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A METAPHOR AND A LESSON

by Jonathan Wilson

I'm not crazy about Ohio Republican Representative LaTourette who recently announced his surprise resignation from Congress. He resigned because of extreme elements in his party that have been making it impossible to reach consensus and govern because of ideology. He's not the only one; he's just the most recent.

I'm not crazy about the guy despite his moderate -- some might say enlightened -- views on a variety of issues. I disagree with him on lots of what I consider his less enlightened "Republican views." Plus -- and this is the important part for me -- moderate or not, his presence as a nominal Republican has contributed to a Republican majority in the House of Representatives, the leadership of which is the proverbial dog being wagged by its errant tail.

His resignation is a metaphor for what has been happening in the Republican Party for the past couple of decades. In that time, thanks to the likes of Ralph Reed, who invited evangelical so-called "Christians" into active involvement in politics, moderate elements have abandoned the Party in droves until the Party became synonymous with the evangelical subset of those who count themselves Christians. For that bunch, almost no one can be "pure" enough, so the evolution has been toward, not away from, the cult of evangelical "Christian" ideology. An ideology that I dare say Christ himself would not recognize on a good day. I call them CINOs (Christians In Name Only).

First left the moderate Right; followed by even the immoderate Right, and that disquieting evolution is continuing toward intolerant theocracy. Toward something one might actually expect to see in countries with a theocratic tradition, rather than a secular tradition such as ours.

Riding a tiger is no doubt fast and definitely exciting; the problem comes with the dismount. The rest of us have been watching from the sidelines, thoroughly entertained by the spectacle, and far too content watching the Republican Party eat its own and "cleanse" the ranks.

Some might mistake LaTourette's resignation as a principled act of integrity. Not so. It was an act of cowardice, pure and simple. I'm reminded that "quitters never win, and winners never quit." LaTourette is a loser. So are those who went before him. His resignation was a cop-out, a metaphor for surrender. A metaphor for throwing in the towel.

Make no mistake, the theocratic cancer will ultimately spread and will not be confined to the Republican Party that so richly deserves it. The country at large will inherit the same fate as moderate Republicans have endured. "Moderate Republicans," whatever they may believe on important issues of our time, is a label that more accurately describes their level of commitment to the fight. Their fatal moderation has found expression in the weakness of their commitment, the lukewarm strength of their convictions, and the short duration of their willingness to fight -- their unwillingness to keep on fighting.

The Bible lists nine Fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That list misses one and, in politics, perhaps the most important one of all. The tenth Fruit of the Spirit is *tenacity*, the affirmative, undaunted dedication to keep on keeping on. It's that spirit that gives birth to Olympic gold medalists. It's that spirit that pits flowing water against a rock and eventually dissolves the rock. It's that spirit that has been lacking among *moderate* Republicans for the past twenty years.

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, September 7, 2012, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by September 5 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

Metaphor and a Lesson (cont.)

Metaphors, like Biblical parables, should teach a lesson. The lesson here is that forewarned is forearmed. The lesson here is that more ignorant people are being born every day and, when they become prideful in their ignorance -- the very meaning of bigotry, they become dangerous to everyone around them. The lesson here is that enlightened education attacks bigotry at its core, and enlightened folks need to fire up; organize; and put more, and more dedicated, troops in the political field.

Smart people learn from their own mistakes; wise people learn from the mistakes of others. We need to act and act wisely. We need to learn from the mistake of Congressman LaTourrette and others who abandoned the fight. This fight is different from some in one respect; it must be fought again and again by every generation. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, "The price of liberty is *eternal* vigilance." Congressman LaTourrette, and others like him, have settled for vigilance of the temporary variety.

A Most Dangerous Woman Indeed

By Bruce Carr



The FFBC guest speaker on Friday morning, August 3, was Donna Red Wing, the new Executive Director of One Iowa. It was Red Wing's second appearance before the group; she was one of our first speakers, in April 1999, when she was policy director at the Gill Foundation's Outgiving Project.

"We are right in the middle of the civil rights movement of this generation," Red Wing said. "Every week there are successes and victories in cities and states across this country. Given so much movement on this issue from coast to coast in just this year, it is undeniable

that we are witness to a movement unfolding. It is inspiring and terrifying at the same time.

"I think of this as my partner, Sumitra, and I moved to Iowa just two months ago. After more than 25 years together, we needed to be where our relationship is honored and respected, where we can enjoy the same rights and responsibilities of any other family [and where the two will marry -- in the eyes of

the law! -- next year]. And we needed to be where the heart of this movement beats: in Iowa.

"I've taken on the role of Executive Director at One Iowa and am working with an extraordinary team toward full equality for all LGBT persons. I'm leading an organization that has worked tirelessly over the past seven years to make Iowa a more inclusive and more accepting place to live, while it has passionately defended the gains that the LGBT community has made. Because of the work of this organization, Iowa was the third state in the nation to extend the freedom to marry to same-sex couples. And in spite of ongoing attacks by in-state and well-funded out-of-state opposition groups, One Iowa and allies continue to protect and defend Iowa families.

"So it's fitting that we packed up our home and our life in Colorado in the month of June -- the wedding month -- to head east to Iowa to defend marriage equality."

Red Wing's brief account of her life showed her to be an extremely savvy and effective activist who easily confronts power with truth. Named the *Advocate* "Woman of the Year" as early as 1992, she was the first recipient of the Walter Cronkite Award for Faith and Freedom. Now a blogger for *Huffington Post*, she was one of three members of the 2008 Obama campaign's kitchen cabinet on LGBT concerns. But her proudest accolade came during her work on the Howard Dean campaign when the Christian Coalition called her "the most dangerous woman in America."

Donna Red Wing has decades of experience in working for full equality for LGBT people across the country, serving most recently as Executive Director of Grassroots Leadership. In her years as a visionary leader, she was Executive Director of Interfaith Alliance, Policy Director of The Gill Foundation, National Field Director for the Human Rights Campaign, the National Field Director for The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), and Executive Director of The Lesbian Community Project. She can be reached at donna@oneiowa.org, 515-288-4019.



Whoever is not beautiful at 20, strong at 30, rich at 40, nor wise at 50, is unlikely ever to be beautiful, strong, rich, or wise.

In a pinch, everything moveable becomes a hammer.

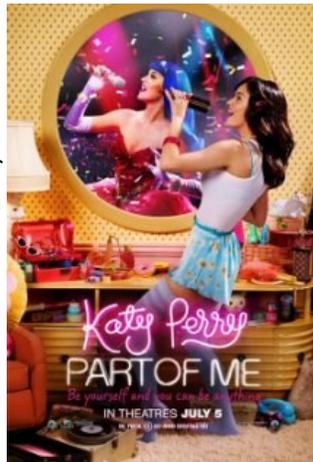


It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end. Ernest Hemingway.

Katy Perry: Part of Me

Review By Gary Kaufman

I consider Lady Gaga and Katy Perry two of the most gifted current recording artists, both having very positive gay-themed songs. One of them, Katy Perry, has done a 3-D documentary of her year-long California Dream Tour, and it is a stunner. Although it follows the tour from the beginning to almost its conclusion, the documentary also documents her life and her evolution in music. It includes some incredible footage of Katy at the age of 4 and at 18 when she documented what she wanted to be in her life.



Katy started in a very Christian household with her parents being traveling Pentecostal ministers. She lived in a very closed society where the only movie she was ever allowed to see was *Sister Act 2*; Lucky Charms were banned because luck was the sign of the Devil. Plus, she had no idea that others did not live that way. She started out singing and writing Christian songs, but this all changed when she heard for the first time Alanis Morissette. Katy formed various groups and signed recording contracts, but it was not until her files were literally stolen from Columbia and taken to RCA where she was allowed to follow her own vision that her music took off. RCA had narrowed it down to 3 songs that were possibly going to be her initial single release. The final decision was up to Katy, and she chose “I Kissed a Girl (I Liked It),” and it was a song that as soon as it was played in any market people just had to have. It was #1 for seven weeks in a row. Her career took off like a rocket.

This tour was called the California Dream Tour. Since Katy was 9 years old she had this dream of being in a shimmering dress singing her music before thousands of people who were singing along with her. So for Katy, this tour was her childhood dream come true. It was during this tour that she had the fifth #1 hit single from her latest album hit the charts. No other female artist had ever had five #1 singles off an album before, and it tied the all-time record with Michael Jackson. So Katy was hot!

What was not so hot with Katy was her newlywed relationship with comic Russell Brand (who did that dreadful remake of the Dudley Moore classic, *Arthur*). Katy set up the tour so that they would play for 2 weeks and then she would get 2 – 4 days off to spend time with Russell. But she was on a world tour, so sometimes this would involve traveling 4000 miles round trip. Russell would not come visit her; she had to go see him. This made Katy ungodly tired as time went on and, eventually, it was not enough, and Russell filed for divorce. In this, the movie shows what a trouper Katy is, for she was virtually having a mental breakdown and crying seconds before going on stage. But she got her dress twirling, and, at the last second, put on her best smile, and ascended to the stage before the

largest crowd of the tour in Brazil where the crowd shouted “Katy, We Love You!” in Portuguese.

Having seen what 3-D can do showing a live concert performance, I can’t imagine anyone else making a concert movie and NOT making it in 3-D. It was positively stunning. I felt like I was on stage. Katy’s opening dress had two pop-out twirling popsicles, one on each breast, and they definitely caught your attention and added to the fun of her dress and REALLY added to the 3-D effect. During one sequence, giant bubbles would seem to float out of the audience and onto the stage with Katy. In another, laser beams would streak out into the audience and, for her “California Gurls” number, she squirts foam right into the camera; beach balls are bouncing seemingly in the audience; and she kicks one of them back. The 3-D concert work was done by a group called Splinter Films -- great work. Best 3-D I have seen!

I was impressed by this documentary on how positive Katy’s gay themed songs have benefited young people. In many clips and tweets they show how they feel and that it is OK to be different – and to let your difference shine. As one of them said, “You are you, you have to be yourself. You can’t be anyone else. They are all taken.”

[HINT ON SEEING 3-D MOVIES: Sit in seats near the rear of the theater – they have the best 3D effect.]

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the September 7 meeting no later than September 5. Email JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Iowa Supreme Court Justice Michael Streit, one of three justices removed from office in the November 2010 election.

Zach Wahls will be appearing at the First Unitarian Church on Bell Avenue in Des Moines, at 7:00 p.m. on August 27. The event is free and open to the public .

Out Networking meets the second Wednesday of every month at 5:30 p.m. at the Kirkwood Lounge (the new home of The Des Moines Social Club), 400 Walnut Street. It is the social, business, and philanthropic networking organization for anyone who is gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, or supportive.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to **Barry McGriff** for coordinating the book exchange.

Snow White and the Huntsman

Review by Gary Kaufman

Snow White and the Huntsman is an adult version of the Brothers Grimm fairy tale of Snow White. Charlize Theron, as the Evil Queen, does an outstanding performance, as the movie creates a story that is true to the original elements of the fairy tale, yet with a lot more emphasis on the Grimm! This is NOT your Walt Disney children's version; in this version Snow White is not a defenseless beauty, but a princess that will fight her way out of prison if necessary. The



Evil Queen is in a predicament; she was given the power of her beauty as a spell when her family was under assault. And with the death of Snow White's mother, Snow White's father, the King, became lonely and was beguiled by the beauty of the Evil Queen. Soon after marrying her the King was murdered so that the Evil Queen and her brother could rule the Kingdom. The Evil Queen locked Snow White in a tower. As Snow White reached puberty, the Evil Queen began losing her power and would regain her beauty by periodically picking a young lady from the Kingdom and virtually sucking all the life out of her (similar to the sucking out of the life force by the lady vampire in the movie **Lifeforce**). Ultimately, when the mirror tells the Evil Queen that she could rule forever if she ate the heart of Snow White. Upon learning of the Queen's desire, Snow White was not all that hot for giving up her heart! She escapes into the Dark Forest, where the Queen has no power, so the Queen sends in a rather hunky Huntsman (Chris Hemsworth) to find Snow White. The Huntsman travels with the Queen's brother who is to bring back the heart. However, the Huntsman learns of Snow White's plight and discovers that the Queen has no intention of granting him his wish and that he, too, is to be killed. At this point Snow White and the Huntsman join forces, and the battle between good and evil is on!

The art direction and special effects are spectacular in this movie! In the Kingdom where the Queen rules, the land is grey and full of ash. The Dark Forest is about as creepy of a place you would never want to visit, and the land beyond is full of green and life of great imaginations. At times the movie is exhilarating; at other times spiritual. Although there are the fierce hand-to-hand battle scenes, they seem to make sense. You get a sense of the strategy it takes to storm a formidable castle, rather than just random fighting which is what one gets in most of this type of movie.

Snow White and the Huntsman has set the standard high for those who want to take a fairy tale and convert it into an

adult adventure. I expect Charleze Theron to be nominated for an Academy Award for her portrayal of the Evil Queen, and the film could rate even more than that. If you are ready for an adult fairy tale, this is it. Director Rupert Sanders did a magnificent job!

A Senator Speaks of Expanding Medicaid

By Senator Matt McCoy

Iowa has done better than most states when it comes to health care reform. But doing better than other states is just not good enough when you remember that no other country has (or would want) the uniquely American combination of high health care costs, poor overall results, and millions of people without health insurance.



Serious health reform is finally coming to the United States, thanks to the courage of President Obama and Democrats in the United States Congress. While it isn't perfect, the federal Affordable Care Act is a big, big improvement.

Expanding Medicaid is a key part of improving health care for the working poor and lowering health care costs for everyone. We will stop waiting to tell people to go to emergency rooms when their health care problems are at the point where they can't stand it. Instead, Medicaid expansion will bring health insurance to tens of thousands of previously uninsured Iowans—many of whom work fulltime.

When that happens, all Iowans will be able to go to a doctor when they are sick. All Iowans will benefit from the expansion of preventive care. And Iowa hospitals will no longer charge *insured* patients more in order to pay for hundreds of millions of dollars in legally mandated charity care.

During the first three years, the federal government will pay the entire cost of Medicaid expansion. By the seventh year, Iowa's share will have risen to 5 percent. This is a great deal for Iowans and Iowa employers.

Governor Branstad says he will reject Medicaid expansion. I don't believe him. Doing that would be the worst sort of financial irresponsibility, and it would make the Governor's job more difficult than it already is.

The Tea Party Republicans who helped Republicans take over the Iowa House are, however, just the sort of people who would put oddball politics ahead of what's best for Iowa. The fate of the 26 to 24 Democratic majority in the State Senate will determine whether Iowa rejects billions of dollars in federal help to bring health insurance to every Iowan and thereby lower our overall health care costs.

Coming out and dropping out (of the politics that made our coming out easier) is not oxymoronic, it's just plain moronic.

Three Regional LGBT Choruses Sing at GALA 2012—Denver

By Rick Miller

The Quire from Iowa City, the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus, and the Omaha River City Mixed Chorus performed July 7 – 12 at GALA Festival 2012 – Denver, along with other international choruses from as far away as Australia and New Zealand. The festival is a creation of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, an international LGBT choral association, and occurs every four years in a different city. Over 6000 delegates sang with their respective city choirs and received a very warm welcome from the inhabitants of Denver – including a proclamation from the mayor.

The Quire, under the direction of guest conductor David Wilkinson, was accompanied by Sarah Zietlow. The Iowa City/Cedar Rapids chorus performed the following pieces: Dreidel, Blue Skies, Since First I Saw Your Face, Pearce Did Dance, Lob Des Frulings, Moon River, and I Found Love. This mixed chorus sang in a concert block with Sacramento, California; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Atlanta, Georgia; and Medford, Oregon, on Wednesday during the final concert blocks of the festival.

The Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus sang a varied concert as 32 members performed before a packed house of over 2000. Under the direction of Dr. Rebecca Gruber and accompanied by Ben Hagen, the chorus also premiered its small group called Men In HarMENy the night before in a cabaret setting. DMGMC was on the same choral block as the Turtle Creek Chamber Chorale and Seattle Men's Chorus. Their repertoire was: What a Merry Party, Toccata of Praise, Abendlied (in German), How Do I Love You?, I Can See It, The Storm Is Passing Over, How Could Anyone (with signing), and Tshotsholoza. The men went on to a private dinner at a local restaurant after their performance.

The River City Mixed Chorus from Omaha created a cho-

ral performance using the theme "Make Them Hear You" under the direction of their new conductor, Dr. A. Barron Breland, and accompanied by Salli Compton. They also used percussionist Vince Krysi. Their set consisted of Seize the Day, I Need to Wake Up, Make Them Hear You, Don't Rain on My Parade, One Voice, Tshotsholoza, You'll Never Walk Alone, and Finale B (No Day But Today). Omaha sang in a set with Miami, Calgary, Kentucky, and Cleveland. RCMC is celebrating their 28th season and this was their eighth appearance at GALA.

The showcase choruses were Gay Men's Chorus of Washington D.C. with a stunning staged musical called "Alexander's House." One of the lead soloists was a former DMGMC member. The theme was based on a gay man's estranged son coming to a beach house that he inherited from his father. He was greeted by his father's gay husband and his closest friends where they set the record "straight" about his father in a kind and understanding way. A new family is formed and there was not a dry eye in the auditorium. This was followed by Heartland Men's Chorus from Kansas City. They performed a set titled: "When I Knew" that included narration by Dan Savage. Using the scrim for a photo montage, the chorus and soloists staged a joyful and sad memoir of men struggling to come out.

It ended with pictures of nearly 15 young men who took their lives - staring at us - as the audience was once again reduced to tears over our collective loss. On Wednesday the Men Alive chorus from Laguna Hills, California, created a farce about the "Sound of Music" called "Van Trapped." This clever setting, with stage props and some "curtained children," was a very humorous anecdote that was the perfect topper to the five days of performances.

There are too many highlights to print, but everyone went away with confidence, spirit, and a new-found connection to the LGBT movement. It was the experience of a lifetime, and we will not soon forget its endearing moments and profound accomplishments. Our region was well-represented with moving music to make us proud of our respective communities and to let the coasts know there is a mid-America that is thriving in LGBT pride also.



Wasn't the Pope raised Catholic? You'd think he'd know better than to pick a fight with a nun, let alone a huge organized group of them.

How to Corrupt the Government Insurance Programs

By Tony E Hansen

www.tigersndragons.com

With the addition of Paul Ryan to the GOP Presidential ticket, we now have a clear choice between the visions of the two major political parties. We can see a clear divergence of political philosophies that could shape the future of our country just in the way that New Deal policies have shaped the past half century. While cost structures for Social Security (SSA), Medicare (HMS) could use some attention, we have to consider seriously the possible consequences to Mr. Ryan's proposal to overhaul those programs.

Mr. Ryan wants the private sector to take over Social Security and Medicare according to his proposals in Congress. His theory is that this will save the Federal government the costs of handling these programs and leave more money for the Medicare and Social Security beneficiaries (otherwise known as the American people).

We have to remember that SSA, HMS, and workforce benefits were set up to combat poverty, especially for the elderly. They were set up exclusively for the elderly and to keep private companies in business for the rest of the population. As well, people are not prohibited from using other retirement savings. SSA and HMS programs are designed to be stable and conservative investments to keep the funds at or above inflation with the idea that no one should be using the money on risky investment schemes that could ultimately rob Americans of their elderly livelihood. The people who manage SSA and HMS are not allowed to defraud the beneficiaries or use their money for risky schemes. Also, people are given a single entity from which to claim benefits, and there is little-to-no confusion as to the rules since they are equal for all plans and beneficiaries. This is meant to promote faith in the funds being there for the beneficiaries when they retire.

A side benefit (whether a good thing or not) of the SSA and HMS funds is that the federal government can borrow against those funds rather than from foreign entities. Consider how this is similar to where people today can borrow against their Roth savings plans or 401K where they are essentially loaning to themselves money they have in the bank. There are rules to this, but essentially, these same people *could* instead borrow from a loan shark and pay relatively high interest rates to someone that is not even a friend. By borrowing against your own savings, you are repaying yourself.

The intent here is not to debate whether My Ryan's characterization of the Social Security program as a Ponzi scheme is accurate. The program's intended design, however, is that millions of Americans pay into a retirement savings for themselves with an expectation that it remains as part of their retirement income. The GOP has been licking their lips at the prospect of getting capitalist hands into the money pot that is SSA and HMS. Just think of the tremendous amounts of capital that

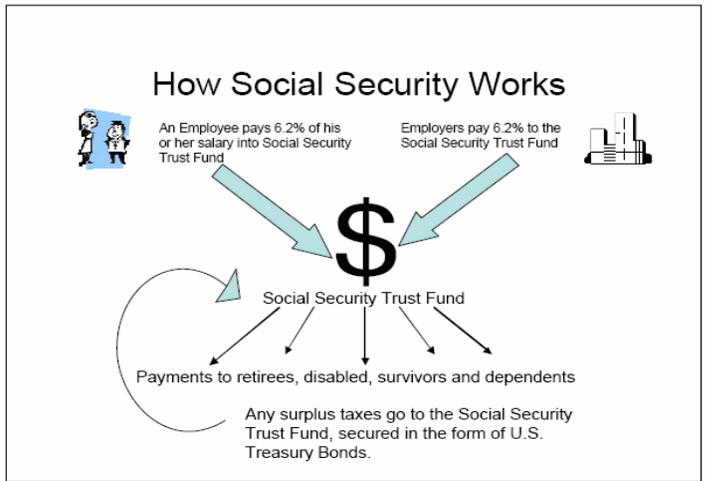


Image courtesy: <http://socialsecurity.procon.org/> and pbs.org

the United States could reap in revenue from aggressive (i.e., risky) forms of investment using the trillions of dollars from those accounts. If one can invest \$5000 and get a nice, modest 6.25% return, which is roughly an average of \$325 per year. If one can invest \$5 trillion and get that same return, which is roughly \$325 billion and, suddenly, California no longer has a deficit issue? Yet, that 6.25 % return is a great day if the investment is sound. We all, however, know what happens when people are given a bunch of money and told to create profit (e.g. Lehman Brothers, Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, Madoff). Odd, consider that people were giving money to a man named Madoff that actually "made off" with their money and left the beneficiaries with nothing.

That is precisely what we can envision with the Ryan-Romney plan for SSA and HMS. We all know "why" because greed caused the crashes in the Great Depression, 1980s and 2000s. Private investors would be granted access to this huge mountain of cash with the idea that these "qualified" people know how to invest. These people will then design complex instruments -- funds, ETFs, bonds, derivatives, transaction fees, balloon profits -- and this will be backed by the full faith of the federal government (see Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac). They will persuade beneficiaries that they can maximize their return using these complicated or expensive instruments and, supposedly, with the assurance of the federal government, the money will be safe. One firm will be able to handle the retirement account differently than another, and, thanks to the recent ruling by the Supreme Court with respect to the Affordable Health Care Act, people can be compelled to pay into the system or fear a tax penalty. That is until the next bailout is needed from the American people to re-fund the eventually destroyed SSA and HMS systems. Then, while the Americans are wondering what happened to their retirement savings, the fat cats that engineered the schemes will be able to continue living the high-life and toasting their success.

We have a clear choice between the Obama and Romney teams, and the future of SSA and HMS are at the heart of the difference. Further, the collapse of the entitlement programs will mean a collapse in the American markets and financial system that will paralyze the global economy where 2008 will seem like a mere burp. I may have painted a dire prediction of privatization of those funds, but given the recent balloon and bust of the mortgage crisis, can we seriously expect something different than this? Can we risk losing our retirements? That is a recipe to corrupt our government insurance programs.

From the Pastor's Pen

By Rev. Jonathan Page

The funny thing about Chick-Fil-A is that I have never been to one. I am from Massachusetts, foreign territory for the Atlanta chain. Oh well, no fried chicken for me. My gay waistline. Is. Devastated. But seriously, the whole Chick-Fil-A debacle has led me to thinking. Here is yet one more occasion when religion is the source of homophobia and discrimination. And some of my friends wonder why I care so much about religious issues!

As has been pointed out many times, gay marriage is an odd issue for conservative Christians to hang their hat on. The record in the Bible for the so-called "Christian family" is mixed at best. Yes, Adam and Eve were a couple...who were never married. Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, they had so many wives (and concubines) that even a notorious philanderer like Wilt Chamberlain would blush. Yes, there are passages in the New Testament that affirm the sanctity of heterosexual marriage, most notably Mark 10:1-12 and the parallel passages in Luke and Matthew. But, the three most important New Testament figures, Jesus, Paul, and John the Baptist, were all portrayed as celibate men. The New Testament even encourages believers to sacrifice their family bonds for their new Christian family in the church, and Jesus claims that there would be no marriage in the resurrection (Mark 12:25 and parallels Mt 22:30, Lk 20:34-35).

Beyond all of that, the religious element of the gay marriage debate confuses me. No one is asking the Roman Catholic Church or the Southern Baptist Convention to sanction gay marriage. Those churches, and any other, can do whatever they please with marriage. If I am already going to hell for being a non-celibate gay man, and since society has decriminalized homosexuality, what does it matter if the state recognizes a long-term committed relationship for what it is? Why get so hung up on this one civic concern? If conservative churches were really so concerned with societal morals, they would be pushing the modern equivalent of 16th century Geneva, which they do not.

Of course, the gay marriage debate has been going on for quite a while and, frankly, the Chick-Fil-A hullabaloo does not add one iota to the discussion. What it does do, however, is to hammer yet one more nail in the coffin of liberal Christianity. Study after study has shown a decline in religious observance among young people. Those who have never been in a church or participated in a religious community often have little expe-

rience with which to judge religion. This is especially true in the Northeast whence I come. Incidents like the Chick-Fil-A management opposing same-sex marriage on religious grounds perpetuate the image of Christianity as a right wing, intolerant religion. This saddens me.

Two years ago, I worked as a teacher at Groton School, a nominally Episcopal boarding school in Massachusetts. Groton is an amazing educational establishment, but it does not know what to do with its strong religious heritage. I repeatedly encouraged the headmaster to embrace more fully Groton's Christian identity so that it could teach a compassionate and well-thought out form of Christianity. The headmaster demurred and little was done. Meanwhile, the students who wanted to know more about Christianity turned to the Christian student group which was run by an evangelical outsider. Because Groton, and the Northeast establishment more broadly, is uneasy about "organized religion," they ignore it with the hopes that it will just go away. It does not. Instead, people are left with a spiritual vacuum in their own lives that is too often filled by ill-conceived right wing Christianity. The Chick-Fil-A debacle only reinforces the notion that religion itself is bad, and this makes the whole problem worse.

In the end, the Chick-Fil-A blowup hardened the lines over gay marriage and gay rights more broadly. Religion is at the core of the problem, and yet so little intelligent debate occurs. I do hope that we can find a better way forward, a way in which we can acknowledge the spiritual dimension of our existence and the benefits of communal religious observance while not succumbing to outdated and reactionary forms of religion.

FFBC member Jonathan Page is senior pastor of the Ames United Church of Christ, 217 6th Street, Ames, Iowa. Sunday service at 10:45. He can be reached at jon@Amesucc.org.



"It is a man's own mind, not his enemy or foe, that lures him to evil ways."~The Buddha

If a book about failures doesn't sell, is it a success?

Chick-fil-A is exactly like abortion: if you don't want one, don't go there. B. Carr

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views
Des Moines, Iowa*

SEPTEMBER 2012

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My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

Trust Animals
By Steve Person

I recently had a minor misfortune in my home. I live in a high rise building in downtown Des Moines. At about 4:30 on a recent Friday morning, my cat awakened me to let me know something was wrong. Her behavior was atypical for her personality. Normally, my cat is a fun-loving and extroverted animal. Like all cats, she sleeps a lot, especially during the day. However, when it comes time for me to retire for the evening, she is respectful of my need to sleep and does not make noise. Frequently, she crawls into bed with me and sleeps alongside.

On the morning in question, I was zonked out, and the cat climbed up on a tall chest of drawers near my bed and flung herself onto my body in an effort to awaken me. She succeeded. She had never done that kind of thing before. I grumbled at her that I wanted to sleep longer and rolled over to go back to sleep. In the mists of demi-consciousness, I heard a faint, recurring noise. I thought it was the small fan I had going in my bedroom, so I got up and turned it off and returned to bed. The noise continued.

I got out of bed to investigate. I opened the door to the closet that houses my auxiliary HVAC unit, and it was completely wet with water dripping from the ceiling. I looked out one of my bedroom windows and at first thought it was raining.—except only one of the three windows was wet. Shortly thereafter, my upstairs neighbor called wanting to know if I had water in my place. I told her I did. She said that unbeknownst to her and her husband, a water pipe broke in one of their bathrooms, and they had over two inches of water throughout their entire condo. Since water—like a scoundrel—seeks the lowest common denominator, many condos throughout the building were damaged. As of this writing, I do not know the physical and monetary extent of damage, but bad news always finds a home.

Many years ago, when I owned a house, we had dogs. One evening, when all were asleep, my dog barked loudly and with vengeance. That was not like her. (I have always been fortunate to have mild-mannered pets.) I finally got her quieted down and went back to sleep. The next morning, we found that a window in the kitchen was almost pried open, and that's what the dog was making such a fuss about.

Moral of the story is that animals do look out for us and usually know ahead of us that something untoward is happening. Emily Dickinson once said that animals know but don't tell. That may be true in many instances, but I am glad that my four-legged friends have had the insight to warn me when things go wrong. Lesson learned.

