



First Friday News & Views

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

Cross-examination of a Latter-Day Evangelical By Jonathan Wilson

You've been seen of late in the public square judgmentally thumping your Bible and claiming that it is the infallible, inspired Word of God, and that you believe every word of the book.

Some things you may believe as a matter of faith have no consequence in matters of public policy; in that category, you can believe whatever you like and separate yourself from other faith traditions that disagree. That's your business and theirs -- not mine. Governmental policy makers shouldn't care. Whether Jesus was physically resurrected or not, for example, doesn't matter a whit in the grand scheme of things in the public arena, even while it may be of utmost importance to you as a Christian believer.

Other things you believe as a matter of religious faith may have implications for public policy makers -- like gay marriage, for example -- and that is where your religion-based positions on a range of topics should be subject to scrutiny and criticism that they are spared within the confines of your church. It's not that you cannot espouse your beliefs on whatever subjects -- and vote them at the ballot box, it's just that you must, in the public square, be prepared to defend your positions in the face of analysis and criticism. If your belief system cannot withstand such scrutiny there should be no reason to follow the tenants of your faith tradition on any topic. If your faith traditions don't hold water, you might want to give them some additional work. It might actually generate a stronger belief system for you and have more relevance for non-believers. In short, I think you have some 'splainin' to do.

As a lawyer, I have a dozen straight-forward questions for you:

1. If the Bible is the inspired Word of God then, presumably, God inspired the original Biblical writers and, in turn, similarly inspired those who have translated the original texts. **If the original authors as well as all of the translators were inerrantly inspired by God in their work, why are the myriad translations of the Bible not identical, word for word?** You cannot have it both ways; God either inspired the English language Bible start to finish, in which case every translation should be identical, or God failed to so inspire -- and who's to say where things have been mis-translated (or mistakenly written in the first place)?

2. **And what's this God-being-male business all about?** As far as I'm aware, the only thing that separates the male from female gender is genitals. Is there any other way? If God has genitals that make God male, they must be gargantuan in size and he should have little use for them in Heaven, or your God is remarkably small after-all. Maybe, just maybe, God was referred to by early Christians as male because Jesus referred to God as "father" when giving prayer instructions. **Is it possible that Jesus was either a captive of his male-dominated time, or that he chose to use a metaphor that might communicate most effectively to an audience in a male-dominated culture? Is it possible, just possible, that God is without any gender, that God has no genitals, and we make God smaller when we blindly pretend otherwise?**

3. **If truth is immutable and unchanging, as you claim, then why the need for a "New Testament?"** Either truth *Continued on p. 2*

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▼ The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am, Friday, July 3, 2015, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA

▼ RSVP by July 1 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com, or phone 515-288-2500

is immutable and unchanging, or God changed “his” mind, or maybe our understanding of the “Truth” in the Bible must change with changing times and circumstances. **Is it possible that the admonition to be fruitful and multiply was apt for a nomadic tribe of the faithful that needed offspring in order to survive lots of infant mortality, but inapt in a world that is already over-populated and stretching the maximum capacity of available resources? When you express gratitude at Thanksgiving for the bounty we enjoy, do you ever wonder what those starving at home and abroad did to deserve such meager portions?**

4. How’d we get here without incest -- twice ordained by God, according to Biblical accounts of creation and repopulation the world after the great flood? Or was incest morally and genetically okay then but not now, and when did that immutable truth change?

5. The essence of rape is the lack of prior consent by the victim; in the case of minors, no consent is even possible based on centuries-old principles of morality, ethics, and law. Given those immutable moral principles, **how do you countenance -- even glorify -- the impregnation of the virgin Mary by God?** The Bible makes clear there was no prior consent. Was it okay because women of that time were essentially mere property and their prior consent was often considered superfluous -- and God apparently agreed? **Did that immutable truth also change and, if so, when and why?**

6. If pain in child birth is God’s continuing punishment of women for Eve’s Original Sin, what did females of other mammalian species do to deserve the same painful punishment? And why do “born again” Christian women still suffer pain in child birth? Perhaps being born again is not everything it’s been cracked up to be.

7. If your Bible-based account of creation is to be believed, why are there nipples on men and tits on a boar?

8. If your Bible-based account of creation is to be believed, and God is truly all powerful, why’d “he” need to rest on the seventh day?

9. If your Bible-based account of creation is to be believed and we are “it” as far as children of God goes, why are you not speaking out against tax dollars being spent in the search for extra-terrestrial life? According to you, that would be a place where we could reduce our deficit spending, right?

10. If the Rapture is imminent (as has been forecast for centuries, and you claim to believe today), then what’s the hang-up about the amount of the national debt? Why not content yourself to have those not called up in the Rapture deal with it -- why is it your problem?

11. If you think the Social Security

System is actuarially unsound, have you calculated the amount of treasure you need to lay up in Heaven to last you for an eternity? Is it even possible to do in the course of any human -- finite -- lifetime?

12. If Bishop Tutu doesn’t aspire to go to an anti-gay Heaven, as he says, where can I go to spend eternity with the likes of him rather than you?

Me thinks your attitude toward the Bible is a lot like the attitude of most folks toward the admonitions appearing on your computer screen to accompany a new app -- scroll to the end and click “Agree” without actually bothering to read it. Frankly, it produces a shallow form of “Christianity” that is readily manipulated and exploited by pandering politicians and charlatans of the pulpit. Come up with some reasonably satisfactory answers to those questions and I’ll bet I can find some more for you to tackle. Until you come up with answers at least to those twelve, don’t expect me or others to feel much respect for your faith traditions or your religion-based positions of public policy.

Briefs & Shorts

Be sure to RSVP for the July 3 meeting no later than July 1. Contact Jonathan at 288-2500 or email him at JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com. Our scheduled speaker will be the newly appointed Des Moines Police Chief, Dana Wingert.

Thanks to Robert Thelen for his introduction of our June speaker, Reverend Dr. Larry Sonner.

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. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details.

SAVE THE DATE: The annual FFBC - PROS picnic will be Saturday, July 25, 2015, 7-10 pm at the home of Michael Thompson and Allen Vanderlinden, 7500 Benton Drive, Urbandale. From the ice arena at 73rd and Hickman, go north about 1/4 mile to Benton Drive; west on Benton Drive to 7500; 2 story brick on south side of the street. Or go to www.mapquest.com for directions.



Martyrdom Befits This Pastor to Pastors

By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday morning, June 5, was the Rev. Dr. Larry Sonner, former Director of Pastoral Care and Counseling for the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church. Dr. Sonner, who lives in Urbandale and has worked in the United Methodist Church since he was ordained in 1962, gave us a powerful account of his over-40-year effort – mostly futile so far, he said -- to open his church to LGBTQ people. (Church doctrine, outlined in the governing *Book of Discipline*, forbids both the ordination of openly gay men and lesbians and the marriage of persons of the same sex. It asserts that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.)

Last October, Sonner took the bold step of officiating at the marriage of two lesbians – and then risked the punishment of his church by going public: he telephoned his bishop, the Rev. Julius Trimble (who has previously spoken to FFBC), and told him

what he'd done, hoping to force an official response and to open lines of communication about the church's unequal treatment of LGBTQ people. Eventually, through much dialogue, the Bishop and a council of other church elders worked with him to reach a "just resolution" in the case, a resolution involving no sanctions. "I'm very happy with the discussions we had and the result we came to," Sonner said. "And I am especially proud of our church for pledging to continue to talk about LGBTQ issues, including marriage and the ordination of clergy."

These issues, of course, are world-wide, for the United Methodist Church is international in its reach, and in Africa and in the southern US the Church still remains prejudiced against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered children of God. Dr. Sonner said that he thinks the struggle is long-lasting, and not likely to be resolved short of separation into somewhat autonomous regional churches. But in Iowa, at least, he is clearly in the majority: there are some 800+ United Methodist clergy in Iowa, he said, and of their e-mail responses to his action a total of 2 were negative and well over 500 positive.

The Rev. Dr. Larry Sonner graduated from Central Methodist College in Fayette, Missouri, in 1958, and from Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, in 1962, and worked in parish ministry in Missouri from 1962 to 1966. He then became Minister of Counseling at Christ Church Cranbrook in suburban Detroit, from 1966 to 1973. During that time he also did graduate work at the Institute for Advanced Pastoral Studies there, and earned his Doctorate of Ministry in Marriage and Family Therapy from the Aquinas Institute in St. Louis. From 1973 he served as Director of Pastoral Care and Counseling for the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church, providing pastoral counseling for clergy professionals and their families, until his retirement in 2000. Dr. Sonner is a licensed marriage and family therapist in the State of Iowa, a Fellow and Approved Supervisor in the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and a Fellow of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. He has been married to his wife Sue for 55 years, and they have three grown children. He can be reached at sonnerls@aol.com.

Ponder This

If all we ever do or expect others to do is follow the law, there remains no place for compassion.

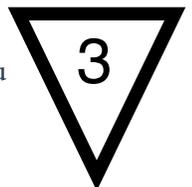
A testimony to our societal decadence is the fact that there's ice hockey in Phoenix, Arizona.

Glass takes one million years to decompose, which means, for all practical purposes, it never wears out and can be recycled an infinite number of times.

Where there's a will, I want to be in it.

You don't need a parachute to skydive; you only need it to skydive twice.

The last thing I want to do is hurt you; but you should know that it's still on the list.





GOVERNOR MUST SIGN SCHOOL FUNDING COMPROMISE

The Legislature closed out the 2015 session with Senate Democrats opting to end five months of gridlock on school funding. The goal of the compromise is to maintain educational opportunities and boost student achievement.

The final agreement provides an additional \$156 million for the 2015-16 school year. The compromise includes a 1.25 percent increase in basic aid for our local schools as well as an extra \$56 million in one-time funding for Iowa schools this fall.

The attention now turns to Governor Terry Branstad, who must sign this funding or veto the compromise. A veto would result in larger class sizes, fewer course offerings and extracurricular activities, and higher property taxes. I encourage you to contact the Governor, and ask him to sign into law the school funding approved by the Legislature in [Senate File 510](#) and [House File 666](#). You can e-mail him by going to www.governor.iowa.gov/constituent-services/register-an-opinion or call his office at 515-281-5211.

After several lean years, Iowa's improving economy makes it possible to do more for our students and schools. The state has nearly \$1 billion in savings, but as support for our public schools has become divided along party lines, Iowa's investment has dropped to \$1,600 less per student than the national average.

In addition to ensuring our K-12 schools can make ends meet this fall, we also voted this year for:

- Continuing a teacher leadership effort that is bringing the best techniques to more classrooms.
- Affordable tuition, job training and skilled workforce initiatives at our community colleges.
- An increase for our state universities that should allow them to continue their tuition freeze.
- Need-based financial aid to help Iowans attend our private colleges.

As we set our sights on funding for the 2016-17 school year, Senate Democrats will continue to work with parents, teachers, community leaders and students to make the case for investing more in educational opportunities that help Iowans of all ages build a successful future.

Additional information

This is a legislative update from Senator Matt McCoy, representing west part of Des Moines, portions of West Des Moines and Cumming in northwest Warren County. For newsletters, photos and further information, go to www.senate.iowa.gov/senator/mccoy.

To contact Senator McCoy during the week, call the Senate Switchboard at 515-281-3371. Otherwise he can be reached at home at 515-274-0561. E-mail him at matt.mccoy@legis.iowa.gov.

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Senator McCoy is an Assistant Senate Majority Leader, chair of the Commerce Committee and chair of the Transportation & Infrastructure Budget Subcommittee. He also serves on the Appropriations, State Government, Transportation and Ways & Means committees.

Another in the series of reflections by FFBC members.

Out and About
By Scott Kuknyo

Overall, the last 11 years of my life have been the absolute best thus far. It is no coincidence that this timeline directly correlates to coming out as the gay man I always was. Before I came out, I was consumed with guilt, shame, and holding myself to the expectations of others. I didn't know how to understand or cope with why I was different from other men around me. Sure, I had role models in my life but they could never truly relate to the pressures I was experiencing as a scared young gay man trying to figure out how to get over these feelings and ultimately, be myself. As I look back at my life, there is very little I would change. I got to where I am today based on those experiences, and I like where I am.

When I entered my teenage years, my family was living in southwest Florida. This area of Florida was more closely aligned with the beliefs of Mississippi or Alabama from a bigotry standpoint. For me, there were only two things I could identify as an upside to living in this part of Florida; my family and the beaches. As I struggled with many internal conflicts, there were signs of my sexuality that were more apparent to others than me. My younger brother asked me twice over a three year span if I were gay. I denied it and, as I look back at his question, I now understand that he wasn't making a negative accusation but, rather, he wanted me to know that he was good with who I was/am, no matter what.

In my attempt to come to terms with my sexuality and desire to come out, I came to the conclusion that I needed a fresh start. This new start included moving to Phoenix, Arizona. There, I initially lived with two very good friends that I had known since grade school. They were not aware of my sexuality but I felt most comfortable around them at that point in my life. Even with these two friends and a number of other close friendships I developed along the way, it took me another five years finally to come out. There were two triggers that ultimately provided me with the guts to come out: I was tired of living this lie I created for myself; and I was turning 30 years of age, and I refused to enter another decade of my life not being truly happy.

When communicating my coming out, I created a scenario in my mind where if my friends and family gave me a hard time about it, I would simply write them off forever and move on. I was too consumed with what anyone else's opinion was, and I didn't realize that fact until I was out to everyone important in my life. EVERY single person in my life fully embraced me and was proud that I had

enough confidence to tell them. I am closer to my family and friends than I have ever been.

Also of no coincidence was that the timing of my coming out also coincided with a relationship I was about to enter with a man. This man was nearly 35 years my senior, had been married for 30 years, and had two daughters my age. While I had some anxiety over how my family and friends would relate to this multigenerational relationship, I was certain Gene would be embraced with open arms because of the kind of person he was. My entire life was in transition at this time; I was coming out of the closet, entering my first relationship with a man and, the best part, for the first time I was able to experience true love, vulnerability, and honesty with someone else. If it weren't for Gene's encouragement, it is unlikely I would have come out to anyone other than my close family and friends.

After eight great years of relationship with Gene, it ended as a result of complications due to a lung transplant he received three years earlier. During my relationship with Gene, he introduced me to several of his friends that included a number of people in the Des Moines area. There was one particular friend that Gene thought I would like. If you knew Gene, you would know he didn't have such words for many people. When we came back to Iowa, I was introduced to this friend and his partner. Over the years, we stayed in contact when traveling back and forth from Arizona and Iowa. After my relationship with Gene came to an end, I made the decision to stay in contact with this friend from Des Moines; he was no longer in a relationship. Eventually, one thing led to another, and I found myself falling in love with this friend, Jonathan Wilson. What is this thing with older men? Nearly a year later, I found myself living in Des Moines and have been enjoying every moment since getting to know central Iowa and meeting new friends.

I have been fortunate throughout much of my lifetime to be surrounded by family and friends that are understanding and supportive. Having nearly as much importance is the environment I have enjoyed coming out (probably more recent than most members) that has provided me with the opportunity to become the self-actualized person I am today. That environment was less about my family and friends, and more about the blood, sweat and tears of those gay and gay friendly individuals who have gone before me. Sacrifices made by countless individuals in public and private settings have led to vast improvements for the gay cause. These are the people I admire because, without them, I would not be able to be the person I am today -- a proud gay man. I can only hope to continue in the footsteps of those who have traveled this road before me with the perseverance needed to build an even better community for future generations of gay men.

If there were no ambiguity in the law, there'd be no need for lawyers. If there were no ambiguity in the Bible, there'd be no need for theologians. If there were no ambiguity in life, there'd be no need for a brain.

Is there another word for synonym?

The first thing to do in seeking the Truth from the Bible is to test whatever you read against your own experience.

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

July, 2015

*First Friday
Breakfast Club*

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MADE ON A  MAC

MY M.O. (MONTHLY OBSERVATIONS)

A Book Review by Steve Person
SOME BRICKBATS, KUDOS, AND OBSERVATIONS

At long last, the 2015 session of the eighty-sixth Iowa General Assembly came to an agonizing close on June 5, more than a month after its supposed May 1 wrap-up date. Much could be said about this dismal record of secret meetings and less than stellar legislative accomplishments, but it is some of the detritus that comes with the legislative session that raises concern. Namely, LOBBYISTS--or at least some certain lobbyists. Perhaps it is my advancing old age that pokes its subjective judgment into the arena here, but why is it that certain people feel it is perfectly OK to make a mess of a public space and then expect others to clean up after them? From the tour desk where I work at the Capitol, there is a certain group of lobbyists—mainly well-dressed and obviously well-educated men—who sit in the ground floor cafeteria area and litter the tables and floor with their newspapers, plastic bottles, coffee cups, and plates of uneaten food, and then leave at day's end without bothering to pick up after themselves. Would they do the same at the firms that employ them? Did uncaring and unfeeling parents raise them? I doubt it. Trash and recycling bins are only a few feet away from where they daily commune, but they think it is beneath them to visit these receptacles. Go figure. Brickbats to them.

On a more positive note: every morning I do a two-mile walk, usually on the skywalk connected to the building where I live. I take a circuitous route through the system, varying my way from day to day as suits my whim. Almost always, I find myself at the end of the skywalk in the Hub Tower where I used to be able to go across Seventh Street but can no longer because of the Younkers fire last year. I now make a U-turn there and walk past Stan's Shoe Shine and Repair Shop tucked into an unimposing corner of the building. It gives me a boost every day to see this elderly, gentle, and friendly man hard at work, plying a trade which likely doesn't bring much money. Yet we always greet each other with a smile and a friendly hello even though neither of us knows who the other is, really. It is somehow reassuring to watch this man going about the only work he has likely ever known with such care and devotion. Maybe someday I will stop and have a conversation with him, but for now it is worth the few seconds it takes every day just to see a smiling face and exchange a wave and a greeting. Small gestures can mean a lot.

Finally, I went to the Gay Pride parade on Sunday, June 14. It speaks volumes about who we are, how others now perceive who we are, and how far we have come. Thousands of people lined the streets to watch the parade, the spectators just as diverse as the participants in the parade. Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie sat on the Wells Fargo stagecoach waving to the crowd and was obviously happy to be there. Various church groups and even the atheists and free-thinkers (with whom I feel genuine affinity) mingled together with no ill will toward one another. Democratic Presidential candidate Martin O'Malley had a contingent of backers in the parade, but I was disappointed that neither Hillary Clinton nor Bernie Sanders was represented. It goes without saying that no Republican group deigned to involve itself. I remember in the mid-1990s when there were more marchers in the Gay Pride parade than those watching it. Progress, indeed!