



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

SEPTEMBER
2009
VOLUME
14
ISSUE
9

First Friday News & Views

“CHRISTIANS” FORGET JESUS

by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, September 4, 2009 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

R.S.V.P. by Friday September 2 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

Self-styled disciples of Christ are giving Christianity a bad name. To a large extent they populate the ranks of those who cling to simplistic explanations of life’s complexities; the ranks of those who are easily made to feel afraid; the ranks of those who lack compassion for millions of their fellow citizens who don’t have access to basic health care; the ranks of those who seem to believe that peace can be achieved at the point of a bayonet; the ranks of those who think the earth is about 6000 years old; the ranks of those who think that God has a gender; the ranks of those who don’t differentiate between magic and miracles; the ranks of those who have their minds made up and refuse to be confused by the facts.

These false Christians believe in a God of both justice and mercy; justice for everyone else and mercy for themselves. They claim to believe that every word in the present-day Bible is inspired, literally true, and not subject to interpretation. They implicitly disdain the way that we are all conceived by blindly professing belief in the preposterous proposition that Jesus was virgin born, and so was his mother. They also forget Jesus . . . had biological siblings. And, in an ultimate irony, they populate the growing ranks of those who believe that worldly wealth is a reward for their “Christian” piety.

These so-called “Christians” are prone to regular prayer in public and forget Jesus . . . said, “Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.” Matt. 6:6

These so-called “Christians” forget Jesus . . . eschewed worldly possessions. Matt. 6:19 These so-called “Christians” forget Jesus . . . never claimed to have been born of a virgin. They forget Jesus, however conceived, . . . was conceived out-of-wedlock. They forget Jesus, while claiming a parent-child relationship with the Creator, also . . . claimed that all people are his siblings. They forget Jesus . . . was a person of color.

These so-called “Christians” forget Jesus . . . rejected numerous teachings of the Old Testament, the Holy Scriptures of his day, in preference for a New Testament. They forget Jesus . . . was a Jew, not a Christian. They forget Jesus . . . repeatedly said that it was said of old (in the Old Testament), but then Jesus pronounced something different as his guiding principle. They forget Jesus . . . did not believe in immutable truth.

These so-called “Christians,” often as anyone to be divorced and guilty of extra-marital sex, claim marriage is sacred and would be defiled by like commitments of same-gender couples. They forget Jesus ... never mentioned, let alone condemned, homosexuality. They forget Jesus ... never married a woman. They forget Jesus ... cherished a special relationship with the disciple John whom he “loved,” presumably in some way distinguishable from the love he had for the other disciples.

These pretentious “Christians” forget Jesus . . . saying, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who *does* the will of “God in heaven.” Matt. 7:21

In short, talk is cheap. *Real* Christians are to be known -- to be distinguished -- by their deeds. *Real* Christians need not even profess Christianity. It’s getting more credible to *be* a Christian if you avoid professing it. To my way of thinking, too many professed “Christians” simply aren’t the real thing. From my vantage point, the *real* Christians who don’t profess it tend to be the Christians I like the best. They are too few, they are too far between, and they are too silent in the face of false prophets who have largely co-opted the label, “Christian.”

Judge Robert Hanson Addresses FFBC

Steve Person

The First Friday Breakfast Club’s monthly speakers have included—among others—governors, mayors, legislators, and an Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice, but perhaps the one who has had more impact on the lives of Iowa GLBT community spoke the morning of August 7 at Hoyt Sherman Place. Polk County District Judge Robert Hanson changed forever the state’s marriage law by declaring the law defining marriage as only between a man and a woman unconstitutional. His 2007 ruling was upheld

Courting is a precursor to marriage;

*“courthousing” is the way about half of
them end.*

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on April 3 of this year by the Iowa Supreme Court.

Judge Hanson quipped, “Some appreciate the job I’ve done—some don’t. Sometimes my decisions upset everybody equally.”

The judge concentrated his address on the selection process of Iowa’s district court judges. The process is a form of merit performance selection. A non-partisan nominating committee of ten individuals and one judge from a judicial district submits to the governor a slate of candidates whenever a vacancy occurs. The governor usually chooses from this list, the only requirement being that each candidate must be an Iowa attorney. The governor, however, is not bound exclusively by the list. He may choose another individual if he so desires.

Once an appointment is made, the judge may serve indefinitely, but a retention vote is held every six years to give voters the opportunity to keep judges or remove them. A judge must get more than fifty percent of the votes cast or otherwise is removed from the bench. Judge Hanson’s next retention vote is in November 2010, and he reminded club members that he would appreciate their support.

Judge Hanson acknowledged that judges often make unpopular decisions, but he offered that he enjoys what he does as a judge. He addressed the concept of so-called “activist judges” and stressed that those who disagree with decisions frequently cause misunderstanding of the judiciary. The judge decried the lack of understanding of so many Americans regarding the balance of power in their government. He said that judges do not seek the cases they preside over, but rather those cases are randomly assigned. The judge also commented on the lack of civil discourse that permeates our current culture and bemoaned the lack of courtesy between those who hold opposing views.

In keeping with his 2007 decision—and demonstrating what a class act he is--Judge Hanson performed a wedding ceremony for FFBC members Tony Braidia and Mark Babcock after the meeting’s conclusion.

A lynch mob is democracy in its purest and most virulent form.



500 Days of Summer

Review by
Gary Kaufman

(500) Days of Summer is one of the more creative romantic comedies I have seen in a long time. The “Summer” of the title is a girl named Summer, not the season. The 500 days of Summer are the 500 days that the title character, Tom, has known Summer. Tom is played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, whom you perhaps know for his stint of playing the role of the teenage alien on **Third Rock from the Sun**. Summer is played by Zooey Deschanel, whom I loved in **The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy**. Here she still exudes the sexy innocence she had there, as acknowledged by the narrator when he explains that, “Summer was the type of girl whose apartments would be let to her at an average of 9.5% off the market rental price, and who would experience 23 glances from gentlemen as she walked to the back of the bus.” Tom is smitten, but cautious. Tom is someone who has believed since early childhood, due in part to an eating deficiency and also due to a total misreading of the meaning of the movie, **The Graduate**, that there was one person out there as that person’s perfect match. As long as you keep looking, fate will throw you together. Unfortunately, Summer not only doesn’t believe that but has instead just moved to Los Angeles because of boredom and feels that she is young and wants to have fun while she can. Besides, she tells Tom, “There is no such thing as love. It is a fantasy.” “You know it when you feel it,” Tom’s replies. He does not want to admit that he loves Summer, for that would end the relationship.

There is this conflict between the central characters, plus the movie ingeniously tells the story by flipping back and forth through the 500 days of Summer. It starts out on day 488 where Summer is placing her hand with a diamond ring on it onto Tom’s hand on a bench while they are seated in a park. The scene shifts to Day 1 when Summer is introduced to the staff at Tom’s workplace--a greeting card company-- during a meeting. The viewer might go from Tom wondering how he can possibly get Summer’s attention, to Day 290 when he is devastated when Summer tells him that she just doesn’t

know where this relationship is going and doesn’t want to see him anymore. Then perhaps back to a day where he is totally in love with Summer. The pacing is both touching and hilarious in its contrasts. Plus, sometimes you misinterpret what you have just seen, which adds to the fun. Tom’s two compatriots Vance and McKenzie, played by Matthew Gray Gubler and Clark Gregg, try their best to advise Tom on his ongoing relationship problems. As Tom says, “Vance, you have been in a relationship with the same girl since the 1997, and McKenzie you haven’t had a dating relationship with a girl since the seventh grade which even then lasted all of two hours, so what do you two know about a modern dating relationship?” The best advice he gets is from his seven-year-old sister, Rachel (Chloe Grace Moretz), who seems to be way more mature than any of the male characters in the movie.

The film has been compared with **Annie Hall** as being a contemporary movie of its time about modern dating relationships. I am not sure I would quite rank it that high, but it is a very funny and creative movie that I highly recommend. One of the most ingenious segments is a split screen comparison of Tom’s expectations of an evening and Tom’s reality during an evening that goes very much awry. It is a hoot!

If Summer doesn’t work out for Tom, we can optimistically point out that there is always Autumn.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the September 4 meeting no later than September 2. Contact JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call 288-2500. Our speaker will be Iowa Supreme Court Justice Mark Cady who wrote the unanimous court opinion declaring the stat’s marriage law unconstitutional.



Thanks to Byron Huff for his introduction of our August speaker, Polk County District Judge Robert Hanson.



Consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Fund .



Smart people learn from their mistakes; wise people learn from the mistakes of others; wise-asses ridicule both.

We Need Sustainable Energy Policy Today

Tony E. Hansen

The debates surrounding the energy initiatives are founded in fundamental resistance to change. People know the current system is weighted toward the energy companies (especially oil), but people tolerate the status quo. Meanwhile, we have supported dictatorships, seen rising costs, dwindling supply, aging technology. The problem with doing nothing substantially different than we are doing today is highly risky considering that inevitable depletion will dramatically reverse any sense of affluence.

The energy industry is multifaceted and has made money on the current policies and monopoly structure, and that industry will resist changing the current profit formula. If we continue to agree with the profit motivated arguments of the status quo, we will continue to have aging infrastructure, reduction of available resources, a missed opportunity, and severely reduced ability to pay for future changes.

We have had chances to make meaningful change and legislation in the past only to forego them in a belief that the private sector will find the cure to what ails the system. Today, we are importing over 70% of the oil we use. This contributes to our huge trade and federal budget deficits (due to the subsidies and government support for the consumption and market structure). Thus, the premise that the private sector will find a way is misguided at best. We need a new direction instead of ignoring the real issues or the hard sacrifices required. Yet, there is a chance for us to profit in ways that are mutually beneficial to the companies and the population.

“Kicking the can down the road” is no longer

an option, and the people that can make the change are you and me. We cannot expect future generations to pick up the can (do the work) if we have only provided examples of how to “kick the can more” (avoid the real issue). We know what needs to be done, and we know the transition may not be easy. Yet, we can not continue to push the issues to future generations or we will lose a great opportunity to invest in a bountiful future.

When we push the burden towards future generations, we miss the opportunity to be inventive and innovative in this generation. At the same time, we hand our global competitors the crown of technological prowess. Today, we can calculate what the costs are and provide a plan for them. Today, we can creatively build technologies and processes that the rest of the world will need.

In the future, if we do not change our habits, those cost structures will not be flexible, and the technology may no longer be ours to design. Further, procrastination and scarcity will force unpopular decisions against our economic security and our present affluence (since foreign powers are competing for the same dwindling supply). We will be forced into abrupt changes and drastic costs (more than the oil crises of 1970s or prices in 2008) regardless of our means to address them at the time.

The energy issues are not new today, but we are running out of time to get sustainable energy and to reduce dependence upon foreign resources. Absent alternatives when the oil supply depletes, today’s mobile economies will slow to a virtual crawl with slower transportation (along with a severe depression). We must persuade legislators to seek a sustainable energy policy rather than exploiting dwindling, limited supplies.

We cannot continue to ignore the facts unless we plan to fail, and we simply cannot afford to miss this opportunity to do something great for our future. We must persuade our legislators to pass real sustainable energy policy that encourages innovation, encourages conservation, and secures our economic future as well as lifestyles. Individually, we can review our own habits and see what we can do to consume less and be more productive with what we have. The status quo, however, is a path to great failure. We can plan now to build technology and techniques that propel economic growth and sustainable energy.

*The moving finger writes and having writ moves on,
and all thy piety and wit cannot call it back to erase
one line nor all thy tears wash away a word
of it.*

Health Care in America

Jonathan Wilson

Almost everyone seems to agree that the US health care system is broken; broken in the sense that we spend demonstrably more on health care per capita and get less than other nations. The US health care system is currently ranked 37th in the world by the World Health Organization. That puts the citizens of *thirty-six* other countries ahead of us. I'd venture that there are lots of reform opponents who can't confidently *name* thirty-six countries. The list includes France, Italy, Germany, Spain, England, Japan, and Canada. But it also includes Colombia, Chile, and Costa Rica. We barely beat out Cuba; it's 39th. But for jingoism -- the belligerent belief that our country is better than any other no matter what the facts -- the opponents wouldn't have a leg to stand on.

Much of the debate most recently has been centered on whether there should be a so-called "public option." Opponents, playing to suspicions and fear of government -- anything "government" -- refer to it as the government-run option. The facts tell another story. The government, with relative success, runs lots of things, things like the military, for example. But also health care, like that provided to those in the military, those who have served in the military through the Veterans Administration, as well as those over the age of 65 who use Medicare. Those without private or government insurance still get undeniable emergency health care -- the most expensive kind -- and everyone else has to pay for it.

I have private insurance and will soon be eligible for Medicare. From my perspective, a bureaucrat is a bureaucrat whether the boss is government or a private company. It's frustrating to deal with them, but -- and here's the kicker -- the private company bureaucrat has a *duty* to maximize bottom-line *profit*. And one place to do that lies in the denial of

The problem with coming out of the closet is that it puts the bigots who know you into the closet. You can't identify them just by looking. It becomes necessary to take fewer acquaintances at face value. You can't assume they're okay with your gender orientation just because they're cordial to your face.

claims. The more claims denied, the greater the profit. In my experience, having private insurance (of any kind) is little more than purchasing the right to sue the insurance company for coverage in the event of a loss.

My first child was born in Australia. My wife at the time was pregnant when we arrived there. I'd spent \$9.27 in the US on a prescription before we left the country. From the moment our plane landed in Australia, *all* medical costs were covered, with no co-pay or deductible. We received terrific care. Australian citizens as a matter of right get free health care coverage, cradle to grave. Australia ranks second only to Japan in the category of healthy life expectancy (the US is 24th). Nationally, through taxation, the Australian government spends far less per capita on health care than the US. In the category of health care *spending* the US out paces all but one country in the entire world. At least we're good at something.

From the Editor (cont from p6)

In 1959, Khrushchev made a visit to the United States. I was ten years old at the time, and I remember seeing him in his limousine as it went down the street on its way to downtown Des Moines. He had been to the farm of his American capitalist friend "Roswell Garst" where he observed American agriculture at work. What I remember most about the time he was in Iowa was a protest sign someone outside his hotel was holding. It read, "We butcher hogs, not people." I believe that's what most Americans thought about the Soviet dictator, and that was somewhat true.

The amazing aspect of the book was when the Cuban Missile Crisis broke out in the autumn of 1962, none of the missiles in Cuba were even close to being ready to be fired. But no one knew that at the time, and the collective sigh of relief that all Americans breathed after the crisis was over was just as genuine as if those missiles had been ready for use. Hindsight is indeed 20/20.

- Steve Person

"No senior citizen should have to choose between prescription drugs and medicine."
GWB

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views
Des Moines, Iowa*

SEPTEMBER 2009

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From the Editor

Khrushchev: The Man and His Era by William Taubman

In the last week of October 1962, I was fourteen years old and in the ninth grade at Callanan Junior High School in Des Moines. It was the scariest time of my life (and that of many others, I'd bet). The Cuban Missile Crisis had come to a head, and I and my friends were convinced that we would not live to see the next week. We all believed that nuclear holocaust was about to happen, and we all knew there was nothing that could be done to avoid it. I doubt today's generation of young people has any idea of the terror that was instilled in an entire generation during that one week.

Amherst College Professor William Taubman has written a compelling biography of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, tracing the rise of the boy born in the southern Russian village of Kalinovka in 1894 to his ascendancy as one of the world's most powerful men by the mid 1950s and into the 1960s.

Taubman relates the extreme poverty of tsarist Russia and the impact it had on young people like Nikita. As a young man, Khrushchev worked in mines and hoped to become a manager or an engineer. One wonders what the world would have been like if he had, indeed, achieved this goal. Alas, Khrushchev never received the higher education he craved and relied on his gregarious personality and story telling to help him ascend to the great political heights he attained.

Although his formal education was negligible, Khrushchev's hard work before, during, and after the Russian Revolution of 1917 helped keep him in the upper echelons of the Soviet hierarchy. For years he was Stalin's viceroy in Ukraine, the second most influential territory in the Soviet Union after Russia itself. Khrushchev ruled Ukraine, for the most part, very well, and was finally summoned to Moscow to work with Stalin himself. During World War II, Khrushchev was again sent to Ukraine to help that area during the worst of the Nazi invasion.

Taubman's book reveals the treachery that Stalin used to employ and then do away with those who worked closest to him. The great dictator's whims were the force of law, and to question his judgment was to seal one's fate. Although Khrushchev made many errors while working with Stalin, Stalin realized those mistakes were just that—mistakes—and not an attempt to make him look bad. He kept Khrushchev on the payroll, so to speak. While other, probably more able and deserving individuals, should have become Stalin's heir after his 1953 death, it was Khrushchev who prevailed.

(See EDITOR, page 5)