



THE
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OF THE
FIRST FRIDAY
BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.

First Friday News & Views

DECEMBER
2006
VOLUME
II
ISSUE
12

Haggard Haggard

by Jonathan Wilson

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The Reverend Ted Haggard has to be a tad bit haggard heading into the holidays. The gay-bashing, married-to-one-woman pastor, father of five, and head of the National Association of Evangelicals has admitted to using his parishioners' money to buy meth and massage from a male prostitute. Incredibly for anyone who wasn't born yesterday, the admitted liar has publicly denied that he actually used the meth or that the massage(s) turned sexual. For my money, I figure we've been shown only the tip of Haggard's experience with male purveyors of pleasure. There are almost certainly more where the one came from. Those disclosures are for another day.

Church member E.J. Cox [*I'm not making this up*] reacted by saying, "People are always saying stuff about Pastor Ted. You just sort of blow it off." [*I swear I'm not making this up*] Blowing it off proved problematic for Pastor Ted, and blowing off rumors about him has proven problematic for his parishioners.

Truth be known, as it now is, and true to his name, Pastor Ted has been pretty haggard all his life; he claims that he has been waging war with a "dark side" within himself as long as he can remember. I have no doubt about that; the man has been living in hell, born of the denial that some of God's children are born gay, and he happens to be one of them. The recent revelations aren't going to change that fact. He may be able to do something about his hankering for meth, but no amount of prayer or personal counseling is going to make him straight.

After prayerful consideration, the Reverend James Dobson has decided that he'll not be a part of the team trying to "rehabilitate" Ted. Dobson says he lacks the time it would require. No kidding, and not to mention the implicit admission that the task is impossible in the time-frame of a lifetime. If Ted wants real rehabilitation he'd be better advised to seek counsel from the Reverend Mel White, someone who's traveled the road ahead of Ted.

There are some long-learned lessons that the Haggard saga should serve to reinforce. First, fervent prayer can't fix it. Second, dating and even marrying unsuspecting straight women won't make it go away. Third, procreating doesn't prove a gay man is straight, it just proves that gay men aren't sterile. Fourth, self-loathing prompts people to pursue self-destructive behaviors. Self-medicating with illicit drugs like meth is just one of many examples. Fifth, maintaining a false facade and living a disintegrated life lead to dysfunction and mental illness. Just imagine the energy Ted Haggard has wasted in his "dark side" war that could have been more productively used toward the good things that he has tried to do in his life. At the end of the day, only those who love themselves can truly love God and others as Jesus admonished us to do as the first and second great commandments. *Matthew 22:38-39*. Everyone else is kept too busy hiding their insecurities.

The one other lesson is that we should simply make the operating assumption that the

(Continued on page 2)

CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, December 1 at Hoyt Sherman Place.
- Our guest speaker will be Rabbi Beryl Padorr from the Tifereth Israel Synagogue.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Wednesday, November 29 to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com or 288-2500 by phone.

(Continued from page 1)

most vocal homophobes are closeted gay people. Those who most adamantly insist that being gay is a choice are, most probably, projecting to the entire population their own sexual feelings and condemning those who have chosen to give expression to their same-gender orientation rather than repress it. Such insistence serves the secondary goal of throwing folks off the scent who might otherwise suspect the truth.

Making that assumption doesn't make it true, and it may not be true in a particular case, but it will be true more often than not in my experience. Making that assumption also leads us to show more sympathy and compassion for those haggard by a life of deception and living in hell.

—Jonathan Wilson

Babel

Starring Brad Pitt,
Cate Blanchett,
Rinko Kikuchi,
Adriana Barraza,
Said Tarchani,
Boubker Ait El
Caid, Gael Garcia
Bernal, Elle Fanning,
Koji Yakusho



Directed by Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu

2Hr 22 Min

Babel begins with the fateful gift of a rifle to a goat herder in Morocco who, in turn gives it to his sons to shoot jackals that have been killing their goats. The gun would supposedly shoot 3 kilometers, and it became a contest between the two boys as to who could prove that the gun would shoot that far. It is then that these two young boys engage in a reckless act that leads to an international incident and tragedies for the lives of people who live in Japan, California, Mexico, and Morocco.

The film, directed by Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu (**21 Grams**), follows the lives of these people at all of these widely diverse locations and cul-

tures. There is the California couple, Richard (Brad Pitt) and Susan (Cate Blanchett) who are vacationing in Morocco in an attempt to refurbish their strained relationship, and that attempt does not seem to be going well. When tragedy hits, they become stranded in Tazarine with a tour bus of Americans who view their primitive surroundings as uncomfortable and dangerous. They discover what it is like to rely upon medical services in an underdeveloped country.

We also meet Amelia (Adriana Barraza), the Hispanic Mexican housekeeper/nanny of two California children who makes a tragic mistake in relying on her reckless nephew, Santiago (Gael Garcia Bernal), to take her and the children to Mexico for a Mexican wedding.

In Japan we meet Chieko and her fellow teenage girlfriends who desire to discover their sexuality yet, as deaf-mutes, they are treated as social outcasts.

The title of the film, **Babel**, is, of course, a reference to the Biblical fable of a time when there was one society and one language, and the people had the audacity to believe they could cooperatively build a tower to Heaven. God, in such response to blasphemy, turned the people into many people with different languages so they could not communicate anymore and would not be capable of building the tower together. This is the Biblical explanation of why people have so many societies with their own languages and customs. This film explores those differences and the difficulties that arise because of the existence of language barriers, customs, immigration policies, governments, and countries.

The starkest contrasts are done through the use of background music overpowering the sounds of the actual events during periods of intense activities. This is best illustrated when the camera follows the deaf-mute girls when they share whiskey and maybe ecstasy, creating a giggle-filled psychedelic outing, alternating between the sights and sounds of a techno disco as normally experienced and the experience of a deaf-mute's silent world. The differences are shocking, as are the differences of the locations and cultures—from really desolate and sparse Morocco to highly urban and populous Tokyo.

The film's style has been compared to last year's Academy Award winning Best Picture, **Crash**. It is similar because it follows the lives of rather diverse sets of people and how they affect each other, illustrated by forward and back editing from one to the other. There is an additional twist of a time-lapse of which the audience is not aware until the end of the movie. Perhaps this is why some have found it confusing.

I consider it a masterful work and one to be seen. It is riveting.

—Gary Kaufman





Althea Holcomb is a bundle of passion whose love for children extends beyond the person she sees in front of her all the way to the future that person has in front of him or her.

The speaker at our November meeting was Althea Holcomb, CEO since 1993 of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Iowa. Holcomb took the job in June of that year—two days before the onslaught of the legendary flood—and has vastly enlarged the scope of the organization’s service during her tenure. When she started, the local BBBS was serving 100 boys and girls a year; by 2005 that number rose ten-fold to 1044 kids.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is the oldest, largest, and most effective youth mentoring organization in the United States. It has been the leader in one-to-one youth service for over a century, developing positive relationships that have a direct and lasting impact on the lives of young people. BBBS mentors children in communities across the USA. Big Brothers of Des Moines was begun in 1968 (by local business leaders, Holcomb emphasized, not simply do-gooders) and was joined by Big Sisters (then run by the YWCA) in 1977 to form BBBS. This year their operating budget totals \$980,000, about one-third of it funded by United Way.

The stated mission of BBBS is to help children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one relationships with adult mentors. National research has shown that positive relationships between youth and their mentors have a direct and measurable impact on their lives. By participating in BBBS, Holcomb noted, Little Brothers and Little Sisters become more confident in their schoolwork performance, are able to get along better with their families, are 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, are 27% less likely to begin using alcohol, and are 52% less likely to skip school.

Most Little Brothers and Little Sisters enter the program between the ages of 6 and 14. Recommended by parents or other authorities, they typically live in single-parent house-

holds, at or below the poverty line. Each is placed with a volunteer Big Brother or Big Sister through a series of intensive interviews that takes about one month. “Matches” last an average of 22 months, but many extend far longer and result in life-long adult friendships. Mentors seem to agree the benefits are mutual.

Holcomb’s presentation was concise but passionate and extremely effective. In response to questions, she assured our group that BBBS is completely neutral about sexual orientation. Parents are always informed and have the final word on choosing a Big Brother or Big Sister for their children.

—Bruce Carr

“Mist of Grace”

by Jay Thompson

Grace walks with me to greet each day
She moves in quiet precision
Grace offers light to suggest the way
She whispers my life’s mission

Grace lends a hand when I must fall
She reminds me to stand up straight
Grace goes in peace when duty calls
She early when hope is late

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com no later than Wednesday, November 29 for the December 1 meeting. Our speaker will be Rabbi Beryl Padorr from the Tifereth Israel Synagogue. Jonathan can also be reached by phone at 288-2500.



Thanks to Joe Raetz for introducing our speaker at the November meeting.



FFBC is a co-sponsor of a public forum on “Making our Schools Safe for GLBT Students” scheduled for Monday, December 11 from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM at the Performing Arts Center of Urbandale High School.

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

DECEMBER 2006

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From the Editor

And Now We Need to Clean Up the Mess



I am thankful the 2006 election is over, and I am even more thankful for the results. But now it is time for Iowans and all Americans to begin cleaning up the campaign process. The plethora of attack ads in this and other elections is disgraceful. Both parties are to blame, and for either of them to claim the effectiveness of such ads is hogwash! The ads are demeaning and unnecessary.

The weekend before the election I attended a party of Statehouse Democratic activists. One of those in attendance was a pleasant young woman from Washington, D.C., whose job is to oversee the mass mailings that all of us who are registered to vote receive in the mail at election time. I talked with her about the negative ads and said that I simply put the television on mute when they come on. Her response was that the ads are aimed at the small percentage of undecided voters in an attempt to get them to vote for the desired candidates. To that I say, again, hogwash! If an undecided voter is swayed by such ads, then the person shouldn't be voting in the first place.

Campaign reform laws have not gone anywhere, and we can't expect those elected to office to change much of anything. I would like to see rigid laws that would not allow any individual, corporation, or group to give more than \$1,000 to any candidate. The so-called "soft money" that fuels many of these ads should also be outlawed.

It is time for the people to do something about it in another way. As I said earlier, whenever those ads came on television, I hit the mute button. By doing that, I also ignored the LEGITIMATE advertisers who were trying to sell their products. I would propose that those advertisers withdraw their advertising whenever a television station agrees to run an attack ad. When enough business people do that, television stations will lose revenue and begin to clean up their own codes of advertising conduct. Also, we all need to contact those television stations and let them know that we not only condemn such ads but also that we refuse to buy any other products advertised on their station as long as the attack ads are run. The legislative bodies and the courts may not be willing to do anything, but individuals can. As the old song goes, "One person can beat a drum and make enough noise for ten."

And what should the legitimate advertisers do to promote their products if they would participate in such a boycott? The print medium, I'm sure, would love their advertising dollars. Also, they could become sponsors of Public Television and Public Radio programs. Their area of coverage may be diminished for awhile, but once the message gets across that hundreds of thousands of people support their effort, there will be a change. It is all up to us.

—Steve Person