

For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8

RECORD

Spring 2017

Newsletter of EVANGELICALS CONCERNED, INC., 311 East 72nd Street, New York, New York, 10021

"Donald Trump's More Accepting Views on Gay Issues Set Him Apart in G.O.P." This was *The New York Times* headline on April 22, 2016. Given the LGBT anxiety over the election results – Columbia professors even wrote, “the cluster of suicides this month can have no other meaning” [since retracted] – it would be useful for both the Left and the Right to gain more accurate perspectives on Trump’s history and LGBT issues.

Before the election, *Times*’ political correspondent Maggie Haberman pointed out that Trump’s “views of gay rights and gay people are what most distinguish Mr. Trump from previous Republican standard-bearers.” She noted, for example, that, “Elton John and his longtime boyfriend, David Furnish, entered a civil partnership on Dec. 21, 2005, in England under a law the country had just enacted granting recognition to same-sex couples. The congratulations poured in as the two men appeared at a joyous ceremony at Windsor Guildhall, amid a crush of paparazzi. Donald J. Trump, who had known the couple for years, took to his blog to express his excitement.”

According to the *Times*, Trump “has nurtured long friendships with gay people, employed gay workers in prominent positions, and moved with ease in industries where gays have long exerted influence.” Gregory T. Angelo, Log Cabin Republicans president is cited: “He will be the most gay-friendly Republican nominee for president ever.”

The Times’ article went on to state that Trump’s “history with the gay community is a long one. He donated to charities focused on the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s and early ‘90s. In 2000, when he briefly considered running for president, he gave an interview to *The Advocate*, a gay magazine, in which he supported amending the 1964 Civil Rights Act to “include a ban of discrimination based on sexual orientation.” The *Times* notes that, “sixteen

years later, gay rights advocates are still trying to persuade Congress to pass a similar measure.” She quotes Trump’s saying: “I know many, many gay people. Tremendous people!” The Brookings Institution’s Jonathan Rauch, who calls himself “an unrepentantly atheistic Jewish homosexual”, affirms that Trump has long “spoken more inclusively about LGBT people than have previous GOP nominees”.

Fast forward to the summer of 2016 in Cleveland. Addressing the Republican Convention after he won its presidential nomination, Trump said: “Only weeks ago, in Orlando, Florida, 49 wonderful Americans were savagely murdered by an Islamic terrorist. This time, the terrorist targeted the LGBTQ community. As your president, I will do everything in my power to protect our LGBTQ citizens from the violence and oppression of a hateful foreign ideology.” He received a resounding applause for saying that and he responded by going off script to thank these Republican delegates for such support for his pro-gay promise.

After Trump won the election, the progressive *Salon* interviewed Rich Tafel, founder of the Log Cabin Republicans. Tafel said: “The one area of civil rights where Trump was a pioneer was gay rights. He has clearly had gay friends and mentors in his life and he simply doesn’t see it as an issue.” He points out that Trump “had the first openly gay speaker to acknowledge he’s gay [PayPal founder Peter Thiel] speak moments before his acceptance speech. That’s pretty radical considering the hall was anti-gay”.

Though Trump’s Fundamentalist supporters, e.g., Robert Jeffress, Jerry Falwell, Jr., et al., are antigay, their views are not to be found in the new White House, much to their chagrin, of course. Indeed, one of the first directives of the Trump administration was to affirm the executive order protecting gays and lesbians working for federal contractors. Randy Berry, appointed

by President Obama to represent the U.S. on LGBT rights around the world, is being kept in office by President Trump.

Lesbians and gay men may or may not like Trump’s personality, and may agree or disagree with his views on any number of issues – if and when they understand them. But it’s irrational to hold oneself hostage to anxiety based in bias, preconceptions and misinformation on where he’s long stood and continues to stand on behalf of the rights of gay men and lesbians. Yet, to the chagrin of antigay Fundamentalists who now realize that they have no presidential ally for their antigay bigotry, that part of their agenda has come to its biggest roadblock ever. And this fact should be pleasing to LGBT folks.

Following President Trump’s well-received first address to Congress, the Catholic League’s antigay William Donohue attacked him for going “mute on moral issues”. Donohue complained that Trump “spoke about missiles and markets, never citing morality”. As the Religion News Service is reporting, Trump’s “vow to protect gays from discrimination has set off alarm bells for some.”

Vice-President Mike Pence reminded George Stephanopoulos: “I was there applauding with him.” Pence’s reference was to the round of applause that the just nominated Trump received for his specifically affirming gay rights at the Republican National Convention. In the February 5th interview with the ABC News anchor and former Clinton advisor, Pence underlined that Trump “was the very first Republican nominee to mention the LGBTQ community at our Republican National Convention and was applauded for it.” Pence assured viewers that “discrimination would have no place in our administration”, adding, “In the patriot’s heart, there’s no room for prejudice.”

President Trump's Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, pushed for opening the Boy Scout troops to openly gay youth when he served as national president of the Boy Scouts of America. Mindy Belz, editor of the antigay *World* magazine, in insisting on “the urgency to reorient [sic] a U.S. human rights agenda away from its narrow LGBT focus”, complains about Tillerson’s pro-gay position. She notes that, “in nine hours of Senate testimony, lawmakers never asked about his views on State’s LGBT agenda.” Tony Perkins, head of the antigay Religious Right’s self-styled Family Research Council, put Tillerson’s pro-gay position in these terms for his FRC constituency: Tillerson “led the charge to open the Boy Scouts to gay troop leaders”.

Richard Grenell was on Trump’s short list to become America’s UN Ambassador. Grenell’s being openly gay was not a problem for Trump. He’d held high diplomatic corps posts since 2001. A graduate of Evangel University, he earned an MPA at Harvard.

Dallas’ First Baptist Church minister Robert Jeffress, a big backer of Trump’s campaign, now realizes that he has no antigay ally in President Trump. Jeffress admits that marriage for same-sex couples is now “the law of the land” and he urges his fellow Right-wingers: “We need to go on to other things.”

But Susan Wright of the *Red State* blog blasts Jeffress for his surrender on the gay issue. She insists that the Bible says that, “gay marriage is corrupt”. Increasingly, though, conservative Christians are changing their minds about what they’ve thought the Bible “says” on this matter. And, as Fox News’ openly gay and Christian contributor, Guy Benson, argues, “It’s time more than ever for America to embrace the real spirit of the Golden Rule” when it comes to marriage for same-sex couples. Ironically, Benson was an invited featured speaker at the Red State’s 2016 Gathering. Clearly, some at Red State conclude as Jeffress and others do – the Right needs to “get over it” and move on.

“The opposite of homosexuality was never going to be heterosexuality.”

This is what a gay Christian blogger on the Evangelical Channel at Patheos says he’s learned over time. Dan Chappell married his wife, Casey, in 2004. They’re still together in ministry and are rearing their children. For a same-sex attracted person, they “would not advocate marriage as the best choice”, says Chappell, yet it’s “certainly one of the possibilities.”

A doctoral student at Dallas Baptist University, Chappell contends that, “The body of Christ continues to need a reasoned and consistent response to the reality of homosexuality in our culture and society.” What most recently prompted his continuing concern about this is, “the hand-wringing surrounding Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. ” He bids his readers: “Pastors and leaders, your people do not need you to join the culture war, they need you to shepherd them into a kingdom-centered approach to living as sojourners in a pluralist society. ... When the sum of our response to the LGBT community is, you’re going to hell, and, I do not want my kids to even deal with your reality, we cannot be surprised that our LGBT neighbors do not look to us in times of need or for any level of moral leadership.” He says that, “the inconsistent singling out of our LGBT neighbors needs to stop!” Chappell writes: “Facts matter and the fact is, the depiction of Lefou, in the latest version of *Beauty and the Beast*, does not promote homosexuality. The depiction of Lefou does acknowledge the presence of feelings that Lefou recognizes and begins to think about. This is not the presence of an agenda as much as it is an acknowledgment of a reality so many of our neighbors and brothers and sisters in Christ are walking with every day!” With one of the lessons from Jesus in mind, he warns: “Selective rage never produces a Christ-honoring depiction of the Christian life. When we choose to be outraged at the existence of same-sex feelings in a movie but ignore the other situations that fall short of God’s call to the moral life of humanity, we present ourselves as hypocrites interested in straining out gnats and swallowing camels.”

Southern Baptist blogger Jim Denison continues to disparage same-sex marriage. He reports that he and his wife were enjoying a recent breakfast at a restaurant near the entrance to the

University of Texas campus. “There we found a series of quotations inscribed on arches supporting the roof of the restaurant.” He singles out one quotation from the “Father of Texas”, Stephen Austin, who sought early settlers by promising them eighty acres of land for each slave they brought into Texas. But Denison fails to mention this embarrassing fact about Austin. He then tries to apply another quote from Austin, found there in the restaurant, that, he says, “especially struck me: ‘A nation can only be free, happy and great in proportion to the virtue and intelligence of its people.’ Note the order on a campus famed for its academic standards: virtue before intelligence.” Denison laments: “Sadly, our culture seems not to agree”. He complains: “According to Gallup, the number of Americans who accept same-sex marriage [along with the rest of what’s on his vice list] are all at record highs.” Yet, if his phrase, “Note the order”, is significant, *note the order* of the items on his vice list. What he lists as of *first* importance, in *first* place, is “same-sex marriage”. He and his wife were enjoying breakfast together and he’s distracted and upset that same-sex couples can enjoy the same kind of companionship.

Denison followed up this blog post with one in which he complains of “Hollywood’s latest attempt to normalize homosexual behavior”. He’s alluding to ABC’s gay history miniseries, “When We Rise”. Denison says he’ll not “recount the extensive biblical prohibitions” against *it*. Against “*it*”? *His* “*it*” is homosexual orientation and same sex marriage that even today’s honest evangelical biblical scholars and historians of the ancient world explain were *unknown* as such in the biblical era and, therefore, about which the biblical texts specifically say nothing. Denison says he’ll not “outline yet another defense of biblical marriage”. *Biblical* marriage? He’s obviously not thinking of the polygamy of the biblical patriarchs and of ancient Israel’s rulers, nor of the child brides arranged by deal-making fathers in male dominated Bible days, nor the duties of levirate marriage of which we read in the Bible. But he is thinking of attempted rapes of sojourners at Sodom and of the modern era’s phenomena called “dating”, “falling in love”, and a man and woman

voluntarily choosing on their own to marry each other.

And he warns, it's, "going to get worse". He rattles off practices familiar in Bible days, e.g., polygamy and sex with children. He scares his readers by suggesting there'll be a run on sex with animals – in spite of opposition from today's animal rights activists?

Denison's supposed clincher for his argument is a challenge to his Southern Baptist readers: "If you think I'm exaggerating, ask yourself if you would have expected legalized same-sex marriage ten years ago." Oops. For Southern Baptists old enough to remember "biblical" arguments against, now legal, *interracial* marriage as late as the 1960s, he'd better throw his clunker into a dustbin of historical Southern Baptist bigotry.

Rules against same-sex marriage and against women in church leadership are on the agenda for the next General Assembly of the conservative Presbyterian Church in America. An early overture is raised "for the sake of our ministers and chaplains serving on the frontlines in our cultural struggle over marriage". Another is for disbanding a study committee on women's role in church. It was set up at the prior PCA assembly. This overture objects, for "women were placed on the committee, potentially exercising authority over the men on the committee" and this offense "is disturbing the peace of the church and causing 'considerable unrest'." (Don't PCA men read theology written by PCA ministers' wives? Should they?) A third overture to the PCA's General Assembly calls for an unequivocally official statement that, in the PCA, "Males Only May be Ordained as Elders or Deacons".

Don't the PCA men know of Lydia? (Acts 16) Have they never heard of Philip's four daughters, all of whom "prophesied"? (Acts 21:9) Have they not heard of Priscilla, who led in ministry with Aquila, her husband? (Rom 16:3–5). Didn't Paul laud Junia, whom he called an "outstanding apostle"? (Rom 16:7) Paul made it quite clear, lifting the phrase, "male and female", from the LXX's text of Gen 1:27, he wrote: "*In Christ*, there's neither Jew nor Greek, there's neither slave nor free, and *there's no "male and fe-*

male", for you are all one in Christ Jesus". (Gal 3:28)

"Western Christianity is effeminate", a PCA minister complains. Pastor C. R. Wiley grumbles that, statistically, more women than men are in church pews. Trying to counter a feminist charge that churches are *patriarchal*, he argues that what's typical is that "tyrannical old women" run the churches. He fusses that, "after I left my last church, it was nearly killed by an effeminate guy who seemed to be hen-pecked by his wife. I've seen a lot of that sort of thing." With swagger, Wiley brags: "I've never had difficulty reaching men and getting them to come to church." He boasts that that's because, "I actually like being a man and I relate well to men."

But, as for men who find themselves homosexually orientated and want to deal with that in a committed, monogamous marriage with someone of the same sex, Wiley's church website pushes back with: "Our Position On So-Called Same Sex Marriage". After laying out objections, the church's web post states: "Like any visitor, we will endeavor to treat a person in such a relationship with kindness, but we will not recognize a 'same-sex' marriage as legitimate."

"The NFL is trying to push homosexuality!" This is Franklin Graham's judgment as he fumes over an ad filmed by the kiss cam during the January 29th Pro Bowl. The ad celebrates couples – including a gay male couple and a lesbian couple – kissing and hugging each other. The Ad Council's commercial is, "Fans of Love / Love Has No Labels". Graham counters: "They're trying to define sin as love and make it acceptable. This generation is being bombarded with an upside-down version of truth and love."

"Gays for Life" posters were again among the signs at the 44th annual March for Life in Washington, DC in January. Among the marchers, as attorney James M. Thunder observed, were "tens of thousands of young people – some 75 percent of them were Millennials. This intimidates the pro-abortion crowd because they have long thought that the idea of pro-life would die out over time."

And for the first time in the event's history, a sitting vice-president, *in person*, addressed the March for Life's hundreds of thousands. Vice President Mike Pence said: "Life is winning in America and today is a celebration in that progress. We've come to a historic moment in the cause of life and we must approach it with compassion for every American."

Though Planned Parenthood's roots are in the birth control work of Margaret Sanger, her own disgust over abortion is hushed up today. In 1920, Sanger wrote: "The question that society must answer is this: Shall family limitation be achieved through birth control or abortion?" Note her distinction between "birth control" and abortion. She asked: "Shall normal, safe, effective contraceptives [i.e., condoms] be employed, or shall we continue to force women to the abnormal, often dangerous surgical operation?" She then asked rhetorically, "Does anyone imagine that a woman would submit to abortion if not denied the knowledge of scientific, effective contraceptives?"

Sanger was blunt: "I assert that the hundreds of thousands of abortions performed in America each year are a disgrace to civilization." Yet now, with readily available, even free, contraceptives, hundreds of thousands of abortions are still performed in America each year and Planned Parenthood does some 300,000 of these.

Norma McCorvey has died. In 1973, she was "Jane Roe" in *Roe v. Wade*. Though she never aborted a baby, the pro-abortion lobby used a legal case in which she was involved to bring the abortion debate to the Supreme Court. She later became a serious Christian and *prolife* advocate. She wrote: "I think it's safe to say that the entire abortion industry is based on a lie. ... I am dedicated to spending the rest of my life undoing the law that bears my name." Since 1973, nearly 60 million babies have been aborted in the U.S.

Later in life, McCorvey was in a loving lesbian relationship during which she nursed her partner through illness and death.

"Fake news: the bigger culprits", an article in the Right-wing *World magazine*, is by editor Marvin Olasky, a former journalism professor at the University of Texas. He notes outlandish headlines from the supermarket tabloid,

Weekly World News: “Space Alien Meets with Newt Gingrich” and “My Steamy Nights with Hillary in UFO Love Nest”. He then warns, “But seriously, the proliferation of propaganda is a problem”. Olasky expresses his fears that, “a government or Google sledgehammer to crush ‘fake news’ could also do away with dissent from politically correct positions [such as *World’s* take on] LGBT issues”. He fears that “fake news” can have “long-term consequences”. And, of course, it can and does.

However, he and his *World* magazine pushed fake news about “ex-gay” claims for years prior to the long overdue closing of the Exodus “ex-gay” network in 2013. Yet just before that ending, *World* heralded Exodus’ director with its “Daniel of the Year” award. But almost before the ink was dry, Exodus’ board, with that “Daniel of the Year”, Alan Chambers, confessed its utter failure and, with their deep regret and heartfelt apologies, they admitted to years of false promises and double-talk that harmed so many dear people. Yet, *World* still pushes the promises that homosexuals can, *a la* double-talk, “change”.

At Calvin College this winter, a psychologist presented his own research on the utter failure of “ex-gay” efforts to change sexual orientation. John Dehlin was prompted to do his research after the suicide of a young gay Mormon. As a guest speaker in Calvin’s sexuality series, Dehlin talked of his research on the responses from over 1,600 Mormons who’d sought help through various types of efforts at sexual orientation change. Only one person out of the over 1,600 seekers after orientation change even claimed any such change. Others spoke of self-acceptance and changes of behavior. Nonetheless, the overwhelming outcome of their quest for orientation change was experienced harm.

“Can you name whether these prominent evangelicals are for or against same-sex marriage?” This was the question in a quiz in a recent Internet game on Sporcle.com. Of course, the answers to this question very much depend on *when* the question was asked, since, over the past four decades, some have changed their minds. Here are some of the 45 “think-

er/leaders” on that list: Mark Achtemeier, Vicky Beeching, Rob Bell, Ralph Blair, James Brownson, Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, Tony Campolo, Alan Chambers, Letha Dawson Scanzoni, Robert Gagnon, Franklin Graham, Wayne Grudem, David Gushee, Stanley Hauerwas, Rachel Held Evans, Bill Hybels, T. D. Jakes, Timothy Keller, Justin Lee, Joyce Meyer, John Piper, Ron Sider, Jim Wallis, Rick Warren, Ken Wilson, N. T. Wright and Christopher Yuan.

The Southern Poverty Center has made up a list of “anti-Muslim extremists”. Not surprisingly, the list of so-called “extremists” features those who, from their own hard personal experience in Islam and as targets of jihadists, have very reasonable objections to Islam. The SPC list includes, e.g., Ayaan Hirsi Ali, born into Islam in Somalia. She’s now an atheist. She was a Dutch MP who fled the Netherlands when Islamist death threats were issued against her and when her friend, Theo Van Gogh, was murdered by jihadists. Also on the list is Maajid Nawaz, an Egyptian-born Islamist who now, as a Westernized Muslim in the U.K., is trying to turn others away from Islamist terrorism. Yet SPC calls both of these *victims of jihad*, “extremists”.

Many seem puzzled over the fact that liberal LGBT activists tend to be quick to find “equivalence” between those they call “haters” whose conscience won’t permit them to bake a *wedding* cake for a same-sex couple and Muslims who, in the name of Allah and *Sharia*, throw same-sex couples off of tall buildings to their deaths.

Some explanation comes from Bruce Thornton, Professor of Classics and Humanities at California State University. He notes that, “Multiculturalism became institutionalized in Western politics and culture.” He cites French social critic Pascal Bruckner’s writing: “Every Westerner is presumed guilty until proven innocent. [We Westerners] have been raised to detest ourselves, certain that, within our world, there is essential evil that must be relentlessly atoned for... colonialism and imperialism.” He points out that, “this fashionable self-loathing, of course, came cheap, as Westerners continued to enjoy the leisure, affluence, and human rights created by Western ideas

that the people they idealized lacked or hated.”

Tom Perez, the new chair of the Democratic National Committee, began his tenure by appointing Rep. Keith Ellison of Minnesota as DNC deputy chair. Perez was formerly the Obama administration’s Secretary of Labor. Ellison, a Muslim, is billed to speak at an April conference under the auspices of the Islamic Circle of North America and the Muslim American Society. He will share the stage with clerics known for their extremist rhetoric – including New York imam Siraj Wahhaj, who the U.S. Attorney for New York named as an “unindicted co-conspirator” in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. In a recorded sermon the imam shouts that homosexuality “will never be accepted among the Muslims! The Prophet Mohammad said the one who does it and the one to whom it is done to, kill them both!” This, of course, is orthodox Islam. But, aware of being recorded, he adds that his listeners shouldn’t actually commit murder.

Ninety thousand Christians were murdered for their faith during 2016. Christians are, by far, the most persecuted religious group in the world. The number killed in 2016 was down from the year before, when over 105,000 were killed. These statistics are compiled by the Berkley Center at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

“Glitter ashes” were provided for Ash Wednesday at progressive Protestant churches around the country this year. Instead of the traditional sooty burnt powder from the palms of the previous Palm Sunday, rainbow colored glitter was placed on foreheads of worshippers in support of “Queer Virtue”.

Liz Edman, granddaughter of the late V. Raymond Edman, president of Wheaton College from 1941 to 1965, is an openly lesbian priest in the Episcopal Church and author of, *Queer Virtue*. She says the idea for Glitter Ash Wednesday came to her as she was wondering, “How could we walk around being visibly queer and visibly Christian, or visibly progressive and visibly Christian?” Her girlfriend suggested glitter ashes for Ash Wednes-

days! The new ritual is spreading now to other progressive congregations.

Eleanor and Hick: The Love Affair that Shaped a First Lady was not the only recent book to focus on Franklin D. Roosevelt's wife's lesbian romance with Lorena Hickok. There's also the book, *Loving Eleanor*. And, in 2000, there was, *Empty Without You*. These books spring from over 3,500 letters written over 35 years. The letters reveal the relationship between the President's wife and the journalist. It ended with Roosevelt's death in 1962. "Hick" died in 1968.

On the first night after FDR's 1933 inauguration, Eleanor wrote to her: "Hick, my dearest, I cannot go to bed tonight without a word to you. I felt a little as though a part of me was leaving tonight. You have grown so much to be a part of my life that it is empty without you, even though I'm busy every minute. ... Oh! darling, I hope on the whole you will be happier for my friendship. I felt I had brought you so much discomfort and hardship today & almost more heartache than you could bear & I don't want to make you unhappy. All my love I shall be saying to you over thought waves in a few minutes.

Good night my dear one, Angels guard thee, God protect thee, My love enfold thee, All the night through. Always yours, ER"

A Christian bestselling author and popular blogger about her children, bulimia, alcoholism and her ex-husband's infidelity is now dating a woman. Glennon Doyle Melton and soccer star Amy Wambach are the new couple. A range of reactions has been registered. Anne Kennedy's column on the Internet's Patheos Evangelical Channel is headlined, "The Bravery of Glennon Doyle Melton". But Kennedy is quick to clarify: "I find I must say no to her new way of life."

Unlike the speed with which John F. Alexander, Mark Olson and Al Krass, evangelical leaders of the social justice group, *The Other Side*, affirmed gays back in the latter 1970s, the Left's Jim Wallis and his *Sojourners* Community took many more decades to finally do so. Now though, a *Sojourners* staffer, a liberal Presbyterian minister who came out as self-defined "queer" five years ago, expresses her enthusiasm over the new lesbian couple. Meanwhile, Ron

Sider, another veteran evangelical social activist on the Left and the founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, is still opposing all same-sex marriage.

Another country radio singer has come out as gay. Ty Herndon says: "My foundation is not cracked, my faith in God is real." Recalling his Alabama childhood, he says: "I was at a tent revival when I was 10 years old and a traveling evangelist was preaching on the sins of homosexuality and I became this withdrawn, unhappy kid." But now, "I have a lot of die-hard country fans who have been with me a long time and are still right there and I have a legion of brand new fans, within the young country listeners, within the LGBT community".

Ten years ago, another country singer, Chely Wright, came out as a lesbian. She, too, recalls praying every day as a 10-year-old, asking, "Dear God, please don't let me be gay, please just take it away." Ten years ago, she did not receive as warm a welcome as is shown by country music fans to such news these days.

Yet another Evangelical megachurch has agreed to come out as LGBT affirming. This time it's Denver Community Church with some 1,500 worshippers each week. The decision was reached after two years of earnest deliberation. LGBT persons will be welcomed into all levels of membership, ministry and leadership. The church was founded in 2001 and is led by Michael Hidalgo. He says: "We've consistently encouraged our people to ask difficult questions and learn together." Hidalgo is the author of *Unlost* and *Changing Faith*, both published by IVP.

The Society for Pentecostal Studies had to find a substitute venue for its scheduled "Pentecostalism and Culture" convocation this year because Urshan College in Florissant, MO got wind of the fact that, as the General Superintendent of the United Pentecostal Church International, owner and operator of Urshan College, put it, "The most significant concern is that one of the 250 presenters identifies himself on social media as an Apostolic homosexual and may use his 15-minute speaking slot to promote this agenda and embarrass the Apostolic move-

ment. If so, then this is a spiritual attack, and we need to treat it as such."

Washington University Lutheran Student Fellowship held a recent meeting in which a young minister of the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) spoke against homosexuality and abortion. In retaliation, the College Democrats held what was oddly billed as "a demonstration of *inclusion*" to denounce the Lutheran students and their guest speaker. The campus newspaper also demonized the minister in an editorial, calling him "an unabashedly homophobic, ultra-conservative, transphobic, anti-choice fear monger." Someone suggested that the College Democrats and campus editorial went a bit beyond "microaggression".

The Gay Preacher's Wife: How My Gay Husband Deconstructed My Life and Reconstructed My Faith. That's a new book by Lydia Meredith, founder of Beacon of Hope, a mission to strengthen families and communities and lift poor children and families out of poverty. She married and had three sons with Rev. Dennis A. Meredith, a graduate of Samford University, a Southern Baptist school in Birmingham. In 2008, after almost 30 years, they divorced but remain close friends. He now pastors an Atlanta church of over a thousand members – mostly LGBT folk. Their gay son is in its music ministry.

T'ruah, The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, renounces two antigay Israeli rabbis. The network of 1,800 rabbis, representing all branches of Judaism, takes action to respect the human rights of all people in Israel, America and the Occupied Territories. *T'ruah* is calling on the Israel Defense Forces to rescind Rabbi Eyal Karim's appointment as the Chief Rabbi of the IDF, and end government funding for the pre-military academy headed by Rabbi Yigal Levinstein. According to the petition: "In a military organization which bills itself as 'the most moral army in the world,' people who serve as religious authorities must reflect the highest ethical standards of Judaism, be committed to the spiritual well-being of all members of the military, and consistently teach respect for human life."

Israel's Chief Rabbi of the Sephardim says homosexuality is punishable by death. In an interview in the paper, *Times of Israel*, Shlomo Amar declared that the gay movement “is a cult of abomination, this is clear. *The Torah says it is punishable by death. It is in the first rank of severe offenses*”. He went on to say that he does not believe that some people are naturally *homosexually orientated* and he called such claims “*nonsense*”.

“What would it mean for the church to show compassion to LGBT men and women?”, asks Fr. James Martin, editor-at-large of *America: The National Catholic Review*. “The word compassion means ‘to experience with, or suffer with.’ So what would it mean for the institutional church, the hierarchy, not only to respect LGBT Catholics, but to be with them, to experience life with them and even to suffer with them?”, he asks. Martin points out: “The first and most essential requirement is listening. It is nearly impossible to experience a person’s life, or to be compassionate, if you do not listen to the person, or if you do not ask questions.” Martin reminds his readers: “Jesus saw beyond categories; he met people where they were and accompanied them. In the Gospel of Luke, when he met a Roman centurion who asked for healing for his servant, Jesus didn’t say, ‘Pagan!’ Rather, he saw a man in need (Lk 7:1-10). Later in Luke’s Gospel, when Jesus met Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in Jericho, who would also have been considered the chief sinner in the area, he didn’t say, ‘Sinner!’ Rather, he saw a person seeking to encounter him (Lk 19:1-10). Jesus was willing to be with, stand with and befriend these people.”

Pope Francis is reducing sanctions against some pedophile priests. With “all this emphasis on mercy”, say some church officials, more and more appeals against sanctions already imposed on disciplined priests will be made. Critics point out that Pope Benedict XVI rarely granted such clemency petitions. He defrocked some 800 priests for sexual misconduct and abuse.

“Persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies or who support the so-called ‘gay culture’ ” cannot be admitted to Roman Catholic seminaries, according to a Vatican document released in December. “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation”, drafted by the Vatican’s Congregation for Clergy and approved by the pope, reaffirms a 2005 policy.

But, Fr. James Martin, editor of the national Catholic periodical, *America*, says: “The people who were open to accepting healthy gay men into the seminaries will still do it.” He says that the document “does not negate the fact, nor could it, that there are thousands of healthy and hard-working and holy and celibate gay priests throughout the world.”

Pope Francis hints that married men who abstain from sex might be ordained. This, he says, could help address the shortage of clergy in remote locations. “We must consider it”, said the pope, in a recent interview with Germany’s *Die Zeit*.

“Why the courts were wrong to rule against a florist who declined service to a gay wedding” is discussed by the dean of the University of St. Thomas School of Law in a recent issue of the Catholic periodical, *America*.

Robert K. Vischer responds to the Washington State Supreme Court’s affirming of a lower court’s judgment that the owner of a small flower shop violated anti-discrimination law by refusing, on religious grounds, to provide floral arrangements for a same-sex wedding. Vischer notes that, on several occasions, she’d gladly provided flowers for the couple. But in the case of the *wedding* flowers, she claimed “an exemption from the law based on her constitutional rights to free speech, free exercise and free association”. Vischer observes: “If any case could have provided a basis for distinguishing between discrimination based on sexual orientation and the narrower refusal to participate in a same-sex wedding, this would have been it.”

He admits that, “these are hard cases” but says he doesn’t believe that in a case such as this one, people “should be forced to provide services that vio-

late their consciences when there are other avenues for the services.” He argues: “The heavy lifting of balancing religious liberty with anti-discrimination norms needs to be done by legislatures”. He also rejects “sweeping vilifications of the court’s decision”, such as expressed by Tony Perkins on the Right. Vischer says it’s “not helpful”. He also points out that the florist’s situation is not comparable to Jim Crow situations: “Jim Crow was a tightly woven web of laws and social norms aimed at the systemic oppression and subjugation of blacks”. He goes on to note: “As a matter of law, it is not accurate to equate a provider’s conscience-driven refusal to participate in same-sex weddings with her decision to participate in weddings within faith traditions to which she does not adhere.” He concludes about this Court’s approach: “For a nation that is built on robust commitment to the liberty of conscience, it is a troubling path. We can and should do better.”

The birth certificates of 731 New York City residents have been altered since 2015. The revisions were male to female in 55 percent of cases, female to male in 45 percent of cases. The applicants’ ages ranged from 5 to 76. Forty-one of them were under 18.

AND FINALLY:

What they’re going to do is “hop into bed right away”. This is the observation from the chief scientific advisor for the Match.com dating site, commenting on the finding that millennials are 48 percent more likely than others to have sex *before* a first “date”. But she then opines: “You learn a lot between the sheets”, rationalizing, “they’re not getting into bed just to have sex. They’re doing it to see who the person is, if they want to put their time and energy into them”. Is this “test” a *reasonable screening* of “the person”? She calls it, “fast sex, slow love”. She also reports that 47 percent of millennial men send crotch shots beforehand and that 53 percent of women say they’ve received such shots – 49 percent of them, unsolicited. Little wonder she’s found that, “57 percent of millennials feel lonely”.