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A FEW BIBLICAL QUESTIONS

by Jonathan Wilson

Let me first say that I don't think the questions I'm going to pose have any business in public discourse. The inescapable fact is, however, that there are those who insist that the Bible is literally true, inerrant as an arbiter of good and evil – right and wrong, and relevant in current political dialogue. Ignoring them seems only to have encouraged them.

At one level, I have to concede that one's religious views are relevant in the political arena. For example, if political candidates believe as a genuine article of faith that humans are the sole and superior creation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (and Mohammad, coincidentally), voters should question the commitment of these politicians to our space program or our long-standing efforts to identify exo-planets and intelligent extraterrestrial life. If political candidates profess belief in the imminence of the "End Times," they can hardly be trusted to balance the national budget or do anything else that would be prudent in the "long-term." Heavens, if God is in charge, what we do or don't do should be pretty much meaningless; there should be no need to vote on anything; and we can just let God take care of whatever. And, finally, anyone who professes that the Bible contains the complete Truth, literal, unchanging, and supreme in human affairs, can such politicians really be trusted to uphold and defend the US Constitution, under oath or otherwise?

Regardless of these incongruities, here are my questions:

If the Biblical story of creation is true and God chose to punish Eve with pain in child birth for having tempted poor, hapless Adam, what did all other female mammals do to upset God and get a like penalty?

If Jesus died on the cross for all our sins -- past, present, and future – why, pray tell, do at least born-again "Christian" women continue to suffer this punishment?

If incest is wrong, as I believe that it is, how did God manage to populate the world after creating Adam and Eve, or re-populate the world after the flood destroyed all humans except Noah's family, without incest?

If traditional marriage between one man and one woman is the exclusive, all-fired Biblical model, what about the myriad examples of multiple wives clearly countenanced by God in the Old Testament and espoused by some Mormon subsets even today?

If Mary was as young as she apparently was, and unaware of God's designs upon her in advance of her impregnation, wasn't God guilty of rape both because there was a lack of prior consent *and* because she was too young to consent even if she'd been asked?

If oral and anal sexual intimacy are verboten because, in our creation, God intended for form to follow function and function to follow form, then why do men have nipples?

If life for all purposes begins at the moment of conception, then wouldn't the miscarriage rate of 30% or more of all human pregnancies, also presumably the will of God, make God guilty of more abortions than Planned Parenthood ever thought about performing?

The reality is that, apart from the Bible demonstrably not being literally true, what is true is less than clear. If it were clear as the parochial profess, there wouldn't be between 20,000 and 40,000 "Christian" denominations and there'd be little need for clergy other than as glorified

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, November 4, 2011, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.

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

social workers. They would certainly not be needed merely to read the Scriptures aloud to the rest of us.

The Bible warns of false prophets; it just gives us darn little guidance for identifying who they are. The Bible doesn't even foreclose the possibility that a false prophet may not know that they are. I would offer this litmus test: when someone purports to speak for "Christians," or to advance the notion that the Bible is to dictate some particular prescription for governing human affairs, your operating assumption should be that he or she is lying.

As said in the opera Porgy and Bess, "The things that you're liable to read in the Bible, it ain't necessarily so," thank God.



Rebecca Gruber

Our guest speaker on the first Friday of October 2011 was Dr. Rebecca C. Gruber, music director since 2006 of the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus -- and one of the very few straight women in the country to hold such a position.

Dr. Gruber's talk was both funny and serious, as she engaged us with her personal account of What I Didn't

Know About The Gays before the moment she stepped up onto the podium of the DMGMC:

I Didn't Know how startlingly diverse they are -- that they don't all dress right out of **GQ**, or all sing nothing but show tunes, or even that some of them can't dance.

I Didn't Know that they came in so many different ages, and so many different levels of experience.

I Didn't Know that I would be expected to be naughty in a way that would get me fired from any other job!

And in a more serious vein:

I Didn't Know how intensely committed they all are to social justice.

I Didn't Know that I would get to recognize their own personal relationships as deep and lasting (and how very big Iowa's decision for Marriage Equality would turn out to be, since it pushed a lot of fence-sitters -- and especially some in our houses of worship -- right off the fence).

I Didn't Know -- although I certainly knew that my task was to help them find their musical and social voice -- that it was they who would help me to find my social and professional voice. Of all the work that I do, I feel most like myself with the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus.

Fulfilling a prior promise that she would "bring samples" to illustrate her talk, the meeting concluded with Dr. Gruber conducting a sizable contingent of DMGMC members in a thrilling performance of their song "How Could Anyone Ever Tell You". Even one of the most hardened veterans of our continuing struggle was heard to admit that he was surprised at how emotional it was to experience the power of the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus.

Rebecca Gruber is a graduate of Simpson College (B.M., Voice and Music Education, 1982), the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University (M.M., Choral Conducting, 1989), the Perkins School of Theology, SMU (Master of Sacred Music, 1989), and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (D.M.A. in Choral Conducting, 2008). [She received her doctoral hood from the hands of FFBC member Dr. Joseph Freund, DMGMC president, during the chorus's 2008 Winter Solstice concert at the Temple for the Performing Arts in Des Moines.] She lives in Des Moines with her three children and can be contacted at conductor@dmgmc.org.

The Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus is dedicated to promoting harmony among all, while advancing a positive image of gay people through outstanding musicianship, creative programming, and community outreach. Originally known as the "Des Moines Men's Chorus" (1985 to 1992), the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus www.dmgmc.org reorganized in 2001, when it was guided by (FFBC member) Dr. Randal A. Buikema, who served as Artistic Director and Conductor until 2005. Not long after, the Chorus found new leadership when it hired Dr. Rebecca Gruber to serve as Artistic Director and Conductor. The DMGMC has an extensive and proud history of performances and honors. Since 2001, the Chorus has given three or more concerts every year and has also performed at various events in a wide variety of venues in Des Moines and central Iowa.

The FFBC usually gives a token of appreciation to our speakers in the form of a CD of the DMGMC. Such a gift seemed inappropriate for Dr. Gruber. Instead, arrangements were made for Kathleen Beebout of **Pies With a Purpose** fame, to bake and present Dr. Gruber with an apple pie. **Pies With a Purpose** can be contacted at 515-491-2885 or pieswithapurpose@gmail.com.



You can't whistle angrily

If the US were actually in decline, would our political leaders be permitted, politically, to say so?

Helping Students Succeed Takes Center Stage

by Sen Matt McCoy

Strong local schools prepare Iowa students to succeed and help our economy grow.

That's why new ideas to help Iowa students succeed are always welcome. After all, our students are competing with young people from around the world for jobs and other opportunities in today's global economy.

In the Senate, I've built on Iowa's tradition of educational excellence by making sure kids start school ready to learn, helping keep the best teachers in our classrooms, raising standards to make a high school diploma more meaningful, and providing workers with training for in-demand jobs.

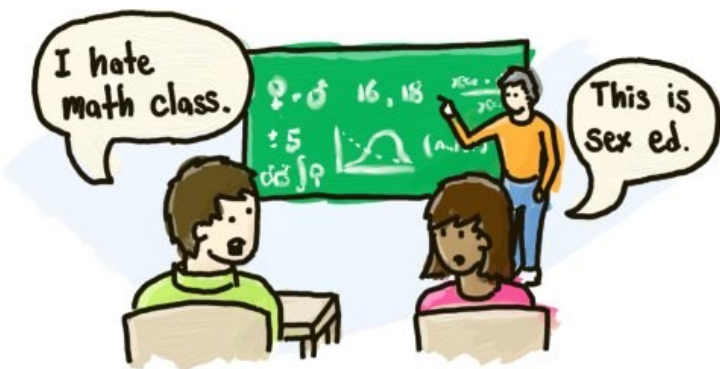
These efforts hit a roadblock during the 2011 session. The fight against deep, unnecessary cuts to education at every level made it one of the longest in Iowa history. Fortunately, Iowans spoke up and the worst cuts were stopped or reduced. Next session, we must do better by Iowa students and schools.

I welcome Governor Branstad's new focus on education. He is calling for raising academic standards, increasing the effectiveness of educators, and innovations that enhance learning. The ultimate goal is improving student achievement, something we can all agree on. How to best achieve these goals will be hammered out in the coming months.

Now is the time for you to get involved. What do you think are some good ways to improve student achievement? How can every local school offer a world-class education?

I encourage you to review the Governor's education proposal at www.governor.iowa.gov. Then let me know what you think. Your ideas will help me prepare for the 2012 legislative session. One of my top goals is to make education in Iowa even better.

It's not class warfare when the upper class starts attacking; it's class warfare only when the middle and lower classes shoot back. Until then it's economic genocide.



Our detractors don't really hate us: if they really hated us they'd be insisting that gay people get married and serve in the military.

My M.O. (cont.)

(Continued from page 4)

Of local interest was Mrs. Kennedy's recollection of the President's meeting with former Iowa Governor, Herschel Loveless. Kennedy initially was going to ask Loveless to fill the post of Secretary of Agriculture, but upon meeting with Loveless, Mrs. Kennedy remembered the President being "disillusioned" with Loveless, "who had no solution to the farm problem, and no original thoughts."

Of even more interest to me was that upon entering his second term, Kennedy planned to fire J. Edgar Hoover as head of the FBI and also his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk. I have never been satisfied with the findings of The Warren Commission that investigated the President's murder, and knowing how devious J. Edgar Hoover was, well, there may have been more to it than we have been led to believe.

If love were easy, there'd be no country music.

It's rumored that some in Southeast Asia eat dog. I don't like dogs, but dog - maybe.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the November 4 meeting no later than November 2. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be former State Senator Jeff Angelo, organizer of Republicans for Freedom, a group advocating for marriage equality.

Thanks to David Twombly for his introduction of our October speaker, Dr. Rebecca Gruber, Director of the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus. Thanks to Rick Miller for hosting the DMGMC members who sang so beautifully for their breakfast. Thanks to Jim Culbert for making the arrangements and Food Bank contribution for the pie given to Dr. Gruber.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Fred Mount and Barry McGriff for coordinating the book exchange.

If you participate in the United Way campaign, consider designating FFBC for all or part of your donation.

Please bring a non-perishable food item to the November meeting. Donations will go to the Food Bank of Central Iowa.

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views
Des Moines, Iowa*

NOVEMBER 2011

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My M.O. (Monthly Observations) JACQUELINE KENNEDY: HISTORIC CONVERSATIONS ON LIFE WITH JOHN F. KENNEDY

Review by Steve Person

Many of you are far too young to remember when John F. Kennedy was President of the United States, and Jackie Kennedy was First Lady. Some of us old geezers remember them well and can readily tell you where we were and what we were doing when we heard the awful news on November 22, 1963, from Dallas, Texas. I was 15 years old and had just sat down in my seat in my fifth period English class at Roosevelt High School when the teacher—Miss Ethel Harold—walked into the room ten minutes late and stated in a clear and somewhat emotional voice that the President of the United States was dead. It was a concept that I simply could not comprehend and, for me, the rest of the day I was in a fog. About all I remember is that I failed a French test the following period, but I probably would have done that, anyway. French and I did not get along too well.

I know I am not alone in thinking that the world would have been a much different place today if President Kennedy had lived and gone on to a second term. While there is no way of knowing for sure, I believe Vietnam would not have become the debacle it did, and the assassinations of his brother, Robert, and of Martin Luther King, Jr., would likely have never happened. Even though there was turmoil in Vietnam at that time, with Buddhist monks self-immolating to protest South Vietnam government policy, and North Vietnamese infiltrating the South to stir up trouble, I cannot help but believe that Kennedy would have handled things differently than Johnson—and later Nixon—did.

This all brings me to the recorded conversations that Jacqueline Kennedy conducted with noted historian Arthur M. Schlesinger in the spring of 1964. In her foreword to the printed version of the tapes, Caroline Kennedy grappled with her decision about how and when these conversations should be made public. Their publication coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Kennedy Administration. Most of the principals discussed are no longer alive, yet there is still a generation that vividly remembers those times. As Caroline noted, “The decision was complicated by my conviction that if my mother had reviewed the transcripts, I have no doubt she would have made revisions. She was a young widow in the extreme stages of grief. The interviews were conducted only four months after she had lost her husband, her home, and her sense of purpose. She had two young children to raise alone. It isn’t surprising that there are some statements she would later have considered too personal, and others too harsh. There are things I am sure she would have added, and her views certainly evolved over time.”

Fortunately, the tapes remained unexpurgated. The quality of them is not the best, for frequently the listener can hear airplanes overhead, Mrs. Kennedy adding ice to her glass, or her lighting up a cigarette. Those touches make them even more personal, it seems to me. Along with the tapes is the printed version which helps tremendously in understanding many names and situations covered orally. The book is nicely illustrated with photographs and annotations by the Presidential historian, Michael Beschloss.

(See My M. O., page 3)

“Either you are a rebel or a slave.” Chris Hedges.