



# First Friday News & Views

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

September 2017

Volume 22

Issue 9

The next FFBC meeting is  
Friday, September 1,  
2017  
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:  
Hoyt Sherman Place,  
15<sup>th</sup> and Woodland,  
Des Moines, IA



R.S.V.P.

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by  
August 28



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## Never Lie to Your Lawyer

by Jonathan Wilson



President [sic] Donald and his lead lawyer have a problem -- maybe multiple problems. Donald's lawyer stated unequivocally that the President had no involvement in the preparation of Donald Jr.'s statement. Lawyers, at least careful, competent ones, do not make such unqualified statements of purported facts without making their own investigation of the facts or getting the purported facts directly from their clients. In this case, the purported facts recited by his lawyer *must* have come from President [sic] Donald himself. The lawyer would have had no way to investigate the facts independently.

We now know that the lawyer's public declaration was not true. That, in turn, means that President [sic] Donald must have lied to his own lawyer. His lawyer now knows his client lied to him. And that, in turn, does not bode well for the attorney-client relationship, or the prospect of effective representation. As a lawyer, I can tell you that (1) a client lying to you cannot be tolerated if the representation is to continue; (2) once a client is caught in a lie, that client cannot be trusted going forward, and (3) when a lawyer cannot trust what the client tells the lawyer, it becomes almost impossible -- no, it IS impossible -- for the lawyer to represent the client effectively.

I'm growing weary with the media generously giving a "pass" on this, even though I'm sure President [sic] Donald and his supporters don't perceive it that way. Here's why: the media keeps saying that Donald Jr.'s statement, that President [sic] Donald himself dictated, was "misleading." It was that for sure, but it was also more. It was a lie, and it should be so characterized by the media. Not calling it exactly what it was enables the perpetrators. It softens their misconduct (\*\*Trumpists -- that word means *being naughty*).

It was misleading when it asserted that the meeting was for the innocent purpose of discussing with Russian operatives the subject of Americans adopting Russian orphans -- how could anyone be faulted for wanting to talk about the adoption of orphans?! The reason is that the issue of Americans adopting Russian orphans arose solely because of U.S. sanctions that had been imposed on (and angered) President Putin. The Russian operatives who came to the meeting were not coming there because of any desire to get orphans adopted into good American homes; they came there wanting to get something in return, namely, assurances that sanctions would be eased or lifted by a Trump Administration-- pure and simple. Claiming that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss adoptions was disingenuous (\*\*Trumpists -- that big word means *misleading* at least). [continued on page two]

There's really no denying that the Donald-dictated statement was purposefully misleading. It was an attempt to further dupe the American people, as well as investigators.

The Donald-dictated statement was also a lie. The statement asserted that the meeting, purportedly about adoptions, had nothing at all to do with the presidential campaign. That has been indisputably shown to be not just untrue -- people can say untrue things that are merely mistaken -- when someone says something that is untrue, knowing its falsehood, that is both untrue *and* a lie. The meeting was arranged through Donald Jr. so that Donald Jr. thought he could garner from the Russian government some negative information about Hillary Clinton *that would be useful in the presidential campaign*.

All this obfuscation (\*\*\*Trumpists -- that means *deception that's intended to avoid responsibility*) may fool some of the people, some of the time. It will not fool professional investigators like Mueller. He and his ilk have seen this kind of thing many times before. Mueller is investigating the potential collaboration between the Trump campaign and the Russian government, and there are already several smoking guns to suggest such collaboration. Mueller is also looking at obstruction of justice.

Here are three things about obstruction of justice: first, it's a crime; second, everyone who was in on it is guilty of a crime and can be charged and prosecuted; third, the statute of limitations for prosecuting obstruction of justice is generally five years, which runs beyond the current term of President [sic] Donald. He needs a good lawyer who can represent him effectively; that can't happen if he continues lying to his lawyer.

***If someone says, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," they have clearly not met a homosexual slightly inconvenienced.***

*Gay & Fabulous*

## Briefs & Shorts:



Be sure to RSVP by August 28 for the September 1, 2017, meeting by calling 515-288-2500, or by emailing Jonathan online at: [JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com) Our speaker in September will be Michelle Book, CEO of Food Pantry of Iowa. You won't want to miss and you're welcome to bring one of more cans of food to donate to the Food Pantry. You are encouraged to invite some of your friends to attend!

Thanks to Friedhelm Brinkhaus for introducing our August speaker, Ryan Berg, author of **No House to Call My Home**, that explores the problem of homeless LGBTQ youth and what can be done.

**Save the date.** The next PROS party will be Saturday, September 9, 2017, 7-10 p.m. at the home of John Schmacker, 3724 Hunter Avenue, Des Moines.



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 coordinating the exchange.

**Consider a tax deductible contribution** to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. We're all going to die, and we can't take it with us. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details.



# Faith Not an Excuse for Anti-transgender Legislation

by Reverend Jonathan Page

Faith is used often as an excuse for bigotry. Religion can be wielded like a weapon, to put down the humanity of others, and to justify an agenda that coincides with one's personal feelings on a group of people. One needs only to look at the current debate over transgender Texans' right to use the restroom that matches their identity, or rather, the debate over whether transgender Texans deserve to be a part of public life.

I am a pastor of a church and the leader of an interfaith organization, and for me, my faith calls me to affirm and embrace my transgender neighbors, not to single them out for discrimination, often under the guise of religion.

In my work, I have had some of my most personally and professionally fulfilling conversations with people who are vastly different from me because they have challenged me to think about the diversity of all of our lived experiences. When I think about the shameful amounts of discrimination that face transgender Texans, it creates a powerful response from the core of my being: a response that is rooted in the fact that we are all God's children, and that we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. You see, my faith tells me that it is an unequivocal teaching of Jesus that we must stand with those who are marginalized. In Matthew 25, Jesus clearly says to his followers: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." This is not to say that LGBTQ people are any less than anyone, but that they are part of a marginalized community, one that we, as Christians, must care for as we care for ourselves. The model of Jesus could not be clearer: he cared most deeply for (and spent the most time with) the supposed "outcasts" of society because he understood that it is difficult to live a life under a dark cloud of others' judgment and scorn. Those who use Bible verses and the pulpit to preach otherwise are working to further an untruth, a fictional narrative that only serves to harm those most in need of our care and understanding.



**Page is senior minister, First Congregational Church of Houston, and president, Faith Leaders Coalition of Greater Houston. He was also a long-time member of FFBC and a regular contributor to the FFBC Newsletter.**

Bills such as Texas Senate Bill SB3 are un-Christian and unconscionable. This bill, introduced by Texas State Senator Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), with the backing of Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, would require discrimination against transgender people and rip away non-discrimination protections from millions of Texans. And, they are a solution in search of a problem. Let's be clear: There is only one possible angle for this, and that is to justify a policy that endorses hatred for trans people.

My first experience with a transgender person was in graduate school. Talking to Scott, you would have had no idea that he was trans. He was a faithful Lutheran with an insightful theological mind and a great sense of humor. He was also perfectly willing to answer any question I had about his transition and his life experience. Knowing Scott changed my perspective. I promise you that if you take the time to get to know a transgender person and listen to their story, your perspective will be changed as well. This is personal. It involves the lives of real people -- my friends. The least you can do is to listen before you judge.

These anti-transgender bills are the lowest form of political pandering: creating an issue that doesn't exist, scapegoating an entire population, and seeking a remedy that would force transgender people out of public life. If a person can't use the bathroom, they can't go to work, they can't go to school, and they can't see a movie. It's a dark, insidious way of saying to trans people: This society is not for you. As a Texan, and as a person of faith, I reject that.

The stakes could not be higher. Listening to transgender people and their allies speaking at a Texas Senate hearing against SB3 and SB91, I heard similar refrains: the hate from society toward trans people leads to an increase in anxiety, fear, depression, and suicide, simply because it is exhausting and scary to even exist while trans. Why would we pursue a law that would exacerbate this issue?

Our lawmakers need to focus on what's important: improving the lives of all Texans, no matter who they are or whom they love. If that philosophy was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me.

It should be good enough for Texas State Senator Lois Kolkhorst and Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick.

# 10 Books Every Gay and Bi Man Should Read

by Jordan Duesenberg

Before I started my career in finance, I graduated with a major in English (don't ask me how that works; I'm still asking myself). Reading is one of my absolute favorite hobbies. When I came out, I remember how hard it was to find any LGBT books that didn't have to do with self-help or parents coming to accept their gay teen. I'm the kind of guy that, once I either like something or am a part of something, I have to know everything about it. Thankfully, through a little research and an Amazon Prime membership, I found some essential reading that I think every gay and bi man should read in their lifetime. Here are ten that I believe are 100% necessary:



1. **Angels in America** by Tony Kushner – This was my first glimpse at gay literature; technically this is a play, not a novel, but I believe it's still important not to miss. Kushner's commentary on gay life during the AIDS crisis and how it was incompetently handled (or not handled at all) by the Reagan administration, is equally tragic and hilarious in its dealings with its characters and what it meant to live and die during this time period when seemingly the rest of society didn't seem to care either way.
2. **The Gay Metropolis** by Charles Kaiser – I just finished this (it's available at the West Des Moines library) and have to say this is hands-down the best history of gay men I have ever read (1940s – 1996). The information pre-Stonewall is especially rich and its accounts of gay life in the 40s and 50s could even make my Grindr loving peers blush at parts.
3. **And the Band Played On** by Randy Shilts – In my opinion, this should be required reading now that we live in the age of Truvada to remember how we got here. Shilts takes a journalistic approach at tracing the early years of the AIDS crisis from the earliest known and reported cases, to how the government, general public, and the gay community responded. Sadly, Shilts passed away from the virus in the early 90s.
4. **Dancer from the Dance** by Andrew Holleran – This is honestly my favorite book of all time, and I would recommend anything by Holleran as essential reading (particularly **Beauty of Men**), but his debut novel is easily his best. Holleran's writing about gay life in the 1970s in New York City, and all the excesses that came with it, is both glamorous and honestly a bit sad in its pursuit of love and sex and the fun, desperation, and loneliness that come with it.
5. **Faggots** by Larry Kramer – If the name alone doesn't put you off, what seems like 1,000 characters and ridiculous situations they find themselves in, likely will. This book also, famously, got Larry Kramer shunned from gay life due to his critiques and what many considered exposure of gay men's lives during the time period. Looking at this in a historical context, it's almost eerily prophetic to see how Kramer's judgment and commentary on how careless sex can have serious consequences, became a physical reality in the years after this publication.
6. **Just Kids** by Patti Smith – I love anything that the Queen of Punk Rock, Patti Smith, produces, and her autobiography is no exception. This coming of age book is about how Patti met the late photographer Robert Mapplethorpe when they were young and poor in NYC, at the start of their artistic careers, and their relationship/friendship as Mapplethorpe came to terms with his sexuality. Try and not cry at the end. Also, this is going to be a mini-series on Showtime soon.
7. **The Velvet Rage** by Alan Downs – Although a bit dated for men in my generation, a still mostly relevant analysis of why gay men are the way we are as a result of our upbringing and the difficulties of growing up closeted or gay in a straight man's world. Personally, I had a number of "aha" moments while reading this.
8. **Giovanni's Room** by James Baldwin – What LGBT book list would be complete without this book? James Baldwin's beautiful and tragic love story about a man in Paris and his relationships with other men (most notably with a man he met named Giovanni as the title indicates), dealing with issues in both homosexuality and bisexuality in a very bold way for the time.
9. **City and the Pillar** by Gore Vidal – Written when Vidal was in his 20s (in 1948) about a young man and his love for his friend after they have a steamy weekend, and his pursuit of him thereafter across the nation. It is notable for its matter of fact take on homosexuality, as well as a peak into gay life at the time when such a thing was not discussed. It has a depressing ending that was even more so in the original copy. Definitely a must read.
10. **Men with the Pink Triangle** by David Fernbach and Heinz Heger – Oftentimes people forget about the horrible abuse that European homosexuals faced under the Nazi rule, but also after they were liberated. A disturbing read at times, but important never to forget this tragic time in history. This is something I think we like to think could never happen again, but it isn't too far off from what is currently happening in Chechnya.







# Dunkirk

Movie Review by Mark Turnage

May, 1940. The Germans have invaded France, trapping hundreds of thousands of Allied troops on the beaches of Dunkirk. U-Boats patrol the seas, cutting off evacuation by boat. German troops close in by land, and stray Luftwaffe are taking potshots at the massive clumps of beached soldiers from the air. Yet this is all the opening five minutes of *Dunkirk*; this is only the calm before the storm. All the troops can do is wait for certain death--their only salvation being the cluster of civilian watercraft small enough to evade the U-boats and evacuate the stranded troops. Even if you entered Christopher Nolan's war film with zero historical knowledge, you would still become absorbed into the world of impending dread, improvised bravery, and shattered humanity that is *Dunkirk*.

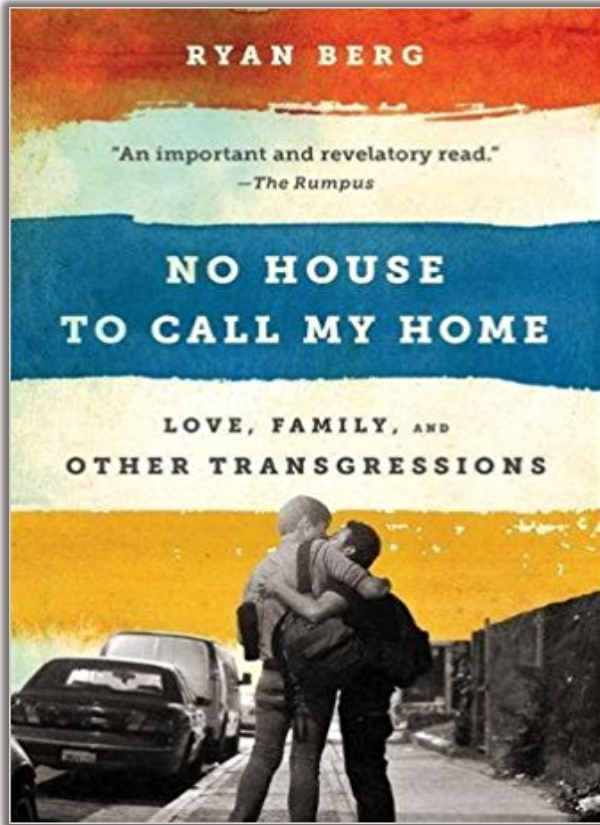
Nolan's mark as an auteur is setting tone and atmosphere while subverting expectations within the opening frames, and *Dunkirk* is no exception. His war film opens with Harry Styles (of former **One Direction** fame, in a surprisingly compelling screen debut) as a young French soldier patrolling the desolate streets of the city with a small, ragtag cluster of comrades. German propaganda fliers eerily rain from the sky, taunting their demise. But *Saving Private Ryan* it's not--a verbose film, *Dunkirk* isn't. But damn, is it loud. Sound is the dominating dialogue here, and though the script is minimal, the sharp sting of bullets against metal, the roar of an airplane engine, a sudden explosion feet away, or even rushing water, punctuate the action and create an unnerving, tense environment in between gaps of movement and silence--the feel of being in the middle of real war.

Another warning for the unexpected: the narrative plays with time, revisiting tense moments to reveal more at stake than what initially meets the eye. Allies that seemed safe are actually in more danger, and while this storytelling tactic has a strong potential to confuse and disorient, to this reviewer the narrative device felt natural. The complexity of the narrative shouldn't feel overwhelming, the war should; and Nolan succeeds in this regard.

The standard Nolan lynchpin actors are all here: Tom Hardy by air, Cillian Murphy by sea, and Kenneth Branagh with newcomer Harry Styles by land. Perhaps it's disingenuous to argue for more diversity, considering the time period and locale, but a few unorthodox scenes that feature other sides of the conflict beyond white men, young and old, would have been a more modern perspective I would have liked to see. At the same time, while their acting is great, the cast's faces seem muted and interchangeable, like a sea of soldiers clustered on a boat. It could be argued that this is a deliberate decision by Nolan to evoke the metaphor of war's interminable conflict, but it also doesn't give much chance or room for empathy with the characters beyond their immediate survival. The star of this film is the war, and question whether the people the camera follows will survive it intact--mortally or mentally.

See it in IMAX if you can.





# LGBT Youth In Crisis

by Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, August 4, 2017, was Iowa native Ryan Berg, author of the 2015 memoir *No House to Call My Own: Love, Family, and Other Transgressions*. Berg, a first-class writer and a passionate – almost breathless – advocate for his cause, treated us to a couple of extensive sections from his book, which relates the heart-breaking stories of eight queer and homeless NYC youth with whom he lived and worked as a social worker in 2004-2006.



"I couldn't shake their stories," he said. "There was an urgency to them that was undeniable. Nothing was being said about the youth experience of homelessness in the media, especially LGBTQ youth -- 40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBTQ -- but because I believe statistics can become numbing, and people really operate from empathy, I had to write the stories." (You can listen in real time to Ryan's moving presentation, again or for the first time, by going to our Web site, <ffbc Iowa.org>, and clicking on the "Speakers" tab.)

We fail these kids, as Ryan told fellow-Iowa writer Mary Kay Shanley in an interview, because "the foster-care system is broken.... I don't have an answer for how to fix the system's broken-ness beyond saying we need to put the wellbeing of people first. Allow young people to build healthy attachments with caring adults. So many young people are disconnected, and have attachment disorders due to trauma, abuse or abandonment. Overworking youth workers and monopolizing their time with arcane procedures only takes them away from the youth. In addition to learning financial literacy or how to write a résumé, youth need to learn how to interact healthily with others – and that happens most often with direct care staff. Policy makers need to remember that, as they shape programs and create space for youth workers to interact with young people. And we need to support our workers on the front lines by hearing them, and recognizing their contribution to the conversation. Often people who have *no* contact with youth are making all the programmatic decisions. Listen to the youth; listen to the workers. Be strengths-based not only with youth but also with workers. Programs should provide clinical supervision for direct care workers to help minimize burn-out and compassion fatigue."

***If you thought getting a health care bill passed by both houses of Congress was difficult (and ultimately impossible), imagine getting meaningful tax reform accomplished without having the President release his tax returns so that everyone can see how proposed changes would impact his self-interest.***

-- J. Wilson

[continued on page 7]



Ryan Berg is a graduate of Valley High School in West Des Moines (where he first began to come out as gay) and the New School in New York City, and holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Hunter College. He went to New York to work in theatre, but eventually, “needing to do something outside myself,” started working with LGBTQ youth in foster care in 2004. He began working as a residential counselor and then a case manager at group homes in Queens and Brooklyn, preparing homeless youth for “aging out” of the New York City foster-care system the day they turned 21. During summer 2005 he took a University of Iowa creative-writing workshop for social workers, but back in New York he focused again on working with the youth; writing *with* them wasn’t working, and writing *about* them seemed exploitative. It wasn’t until he left a couple years later and started working on an MFA that he realized he could not shake those stories, and needed to tell them. *No House to Call My Home* won the 2016 Minnesota Book Award for General Nonfiction and the 2016 NCCD Media for a Just Society Award, and was listed as a Top 10 LGBTQ Book of 2016 by the American Library Association.



A 2010 Lambda Literary Foundation Emerging Writers Fellow, Ryan Berg also received a 2011 Nonfiction Literature Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts and a Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant. His writing has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Slate*, *The Advocate*, *Salon*, *Local Knowledge*, *The Rumpus*, and *The Sun*. Ryan has been awarded artist residencies from The MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He now lives in Minneapolis, where he is program manager for the ConneQT Host Home Program of Avenues for Homeless Youth, an outside-the-system community, and volunteer-based agency whose mission is to provide emergency shelter, short-term housing, and supportive services for homeless youth in a safe and nurturing environment. Ryan Berg can be reached at [rberg@avenuesforyouth.org](mailto:rberg@avenuesforyouth.org) or [ryanjberg@hotmail.com](mailto:ryanjberg@hotmail.com).

## Symbols Matter

by Jonathan Wilson



Controversy has swirled around a bronze statue of Robert E. Lee that stands in Charlottesville, Virginia -- for the time being -- not to mention the death and injuries that resulted from clashes between protesters and counter-protesters. One group saw the statue as a symbol of the slavery over which the Civil War was fought, and the other saw it as some type of symbol of “history.” The latter, more accurately, saw it as a coded symbol of white supremacy and the angst created among them by what racial civil rights progress we’ve made since the South lost the Civil War 150 years ago.

This has gotten all insightful, reflective people among us to think about symbols. That got me thinking about Matthew Shephard, a young gay man who was singled out *because he was gay*, brutally beaten *because he was gay*, strung up on a fence in rural Wyoming in near freezing weather *because he was gay*, and, *because he was gay*, he was left there alone with his life draining away until he was finally found, but too late. *All because he was openly gay*.

The young predators who attacked Matthew Shephard were doubtless acculturated with the demonization of gay people, a phenomenon that is broader than Wyoming and broader than LGBT people. It also goes to demonization of racial and religious minorities, Liberals, the Left. It goes to anyone considered “other.” It particularly infects the lesser among us who so desperately need someone to feel better-than. But consider the culture in rural Wyoming, and the symbolic significance of what was taking place that cold, dark night when Matthew Shephard struggled against his attackers, to no avail. After being beaten to unconsciousness, they hung him on a fence to die. Now consider this: in rural Wyoming ranchers have a problem with predators like wolves and coyotes. The ranchers fear for their livestock and hate the predators; when they can, they kill them. After they kill them, they hang the carcass on a fence to send a message -- to create a symbol -- for others like them.

It is said that, in war, the winner gets to write the history. Lest some forget, the Union won the war. Slavery has been abolished. The United States of America survived the abolition of slavery, a civil war that slaughtered thousands, reconstruction, lynchings, segregation, discrimination, and an ever-too-slow effort to achieve equality for all citizens, in all aspects of life, regardless of race. The South lost the war, and lost the right to have public symbols that purport to celebrate the Confederacy, and secondarily, the institution of slavery that the Confederacy espoused. Modern-day “sons” of the Confederacy, whether they are KKK members, white supremacists, or members of the alt-right, are left with only the right to *peacefully* exercise individual rights of free expression under the First Amendment.

My message to the losers: the Union won; the victor gets to write the history and pick the public symbols; public displays of statues of Robert E. Lee and his ilk should come down.

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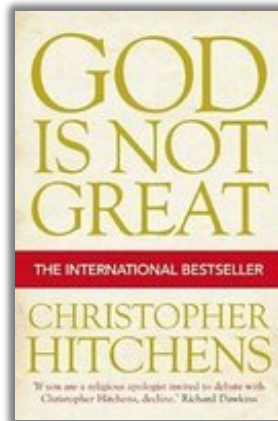
# Some Random Thoughts...

by Steve Person



In its July 22, 2017, edition, *The Des Moines Register* published its Iowa Poll on institutions to which Iowans entrust their faith. With six being the top number in the scale, the armed forces and God tied for the top spot at 5.1, while trust in organized religion rated only a 3.7. Curious. This article occurred just as I was re-reading what I consider one of the most important pieces of nonfiction ever published—Christopher Hitchens's ***god is Not GREAT: How Religion Poisons Everything***. (I reviewed this book in the newsletter a few years ago and lent the book to someone; I don't remember to whom. Unfortunately, it was never returned to me, so I bought a new copy that contained a New Afterword penned by the author before his untimely death in 2011 at age 62).

Hitchens lays out his argument against all organized religions in clear and concise prose. As for Christianity, he states, "The best argument I know for the highly questionable existence of Jesus is this. His illiterate living disciples left us no record and in any event could not have been 'Christians,' since they were never to read those later books in which Christians must affirm belief, and in any case had no idea that anyone ever found a church on their master's announcements." He continues, "But the case of the Virgin Birth is the easiest possible proof that humans were involved in the manufacture of a legend. Jesus makes large claims for his heavenly father but never mentions that his mother is or was a virgin, and is repeatedly very rude and coarse to her when she makes an appearance, as Jewish mothers will, to ask or see how he is getting on." On that same page, "Then there is the extraordinary matter of Mary's large brood. Matthew informs us (13: 55-57) that there were four brothers of Jesus, and some sisters also." So much for virginity.



As for the Old Testament: "It goes without saying that none of the gruesome, disordered events described in Exodus ever took place.... There was no flight from Egypt, no wandering in the desert (let alone for the incredible four-decade length of time mentioned in the Pentateuch), and no dramatic conquest of the Promised Land. It was all, quite simply and very ineptly, made up at a much later date. No Egyptian chronicle mentions this episode either, even in passing, and Egypt was the garrison power in Canaan as well as the Nilotic region at all the material times."

Hitchens further explodes the infallibility of Islam and describes the **Koran** as "ill-arranged plagiarisms, helping itself from earlier books and traditions as occasion appeared to require."

So what did Hitchens believe in? He unabashedly favored reason and the scientific method. He argued that while religion claims to strive to improve human behavior, it does so by enforcing strict adherence to ideas that punish people rather than encouraging them to think and explore. "Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it."

This book is one that deserves more than one reading, and this time I shall not be lending out my copy!