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**GAY CHILDREN OF GOD OR STRAIGHT ONES ACTING BADLY:
THE CHURCH DEBATE**
by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, April 3, 2009 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our speaker will be Dr. Neal O’Sullivan of Hy-line International .

▼ R.S.V.P. by Wednesday April 1 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

We were privileged to have Bishop Julius Trimble as our FFBC speaker. His intellect and spirit of connection with, and respect for, all “children of God” were readily apparent. As head of the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church he has his work cut out for him. The [dis]organized church in Iowa and elsewhere has been losing members for years, it faces increasing financial challenges in what promises to be an extended period of economic uncertainty, and (despite the fact that he is a person of color) the United Methodist Church remains problematically segregated along racial lines every time congregants assemble. With those challenges as a backdrop, the prospects for progress in the near-term toward the embrace of gay children of God cannot be considered great.

That progress remains particularly challenging because, while individual members and churches are more enlightened and welcoming, the official position of the United Methodist Church continues to be that intimate homosexual relations [all of them] are “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Inherent in that statement is the untenable moral principle restated more clearly as follows: “whether you’re in a monogamous, committed same-gender relationship for a lifetime, or are promiscuously intimate with as many different same-gender partners as you can seduce until you die of exhaustion or worse, it’s a moral equivalent”. In either case, gay “children of God” are equally condemned. Gay “children of God” are headed to hell without passing GO. That morality message betrays the essence of “prejudice,” i.e., a preconceived notion not consistent with reality. It essentially denies the very existence of gay “children of God,” in preference for the view that those engaged in same-gender intimacy are actually straight “children of God” acting badly.

Boiled down, the challenge for Bishop Trimble and other like-minded United Methodists to make gay “children of God” feel truly welcome is impossible in the near-term. It can, for now, be comfortably overcome only by the schizophrenic, those capable of holding two, inconsistent realities simultaneously without becoming completely dysfunctional. The United Methodist Discipline defines what it means to be a United Methodist. Gay “children of God” cannot be a United Methodist any more than can someone who believes that the Pope is the infallible head of the church; or that baptism is no more than a poor substitute for a bath; or that Jesus was not the Son of God; or that it is unimportant to support the church with “prayers, church attendance, gifts, and service” [as stated in the oath made at the point of membership]. Fortunately for the United Methodist Church there still are those gay “children of God” willing to belong nominally and work within the church. If that weren’t true, the United Methodist Church would have almost no organ music!! The church should not be expecting an ingathering of “members” from substantial numbers of non-organist, self-identifying, self-

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respecting gay people. Not going to happen.

The Bishop distinguished himself as one who “does not trust [his] prejudices.” Unfortunately, most folks do trust their prejudices and, often as not, do so because they are not even aware that they are prejudices. Unfortunately also, so-called “Christian” churches have historically served more than not to perpetuate prejudices -- against gentiles, against other religious denominations and traditions, against viewing the world as a sphere, against women, against people of color, against owners of bars, and against advances in civil rights generally [religious institutions continue to be exempt from civil rights laws] and gay civil equality in particular.

Those prejudices are more readily perpetuated and more difficult to change when the church has, as it undeniably has, driven away those formerly affiliated with the church who are, by their lives and example, most able to make a lie of the prejudice, gay “children of God” who do exist no matter what the United Methodist Church says. It was to Bishop Trimble’s credit to come and break bread with gay people who, according to the church that he leads, do not exist. According to the United Methodist Church, the good Bishop was having breakfast alone. We know better, and so does Bishop Trimble thanks partly to applause from the supposedly non-existent.

Muzzling the Church on morality: just as the Amish (by condemning all driving) render themselves irrelevant on the subject of appropriate driving behaviors, the church that condemns all same-gender intimacy makes itself irrelevant in providing guidance on moral questions of gay children of God.

Connections

By Randy Happel

In his remarks at the March meeting of the First Friday Breakfast Club, Rev. Dr. Julius Trimble, Bishop of the United Methodist Church in Iowa, spoke about connections. He opened referencing his “bag-packing” theory — a concept Rev. Trimble uses to explain why he feels we are all connected.

“It doesn’t matter where we say we are from, if we were all to pack our bags enough times to ‘go back home’ I contend we would all end up in the same place, in the same village together,” Trimble says. “I believe we

are all connected by one blood, by one creator and one spirit and our separation is really ‘artificial separation’ that has happened over the course of history and the result of our own choosing.”

Bishop Trimble elaborated on “bread connections” — those occasions when people come together to meet, share experiences, and break bread together. Trimble contends that through bread connections we break down barriers of others whom we have not previously met and those who appear different from ourselves.

“There are few places where our common humanity can be lifted up and celebrated,” Trimble said. “But each time we come together around simple signs of bread, we tear down many walls and get a glimpse of God’s intentions for humanity. Bread connections are occasions when we are called to be concerned about the well being of each other.”

“In the breaking of bread together, we reclaim our own broken condition rather than denying its reality,” he says. “We become aware that we are taken and set apart as witnesses of God and we are blessed by words and acts of grace.”

Trimble considers the invitation to address the First Friday Breakfast Club a personal opportunity for him to reach out to those who he admits have not been viewed favorably by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church.

“For many in the gay community, I think the United Methodist Church has been a disappointment,” Trimble says, “at least at the highest levels of our decision-making body and our General Conference. In our Book of Discipline we adamantly say that we welcome all people, and yet we continue to view homosexuality as ‘incompatible with Christian teaching.’ One of my prayers to God over the years is that I would be a stepping-stone of encouragement as opposed to a stumbling block towards progress.”

But having said that, the Bishop reiterated that not all members within his denomination agree with the current views of church leadership.

“Many of the local congregations of the United Methodist Church of Iowa are openly affirming and welcoming to all persons — standing over and against the “official stance” retained by the General Conference,” Trimble said. “I don’t trust my own prejudices nor do I trust any moment in history as being the final statement about what God has to say. The love of Christians is bigger than the denomination, but God’s love is bigger than the church.”

A measure of our wisdom increases incrementally with every trip we make to the cemetery.

Waltz with Bashir

Review by
Gary Kaufman

Although this movie has ended its run in Des Moines, **Waltz with Bashir** is a good film to catch when it's released on DVD. The film was nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Oscars and won that category at the Golden Globes this year.

The director of the film encounters an old army buddy that he knew in the Israeli war with Lebanon, and the army buddy is troubled with a recurring dream in which he is being followed by angry dogs ready to kill him. During the war in Lebanon, the buddy had led excursions to find rebels. In order to enter the towns undetected, they would shoot the town's dogs so they would not warn residents of the incoming soldiers.

This triggered the director's own recurring dream. He and friends are naked in a river and walk onto the beach. One has a rifle in hand, on the beach are their clothes, and they dress before they go into town. They march into the Lebanese town and they encounter massive waves of wailing women. He is troubled by this dream. He believes it has something to do with being where the massacres took place, but he cannot remember the massacres.

The film then begins a searching process with the director visiting soldiers that were in his dream, or who were at the massacre. Each reveals what he remembers and a more complete picture emerges. At times it is similar to "Heart of Darkness" where the gunboats would shoot their artillery aimlessly into the jungle -- civilization confronting the so-called uncivilized. Here, it was young Israeli men, scared, driving in a tank through orange groves. They shoot their machine guns indiscriminately during the trip even though no one is shooting at them. The war becomes more surreal as the men go home on furlough, see their homeland unchanged (full of life and exuberance), and then in a day, they are back to their world of terror and murder.

The massacre was a reaction by the Christian Phalangists, whose leader, Bashir, had been elected President only to be shot down in his first day in office. He was their hero and his death must be avenged. The Israeli soldiers were outside the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, ostensibly providing cover and protection to the Christian Phalangist militia men (who were supposedly interrogating the refugees). The film raises the question of why did it take so long for the Israelis to put an end to the exterminations in the camps. The Israeli soldiers would see the killings from their vantage points, and would report it to their commanding officers. Nothing was

ordered to be done. They were merely thanked for their reporting. It is even more perplexing when it is revealed how easy it was to end the slaughter. An officer comes up to the village and shouts, "Stop the shooting. Everybody go home!" And as soon as this short statement is delivered the militia men leave and the surviving villagers return to their village.

This film is animated, although in that sort of surreal manner in which the backgrounds are rotoscoped real backgrounds while the characters are often in full animation. Sometime they include sensual rotoscoped images of naked men. At the end, the animation ends, and you are then shocked into the reality that this was a real event with real footage. You go from the wails of animated old women crying for the loss of their husbands and children, to actual footage of the women wailing, of the piled up bodies, and of a touching image that was described earlier. Your jaw will drop from the visualization of the horror. It has the greatest impact of any animated film I've seen.

The film demonstrates the horrors of war and explores the thoughts of those who fight the war as well as soldiers' reactions. When a soldier accidentally kills an entire family by riddling a car with bullets, is it just a casualty of war, or has the soldier murdered innocent persons? These are dilemmas that a soldier must harbor in his thoughts. These are thoughts you will share if you decide to see **Waltz with Bashir**.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the April 3 meeting no later than April 1. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Dr. Neal O'Sullivan of Hy-line International .



Thanks to Charles Carnes for his introduction of our March speaker, Iowa United Methodist Church Bishop, the Reverend Dr. Julius Trimble .



Thanks to David Teachout for YEARS of services as our newsletter production editor, and thanks to Tony Hansen for assuming those duties going forward



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Des Moines, Iowa*

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From the Editor

The Rope Walk

In 2003, the newly created Iowa Center for the Book announced its first “All Iowa Reads” title, **Peace Like a River** by Leif Enger. The purpose of “All Iowa Reads” is to encourage Iowans statewide to read and talk about a single title in the same year. Librarians and other local organizations are encouraged to sponsor discussions of the title.

The “All Iowa Reads” book for 2009 is **The Rope Walk** by Carrie Brown. Over the years, I have read most of the “All Iowa Reads” selections. When I worked for former Iowa First Lady Christie Vilsack, I participated in many library discussions with her and Iowa readers in 2003, 2004, and 2005. All of the books make for lively discussions in book clubs and library groups.

Of all the selections made for “All Iowa Reads,” I have to say that **The Rope Walk** is the weakest and most poorly written of the otherwise outstanding picks. Its author, Carrie Brown, is a professor of writing at Sweet Briar College in Virginia. **The Rope Walk** is a prime example why teachers of so-called “creative writing” should not be composing novels.

The story itself is rather appealing, what in literary terms would be called a “bildungsroman,” a coming-of-age story. The main character is a ten-year-old girl named Alice. The reader is introduced to Alice on her tenth birthday in a quiet Vermont town. The narrative continues into Alice’s eleventh year and chronicles the events—personal, national, and international—that she participates in and hears about from various sources. With an African-American boy (Theo) that her family takes in for the summer, Alice befriends a man who has returned home after a highly successful career in the international art world. The man, Kenneth Fitzgerald, returns home to live out his days as a man afflicted with AIDS. Alice reads to Kenneth on a regular basis because his eyesight is failing. Theo invents various games that the three of them can play. His idea to create a rope walk for Kenneth so he can enjoy walking through the woods results in an ironic ending.

Unfortunately, Carrie Brown seems to have decided that symbolic language is the only way to tell such a simple story. The imagery, personification, and comparisons drag the story down and make for tedious reading. I counted no fewer than 451 similes in the book, some of them being compound in structure. While I can appreciate the need to name characters to represent their personae in the story, the obvious name of Alice—who initially lives very much in her world of imagination—is straight out of Wonderland. Like the Alice of Lewis Carroll, Carrie Brown’s Alice finds a world that is all too real in the seemingly surreal circumstances of the year 2005. Her father, Archie, is the solid support his name implies, while Kenneth Fitzgerald echoes the kind of characters that F. Scott Fitzgerald created so much more convincingly in his early twentieth century works.

I would encourage anyone to pick up the book and read it and would be interested in other reactions. The book is my book club’s selection for this month, and I look forward to hearing what the others think of it.

Previous “All Iowa Reads” selections are **Peace Like a River** (2003), **Niagara Falls All Over Again** (2004), **The Master Butchers Singing Club** (2005), **Gilead** (2006), **Splendid Solution: Jonas Salk and the Conquest of Polio** (2007), and **Digging to America** (2008).

- Steve Person