor the religious diversity of our state, you must also support civil marriage equality."

A failed attempt, initiated by religious lobbying interests who oppose the Supreme Court decision, to force a debate in the Iowa legislative chambers on the merits of same-gender marriage equality, appears to have delayed until perhaps 2014 any possible general election referendum to overturn the Supreme Court ruling. But Brad Clark, campaign director with Des Moines-based ONEIOWA, a leading advocacy and constituency organization representing issues affecting gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered citizens, and whose efforts were instrumental in helping educate members of the Supreme Court on the legal merits of same gender marriage, cautioned against becoming complacent.

"The opposition is well-organized and firmly committed to achieving their goal of overturning the Supreme Court's decision through the only means available to them," Clark said. "Opponents of equality will work hard, spreading lies and misinformation, to defeat fair-minded legislators in November in order to push through a divisive constitutional amendment to take away the freedom to marry. ONEIOWA remains committed to preserving the unanimous decision of Iowa's highest court."

Interfaith Alliance of Iowa, a non-partisan organization established in 1996 to protect both faith and freedom in Iowa, provided legislators with a letter reiterating the views held by more than 160 Iowa clergy - representing a broad spectrum of theological beliefs - in support of civil marriage equality for same-gender couples. The letter also expressed opposition to any future legislation that would diminish the marriage rights provided by the Iowa Supreme Court.

"As clergy, we stand together in support of civil marriage equality for all families," the letter states. "We ask for your support of civil marriage equality and that you oppose any resolution or attempt to diminish these rights."

Randy Happel