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CHRISTIAN CANNABALISM

by Jonathan Wilson

Christians have been metaphorically eating each other ever since the Roman emperors stopped feeding them to the lions. They took the wrong lesson from that early Christian experience. Their tendency toward internecine cannibalism first broke out most publically and memorably with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The Protestant Reformation itself split what was left of the original church after it had split in the eleventh century from the Eastern Orthodox folks.

The Protestants took from the sixteenth century split a serious, vengeful, seemingly uncontrollable propensity for disunity in Christ and, today, there are somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000 Protestant denominations. In order to maintain their individuality and preserve their existence, they must downplay their commonality and, instead, emphasize the trivial that differentiates them one from another. Pick a topic, any topic. How to baptize – dunk or sprinkle. The Trinity vs. Unitarianism. Transubstantiation – whether communion elements are symbolically or literally the body and blood of Christ. The status and proper role of women vs. the Biblically-based superiority of men. Whether the individual or God is to be in control of procreation. Predestination vs. choice. Whether there are gay children of God or merely straight ones misbehaving through same-gender intimacy. Whether the Bible is literally the inerrant word of God, despite demonstrable contradictions, or something else.

More significant to the current political climate has been the rise of a modern-day brand of evangelical “Christian.” Congregations of these folks spring up on street corners all over the place and grow like a cult around the personality of a “pastor” who lacks any denominational accountability. They are particularly virulent in the political arena but couch their virulence in religious rhetoric. They have reduced to an art form the doublespeak described by George Orwell in his book **1984**. By espousing the principle of love for the sinner while hating the purported sin, they give coded permission to treat the sinner much as you would if you, in fact, hated them and not just the sin.

The most disturbing feature of this brand of evangelical “Christian” is their holier-than-thou arrogance. No public figure is pure enough; no one is good enough. In their search for anyone-but-Mitt, they have successively been unable to find an acceptable alternative. One after another candidate has risen and then fallen in the polls. Christ himself wouldn’t qualify; he’d almost certainly be too socialist for them. Mark 10:17. Not to mention the gown, sandals, and hanging out with guys all the time. **Newsweek’s** conservative columnist, David Frum, got it right when he said recently that the evangelicals won’t give leaders the latitude to be effective leaders.

These folks cling tenaciously to myths about the way things *are* and not just to the way things should be. They want simple answers to the complex questions of life. They want moral certitude in a real world more accurately characterized by moral ambiguity. They tend to “tell it like it isn’t in no uncertain terms.” Accordingly, they condemn themselves to a life of hypocrisy, reinforced by judging the purported failings of others. They rely heavily on a schizophrenic God of both justice and mercy – the latter for themselves and the former for everyone who disagrees with them. The cheapest way to feel good about yourself is to identify someone with a difference you can condemn or toward which you can feel superior. That exercise, in fact, doesn’t make you better or them worse.

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, February 3, 2012, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by February 1 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

Cannibalism (cont.)

The bad news is that the Republican Party in Iowa has become, essentially, synonymous with this modern-day brand of evangelical “Christian.” That’s largely true of the national Republican Party as well. The good news is that their days as a meaningful political force are numbered. They will be unable to find and preserve the required unity in the political arena that has historically eluded them in Christ. Disunity is endemic to their faith and to their very being. Bon appétit evangelical “Christians.”

Rep. Liz Mathis

By Bruce Carr



Our guest speaker on the first Friday of January was the newly elected Democratic senator from Iowa’s 18th District, Liz Mathis. A former TV anchor in Cedar Rapids [FFBC member and Iowa Senator Matt McCoy introduced her as “the Diane Sawyer of eastern Iowa”], Liz Mathis was the winner in a special election last November to replace Senator Swati Dandekar, who had been appointed to the Iowa Utilities Board.

Dandekar, who had represented the Democrats’ one-vote majority in the Senate, was named to the post by Governor Branstad -- “in a move his opponents call both shrewd and cynical,” as the **New York Times** noted in September. Noting that Dandekar “happened to be a state senator from a Republican-leaning district,” the **Times** went on to quote the Governor, “‘I guess that’s a bonus,’ Mr. Branstad said in an interview in which he restated his insistence that he had appointed Ms. Dandekar to the Board because of her qualifications.”

Mathis charmed us all with her intelligence and her eagerness to get started in the Senate, as well as her evident pleasure at talking with an important group of supporters. Of course, the most nationally prominent issue of the special election (and the one of primary concern to FFBC members) was marriage rights for same-sex couples, although Mathis did note her insistence on focusing the campaign on economic issues in her Cedar Rapids-based district and in the state.

She outlined some of those points: On putting Iowa back to work, she urged giving Iowa companies first crack at state and local contracts, cutting property taxes by \$300 million for small businesses, supporting companies that hire Iowans, and recruiting high-tech jobs to Iowa. On education, she insisted that we increase the number of third-grade children who can read at grade level, focus on job skills and worker training, stop cuts to classrooms, and expand access to science, technology,

engineering and math.

Senator Mathis fielded questions from the group with alacrity, common sense, and good humor. It was a satisfying morning to remember that sometimes the good guys actually do win.

Liz Mathis was born on a farm in rural DeWitt and received her bachelor’s degree in 1980 from the University of Iowa where she double-majored in communication and theater arts and in journalism. After graduating, she joined KWWL’s Cedar Rapids bureau but soon moved to Waterloo to become an evening co-anchor at the age of 23. Taking a break from broadcasting in August 1996, she joined the faculty of Wartburg College, where she taught electronic media and First Amendment law. In 1998 she became a news anchor, reporter, and producer at KCRG-TV, where she remained for nine years. In July 2007, she retired from broadcasting to become vice president for community relations for a non-profit counseling and assistance agency in Cedar Rapids; she later became chief information officer for Four Oaks, a child welfare and juvenile justice agency. She is married to Mark Mathis III, who owns the advertising agency ME&V. They live outside the city of Robins, and have two children, Mark IV and Mary Fran. Mathis has also taught part-time at the University of Iowa’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication and remains a member of the Wartburg College Board of Regents.



Next Month’s Speaker: John Berry, the White House Director of Personnel Management, the highest ranking member of the Obama administration to be openly gay and confirmed by the US Senate.

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All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing. Edmund Burke

War Horse

Review By Gary Kaufman



Steven Spielberg has sent us a warm fuzzy this holiday season with his film **War Horse**. It follows the life and journey of a horse before and through the Great War (which is what World War I was called before there was World War II). I have never understood why World War I occurred. None of the purported justifications seem to justify the massive death and destruction that followed. It was a war in which they used Civil War tactics during a period of 20th Century weaponry. Cavalry charges

against machine guns. It is a war that decimated an entire generation of Europeans.

Steven Spielberg offers no explanation, but by following the journey of the horse through its successive handlers it offers vignettes of how the war affected those caught in it. The thoroughbred horse was originally purchased by a poor farmer who bought it as a matter of pride and as a way to stick his finger at his landlord in a bidding war. He may have won the bidding but almost lost the farm as a result. When the war broke out the horse was especially valuable to the army and was sold in a desperate attempt to save the farm. It succeeded in doing that, but this also broke the heart of the lad who had raised and trained the horse.

The film illustrates the “hurrah” attitude that prompts the young to enlist and join in war, but soon the inevitable horrors of war become their reality. At one point the cavalry attack a sleeping brigade of German soldiers, massacring as many as they could until the Germans unleash hidden machine guns on the cavalry and the massacre is reversed upon the English. At another point a German soldier uses the horse to try to run away from the battle in an effort to save his 14-year old brother who had enlisted in the army. They are both caught as deserters and summarily executed, but the horse is left behind. A frail, peasant maiden finds strength in the horse. Soon, however, the army shows up again and takes everything the maiden and her grandfather have on their farm, including the horse. “Everyone has to make their sacrifice for the war effort,” they are told by the confiscating captain. Their “sacrifice” seemed to include losing everything they had.

The film graphically shows the mistreatment of horses during the war to pull enormous cannons to the front. Horses were driven until their deaths. The film also captures the spirit that is unique to World War I when individual soldiers from both sides call a temporary truce in No Man’s Land and, together, save the horse that had freaked out and entangled itself in barbed wire. The two soldiers cautiously approach each other, yet form this surrealistic comradery as two human beings

If you're happy and you know it, think again.

caught up in a world gone mad who share a human trait of wanting to save an injured animal.

In the end, happily, the horse is reunited with the lad who raised it, thanks to a somewhat contrived set of fortuitous circumstances.

Steven Spielberg’s eye captures incredible moments of cinematography with scenes that are as powerful and inspiring as some of the great moments from **Gone With The Wind**. Steven Spielberg’s film is a broad portrait of an era that I find inexplicable. You may want to visit this era by seeing this film.

Life is terminal; our journey is a dead-end; shun mere chances to die; seek ways to die while advancing the ball.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the February 3 meeting no later than February 1. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be John Berry, the White House Director of the Office of Personnel Management and the highest ranking official in the Obama Administration who is openly gay and has been confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

Thanks to State Senator Matt McCoy for his introduction of our January speaker, Liz Mathis, newly elected state senator from Marion.

If you haven’t yet made your reservation for The Red Party Scholarship Fundraiser, it is not too late to do so. A minimum donation of \$40 is requested in advance, \$50 at the door. The price includes wine, beer, soda, and food. The prize for the best dressed in RED is two tickets to **Billy Elliot**, coming soon to the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines. The party starts at 6 p.m. at Hoyt Sherman Place, 1501 Woodland Ave.

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.

Congratulations to Brad Holland, Scott Klinefelter, Allen Vander Linden, and Ryan Crane for their election to the FFBC Board of Directors at the January meeting.

Gay Marriage After DOMA

By Jonathan Wilson

The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) purports to do two things that are subject to constitutional challenge. First, it declares that the federal government and its agencies will recognize only serial marriages between one man and one woman. It places no limit on the number of times these folks can divorce and remarry, the Biblical admonitions to the contrary notwithstanding. Matthew 5:31 and 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18. God knows so-called “Christians,” and at least one candidate for President, have been ignoring those admonitions with a vengeance. The challenge there is based on equal protection, due process, and privacy grounds – primarily equal protection.

Second, DOMA declares that the individual states – despite the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the US Constitution – are not required to recognize lawful marriages performed in another state. The obvious basis for challenge is taught in fifth grade that the Congress lacks the power to amend or over-ride the provisions of the US Constitution.

It’s no wonder that the Obama Administration, led by a constitutional scholar, has declined to defend DOMA in the federal courts.

Those two key provisions conspicuously do not declare void, or purport to infringe upon the right of any state to legalize, marriages between adults of the opposite or of the same gender. As a result, the complete repeal of DOMA would leave in place the lawfully performed marriages performed for same-gender couples. That in turn, would set up a Full Faith and Credit Clause attack against any state that declined thereafter to recognize such marriages lawfully performed in whatever state.

Interestingly, the Full faith and Credit Clause does allow one circumstance in which a state is not historically required to recognize the laws of the other states. When a foreign state’s laws violate the fundamental public policy of a state as expressed in its criminal laws, that state is not required to give the foreign law recognition. So, for example, if Nevada allows lawful prostitution (which it does), a pimp and prostitute driving across Iowa could not resort to the Iowa courts to sort out a dispute over the division of proceeds. Prostitution is a crime in Iowa. Similarly, if Utah were to legalize polygamy, Iowa courts would not get involved in sorting out domestic issues with such unions. Polygamy is a crime in Iowa. Iowa courts would not have to recognize a marriage between siblings even if that were legal somewhere. Incest is a crime in Iowa.

Thanks to Lawrence v. Texas, sodomy laws that would make same-gender intimacy a crime were struck down in all of the states where such laws were still on the books. Paradoxically, one of the dissenting justices in that case was right when he forecast that the decision would open the door to recognition of gay marriages. It was as if he were “reading ahead of the class.” Because same-gender intimacy, that is inherent in same-gender marriage, is no longer a crime in any state – and cannot

be made so -- this potential exception to the applicability of Full Faith and Credit Clause does not apply. If DOMA goes in its entirety, legally performed marriages of same-gender couples will be and remain legal and will, almost certainly, be recognized by all states (absent an amendment to the US Constitution).

How Can We Grow

Iowa’s Economy

By Senator Matt McCoy

The 2012 session should be all about jobs so that Iowa can continue recovering from the national recession and increase our global competitiveness. I intend to work in a bipartisan way to help Iowans create jobs and grow our economy.

We have plenty of opportunities.

First, we should help Iowa businesses create jobs by **cutting commercial property taxes**. Last year, the Senate voted to cut property taxes in half for four out of five Iowa businesses.

The tax cut would be paid for with state dollars, not by shifting the cost of local schools and services onto the backs of homeowners and farmers. Most importantly, the Senate’s property tax cut helps those who need it most: Iowa’s small and Main Street businesses.

This proposal passed the Senate last year on a bipartisan vote of 46 to 4 but wasn’t taken up by the House. Now’s the time to finish our work on this commercial property tax cut and send it to the Governor for his signature.

Second, we should **improve education** in a way that will lure business to the state and prepare Iowans for high-skilled jobs. We want a more talented, more productive, more competitive workforce, as well as inventive, innovative Iowa entrepreneurs.

The ultimate goal of education reform is a stronger Iowa economy. Talented, skilled workers are the foundation of our economy, which is why student achievement is so crucial to creating jobs. We need great teachers, strong math and science education, and affordable college tuition.

Third, we should finish work on the **job creation** legislation awaiting action in the Iowa House. The 2012 session is the second year of the 84th General Assembly, so the jobs bills that the Senate approved last year can still be passed by the House and sent to the Governor for his signature. These measures include:

- Helping 60,000 Iowa businesses with a state tax credit to defray the cost of offering employee health insurance.
- Providing low-interest loans to small businesses struggling to recover from the national recession.
- Helping Iowans earn job training certificates that give them the skills to fill job openings.
- Jumpstarting Iowa’s clean energy industry through consumer rebates for small solar and wind power at homes and businesses.
- Making sure the benefits of rules and regulations outweigh the costs of implementing them.

From the Pastor's Pen

By Rev. Jonathan Page

Grace comes at unexpected moments, those moments that make you smile and renew your hope.

It was September 2009 when I first heard about the National Equality March planned for Washington DC in October. The march was intended to show support for gay rights and put pressure on politicians to do something other than talk. At the time, I was the undergraduate chaplain at Harvard, and I immediately went about recruiting students to participate. We had about fifteen or so students signed up. Transportation and lodgings were all arranged. Then, a few days before the march we received the bombshell: the Harvard gay alumni group pulled the funding promised because the march was “too political.” After letting fly a few distinctly un-Christian sentiments towards the powers that be, I got online and booked a ticket anyway. In spite of my measly bank account, it was a “damn the torpedoes” kind of moment.

My flight arrived on Saturday night for the planned Sunday march. Being a good gay man, I headed right for the bars near DuPont Circle. All around were gays who had been at the Human Rights Campaign's black tie dinner that evening. Overlooking the fact that the majority of them had pre-tied satin bow ties, I still had mixed feelings about the “gala” that night. President Obama was the keynote speaker and his appearance was seen by many to be his one concession of 2009 to the gays—give a speech and shut them up the day before the big march. Well, properly fortified with a few cocktails, I began asking who of the black-tie-crowd would be at the march the next day. I received the same answer again and again, “Not me.” “But you live in DC,” I protested. “Surely you can make the effort.” “No interest,” this one gay replied. “I'd rather sleep in.” “But,” I began in retort, “the march does not begin until noon.” He looked at me, “As I said, I want to sleep in.” Then he smiled, spun around on his imitation patent leather shoes and sashayed off. Needless to say, I was unhappy. To make matters worse, I lost my cell phone that evening on the streets of DC. Strike three.

But Sunday morning dawned. In spite of losing all of my contact numbers, I located my good friend Tim McCarthy, who teaches aspiring radicals at Harvard, amidst the West Virginia gays. Go figure. Tim is from Albany. Anyway, we began marching and —behold—people appeared. There were people everywhere. People of all ages. Families with kids. The mood was optimistic, joyful. As we marched, we passed one evangelical cursing us all to hell. I was about to confront him with an array of theological arguments when, from behind me, I heard someone yell back, “Don't worry, man, Jesus loves even you.” I turned and saw a hot guy in his early 20s. God bless the younger generation. Later, as we stood near the Capitol straining to hear the speeches, Tim pointed to our left. There were the Unitarian Universalists with their big orange banner, “Standing on the Side of Love.” Tim nodded, “Gotta love the UU's,” he said. “They are always at stuff like this.” Just then I saw one sign that caught my eye. It read, “Jesus hung out with twelve dudes and a prostitute. He was a lot more like me than you.” True, true.

Now if we could only get the word out, I thought to myself. At least there is hope.

Jonathan Page is senior pastor of the Ames United Church of Christ, 217 6th Street, Ames, Iowa. Sunday service at 10:45. He can be reached at jon@Amesucc.org.

God is the point between zero and infinity that touches each of us and calls us to do good to one another in our time.

FACT: The proportion of American adults who are married has plunged to record lows. Just 51 percent of all adults who are 18 and older are married. Same-gender couples are doing their best to reverse that trend.

Paradoxically, it would be easier to find Biblical citations, even quotes of Jesus, to support the typical planks of the Democratic Party platform than that of the Republican Party.

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Des Moines, Iowa*

FEBRUARY 2012

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My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

A Slow Death in Paris

By Steve Person

She became one of the most famous and infamous women in history. Wallis Warfield Spencer Simpson Windsor is, perhaps, the most misunderstood public figure ever to have lived. The sad story of her demise is chronicled in Hugo Vickers's fascinating book, **Behind Closed Doors: The Tragic, Untold Story of the Duchess of Windsor**. Vickers divides his 462-page book into two parts—The Death and The Life. The former is by far the more intriguing, while the latter chronicles many familiar stories in the life of the duchess, but with fresh insight.

Upon the death of the Duke of Windsor on May 28, 1972, the widowed duchess entered into the final phase of her incredible life experience. Her health had already begun to deteriorate, but she kept a fairly normal routine for a few years until 1975 when she could no longer take care of herself. Her French lawyer, Maitre Suzanne Blum, took control of the duchess in every possible aspect. Blum determined who could visit the duchess, issued statements on the duchess's behalf (which the duchess had no idea were being issued), stole precious objects and papers from the house in the Bois de Boulogne, and kept the duchess a prisoner in her own home for eleven years until her death in 1986. Unfortunately for the Duchess of Windsor, her in-laws didn't much care what happened to her, just what would become of her estate. It is a sad comment on the royals in the House of Windsor regarding their callous treatment of the duke and duchess after his abdication.

According to Vickers, "Wallis Simpson was fond of Edward VIII but she was not in love with him. Therefore the Abdication is not one of the great romances of the twentieth century, it is one of the great tragedies. There came several points in 1936 when Wallis realized the dangers and panicked. She tried to escape. How hard she tried is a matter of speculation. But she always considered the Abdication a terrible mistake that should have been avoided. She used to say, in later life, that she aged ten years in 1936, and that the one thing for which she never forgave the Duke of Windsor was abdicating.

She was thus condemned to a life of self-imposed exile, looking after a man who had been busy every day of his life but who now had nothing to do other than play golf, travel from one hot spot to another, eat admittedly delicious meals and ruminate over the past, which he did endlessly...."

In an article in the British publication, **Literary Review**, Jane Ridley states, "The English love to hate Wallis Simpson. She is vilified as the gold-digging sex goddess who stole our film-star king, Edward VIII. Hugo Vickers has spent a lifetime following Wallis. At the age of twelve, when most children his age were in thrall to the Beatles, Hugo was a fan of the Duchess of Windsor. His researches have convinced him that Wallis has been unfairly treated, and that she was not a villain but a victim. This was true throughout her life, but never more so than at the end.

...Vickers's account of the Duchess's long, horrific death and Blum's machinations is a page-turner, piling on detail after grisly detail."

Alas, this literary gem is not available in the United States. I had to order it from Amazon UK. Ah, the power of the Internet!