



# First Friday News & Views

July 2017

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The Monthly Newsletter of the  
First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.

**Theology Matters**  
By Jonathan Wilson

By "theology" I mean that which someone accepts as a part of their personal belief system; that which someone believes largely without further scrutiny; that which is mostly unalterable despite contrary facts and any amount of reason. The 19th Century Danish philosopher and theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, coined the phrase "tragic leap of faith." It was used to describe the point, in the search to understand the purpose of life and our existence, where reason and proof fail and everyone, consciously or unconsciously, makes a "tragic" leap of faith to a point of personal equilibrium, and closes their minds to further inputs. The phrase describes what religion is all about. Religion is the place where many people turn for help in their approach to that inevitable leap of faith.

For some that leap comes sooner than later. An example would be those who treat the Bible somewhat like the admonition on a new software app; they don't bother reading it and merely scroll to the bottom and click "I Agree." They are the dangerous ones, particularly when they ascend to a position of power or gain authority for public policy-making.

Make no mistake, everyone is at liberty to believe whatever they choose to believe. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan said, "You are entitled to your opinion. But you are not entitled to your own facts." This is particularly true in matters of religious belief, something expressly protected by the US Constitution, every state constitution, and every state and federal civil rights law.

That said, it does not follow that a person's theological or religious convictions are irrelevant or should be ignored by voters. If we elect enough people like Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann, who believes that the End Times are indeed imminent, then what should we expect when it comes to fiscal responsibility? Why not run up the national debt for short term benefit if the day won't come when the debt must be repaid? Why not strip mine our resources, pollute our air and rivers, melt the polar ice caps, and deregulate anything that interferes with immediate, maximum profit? "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." If the earth was created six thousand years ago, as a matter of public policy we shouldn't be funding archeology education. If the Biblical account(s) of creation are true, we should not be wasting money on NASA's search for extra-terrestrial life.

The most recent and glaring example of such shallow thinking, born of taking that tragic leap of faith prematurely, comes from US Representative Tim Walberg (R-Mich.), a former church pastor. He doesn't believe the scientific evidence of climate change (which is now irrefutable), but then told a group of constituents that, even if the climate scientists are correct:

"As a Christian [sic], I believe that there is a creator in God who is much bigger than us. And I'm confident that, if there's a real problem, he [sic] can take care of it."

As observed by Steve Benen in the HuffPost, "If this is how Americans chose to think about addressing challenges, and we started started shapCont'd on P. 2Cont'd on P. 2started shaping policy to reflect unusual religious beliefs, the scope of the implications is staggering. We could stop investing in national defense, confident that an all-powerful God would create peace. We could stop worrying about health care, knowing that He would heal the sick. There'd be no need for officials to

COVER:

*Theology Matters*  
by Jonathan Wilson

*Inside This Month*

Unfollowed

by Jordan Duesenberg

I Love Senior Citizens

by Steve Person

June Speaker: Reverend Anna Blaedel  
*A Modern Day Profile in Courage*  
by Bruce Carr

*How Do My Thoughts and Actions*  
*Affect Others*  
by Michael Sterk

Briefs and Shorts

*Wonder Woman (2017)*  
by Mark Tunage

Ponderables

*Modern Day Hamlet (Book Review)*  
by Steve Person

The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am,  
Friday, July 7, 2017, at Hoyt Sherman  
Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines,  
IA. RSVP by July 5th to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com), or phone 515-288-2500

Cont'd on P. 2

focus on disaster preparedness and response because "if there's a real problem, He can take care of it."

In my belief system, God has no hands but our hands. I believe we are called to use our God-given minds to their maximum, and only -- only -- when science and reason are utterly exhausted, turn to our faith assumptions. I believe the actions and public policy driven by those faith assumptions should still be guided by compassion for the disadvantaged and the powerless.

Theological or religious beliefs should be protected, as they are. Those beliefs become fair targets, however, for evaluation and critique when they are brought into the political arena. They should not be ignored when responsible voters go to the ballot box. "Thinkers" like Michelle Bachmann and Tim Walberg should be marginalized and should not be elected to public office. We ignore their premature leaps of faith at our peril.

### *Ponderables*

*"You can't con people, at least not for long. \*\*\* [I]f you don't deliver the goods, people will eventually catch on."*  
*The Art of the Deal* by its purported author, Donald J. Trump.

*Those who would sacrifice freedom for short term security deserve neither.* Benjamin Franklin

### **Unfollowed**

By Jordan Duesenberg

I've "unfollowed" everyone on Facebook that posts pro-Trump articles. I know this isn't technically what we're supposed to do, because it always helps to hear opposing sides. I mean, isn't that what our country is all about? But honestly, I find myself not really caring. The complete ignorance of anybody that could support Donald Trump at this point completely baffles me. I know this is part of the problem. I know that Trump supporters probably "unfollow" people that post anti-Trump articles as well, as they all swim in their Fox News BS -- further worsening the problem. Yet, I still can't find myself wanting to read anything or be around anybody that supports this man.

My dad is a Trump supporter. Obviously, I love the guy; he's my dad. But boy-oh-boy, do we get into it about Donald Trump (and Republicans in general). I can confidently say that I've (finally) surpassed my dad in physical prowess and could probably take him in a fight (although never second guess old man strength), but my dad can still run circles around me when it comes to intelligence, especially when it comes to debating, which kills me. It kills me even more because my dad's intelligent and I simply don't get how any intelligent human being can support Donald Trump. Trump supporters are all supposed to be backwater, toothless deplorables from places

Almost every time we get into a political argument, neither of us is capable of backing down. We also both have a tendency to raise our voices when said arguments happen. As you can imagine, this puts a pretty big damper on family events. Trust me, nothing ruins Thanksgiving quicker than arguments about global warming and abortions. This ultimately led to my dad and me agreeing with one another that we can no longer discuss politics at family events or in each other's presence (it should be noted that I did break this rule the following weekend at Easter brunch when I saw Terry Branstad at the buffet line and I looked at my dad and said, "Who let Braindead in?" That didn't end well). I have since held on to our agreement and my dad and I no longer bring up anything political in one another's presence. Like with Facebook, I'm avoiding the problem entirely.

There is, however, one place that I simply cannot avoid Trump supporters and outspoken Republicans: my job. I work in a conservative industry. I've come to terms with the likelihood that every single person I work with is a Republican. No harm, no foul. I don't care to ask anyone, mostly because it's none of my business, and also because I find myself constantly bombarded with pro-Trump and anti-liberal conversations. Whether it's colleagues, wholesalers, or clients, I can't escape it. I can't simply "unfollow" or mute a client that's talking about how sensitive liberals are while I'm going over a portfolio review with them, or a colleague trying to engage me about an article in the paper. This has actually become one small area of personal growth for me. While I do wish I could share my opinion during those examples, I actually think it has been good for me to hear an opposing opinion, and simply keep quiet, change the conversation, or walk away. Perhaps because of this, maybe I'll gather up the strength and "re-follow" some of my old friends on Facebook that continue to support our embarrassment-of-a-president and not argue or debate with them (even if I know I'm right).

### **I love senior citizens!**

From an anonymous source  
Submitted by Steve Person

A self-important college freshman attending a recent football game took it upon himself to explain to a senior citizen sitting next to him why it was impossible for the older generation to understand his generation.

"You grew up in a different world, actually an almost primitive one," the student said, loud enough for many of those nearby to hear. "The young people of today are much more advanced than people your age. We grew up with television, jet planes, space travel, man walking on the moon, and the Internet. We have cell phones, nuclear energy, electric and hydrogen cars, computers, automated manufacturing, amazing technologies.... and," pausing to take another drink of beer.

The senior took advantage of the break in the student's litany and said, "You're right, son. We didn't have those things when we were young.... So we invented them. Now, you arrogant little shit, what are YOU doing for the next generation?"

The applause was  
resounding...



**A Modern Day Profile in Courage**  
By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, June 2, 2017, was the Reverend Anna Blaedel, director of spiritual formation and co-director of the University of Iowa's Wesley Student Center in Iowa City. She gave us an inspiring and thoughtful account of her "wild and precious life" as "an out, queer, and partnered" minister who is a leader in the movement to call out and correct long-standing United Methodist policies and practices against openly homosexual clergy.

Anna Blaedel is an impressive and inspiring orator, and she earned standing applause when she finished. You can – nay, you should -- listen to the live recording of her speech to hear the full effect of her poetic passion. Just go to our Web site, <ffbcuiowa.org>, and click on the "Speakers" tab.

Blaedel began by listing the Wesley Center's six core values -- hospitality, courage, community, justice, authenticity, and healthy and sustainable leadership -- noting that they inspire her own spiritual and political life as well, and that they have sustained her through the draining process of fielding the formal complaints lodged against her by church officials. The first formal complaint, against her insistence on being open, was ultimately dismissed by her bishop, but now she faces another complaint and hearing for officiating at the wedding of two lesbian friends last April. "Although I knew that the wedding could cost me my [ordination] credentials, could cost me my job, could cost me my health insurance, and could cost me my income," she says, "I knew also that saying 'no' to one of my best friends would cost me my integrity and my soul."

So the work is nowhere near complete, Blaedel continues. "The United Methodist Church is still unwilling to acknowledge or account for the harm done

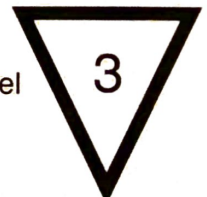
to LGBTQ people through discriminatory, damning policies, and practices that prohibit and punish us. The status quo remains unacceptable, and folks have been accepting it for far too long, with devastating and cumulative effects. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words continue to call and lure and haunt: 'Non-violent direct action seeks to create such crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.'" Further, she has said, "We must fight the powers and principalities that wield death and destruction: White supremacy. Islamophobia. (Trans)misogyny. Heterosexism. Anti-semitism. Nationalism. All the manifestations of xenophobia that are, inherently, incompatible with Christian teaching and with justice and with love-in-action.... Remember, too: You are loved. You are not alone. You can do hard things. We need each other. Follow joy. May it be so."

*Editor's note: Anna Blaedel was the recipient of the FFBC scholarship in the year 2000. It has been reported that the most recent complaint filed against Reverend Blaedel has also been dismissed.*

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Anna Blaedel grew up in Ames and, after graduating from the University of Iowa with a BA in Religious Studies, moved to the San Francisco Bay Area's Graduate Theological Union to pursue her theological education, earning a Master's in Divinity from Pacific School of Religion. She returned to Iowa in 2008 to begin her first professional ministry, in Osage, and was ordained a clergyperson in the United Methodist Church in 2010. In 2013, she was appointed to what she calls her "dream job" at the University of Iowa campus ministry, where she serves as director of spiritual formation and co-director of the Wesley Center. Blaedel is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Theological and Philosophical Studies at Drew University's Graduate Division on Religion, studying movements of racial justice and queer liberation.

Anna is drawn to intersections: spirituality and social justice, academic study and community activism, political action and contemplative practice; and she counts among her spiritual practices the sacrament of brunch, sharing silence with strangers and beloveds, waking up before dawn, walking in the woods, and riding the subway. The Rev. Anna Blaedel can be contacted at [anna-blaedel@uiowa.edu](mailto:anna-blaedel@uiowa.edu).



## How Do My Thoughts and Actions Effect Others?

By Michael Stern

It is not my intention to offend anyone with this article, but I also realize that may be inevitable. The subject matter in a previous article in the FFBC newsletter has me really nervous and concerned. I'm asking that people think outside of the box of their own opinion, and consider what affect their opinion may have on others, and the future for all of us.

I'm 55 years old. All of my life I've heard phrases like "to each his own," "everyone is entitled to their own opinion," and "the Constitution gives us the right to freedom of speech." While I agree with all of these phrases, I've also lived long enough to know that if people don't think and exercise caution before speaking their opinions, unfixable harm and damage can almost certainly be done. Another phrase I've heard a lot in my lifetime is "think before you speak." This phrase was usually used when someone had gotten very hurt by another person voicing a judgmental or insulting opinion too loudly.

A show like **Fire Island** is going to make what is already a very difficult situation for gay men living in small town, rural America much more difficult. It will poison the minds of many of those living in rural America, and promote a belief system that says the LGBT movement is a step below prostitution. Everyone knows from a past article I wrote that I believe in embracing the entitlements that are available to us, but as with anything in this game called life, if it is taken to the extreme or excess, a good thing can become a very powerful and destructive bad thing.

Don't underestimate the power of small town rural America. It still makes up a huge portion of America. They may argue between themselves, but when faced with an issue that threatens their way of life, they will join together with a bond stronger than any super glue that was ever created, and become a force that is hard to beat. Society may think of them as a bunch of red neck hicks, but when they join together, they become a force that is almost unstoppable. Just look at who is in the White House. It has been said that the non-college educated white men came out in full force to vote for Trump.

A show like **Fire Island** could ignite a backlash of dynamite that we will never recover from. Daniel Hoffman-Zinnel told us when he spoke to us that he became an over-achiever when he was younger. I have been a work-a-holic the past 30 years living in rural Iowa. Rural America is nothing like city and suburban America. Please think before you act and speak as to what the outcome could be for a lot of people.

This issue goes far beyond married people with kids having it all together. No one has it all together. Just take a look at the divorce rate. Life hands us all curve balls, repeatedly. It's how we handle those curve balls that defines us and our character. This is about responsibility, discretion, etiquette, appearance, character, a good reputation, consideration, doing what's best for the team, and

learning to become an adult. Shows like **The Kardashians**, **Real Housewives**, and **The Jersey Shore** are apples-to-beats comparables with **Fire Island**. The former aren't representative of the vast majority of America. It's few rich people flaunting their wealth with no regard for their actions, or sense of responsibility. I won't willingly watch those shows; nor will I ever have that kind of money.

We live in a society where image and first impression can make or break, enable or destroy, succeed or fail just about anything. Shows like **Will and Grace** and **Nate & Jeremiah**, and programs like the FFBC Scholarship program with the standing ovation Jonathan told us about last month have done huge wonders to show society the LGBT people can be and are ordinary, authentic people. They have done a good job of presenting a positive image to small town rural America. Do we really want to reverse that image after so much has been done to make the image better? Is **Fire Island** worth reversing all of the progress that has been gained the past few years?

Did anyone see TLC's second episode of **This Is Life LIVE**? In a mailing I got from the DMGMC, it has a line that says, "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." The June 2nd FFBC speaker is now facing a 2nd battle with the United Methodist church. [*more accurately, the Dis-United Methodist Church. Ed.*] The stories of some of the scholarship winners were heart wrenching. While coming out may be easier for some people, it's still a very traumatic decision for a lot of others. We still have long way to go in changing the image of the LGBT group. I know on the surface it's hard to accept, but for a while longer the bar has to be kept high as far as the positive image of the LGBT community is concerned.

I'm not trying to tell anyone how to live, but I am asking that, for now, everyone try to create a win - win situation for all of us as a collective whole. We all need to think about what impact our actions will have on others. Personal agendas may have to be sacrificed for the sake of those who are still facing horrifying situations.

### *Ponderables*

*When you get to a certain age, everything you buy comes with a lifetime warranty, at no extra charge. This comes in handy when aging has you looking for silver linings.* J. Wilson

**Wonder Woman (2017)**  
Review by Mark Turnage

For those leery about the influx of superhero movies in theaters, you might ask yourself, "How is **Wonder Woman** any different from every other comics-based film?" Yet director Patty Jenkins delivers a beautifully composed and accessible narrative vision, even for those who've never picked up a comic book before: it's a war movie, a coming-of-age story, and a mythology film all in one.

The director of **Monster** rewards nearly every cast member with character moments and a more generous color palette reminiscent of a Marvel film (I heard that collective gasp, DC Comics purists). This serves as a stark contrast to prior entries in the DC Comics film franchise (**Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice**, **Suicide Squad**), which many, including this reviewer, agree were exercises in monotonous, incoherent drudgery and dourness to the point of camp.

The parallels to Marvel's **Captain America: The First Avenger** are there, it's true—a hero with an ethical code as strong as their shield is tasked with turning the tide of a World War -- but how **Wonder Woman** differs is the earnest but not naïve perspective of its lead: the dissonance between her isolated utopic warrior culture of women and the savage, war-riddled lands of men, framed by her burgeoning awareness of humanity's capacity for good and evil.

Midway through the movie, Wonder Woman/Diana Prince is confronted with different facets of the human cost of war, and must choose what to save: individuals in immediate pain, or the greater good of saving lives threatened by war. Diana hesitates before pressing forward reluctantly, clearly pained to leave anyone behind. A second instance is in the final act: the day is saved, yet the war rages on. Both are scenes befitting of a war movie, and it's refreshing to see them in a superhero film. Defeating evil doesn't always provide closure. Heroes make hard choices. Jenkins and her team have made excellent choices, mostly.

Which brings me to Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman. As an actress, Gadot succeeds in bringing Diana to life, but some may find her personal politics contradictory to the ideals of intersectionality and peace her character stands for, and some of the most powerful Wonder Woman moments for this reviewer were dimmed because of it. To summarize, is it good that a superhero film with a female Israeli lead is a success in an increasingly xenophobic America? Yes, absolutely. But it's problematic when a character who empowers \*all\* women is played by an actress whose tacit public endorsement of anti-Palestinian sentiment indicates she may not believe all women should be empowered. This is ironic, considering the film's main themes are the toll of war, the power of belief, and the uncertainty of peace. This reviewer doesn't expect entertainers to be saints -- hardly -- but I do believe they need to be held accountable when necessary.

Now for brevity's sake—there's queer humor in this film! Chris Pine's Steve Trevor delivers laugh-out-loud

chuckles in several scenes early on where Diana mistakenly infers his sexuality, even if Steve is not without a few chauvinist, patronizing moments in the script. Did I mention the film's villain sniffs inhalant from small glass vials that give him superpowers? You do the math.

Ultimately, **Wonder Woman** asks the question the modern Superman films failed to: Is humanity redeemable enough to merit saving? Maybe, maybe not but **Wonder Woman** has certainly saved the DC Extended Universe franchise. Skip it or see it? See it.

*[With this article, Mark Turnage takes over the task of our regular movie feature. This follows the untimely death of Gary Kaufman, who provided insightful movie reviews for many years. Tribute and gratitude are due to Gary Kaufman posthumously. Thanks also to Mark Turnage for his willingness to step in. Ed.]*

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Our speaker in July will be Dr. Loren Olson, psychiatrist and author of *Finally Out*. You won't want to miss. You are encouraged to invite some of your friends to attend!!

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Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Scott Kuknyo for helping coordinate the book exchange.

Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. We're all going to die, and we can't take it with us. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details.

Thanks to those who have given to the scholarship program. We awarded eight scholarships this year. We have awarded more than \$250,000 in total.

### Ponderables

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## A MODERN DAY HAMLET?

### A Book Review of Sally Bedell Smith's biography, **Prince Charles: The Passions and Paradoxes of an Improbable Life**

by Steve Person

In Shakespeare's tragedy of Hamlet, one of the major flaws of the title character is his intense over-analysis of people and situations. While Prince Hamlet's assumptions generally turned out to be true—especially regarding the treachery of his Uncle Claudius—in Bedell Smith's new biography of Prince Charles, much the same can be said about the heir to the British throne.

Prince Charles has now surpassed his great great grandfather (Edward VII) for being the person who has waited the longest to inherit the title of King. His mother, Elizabeth II, at age 91, continues to enjoy generally good health, and the Prince may have quite a further long wait to fulfill his birthright. In waiting, however, Prince Charles has not been idle. He has championed many causes from environmental concerns to organic farming to architectural criticism of many of Britain's leading architects.

At times in his sixty-eight years, Prince Charles incited media reporters to have a field day poking fun at his less-than-normal activities and pronouncements. In the 1970s, he was lampooned as an eccentric who talked to the plants in his garden at Highgrove (his country estate) or his wish to be a Tam-pax inside his then mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles. His assault on modern architecture, especially the high-rise buildings that now prick the sky in London, resulted in pointed reposts from the British architectural establishment.

To be fair, Prince Charles is a tireless worker for the projects he has taken on. While in his 20s, he established what has turned out to be his major accomplishment, To be fair, Prince Charles is a tireless worker for the projects he has taken on. While in his 20s, he established what has turned out to be his major accomplishment, The Prince's Trust. The trust has raised millions of pounds to provide opportunities for thousands of underprivileged young people in the United Kingdom to gain job skills and life-long To be fair, Prince Charles is a tireless worker for the projects he has taken on. While in his 20s, he established what has turned out to be his major accomplishment, The Prince's Trust. The trust has raised millions of pounds to provide opportunities for thousands of underprivileged young people in the United Kingdom to gain job skills and life-long means of independence. Also, in his bid to make architecture a more human-friendly endeavor, Charles helped plan and execute the making of his ideal village in Dorset, a community named Poundbury. The village, using local materials wherever possible, is the Prince's ideal for modern families in Britain. It continues to grow and may eventually achieve the dream that Charles envisioned. Likewise, in his role as the Earl of Rothesay (a Scottish title), Charles continues to oversee the refurbishment of Dumfries House, a treasure that nearly went the way of many British country homes that yielded to razing by ruthless developers.

Like Hamlet, Charles is college educated. His degree from Cambridge in 1970 made him at that time the only heir to the British throne to have a college degree. Bedell Smith's exhaustive research makes this a must-read for those who enjoy a good biography. Unlike Hamlet, I doubt Charles will ever succumb to the jab of a poisoned epee (*a sharp-pointed dueling sword, designed for thrusting and used, with the end blunted, in fencing. Ed.*), but one never knows what a poisoned pen can accomplish!

