

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

Summer 2015

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

San Francisco's most prominent evangelical church no longer requires same-sex attracted members to remain celibate. No longer a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America, the thousand-member City Church is now affiliated with the Reformed Church in America.

City Church elders call for reflection: "Imagine feeling this from your family or religious community: 'If you stay, you must accept celibacy with no hope that you too might one day enjoy the fullness of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical companionship. If you pursue a lifelong partnership, you are rejected.' This is simply not working and people are being hurt. We must listen and respond."

Similar stands have been taken by other megachurches such as the Eastlake Community Church of Seattle and GracePointe Church outside of Nashville, where the announcement was greeted with a standing ovation. Not all are pleased, though, and some have left.

A Calvin College sociologist's study on creationism may give hints to dealing with antigay attitudes in churches. Jonathan Hill finds that one's family's beliefs about creationism, and even more so, the "social pressure from the congregation", are significant factors in one's holding to creationism. Hill notes that this "intersection of certain beliefs with certain contexts is the only sure-fire way to lead to a certain creationist position." On "those who accept human evolution and believe God is involved in this process" – somewhat analogous to evangelicals who affirm support for same-sex couples – Hill says, they're "confident in their beliefs [and] arrive at their position in idiosyncratic ways that aren't easily captured by the types of measures available in this survey", i.e., in sync with the pronounced opinions of family and local church.

"Still," Hill reasons, "for those who want to promote ideas of evolutionary creationism this can be instructive. We do know what tends to shut down openness to evolutionary creationism. Ideas promoting evolutionary creationism are not likely to shift the perspective of many without attending to the issues of social context highlighted here. Strategies, for example, that open up space in congregations to have conversations about human origins without endorsing a settled position could go far to allowing Christians to entertain ideas that once seemed implausible."

"When it comes to support for gay marriage, a lot of it depends on who you know" says Ed Stetzer, church planter, executive director of LifeWay and a contributing editor to *Christianity Today*. LifeWay surveys find that, like other folks, evangelicals who have friends who are gay or lesbian are much more likely to say same-sex marriage should be legal than those who don't. Among evangelicals who favor legal same-sex marriage, the figure nearly doubles for those with gay or lesbian friends compared with those without them – from 20 percent to 38 percent.

Alan Turing saved millions of lives by cracking the Nazi Enigma code. In 1945 he was awarded the OBE (Order of the British Empire) and in 1951 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. But the following year, his government arrested him for *being* a homosexual and he was given the choice of imprisonment or chemical castration. He chose the latter and within two years he was dead – probably by suicide.

The Imitation Game is the film that recalls his brilliance and his social isolation as a closeted homosexual. Rikki Elizabeth Stinnette, in her *World* magazine review says it's "a well-written film with one unsurprising flaw: It's now politically correct, obligatory

even, to push homosexuality as a personal preference." Her twist, including that snarky "personal preference" jibe, no doubt pleases her Religious Right editors but bears false witness to Turing's tragic experience. She complains: "The film rather blatantly suggests that governmental intolerance ruined Turing" – as if it didn't. In conclusion, she says: "I would have appreciated this film more if it gave full disclosure on the tragic side of Turing's life choice [sic] rather than easy accusations about society's intolerance."

The toll of loneliness can kill. Over 35 years of research at Brigham Young University finds that loneliness is as bad for one's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic. Accounting for other variables, the lonely have a 26 percent greater risk of premature death. Living alone is even worse and can increase risk of early death by 30 percent. Clinicians and sociologists say these studies underscore the urgency for legal marriage for same-sex couples who've struggled for so long in hiding and promiscuity, in singleness, in mixed-orientation marriages and in unstable partnerships that, instead of having the support of family, friends and faith communities, have had to manage against hostility from these very quarters.

"In 2011, Eric married the love of his life, Abby, a math teacher. Together with their dog, Nash, the couple now lives in Kansas City." Such is a popular bio among evangelicals. But, in this particular case, it's the bio of a propagandist against same-sex marriage. It's Eric Teetsel's, director of the antigay Manhattan Project. It, thus, may strike some as a bit insensitive to those he tries to prevent from marrying the loves of *their* lives. It's hardly a straightforward response to Jesus' call to treat others as we want to be treated.

Yet, in a *First Things* essay, he brings up requests for a Christian to bake "a

wedding cake for a same-sex ceremony, or a cake in a lewd shape, or a cake celebrating abortion” and says that, in these cases, “the Bible fails to provide an absolute answer. What is a Christian to do? The answer is a matter of individual conscience. Not whether Christians should or should not do something, but whether they must do something.”

Teetsel complains there’s a “widespread failure of pastors and other church leaders to properly equip everyday Christians to respond to the culture wars. Christians don’t know what the Bible says.” Although not a biblical scholar, himself, he ignores evangelical biblical scholars who disagree with his take on, e.g., homosexuality.

In a *Patheos* blog, he admits: “Discrimination erases the inherent dignity of individuals as creatures made in the Image of God, replacing it with hatred or fear of a group based on some characteristic like race, sex, or sexual preference”. But, even in his dismissive use of the term, “sexual preference”, he’s discriminating against those whose sexual *orientation* is well understood today as an immutable *given*. And he’s ignoring the fact that, on race and sex, the segregation supporters and mixed-race marriage opponents among his evangelical Christian forebears used other Bible verses as sincerely and politically – and hurtfully – as he uses Bible verses against same-sex marriage today.

Some 34,000 black churches have cut their ties with the Presbyterian Church USA since that denomination endorsed marriage for same-sex couples. Anthony Evans, the president of this coalition of 16 million black Christians in 15 denominations, says: “We urge our brothers and sisters of the PCUSA to repent and be restored to fellowship.”

“I love all people, and want the very best for everyone.” After she passed by the Supreme Court building on the day the Justices heard oral arguments on same-sex marriage, a Liberty University grad posted that remark in her essay on *Patheos*.

Maine Skeptic replied: “I think your choice really comes down to your principles. Do you believe in freedom of religion, freedom of speech, democratically elected government, and equal

protection under the law? If you do, then you work with people who disagree with you, finding common ground upon which a peaceful society can be built. This is a harder path, because it requires you to wrestle with the balance between practicing your own religion and protecting the rights of those who disagree with you. If you think those things are unimportant, then you join the groups who believe that this country was founded on the Bible, and you use your influence and privilege to make sure ‘the wrong people’ don’t get rights that only you deserve. You effectively work to undermine the Constitution, because Constitutional freedoms will get in the way of getting your way.” The skeptic later added: “In the eyes of the law, marriage is a legal contract and nothing more. If you think the state views it as a religious sacrament, ask how comfortable you would feel with the government licensing religious sacraments.”

Eastern Orthodox conservative pundit Frederica Mathewes-Green on gay marriage, posted on Facebook: “I was asked why I don’t oppose gay marriage, and I’ll try to make this brief. It’s because I don’t agree that gay marriage harms society, or harms marriage.” Her fans pushed back. But, she thinks, “biology (or perhaps endocrinology) is on our side”. In heterosexuality, she says, “oppositeness is indeed a marvelous thing.”

However, she fails to see that the *experienced* sense of oppositeness, fascinating otherness, is what *anyone*, gay or straight, is attracted to in the romantic partner. So, she insists, “no law can make [us] un-know what we all [*sic*] instinctively know: gay marriage is not the same.”

She does admit that, “straight marriage is much more threatened by the things straight people do: internet porn, adultery, and most obviously, divorce. To blame gay people for destroying marriage seems a classic case of ‘Look over there!’” Still, ignoring the many faithfully committed same-sex marriages, including those of same-sex Christian couples, she dogmatically declares that, “gay sex damages the soul” and it’s “one of the things that impede spiritual growth.”

God, Guns, Grits and Gravy has some surprising words on gay marriage.

Religious Right Presidential wannabe, Mike Huckabee, writes: “The claim that same-sex marriage is destroying society is actually greatly overstated”. He agrees with other conservatives when he contends: “Christians who themselves abandoned the primacy of lifelong marriage to follow the divorce and remarriage customs of a secular society have as much to answer for as those who militantly push to redefine marriage. ... Marriage as an institution is not so much threatened by same-sex couples as it is by heterosexuals’ increasing indifference to it.”

Maggie Gallagher’s “Indiana Crisis Report Card” gave an “A+” to Huckabee and Santorum, an “A” to Rubio and Jindal, an “A-” to Bush and Cruz, a “B” to Carson, a “C+” to Fiorina, a “D” to Christie and Perry, and an “F” to Walker, Paul and Graham. Her “Report Card” was published on *The Pulse 2016* website.

Ralph Blair wrote on Gallagher’s Comment thread: “Even many of the folks who think that a same-sex wedding is wrong don’t frame the issue in terms of ‘enemies’. But Jesus commanded his followers to treat everyone as we’d want to be treated and to do good even to *enemies*. How do those who refuse to bake a cake or provide flowers for a same-sex wedding think they’re following Jesus in doing unto *others* as they’d have others do for them at *their own* wedding? They live by a double standard.”

Seven percent of Millennials identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. And, among all Millennials, homosexuality is considered morally acceptable by 55 percent and morally wrong by 38 percent. Among white evangelicals in this age range (18-35), 20 percent see it as acceptable and 78 percent say it’s wrong. The figures for white mainline Protestants are 57/37, black Protestants, 40/54, Hispanic Protestants, 31/65, white Catholics, 62/33, and Hispanic Catholics, 57/39. Among the “unaffiliated” it’s 83/13.

This Public Religion Research Institute survey of 2,314 Americans was done online in English and Spanish in February 2015. The margin of error for the overall survey is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points.

Joel Belz, founder of Right-wing World magazine, says: “We were wrong.” He’s answering his own question: “Was it only yesterday that many of us were claiming that same-sex marriage would never gain approval if we only allowed the general public to vote on the issue?” He and other antigay people objected to the issue’s being left to judges and lobbied for “the people” to decide. The people have been expressing support and continue to move in the direction of Jesus’ Golden Rule, wanting for others what they want for themselves, a lovingly workable marriage. But Belz laments this shift as “an expression of rebellion against God’s order of things carried to new levels.”

“I guarantee it would solve the problem post-haste if homosexuals were stoned.” Bob Jones III, as President of Bob Jones University, said this at a press conference in Washington in 1980. Now, as BJU Chancellor, Jones apologizes: “I take personal ownership for this inflammatory rhetoric. This reckless statement was made in the heat of a political controversy 35 years ago”, though he’d remarked before saying it in the first place: “I’m sure this will be greatly misquoted”. Yet gay alums, closeted as students, recall his saying this and similar things in chapel. Now he explains: “The Bible I love, preach, and try to practice, does not present today the stoning of sinners as God’s way.”

BJUnity, a support group for LGBT folks and friends associated with BJU, issued a response to his apology: “We are grateful that Bob Jones III has taken responsibility for these words — words that have caused deep harm for many more people than any of us knows. ... It represents the beginning of a change in the rhetoric and conversation.” Jones’ recent statement was prompted by a petition that was signed by thousands.

London Imam, Anjem Choudary, calls for the death penalty for “sodomites” and Canada’s leading Imam says Muslim “sodomites” receive an “important benefit” from being stoned to death. President of the Islamic Forum of Canada and VP of the Islamic Council of Imams of Canada, Faisal Hamid Abdur-Razak, states that, according to the Prophet, the one who

is stoned to death “is in heaven, he is purified”.

Sharia calls for the death penalty for gays. ISIS distributes photos and videos of gay men being stoned and thrown to their deaths from tall buildings. Throughout Muslim cultures, even without a judge’s pronouncing sentence, a family can kill a member who’s gay in order to defend the family’s “honor”. It’s done in Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Iran, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, though in Sudan, a merely severe lashing and imprisonment can be the penalty for first offenses and for same-sex kissing.

Islamic State savages are releasing videos of their murdering bound and blindfolded gay men, dropping them from cranes or high buildings while Islamic mobs on the ground pelt the dying or dead victims with rocks. Islamic State uses the Koran’s story of Sodom to justify these murders.

A Bob Jones University missionary’s son says gay marriage should be legal. Marco Nunez, Jr.: “On one hand I had the value system I was brought up in and how I believed I was supposed to express that.” But he doesn’t feel right telling another American citizen: “‘You don’t get to be treated the same way I do because you love somebody who is the same gender’. I finally ended up at a place where I personally felt like equality for marriage opportunity should be the same across the board.”

Nunez is a member of the Young Conservatives for the Freedom To Marry, a group that aims to replace antigay language in the national GOP platform.

2015 marks the centenary of the death of Ellen G. White, the Seventh-day Adventist pioneer. And, as is the case in other churches, there have been shifts on several social issues in those hundred years. In March, an SDA Youth & Young Adult Ministries Summit was held. It was the first gathering of leaders of SDA youth ministries to formally address LGBT issues. Chris Blake, a communications and English professor at Lincoln, Nebraska’s Union College, an Adventist school with an unofficial gay/straight alliance, led the event. More than 100 SDA church and statewide youth ministers attended. Gay and lesbian youths

and their parents shared stories of their struggles.

Peter Sprigg of the Right-wing Family Research Council is still claiming “change” for homosexuals. But what does he mean by “change”? He says: There are many people who have testified to a significant change in one, two or all three elements of their sexual orientation [*sic*] (attractions, behavior and self-identification)."

Yet all of the now ex-“ex-gay” leaders used to make the very same “change” *claims* but they now no longer do. They now admit that neither they nor anybody else in the “ex-gay” movement ever changed from *homosexual orientation to heterosexual orientation*. And, even while they were *claiming* such a change, many of them were still engaged in same-sex *acts*, even with other “ex-gays”. Sprigg’s three-pronged definition completely ignores this history. So far as mere “self-identification” is concerned, that’s easy, and that’s what they did. They *called* themselves “ex-gay”.

Orthodox Jewish author David Benkof once founded a gay-press syndication service. He’s taught Hebrew grammar and he blogs at *The Daily Caller*. Formerly an active and now a celibate gay man, he challenges “ex-gay” advocates. In a recent essay in the *Jewish Journal*, he responds to remarks made in support of reparative therapy by Rabbi Mordechai Willig of Yeshiva University. He respectfully, but pointedly, asks the Rosh Yeshiva to meet and talk with even just a few of the many gay folks who’ve been all through “reparative” therapy without experiencing any change in sexual orientation. Benkof concludes: “Most importantly, some of your listeners are gay or have gay loved ones. When they hear a prominent rabbi promote ideas they know are false — while refusing to hear their experiences — why should they ever trust him on anything?”

Charles Stanley, First Baptist Church of Atlanta senior pastor, has declined the Jewish National Fund’s recognition in the wake of Jewish and gay activists’ objecting to the honor in view of his long held and voiced *antigay* views. Stanley, a popular evangelical speaker, author and twice president of the Southern Baptist Conven-

tion, says he backed out of accepting the honor because of his “deep love for Israel” and his “reluctance to be a point of controversy and conflict within the Jewish community.”

His son, Andy, founder of North Point Community Church, a megachurch in Alpharetta, Georgia, takes a different approach to gays. The younger Stanley said in April: “We just need to decide, regardless of what you think about this topic — no more students are going to feel like they have to leave the local church because they’re same-sex attracted or because they’re gay. That ends with us.” He said that the church should be “the safest place on the planet for students to talk about anything, including same-sex attraction.”

Doubting that, “Biola, or most evangelical colleges, are going to change their standpoint on homosexual behavior,” Matt Jenson of the Biola theology faculty says: “I do think we’ve got a ways to go in thinking about the pastoral care of gays and lesbians.” Mindful of evangelical ethicist David Gushee’s change of perspective on same-sex relationship, Jenson says: “Though I don’t share his conviction, ...I hope that the church can be a place where it’s more and more safe to talk about sexuality issues without shame as a part of a particular person’s discipleship. Even if the church doesn’t condone certain actions, we can be radically different in how we support people in their ongoing walk with Jesus.”

Casey McCann, a senior and rep of Biola Queer Underground, agrees that healthy conversation of opposing views is necessary: “Learning to think well about things can bring us back together. I hope the church is moving towards openness and charity and conversation rather than division.”

All evangelicals have gay and lesbian relatives. That’s not news. But it’s

now known that Michelle Duggar has a lesbian sister. Her sister, Evelyn Ruark, appeared on one *19 Kids & Counting* show, but wasn’t identified as lesbian and her longtime lesbian partner didn’t appear. Meanwhile, the Duggars campaign against gay rights.

Other prominent conservative Christian families with gay or lesbian relatives have founded Christian colleges, universities, seminaries, national Christian ministries, mega-churches, headed foreign missions, started Religious Right organizations and written bestselling books on biblical studies, theology and practical Christian living. Few of them have shown real love for their same-sex oriented relatives — although some have, indeed, done so. Responses have ranged from ending all communication to loving affirmation and support.

“Don’t Cater to the Homosexual Agenda.” So says a recent ad in the *Colorado Springs Gazette*. Friendship Assembly of God church sponsored the ad. The church’s pastor, James E. Hagan, complains that, “the homosexual agenda has to be totally accepted, not just in writing, not just in schools or colleges, but down to our grade schools and in our churches. We have to hire homosexuals, we have to bow down to what their belief system is.” Hagan says: “If homosexuals say they never come to my church, good! For every homosexual who comes into my church stealthfully, and some of them do, they may corrupt a dozen of my teenagers. I would rather have one of them not come then have a dozen of my teenagers corrupted.” Hagan says people *choose* to be gay. Local FOX21 asked him when he *chose* to be straight. He boasts: “I was born normal.”

Yet again, class discussion of gay issues gets restricted to the politically correct. A Marquette University grad

student instructor, Cheryl Abbate, told a student that she would not tolerate his voicing an opinion against gay marriage in her class discussion on philosophical theories and modern political controversies. She said he’d offend LGBT students. He told her the restriction violated his free speech rights. She said: “You can have whatever opinions you want but I will tell you right now, in this class homophobic [sic] comments, racist comments, sexist comments will not be tolerated. If you don’t like it, you are more than free to drop this class.” He dropped the class.

Marquette political science professor John McAdams responded to the censorship by blogging: “Politically correct academics are so entirely convinced their own attitudes are righteous that they cannot accept people disagreeing with them, and even criticizing them. It’s the result of an extremely inbred, narrow and parochial culture.” The Catholic university officials proved McAdams was right when they sent him a letter that read in part: “Until further notice — you are relieved of all teaching duties and all other faculty activities, including, but not limited to, advising, committee work, faculty meetings and any activity that would involve your interaction with Marquette students, faculty and staff.”

AND FINALLY:

Wesleyan University offers housing for LGBTTTQQFAGPBDSM students in order to be as inclusive as imaginable. But Facebook beats Wesleyan at political correctness in Genderland. Facebook offers half-a-hundred different gender options — including a fill-in-the-blank option in case even Facebook fails the selectively pc “diversity” test and triggers unwanted feelings in the increasingly so easily offended.