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Time Makes Ancient Good Uncouth

by Jonathan Wilson

INSIDE

- Briefs & Shorts 2
- June Speaker Review
by Bruce Carr 2
- Boy Culture** — Movie
Review by Gary Kauf-
man 3
- From the Editor 4

I had an interesting experience recently when I was a panelist in an Ames Town Hall Meeting, sponsored by Faith in America, Inc. That organization seeks to be a catalyst for dialogue and education in the effort to achieve equality among all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation, with a particular emphasis on using concepts and language traditionally reserved to organized religion. It was founded by gay philanthropist Mitchell Gold, and its executive director is Jimmy Creech, a United Methodist minister defrocked for conducting same-gender commitment ceremonies. Based on a rough estimate gleaned from participant comments and sporadic applause, 15-20% of the audience was made up of those coming out of a fundamentalist “Christian” tradition. The interactions were mostly civil and respectful, but with a discernible edge and a palpable tension. There was visible security, just in case. It was great; a wonderful adrenalin rush.

Thanks in great part to my father, who was a United Methodist minister, and growing up immersed in an atmosphere dominated by organized religion and the Bible, I was definitely in a comfortable element, even though no match for the knowledge and finesse of Jimmy Creech.

In my prepared remarks I offered a perspective that I want to reiterate here. In my response to a comment in the Q&A exchange, I missed the opportunity to make the most of another point. I hate it when that happens, but it happens to all of us. I’ll also share it here in the hope that doing so may make me feel better, and reinforce it in my mind for use if the opportunity ever presents itself again.

The first observation I offered was about my own epiphany in reconciling my same-gender orientation and the Scriptures. I knew that the Biblical writer erroneously thought the earth was flat and the center of all creation, and that never kept anyone I knew from searching for and valuing the Truth in the Bible. I finally realized that the Biblical writers also erroneously thought all of God’s children are straight, making same gender intimacy for them just another example of straight people acting out. That some of God’s children are gay, actually same-gender *oriented*, was not recognized until the early 1900’s. If the Biblical writer’s perception of their audience had been correct, the Leviticus admonition would be right on the mark. If wrong, as they were, then so is the admonition.

The second observation has to do with values. One participant in the Town Hall Meeting claimed that values don’t change over time, and the only reliable source for determining values is the Bible. Needless to say, the comment was offered in the context of claiming that same-gender intimacy is wrong and the government should avoid endorsing a contrary view in statute or public school curriculum. While I did manage to work in a line from a favorite old hymn that “time makes ancient good uncouth,” and asserted that values do, indeed, change over time, with examples, I could have done better. I could have done better by simply pointing out that there’s an “Old” Testament and a “New” Testament, obviously for some religious reason, and that requires everyone who believes in the Bible to recognize that values do change over time. I could have simply referred to the example of Jesus. He made the point repeatedly when he is quoted in the Bible saying, “You have heard it said of old, but I say to you . . . [whatever — loving enemies, turning the other cheek, etc.] Matthew 5:21, 5:27, 5:31, 5:33, 5:38, and 5:43. In the exam-

CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, July 6 at Hoyt Sherman Place.
- Our guest speaker will be Myke Selka of the LGBT Community Center.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, July 3 to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com or 288-2500 by phone.

(Continued from page 1)

ple of Jesus, everyone who claims to be Christian *must* believe that values change over time. That fact may still beg the question of what values we should espouse at any given time, but it still stands for the compelling proposition that values are *not* immutable. Also in the example of Jesus, we are called to examine and re-examine our values because even Jesus “grew in wisdom” the longer he lived. Luke 2:52.

I’ll nail it next time. No Christian worthy of the name believes that values don’t change over time. Every Christian is called to grow in wisdom, and that requires a conscientious examination of facts in determining values. The earth is *not* flat, it is *not* the center of all creation, and all of God’s children aren’t straight.

—Jonathan Wilson



Our June speaker was Jimmy Creech, executive director of Faith In America Inc., a non-profit advocacy group founded in 2005 to challenge the injustice of religion-based bigotry in America. (Visit www.faithinamerica.info on the Web.) After commending FFBC on the occasion of our annual scholarship awards, Creech—who is heterosexual—gave us three little stories from his development as a gay activist:

- ▼ “Pee wee,” a grade-school fairy whose harassment as “queer” Creech regularly joined as a boy;
- ▼ “Adam,” a prominent member of the Rev. Creech’s North Carolina church who came out to him in 1984; and
- ▼ Dr. Tom Dooley (1927-1961), a missionary doctor in the tradition of Alfred Schweitzer, who worked in Southeast Asia and who was quietly (and dishonorably) discharged from the U.S. Navy after his homosexuality was rumored.

When Creech celebrated the holy union of two men in Chapel Hill in 1999, the United Methodist Church brought charges against him; he was found guilty and his credentials of ordination were taken from him. Since then, he has been advocating, preaching and speaking around the country for our causes. He has also written a yet-to-be-published book entitled *Adam’s Gift*, about his experiences with the church’s struggle to welcome and accept lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

From 2000 to 2005, Creech served as chairperson of the board of Soulforce Inc., an inter-religious movement that uses the principles of nonviolent resistance—taught and practiced by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.—to confront the spiritual violence perpetrated against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons by religious institutions.

Creech spoke passionately about his continuing ministry, eloquently against the silent isolation and pain caused by religious bigotry, and inspiringly of the inherent dignity and sacred worth of all persons, however formed. He was accompanied at our breakfast meeting by Mitchell Gold, the founder of Faith In America. Gold, who is gay, is co-owner of the high-end residential furniture manufacturer Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, in Taylorsville NC.

—Bruce Carr

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the July 6 meeting no later than July 3 to Jonathan.Wilson@davisbrownlaw.com. He can also be reached by phone at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Myke Selka of the LGBT Community Center.



Thanks to Michael Thompson for introducing our June speaker, Jimmy Creech, Executive Director of Faith in America, Inc. Also, thanks to Steve Person for introducing Des Moines Mayor, Frank Cownie.



HOLD THE DATE July 21 for a summer party jointly sponsored by FFBC and PROS. It will be at the home of Jack Barnhart and Bob Schanke, 498 Edgewood Lane, Pleasant Hill, from 7:00 to 10:00 P.M. No charge for FFBC members.



Thanks to Mike Perry for spearheading our Pride booth, to Fred Mount for loaning his antique car, and to all the volunteers.



So far this year we’ve raised over \$7,100 for scholarships. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund. Send your check to Jonathan Wilson, 666 Walnut Street, Suite 2500, Des Moines, IA 50309. Make the check out to FFBC and write “Scholarship” on the memo line.



Who would Jesus torture?

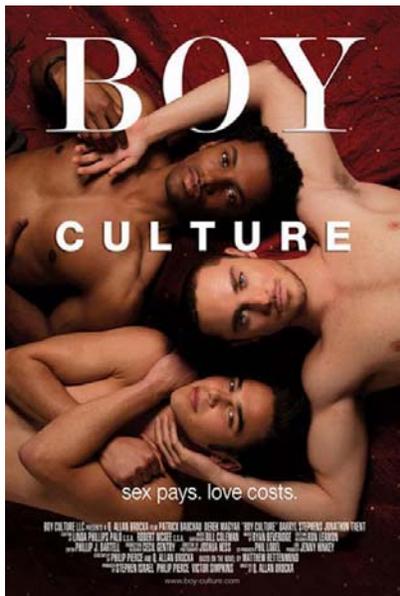
Boy Culture

Starring

Derek Magyar,
Patrick Bauchau,
Jonathon Trent,
Darryul Stephens,
Peyton Hinson,
Kyle Santler

Directed by Q. Allen
Brocks

1Hr 28 Min



to pose as his lover. Andrew has never discussed his sexuality with his family, but the situation goes really well. In the kitchen his mom tells him how happy she is that Andrew is not alone and has found a partner. Andrew asked, “How long have you known about me, Mom?” “Oh, I knew since you were 8 years old.” A very positive portrayal of coming out to one’s family and an illustration that fear of coming out can often be your own emotional barrier that prevents you from telling people what they actually already know. It also shows the loving support a family can give to a gay son.

Some viewers will be turned off by the open sexuality portrayed. But I think that is more than tempered by the emphasis on the male human need to open up to love and emotion and caring for others, including the need to communicate that to those for whom you care.

Although the film is not rated, it never goes much above the R-rating level. But there are plenty of hot men and nearly naked bodies to hold your attention.

—Gary Kaufman

Editor’s Note: I saw the movie because of this review. It was one of the best films I’ve seen for a long time. J. Wilson

It was reported that in the meeting between Bush and the Pope, they discussed: the Iraq war, US humanitarian efforts around the world, religious intolerance in Iraq, Bush’s discussions with other world leaders, the US missile defense shield, and the fight against AIDS in Africa. Their entire meeting lasted
31 MINUTES!

A “Dam” Good Showing for FFBC

by Michael Thompson

On a beautiful, sunny Saturday, June 2, four FFBC members gave it up for the 20K (12.4 mile) Dam to Dam race. With over 4,000 runners, the annual race is from the top of the Saylorville reservoir dam to Nollen Plaza. The event originally ended at the Center Street dam, hence the name. FFBC runners included David Teachout, 1 hour 32 min., Mark Koskamp, 1 hour 52 min., Michael Thompson, 1 hour 53 min., and Rick Davis, 1 hour 59 minutes. David and Mark each have run over a dozen Dam to Dams, Rick has completed 8, and Michael 4. ▼

The Senility Prayer: Grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the others, and the eyesight to tell the difference.

FFBC

*First, Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

JULY 2007

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From the Editor

Bicycles Built for Millions

I recently returned from a trip to Europe, visiting Amsterdam and Barcelona—a strange combination, I know, but the itinerary was not of my choosing. I was simply along for the ride. From the hundreds of “coffee shops” that dispense marijuana and hashish, to the Red Light District where prostitutes in windows entice customers, Amsterdam is a delightful city of contrasts.

Unlike the United States, where the pedestrians have the right of way, that is not true in most European cities. In Amsterdam, bicycles dominate. As a rule, most bicyclists are polite, and if you as a tourist stray into a bicycle lane, riders will gently ring their tingling bells on the handlebars to let you know to get out of the way. Some of the ruder cyclists may thump you on the side of the head if you get in their path, but that is unusual.

A brochure I picked up explained this riding phenomenon in Amsterdam. “Amsterdam is known as the City of Bikes, since there are over one million on the streets today, curiously more than the number of residents. The typical bike of Amsterdam is called an Oma-Fiets (Granny Bike). No need for mountain bikes here as there are no mountains in the Netherlands, and if you had one (a mountain bike) it would likely be stolen within about 24 hours. Bikes here are often old and rusty because of RAMPANT bike theft. The rule of thumb here is to spend more on a lock than the bike itself, seriously. Another interesting fact is that near the end of WWII, while fleeing the city from advancing Canadian troops (eh?), the Germans stole virtually every bike they could get their hands on. The few remaining bikes developed a status that survives to this day in ‘the older the better’ tradition. And yes, the Dutch still want their bikes back.”

Another interesting local phenomenon in Amsterdam are the phallic-like poles along the roadside. The same brochure explains their reason for being. “Called Amsterdammetjes, they’re for tourists to walk into and look silly. Guys in particular should watch out, since these things are at just the right height (in most cases) to deliver a potentially damaging impact between the legs. They are actually there to help separate cars from pedestrians. The Dutch feel so strongly about these objects of affection that they managed to get over 50,000 signatures on a petition opposing government plans to remove them.”

I also learned the difference between Holland and the Netherlands. “Holland is the name of the province of which Amsterdam is the capital. It united with other provinces as a country to fight Spain in 1579. With Amsterdam at its center, Holland was the most important region in the newly formed country and remained the informal name of the country.”

Enlightenment is always an end result of travel, and I was glad to have visited two of Europe’s great cities. More on Barcelona will come later.

—Steve Person