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Mail	<p>With Soviet rockets flying into a realm once free of all humanity, Americans felt threatened by Communists who did not believe in God and who like us possessed atomic powers that would make Hiroshima appear like a test case. So life beyond the gravitational pull of the Earth, which bounded us to fear and atrocities, offered promise of a higher life form who (that?) would show us a better way of being because we no longer were sure being human offered much promise. We were searching for a utopia. And as portrayed in <i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i>, we presumed that the promised land would come only with the arrival of a highly intelligent—meaning more intelligent than us—carbon-based bi-ped.</p> <p>Being young, I could conceive of no other form. Those microbes that infected me each spring and fall were not life. Nor could I conceive of life based on noble gases. No gas was noble then. There were only two forms of gas, the kind that went into the tank of a car and the kind that came from my rear end, one enormously practical, one enormously humorous. It was a time when Americans were driving across America, relocating to the suburbs, to California and Florida, all with that hope for something better than what was. My family stayed in Brooklyn, and gasoline was something we used rarely because there was (is) not point of driving in New York. So in our universe, that contracting finite world of NYC, we found use for only one gas—farts, more precisely the humor of farts. Actually a fart—defined by its sound and more important its aroma—is never humorous. The scatologically inclined find humor in the reaction to its sound and odor. When it wafts into a room, people react as if they never farted. That pretense makes farts jovial. Noses wriggle. Eyes dart. Mouths remain closed as people wonder from whose orifice this alien odor has emanated. Their puzzlement</p>

turns to stupefaction as if to say, “Nothing from Earth could produce such a scent.”

“Who did *that*?” I ask that question when I fart in public, and I adopt an accusatory glance, putting each person around me on the odoriferous defensive. There exists a fear of even being accused as if a fart were a terrorist attack on the sensibilities of people standing in waft's way. Many of my acquaintances prefer the fart-and-run tactic, leaving those individuals to look at each other and to wonder who cut the cheese. Those lingering seem almost afraid of what they cannot see, fearing the odor or the embarrassment and reducing a normal bodily function to disgusting.

It's an old story. In “The Miller's Tale” of Canterbury fame, propels a story of lust, trust, and myths with the aroma and power of farts. The deceitful scholar Nicholas boards with the Miller, who married a beautiful young woman, Alisoun who is less than pleased with her conjugal arrangement. Nicholas senses her frustration. This young man, who has spent much of his university time studying the philosophical and theological teachings of what was then a corrupt Catholic Church, weaves a story based on his dreams and the stars how a second great flood will cover the Earth. He tells the Miller that he must build a boat from a tub that would balance on the top of his house. The Miller, believing that God will save him and no other villager, sets to work. As he does, Nicholas enjoys the fruits of Alisoun's bed.

Nicholas is not alone. In the village, there's the dainty parish clerk Absalon who censures the church on holy days and prefers licorice scented breathe. He also becomes upset when someone breaks wind. One night while the Miller was sleeping in his contraption and Nicholas and Alisoun were enjoying their union, Absalon shows up at her window. Despite her protest that she has a love, Absalon insists on a kiss.

She flung the window open then in haste
and said, “Have done, come on, no time to waste,
The neighbours here are always on the spy.”

Absalon started wiping his mouth dry.
Dark was the night as pitch, as black as coal,
nd at the window out she put her hole,
And Absalon, so fortune framed the farce,
Put up his mouth and kissed her naked arse
Most savorously before he knew of this.

And Back he started. Something was a miss:
He knew quite well a woman has no beard,
Yet something rough and hairy had appeared. (103)

Absalon wants his revenge and he returns with a hot poker ready to smote Alisoun for her betrayal.

Now Nicholas had risen for a piss,
And thought he could improve upon the jape
And make him kiss his arse ere he escape,
And opening the window with a jerk,
Stuck out his arse, a handsome piece of work,

Buttocks and all, as far as to the haunch.

Said Absalon, all set to make a launch,
“Speak, pretty bird, I know not where thou art!”
This Nicholas at once let fly a fart
As loud as if it were a thunder-clap.
He [Absalon] was near blinded by the blast, poor chap,
But his hot iron was ready; with a thump
He smote him [Nicholas] in the middle of the rump. (104-105)

Hearing Absalon fall and Nicholas yelp, the Miller topples from his vessel, and the three seekers of salvation become the laughing stock of the village.

Fear—whether the fear of something we consider unpleasant, the fear of being caught, or the fear that comes from believing in a myth—is not hot. It is cold. It freezes us to a spot of unknowing, enabling us to deny our humanity, to fret about an act in which we all have participated, to disdain a part of us as natural as a planet's orbit around the Sun. Until we explore and study do we free ourselves of fear. In that freedom, we can discover that we—along with our farts—are riding on the tipples of sound waves set rumbling by the aftereffects of the cataclysmic Big Bang in a time before carbon-based bi-peds roamed the Earth. During that exploration we discover our humanity in our desire to explore that which we don't know, understand, or even have a vocabulary to conceive.

Therefore two sides exist to human nature: That which explores the unknown and that which fears the unknown, the latter being the less human of our nature. A year ago, a CBS News/*New York Times* poll revealed that more than half of Americans, presumably individuals with at least some high school biology, believe that God created us in our present form. In other words, half the individuals in the richest and most powerful country—meaning it has the means to educate its citizens—fail to recognize Lucy, the ancient Ethiopian hominid. They in essence deny the role of evolution in shaping homo sapiens. (I should note that not only fundamental Christians prefer myth to science. For example, Rabbi Nosson Slifkin endured the following criticism from 23 fellow ultra-Orthodox rabbis: “He believes that the world is millions of years old—all nonsense!--and many other things that should not be heard and certainly not believed. His books must be kept at a distance and may not be possessed or distributed.” [Mindlin, F3])

These people opt for the pseudo-science of a universe created by an intelligent designer, a form of study with all the logical and scientific justification of astrology and phrenology. For example, William Dembski, Ph.D., claims that the mathematical “No Free Lunch” theorems (NFL), developed by David H. Wolpert and William G. Macready, prove that an intelligent designer created the universe with a specific blueprint. In a *New Yorker* article, H. Allen Orr writes that Wolpert “recently denounced Dembski’s use of those theorems as ‘fatally informal and imprecise.’”

Intelligent design and its sister Creationism are denials of the most marvelous act of creation, of a being setting in motion the Big Bang, allowing the universe to create itself. Each works on the premise that some almighty being worked as an engineer designing from a blueprint, some cold calculating manner. That being could equally be an artist for the genius of an artist is not in the doing but in the thinking because once thought, the act of the artist must be set in motion. It would appear then that everything in the universe came about as if by accident. Not so. Everything came into being as an act of creation, making something from

nothing. As in all creation, the essence of the artist becomes a part of all that is created.

Yet the universe is not the greatest creation. If there is a being, he, she, or it set in motion a process billions of years ago that has endowed us with three gifts: curiosity, life, and love. Yet each gift is also a bane of existence. Each leads to something new, something unknown, and potentially dangerous, but when we find courage, we discover that of what we are and, more important, can be—farts and all.

That courage has driven space exploration and our fascination with what we call Outer Space. The scientific desire to know how the universe began easily evolves to know why we began, why we inhabit this orb set in motion of expansion. This pursuit, at least as old as recorded time, manifests itself in more simple terms. For example, people watch episodes of *Star Trek* and its subsequent offspring and a variation on TBS called *The 4400*. They await the contact with those beings, not human, but with an intelligence that parallels our own. So in the quest that is not at all fictional, we use tax money to launch probes into space.

For almost a year, Spirit and Opportunity, two probes launched by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, have roamed the craters and plains of the Martian surface. Just before Christmas 2004, Spirit found a rock, Gothic (gor-tite) in a 95-mile wide volcanic crater. This discovery of a rock surprised no one. The discovery was significant though. The rock forms only in the presence of liquid or gaseous water. It is the “most compelling evidence I've seen to indicate water on Mars,” said Dr. Gostur Klingelhoer of the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, to a *New York Times* reporter on December 14. Where there's water, there could be or could have been life. Meanwhile Opportunity had discovered signs of water on the Meridiani Planum, a wide Martian plain. During the first week in March 2006, spacecraft Cassini found signs of liquid water on Enceladus, a moon of Saturn. “We have found an environment that is potentially suitable for living organisms,” said Dr. Carolyn Porco of the Space Science Institute in Boulder to the *New York Times* on March 10, the same day that the satellite Observer went into orbit around Mars—its mission being to find signs of life on the red planet.

Could Americans imagine life evolving from or in a Martian aqueous solution? To those who believe that some intelligent designer created human life as it is today probably could not fathom life on another planet.

I read Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* in my freshman year of high school. Prior to that book, I had trouble concentrating when I read. I found the process tedious. Then Bradbury wrote of a male Martian who in a jealous rage shot an Earthling with a bee gun. This wonderful being—with a lifestyle as Bradbury described more peaceful and serene than that of the Earthling—succumbed to that all too common venality of human beings and then destroyed the human with a weapon honed from nature. It never occurred to me that an atomic weapon was honed from nature, which it is. The previous summer a bee had stung me on the second toe of my right foot. It swelled. I limped for several days. I could imagine the rage of the Martian, fearing the loss of the wife he treasured. I could also imagine how painful the loss of life was to the Earthling and all the bees, presuming that they all lost their stingers as the myth of bees tells. I don't want to confront the truth of that myth—at this time.

Confronting a myth is no simple matter. Myths—like the variation of creationism proposed by believers in the intelligent designer theories about the universe—are

essential for psychological survival. For example, I like the concept that a bee will die after it stings me. It's my retribution, and vengeance is sweet. It is a harmless myth of sorts, much like the myths about bi-ped Martians or insect-like Martians attacking the Earth as in H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* and its modern day recreations *Independence Day* and *War of the Worlds*, starring Will Smith and Tom Cruise respectively.

While myths help us cope, they perpetuate ignorance. We find it easier to believe in the myth than to confront our ignorance because knowing what is as opposed to what we wish or believe it to be frightens us. That is why exploration frightens us. It forces us to confront all myths and to accept them as myths. My favorite myth—aside from creationism and its half-brother intelligent design—tells the story of rabbis hunting for Christian females before Passover so they can make matzos from the girls' blood. It is an old myth that has reappeared recently on anti-Semitic Web sites. Exploration of daily events exposes the myth. For example, I lived in a predominantly Catholic neighborhood in Brooklyn. It bordered a Jewish neighborhood. During my entire childhood, not one girl went missing from my neighborhood during Passover, and yet my Jewish neighbors celebrated their Passover seders with matzos. It sometimes easy though to hold onto a myth. For example, the myth could be true because it would explain why so many teenage Catholic girls never called me back when I asked them out on a date.

Why do we prefer the myths of roaming murderous rabbis or galactic wandering aliens? We need to believe, to explain, and to perpetuate ideas even when—especially when—all reason calls them fancies. It is easier to hold onto old ideas than to adopt new ones. Change demands effort.

Bradbury jump-started my change. Until I read his book, I never imagined people from Earth landing on a planet. I couldn't because my myths had prepared me only for visitors from outer space landing on Earth, and the engineering of the time reinforced that myth. We had yet to land a man on the Moon. By the time I read Bradbury, the United States and the Soviet Union had launched dogs, monkeys, and men into space. They went up, orbited the Earth, and came down. I could not envision Neil Armstrong some three years later in the summer of 1969 leaping from the stairs of Eagle saying, "One small step for man, one giant step for mankind." Nor could I envision the returning astronauts being held in isolation for fear that they returned with an element or microbe whose mere presence on Earth would destroy humankind, microscopic variations of H.G. Wells creatures from *War of the Worlds*. Nor could I imagine landing probes that explored a planet I so admired as a child..

Evidence of water molecules leads us one step closer to what I had so hoped for as a child—alternative life forms that or whom we could revere and that or who would give us insights into ourselves and the universe. With their guidance humankind might finally learn to harness technological advances exclusively for peaceful development. Then again there's always the unknown, the fear, and there is always the possibility that these life forms would engender the same fear we had of HIV or Hussein's WMDs (weapons of mass destruction).

We gravitate easily to fear sometimes with justification, sometimes not. There are those who fear the erosion of family values and same-sex marriage as much or more than they fear the effects of intestinal peristalsis or feared Saddam Hussein's WMDs. So for example, some members of President George Bush's administration found it easier to assume that Saddam Hussien was working on a cache of WMDs—including lethal gases—than to presume that American, European, and UN intelligence reports had accessed the situation correctly. The

administration officials rationalized their data in order to fulfill a myth that many of them had perpetuated since the end of the first Gulf War when they worked for the president's father. They, much like the Miller, possessed an ability to rationalize their myths into a reality that only they themselves saw.

The Miller took the vague astrological and dream messages of Nicholas and massaged them, creating the myth of a second great flood and he being the new Noah. Over the course of the past two decades, our society has begun to accept such vast rationalizations of myths as being intellectually legitimate. It is evidenced by the tolerance of the Bush Administration's assessment of Saddam Hussien. It is evidenced by the presumption that creationism is a legitimate theory of human development. It is evidenced by the presumption that the Christian interpretation of the Bible has been and should be the foundation of a secular democracy. Since the Reagan Administration, the politically conservative have courted this presumption of righteousness, and in doing so, they have created the so-called Christian Right.

The two words accurately describes the political and religious leaning of a group of Christian Americans, but they have a subtle vernacular meaning. We are a rightist society, meaning most people are right-side dominant, leaving lefties, south-paws, out in the cold. We design for righties—from the arrangement of a place setting at a dinner table to penmanship. Righties take it for granted. In such a society, the word right has also taken on the meaning of *correct*. So when the expression Christian Right is used, we can *hear* the oxymoron Christian Correct.

While the movement gained momentum during the Reagan Administration, its philosophies and theology became mainstream during the Republican 1994 victory in the House of Representative. The father of that victory and the political cheerleader for the Christian Right, Newt Gingrich, has since fallen from favor, but he has managed to write a book, *A 21st Century Contract with America*. Having lost his pulpit as Speaker of the House, he has managed to squeeze out a mind fart with this book:

“Since the 1960s, the conservative majority has been intimidated, manipulated, and bullied by the liberal minority. The liberal elites who dominate academia, the courts, the press, and much of government bureaucracy [and who brought you the end of segregation, the Vietnam War, and rampant pollution] share an essentially European secular-socialist value system.”

His words are telling of the transformation. For example, during the past ten years, the political right has transformed the word European into a pejorative. In the minds of the Christian Right's leadership, the socio-political thinking of Estonians, Greeks, Albanians, Slavs, Poles, Italians, Hungarians, Dutch, Germans, French, English, and Irish have been brewed into one, highly improbably political stew of shared objectives. They have created a myth.

This conservative fanfaron, like some kind of intellectual Absalon, writes the word secular as if it were a fart. This former teacher and historian forgets or ignores three points:

1. Many of our founding fathers, including Adams, Monroe, Jefferson, and Franklin, were deists.
2. Our founding fathers were only second generation “Americans,” meaning more European in nature than American.

3. When they wrote the Constitution and the *Federalist Papers*, they wanted the church and state to be separated. They did not trust organized religion for they knew the havoc organized religion had brought to Europe, and with that history engraved in their memories, they created a government that was secularist in the European traditions of Rousseau and Voltaire and Locke.

By weaving a myth about the formation of a Christian state, though, the Christian Right engendered a credibility. It is not questioned by most Americans whose knowledge of their own history is at best poor. It is not questioned by many politicians because they fear the political power of the Christian Right or at the very least of being labeled with the pejorative secularist.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall, religious conservatives meanwhile witnessed the fall of godless communism at the hands of Christian America, and during the Reagan and the George H. Bush's administrations, they needed a replacement. They found it in the zealous Iranian Shiites who created a theocracy. The religious leaders with all the presumption and wisdom of the Miller banned *anything* not acceptable to *their interpretation* of the Koran. Then American minds farts exploded after 9/11 as the radical elements of Islam misquoted the Koran as frequently as the Christian Correct misquote the Bible. Members of the Islamic Right condemned Christians and Jews as infidels. Idealizing the past, they prayed and aspired for a return of the caliphates that ruled Northern Africa, portions of southeastern Europe, and southwestern Asia prior to the 13th Century. It was not difficult for writers like Paul Berman to show a connection between what the ideas of Islamists and 20th Century European fascists, both creating a romanticized notions of what their groups once were and what they could be. (There is more than a sharp irony that fascists as well as fundamental Moslems and Christians have believed or believe that civilization is declining into some kind of final stage, and that they can rescue it if people only believe as they believe.)

Members of the Christian Right of course felt threatened by the fantasy of past Moslem glories. Equating Christianity and democracy, the Christian Right looked East to portions of central Asia and northern Africa and saw the rise of Christianity's newest threat, as if fundamentalist Christians would have to rise up and bear arms as the Catholic nobleman did during the First, Second, and Third Crusades.

The Bush Administration lead the charge into Afghanistan and then into Iraq under the presupposition of unilateralism rationalized by the threat of imagined weapons of mass destruction. In both wars, the U.S. won, which the Christian Right interpreted as Christianity won. Christianity's Right scoured the countryside for WMD. God didn't help them find them. But just as easily as Absalom ignore the Catholic Church's precepts that banned extra-conjugal visitation rights to acquaintances, the Bush administration ignored the commandment of Jesus: Love your neighbor as yourself. Rather his administration sanctioned—in violation of the Geneva Convention—the torture of enemy combatants, who were imprisoned in GB, Cuba, outside the jurisdiction of Federal courts, denying them access to lawyers and family members. They sent some prisoners to countries whose methods of interrogation made America's pale.

In the shadows of a past that Islamic and Christian fundamentalist would prefer to ignore, Voltaire would have screamed, "Crush the horror." As Adam Gopnik explained in his *New Yorker* article, Voltaire was referring to the "alliance of religious fanaticism with the instruments of the state, and the two combined for

torture and official murder.” (76) To paraphrase Voltaire, we become what we fear. For example, owners and operators of IMAX theaters are not running a variety of movies created for the large-screen format. They are not violent or sexual, but they do use words that their potential audiences might find objectionable. These are not Lenny Bruce or George Carlin words. They are evolution, Big Bang, and 50 million years as in reference to a layer of the Earth's surface. The insensitivity of these words: They imply the fallacy of creationism. The owners/operators fear that Christian fundamentalists in their communities will at the very least not attend the movies and at the very worst demonstrate outside their theaters. In essence the owners/operators of these theaters, even those associated with a scientific operations like museums, are allowing the fallacies of myths to take precedence over the facts of the empirical. And how different is that from the fundamentalist Moslem leaders in Iran and Afghanistan before the war?

For me it was most apparent in a freshman composition class that I teach. At the end of the semester, the students must submit a 2000-word research paper. They pick their own topics. At the end of the 2004 Fall semester, several selected same-sex marriage. Since I prohibit the use of faith-based sources (Old Testament, New Testament, Koran) as primary sources, they pursued their endeavors with fanatical generalizations without documentation. They never questioned their presumption that heterosexual marriage was the only intended union. While cloaking marriage in veils of a religious moment, they ignored that a large percentage of Americans have never married within a church and that they are still considered married. In other words, they never confront the notion that marriage is on one plane a civic ceremony, a witnessed contract between two adults. Of course they ignored the notion that marriage is conceived in most societies as a means of creating patriarchal responsibility for children produced. They never entertained the concept that marriage is institutionalized in many societies and has become a snare for women and children. They always, always, ignored the reason why most people in the United States marry in the first place—love.

It was not the first time for me. When I read and hear those opposed to same-sex marriage, I never hear the concept of love—especially from heterosexuals. It's as if this concept doesn't exist, as if the desire to share body and life are not part of the contract, as if the admission to this concept would legitimize the concept of same-sex marriage. The students did offer the fallacious arguments that homosexual relationships degraded into banal acts of sexual indulgence and that fidelity was a concept understood only by a man and a woman.

My students had to believe. Without these myths, they would face their worst fear: That sometimes gay couples love each other more than some heterosexual couples. And if that is true, as it is, then gay couples should be allowed to marry. They ignored the concept of love because they know in their hearts what studies have shown: “With their mouths they [members of the supposed Christian renewal movement] claim that Jesus is Lord, but with their actions they demonstrate allegiance to money, sex, and self-fulfillment.” (Sider) In essence it is possible according to the findings of Ronald Sider's studies that the desire to share a life together between a gay couple outweighs the same desire in a heterosexual couple. He notes that heterosexual Christian men “beat their wives as often as their neighbors. They were almost as materialistic and even more racist than their pagan friends.”

They would face the fact that life gives meaning only when it is shared with another and that the sexual proclivities of a couple only manifest that desire to

share a life—with the need to touch, to become intimate in way reserved only for one other individual on the planet. To face that fact then would open conservative Christians to the greatest of fears: They are no different from any gay couple.

By adhering to the myth of lewd behavior of homosexuals, the Christian Right clings to words that they attribute to God without thought. Just as extremist Moslems, “many Jews and Christians have assumed that their holy scriptures were some kind of immutable truth that descended from heaven in—what, on a tablet? On a scroll?...These kinds of text are accretions that developed over time, they come out of arguments.” (Pagel)

Elain Pagel, the Harrington Spear Paine Professor of Religion at Princeton University, argues that the New Testament attributed words to Jesus that had evolved from debates decades after the crucifixion. She notes, therefore, that fact “makes it impossible to maintain a kind of literalist and simplistic view of revelation.” In other words, too many individuals treat their texts as if they came from an individual transfixed by a lord god—acting as a divine stenographer.

Such literalism creates problems always ignored by fundamentalists. The Old Testament, for example, is considered a sacred text by Jews, Moslems, and Christians. According to Deuteronomy, I could have asked the selectmen of my New England town to stone my sons. They were normal adolescent boys—meaning that they were stubborn and rebellious. “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son...they [my wife and I] shall say unto the elders of [our] city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious,'...and all the men of [our] city shall stone him with stones that he die, so shalt thou put evil away from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.” (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). What's more, I have the right to own a slave (Deuteronomy 15:12-14) for six years after which I must set him/her free. In addition, I am permitted at least two wives (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). All Christians should also not eat pork: “And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven-footed, yet he cheweth not the chud, he is unclean to you.” (Leviticus 11:7). Yet I am not permitted to stone my sons, to have two wives, and I can enjoy bacon with my eggs. That means that we are selective about which one of the Bible's laws we will honor. If it is permissible to be selective, why cannot homosexuality no longer be considered an abomination? No conservative religious follower has ever rationally explained the duplicity. In the end they create a belief system based more on myth than anything remotely called faith.

It is a duplicity or adherence to myth that has begun to permeate the thinking of the Christian Right, allowing its organizations to use their influence in a manner that is detrimental to the political process. For example, a coalition called the Arlington Group—including James Dobson of Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, the Southern Baptist Convention, American Family Association, Jerry Falwell, and Paul Weyrich—held President's George Bush's Social Security plan hostage. They wrote, “When the administration adopts a defeatist attitude on an issue that is at the top of our agenda [same-sex marriage ban amendment to the U.S. Constitution], it becomes impossible for us to unit our movement on an issue such as Social Security privatization.” They were warning the President that they would hold hostage his Social Security reform.

(They could be missing the point. As reported in a 11 March 2006 posting in *Slate*, the Delaware Supreme Court found that a gay woman could retain joint custody of triplets she co-parented with their biological mother. God forbid, a court recognizes the concept of love extending beyond heterosexuals. The ruling will effect American families since Lambda Legal Defense Fund says that about 8

million gay parents care for about 10 million children.)

In the warnings of the Christian Right, they ignored the cornerstone of political conservatives, such as President Bush—less government is better government. The President believes that the nation's citizens can do a better job managing retirement accounts than the Federal government. His administration is pushing responsibility back onto the citizenry, a conservative priority since the Reagan Administration, an agenda the Christian Right usually has supported—except when it comes to the sexual behavior of the nation's citizens. By advocating a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages, the coalition believes that the laws governing marriage should be stripped from the states and given to the Federal government. The coalition's implication is that people know how to handle money but the state needs to monitor what they do in their bedrooms.

By implications of their own beliefs, however, the amendment that they propose goes not nearly far enough in terms of supporting Christian family values. The amendment therefore should not ban only same-sex marriages. It should also ban divorce. It should make extra-marital affairs illegal. After all, divorce and extra-marital affairs violate the Christian Right's concept of family because in all the discussions of same-sex marriage, the love and respect two individuals have for each other is never discussed. In the eyes of the Christian Right, a relationship becomes sacred not because of love but because one person has a penis and the other doesn't.

That definition though does help in rationalizing the behavior of Jesus's forebearers. After seeing their mother transformed into a pillar of salt, Lot's daughters hid with their father in a cave. Believing that they were the last of humanity, they seduced Lot—the forebear of David, thereby making Jesus a descendant of an incestuous relationship. Then again, it is best to ignore that which violates *the* myth. Rather than trouble with the confusing signals from the Bible and the problems of marriage as an institution in America (meaning almost half of all marriages end in divorce), the Christian Right prefers to perpetuate the myth of homosexuality taking over America and transforming its values.

Dobson may have seen the Lambda figures, and that might explain “things.” According to Dobson, SpongeBob SquarePants is participating in a pro-homosexual video. He co-stars with Barney, Jimmy Neutron, Winnie the Pooh, Kermit the Frog, and Miss Piggy. During the video, these stars of children programming promote the concept of tolerance, which in a twisted form of logic could be construed as a euphemism for pro-homosexuality. I am open-minded so after reading Dobson's claim, I went into my kitchen and examined my sponge, looking for little genitalia. When I couldn't find them, I threw out the sponge and replaced it with a nylon scrubby. I didn't want my sponge spreading such venality among my dish detergents, knives, spoons, forks, and plates.

Who could argue with Dobson? Once the characters are examined carefully, it is all so apparent. There are the mix-marriage proponents—Kermit and Miss Piggy. Her desire to marry a frog plays as a metaphor for interracial marriage. Then there's purple Barney. What straight guy would ever wear purple? Pooh is always licking his honey pot, a sure metaphor for drug addiction. I have yet to figure out Jimmy Neutron, and I cannot understand why such a handsome sponge as Bob hangs with Patrick Starfish, whose wide belly obviously makes him a middle-aged heterosexual. But as the Christian Right will remind anyone willing to listen, the gay community are an insidious bunch—which explains why SpongeBob is not alone in his quest to destroy America's family values.

The public network, PBS, had asked the rabbit friend of Arthur the Aardvark, Buster Baxter from the show *Arthur*, to visit friends who had lesbian parents. The show was called *Postcards from Buster*. Worried about the sensibilities of the American public, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings condemned the program, claiming that parents would not want their children exposed to a lesbian lifestyle. Secretary Spellings obviously ignored the fact that each day we all are exposed to a lesbian lifestyle through people with whom we work and our neighbors and our relatives. Even so, PBS pulled the show—better safe, then sorry.

Her upset came shortly after parents complained that St. John the Baptist School in Costa Mesa, California, permitted two adopted boys into the school. The reason: The boys' parents are gay. That bastion of liberalism—the Orange County California Diocese—sees nothing wrong with the Catholic school's decision, noting that the children are not responsible for their parents' behavior. The diocese also noted if it were to single out children whose parents were gay, then why shouldn't it single out parents who commit adultery or cohabit, equally venial as homosexuality in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The parents in opposition claims that “these sodomites” are using the children as “political pawns” to change the church, an invasion of sorts. These parents also argue that the children should not have been baptized—even though such a decision would violate centuries of Catholic theology.

Then again I wonder how people like Dobson can be so attuned to information that most Americans miss. Could they see in others what they fear most in themselves? I don't know, but it's apparent that these people are unique. They have the singular quality of being able to deny the validity of decades of scientific research, preferring the myths of the Old Testament, even though they still eat pork. These same people would have no choice but to deny the potential for life on Mars because if there were life on Mars then they would no longer be biblically special. Noah never traveled to Mars, so the two-by-two scenarios—again a distinct image of heterosexual supposed preference—would vanish.

It would never occur to these individuals that their Supreme Being gave them only two gifts—life and love. When combined, no one individual is more special than the other. There's only the celebration of each other's lives. Yet they never discuss the gift of love, the willingness of two individuals—regardless of their sexuality—to pledge themselves to each other. And what is marriage but the formalization of such a pledge. It is that pledge that gives sanctity to the union; the union does not give sanctity to the individuals. Whether the pledge is witnessed by the state is irrelevant. The union is sanctified with or without the state's permission because the state has no power over love.

During the past two years, the desire for states to recognize same-sex marriage has nothing to do with the sanctity of the event—for how can a justice of the peace, a secular position of the state—sanctify any arrangement. It has everything to do with equal access to laws that afford benefits to spouses, especially in regards to health care and other such personal matters. It has everything to do with eliminating a prejudice that would come from a two-tier system of marriage—one for heterosexuals, one for homosexuals—the implication that one is superior to the other. It is akin to creating one marriage for two virgin heterosexuals and another for non-virgins. It makes no sense since it is a civil—not religious—ceremony.

The one point that comes through from the Christian Right is that the state recognition of same-sex marriage will diminish the status of heterosexual

marriage. But since a marriage is performed by the individuals being joined, then only they can diminish the union. Is that what the Christian Right fears? Do they fear that the state will recognize in another way that fundamental Christians are no more special—at least in the eyes of the state—than homosexuals? It may come as a shock but in the eyes of God they are not.

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