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point of view

Confessions of a Blog Addict.

June 1, 2011

Confessions of a Blog Addict. Or Why I Love to Hate GetReligion.org and FamilyScholars.org

by [Anonymous](#)

I confess. I'm hooked. I am an addict, and I blame it on glbtq.com.



The two right-wing blogs
Anonymous most loves to hate.

Until two years ago, when I encountered glbtq.com's entry entitled "Political Blogs," I had read blogs only occasionally and never deliberately sought them out. Prodded on by that article, I decided to stick my toe into the blogosphere. Since then, I've become hooked.

My husband accuses me of neglecting him. He says he is a "blog widower." My much loved mother-in-law fears that I have become obsessed. I am terrified that my boss will notice how much time I spend on the computer (during my breaks) at sites with names that are unlikely to have anything to do with my prosaic profession. I have even occasionally turned down social invitations because I feared that I might miss some urgent post or response to some comment I made. In short, this habit has gotten out of control.

It may also be bad for my health. Every time I read about something Maggie Gallagher has done or said, my blood pressure rises astronomically.

Truly, I waste far too much time on my habit. Well, "waste" is a loaded term. Actually, most of my blog reading is useful. I learn a lot. I am very well informed. I enjoy some good writing and learn new ways of dispelling ignorance and refuting prejudice.

Still, I have probably spent a lot of time learning things that have little redeeming social value. Especially the time I spend on a couple of anti-gay sites. Yes, I know: arguing with homophobes is not very profitable. Still, I feel compelled to do so, or at least compelled to find out what the homophobes are thinking and how they manipulate their gullible fellow-travelers.

Ah, maybe that is the redeeming value that justifies monitoring sites like GetReligion.org and FamilyScholars.org, the ugly blogs that will occupy most of my space in this essay.

My Favorite Sites

I usually begin my day by checking out my favorite gay news sites and blogs. I go to Advocate.com to find out what news happened overnight, and throughout the day I check Advocate.com and 365gay.com for news updates.

I don't just read the news items posted on these sites. I often feel compelled to comment on them. And then to comment on the comments left by others. Oh dear, have I become a troll as well as an addict?

I also like to check out the blogs on 365gay.com. John Culhane and Jennifer Vanasco always have interesting things to say. Vanasco is sane and sensible. Culhane, who teaches law, is a valuable source for understanding the nuances of legal issues.

I am less fond of the work of 365gay.com's other bloggers, James Withers (too prickly and self-absorbed for my taste) and John Corvino (who often makes good points, but who collaborates with people from Focus on the Family and National Organization for Marriage, which in my book compromises him).

After checking out the news sites, I typically move on to my five favorite gay blogs: John Aravosis and Joe Sudbay's AMERICAblog Gay (www.gay.americablog.com); David Badash's The New Civil Rights Movement (thenewcivilrightsmovement.com); Alvin McEwen's Holy Bullies and Headless Monsters (holybulliesandheadlessmonsters.blogspot.com/); David Mixner's "Live from Hell's Kitchen" (www.davidmixner.com); and Karen Ocamb's LGBT ; POV (www.lgbtpov.com).

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Oh sure, I sometimes check out other gay and political blogs, from Real Clear Politics and Daily Kos to Pam's House Blend, Good As You, and Towleroad, but these five are my favorites.

They are my favorites because in addition to being informative and well-written, each has a distinct personality that I appreciate.

Aravosis and Sudbay, for example, personify passion and fierceness in their pursuit of justice. Their commitment to the cause of equality is boundless. They are very good reporters as well as analysts. They often break news from within the Washington beltway, and they understand the intricacies of the legislative process. Most of all, I enjoy the fact that they hold accountable our friends as well as our enemies.

Badash's The New Civil Rights Movement shares the passion of AMERICAblog Gay, but is somewhat more cerebral and more carefully considered. It offers a digest of daily news, supplemented and clarified by commentary and analysis. Its content is divided into various (often overlapping) categories such as "Bigotry Watch," "Gay Agenda," "Families," "Legislation," "Marriage," "Media," "Religion," and "Sports." Badash's posts are always thoughtful.

Alvin McEwen's Holy Bullies and Headless Monsters is a marvelous compendium of commentary. As its name suggests, it was established to challenge the lies and libels directed at the glbtq community by conservative religious organizations. Its motto is "Lies in the name of God are still lies."

But McEwen, an African American gay man residing in Columbia, South Carolina, does much more than expose the lies of religious conservatives. He posts on glbtq culture and politics generally as well as on right-wing religious terrorism. One of my favorite features is his "Know Your LGBT History" series. McEwen is a sharp thinker and excellent writer who is always a pleasure to read.

David Mixner is a national treasure, whose long history of activism is inspiring; his "Live from Hell's Kitchen" is also always a pleasure to read. One of our foremost political experts, Mixner not surprisingly devotes a lot of bandwidth to politics and politicians. But he is a remarkably well-rounded man, and his interests range widely, including art (especially photography), architecture, Broadway, history, and many other topics. In his blog, he reflects on issues as disparate as the problems of aging and the delights of friendship.

Another powerful writer is Karen Ocamb. Her LGBT ! POV is primarily a news blog, and Ocamb is an astute news commentator and political analyst. But what makes her blog special and personal is her deep roots in the Los Angeles glbtq scene. She knows many of the West Hollywood and Los Angeles figures that she writes about, and she is generous in sharing the fruits of her own long history of activism.

Well, these are my favorite blogs. I don't really consider the time I spend on them wasted at all. They provide erudition and insight, as well as a great deal of pleasure.

Blogs I Love to Hate

However, there are two more blogs that I visit regularly that I wish I could resist. I don't visit these blogs daily and I have even weaned myself from them for months at a time, but I find myself frequently wanting to check them out. I don't completely understand their attraction. But in different ways they illustrate the duplicity of the opponents of gay rights. I suppose from that perspective, one might call them instructive.

Both blogs—GetReligion.org and FamilyScholars.org—maintain a pretense of objectivity and nonpartisanship that they regularly violate, sometimes in such flagrant ways as to become downright comical. In actuality, despite their elaborate pretense of nonpartisanship, they both reflect the values of the dubious right-wing foundations that fund them.

GetReligion and FamilyScholars do not feature the openly anti-gay rants of extreme sites like those maintained by Family Research Council and other wingnuts—I'm not masochistic enough to frequent such places—but they are quite homophobic enough, and perhaps all the more dangerous for being insidious.

Much of the fun of reading these blogs resides in the contortions the contributors perform to maintain the illusion that their sole interest is in responsible journalism (in the case of GetReligion.org) or in reporting on family studies topics (FamilyScholars.org).

Another source of fun is the sheer lunacy of some of their bloggers.

I am writing about them here mainly in the hope that by setting down how awful they are, I will be able to break free of my strange addiction to them.

GetReligion.org

GetReligion.org bills itself as a journalism site dedicated to exposing

shortcomings in the mainstream media's depiction of religion, including errors of omission, such as failing to notice the "ghosts" of religion in news stories.

GR's bloggers, led by veteran religion reporter Terry Mattingly, criticize newspaper and sometimes television stories that allegedly misrepresent or distort or ignore religious issues. Occasionally they praise what they see as outstanding religious reporting, but generally their approach is negative, accusatorily and smugly noting the ostensible ignorance or prejudices of journalists and the secular media generally.

Most often, however, they use critiques of journalism simply as a pretext for their own editorializing, typically presenting conservative religion as victimized by the liberal prejudices of secular reporters. They whine on and on about how unfairly the religious right is depicted by the mainstream media, and attempt to pressure the media to shape the coverage of same-sex marriage and other contentious issues in ways favorable to their conservative spin.

On the site Mattingly acknowledges that GetReligion.org is funded by a philanthropist whom he identifies as Roberta Green. What he doesn't point out is that Roberta Green is the wife of Howard Ahmanson, Jr. and that the site is actually funded by Ahmanson's Fieldstead & Company, also known as Fieldstead Institute.

Mattingly's identifying the "angel" of GetReligion.org as Roberta Green (instead of Roberta Green Ahmanson, as she customarily identifies herself) amounts to an attempt to deceive or at least to conceal the bias of the blog. Mattingly's attempted deception probably also acknowledges a conflict between his eagerness to take Ahmanson's money and a reluctance to be too closely associated with him.

Who is Howard Ahmanson, Jr. and why is his connection to GetReligion noteworthy?

Ahmanson, who inherited a vast banking fortune, is a principal supporter of extreme right-wing causes in the United States. He has been associated with the Christian Reconstructionist Movement, which advocates for the government's imposition of Old and New Testament biblical laws and principles, including the prescription of capital punishment for homosexual acts. His purpose, Ahmanson said in 1985, is "the total integration of biblical law into our lives."

(In fairness, Ahmanson announced in 2004 that he no longer considers it "essential" to stone homosexuals to death.)

Ahmanson was the single largest individual contributor to California's Proposition 8 campaign, which deprived gay and lesbian couples the right to marry. He donated \$1,395,000 to the "Yes on 8" organization.

He has also been a major supporter of the "ex-gay" movement and of the secession of congregations and dioceses from the Episcopal Church of the United States as a result of the ordination of Bishop V. Gene Robinson in 2003.

Ahmanson's fixation with same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and the Episcopal Church are mirrored in GetReligion's obsession with these topics. The challenge for the GetReligion bloggers probably resides in propounding their angel's extreme right-wing positions while attempting to appear more respectable than he is. Hence, they perform an intricate balancing act as they try to conceal their homophobia under a facade of objectivity, as though their interest really is journalism rather than gaybashing.

Often they engage in what must be nothing less than dishonesty. For example, in June 2008, soon after the California Supreme Court ruled that the state constitution required marriage equality, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story on how the ruling sparked a debate about homosexuality between religious people who read the Bible literally and those who call for new interpretations. In the article the reporter pointed out that some biblical passages call for the death penalty for homosexuality.

GetReligion's snarkest blogger, Mollie Hemingway (who posts as "Mollie"), got bent out of shape about the reporter pointing out what the Bible literally says in an article about conflicts between literalists and interpreters, viewing the reference to Leviticus in particular as inflammatory.

Moreover, she claimed that the article "belittles the issue [of religious attitudes toward homosexuality] to cast it as a dispute over a 'handful' of passages. The teachings about homosexuality . . . are about much more than a handful of Scriptures. There is an entire ethic—woven throughout Scripture—about sexuality in which homosexuality is just a part. There are also 2,000 years worth of tradition and church teaching about the matter."

In the lively discussion that followed, a few commenters pointed out that the Leviticus passage and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah are routinely cited by religious opponents of homosexuality, some

recalling that they had heard sermons as well as political speeches in which those passages were referenced. But Mollie and the faithful regular commenters adamantly denied that any Christian would call for the death penalty for homosexuality, blithely ignoring the long shameful history of Christian persecution of homosexuals.

Mollie wrote: "Paul, the author of Romans, did not call for the death penalty for homosexual activity or any of the other sins he enumerates. The Apostles certainly did not. In fact, if Christians have ever called for the death penalty for those or any other sins, they would be very bizarre Christians indeed. The book of Romans itself is about the opposite of calling for the death penalty for sin."

It is possible, but unlikely, that Hemingway is simply ignorant of Christian history, including the "2000 years worth of tradition and church teaching" she cited, and therefore unaware that the death penalty for homosexual acts was in fact put in place by Christians throughout Europe in the middle ages and was performed as late as the mid-nineteenth century.

(Not until 2003 were religiously-inspired—and defended—draconian penalties for homosexual acts in the United States declared unconstitutional. Does Hemingway think that Christians had nothing to do with these laws and their perpetuation?)

She might conceivably even be ignorant of the contemporary Christian Reconstructionist Movement or its related movement called Dominionism, which also prescribes the death penalty for homosexual acts.

More likely, however, she and her fellow bloggers and commenters were simply lying, following a script designed to paint the Christian supporters of Prop 8 as kindly people who have no animus toward homosexuals but merely want to preserve traditional marriage. That, at least, is the way she and the other bloggers at GetReligion think the mainstream media should frame the same-sex marriage debate.

What makes this false claim that Christians have never called for the death penalty for homosexual activity most baffling, of course, is that GetReligion's very funder has had extremely close associations with a movement that advocates the death penalty for homosexual acts. Are the bloggers simply telling bald-faced lies? Or do they really not know who pays their bills? Or what he advocated until fairly recently?

The homophobia of GetReligion is displayed over and over. Sometimes it manifests itself in the blogs that gleefully ridicule the Episcopal Church, other times it surfaces in its hyping of the alleged threats to religious freedom posed by proposals to extend equal rights to gay people.

Sometimes GetReligion's homophobia is simply petty, and therefore comic. Mollie, for example, got her underwear in a twist in 2008 because a *New York Times* feature story by Ariel Kaminer on the entertainment offered on Rosie O'Donnell's gay family cruises did not once quote an anti-gay expert (George Rekers or Maggie Gallagher, perhaps?) or religious leader to say something about how bad homosexuality is. The failure to give voice to homophobes constituted "cheerleading" for same-sex marriage (which was not even mentioned in the article), Mollie said, declaring that the article was written "as if the experience on the cruise is nothing but lollipops and rainbows. I have never seen so many positive words per paragraph since I received the Ricky Schroeder Fan Club newsletter."

The bloggers at GetReligion get upset when gay people and their families are presented in newspapers and television as ordinary people without a quote from someone condemning them. Their criticism, which echoes right-wing lamentations against the "normalizing" of homosexuality, is all in the interest of journalistic balance, they pretend. Certainly, Mollie doesn't think she is homophobic, as she keeps repeating over and over.

Indeed, she got very perturbed when a newspaper reporter pronounced the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) "gay friendly" when the denomination voted to ordain gay and lesbian ministers in committed relationships. This disturbed her because applying the term "gay friendly" to ELCA implied that denominations that teach that homosexuality is an abomination are by contrast "gay unfriendly." (She is a member of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, sometimes referred to as the Misery Synod, and her denomination unequivocally condemns homosexuality.)

In a revealing rant, she went on to compare homosexuality to lying. "Pick something else that Scriptures teach is a deviation from God's will. Anything will do, really, but let's take an easy one from the Ten Commandments—lying.' . . . Okay, now let's imagine that one church body endorses lying. And now let's imagine that another church body takes the position that lying falls short of how God wants us to behave. . . . Now which church body is liar-friendly? Some (be they liars or not) would much rather have a church in which lying is condemned—and forgiven—than one where they are told lying is A-OK and nothing to feel guilty about. Some would believe the second church to be infinitely more friendly."

So, you see, the churches that affirm the equal dignity and worth of gay people are really gay-unfriendly and the churches that terrorize gay people with threats of hell-fire are actually gay-friendly. It all depends on how you look at it, and Mollie chooses to look at it from her own skewed perspective and would like for the media to share this point of view.

What Mollie doesn't like is for Christians like her to be considered "gay-unfriendly" or in any way to be held accountable for homophobia. To call out religious terrorists is to victimize Christians, which is a constant theme at GetReligion: poor Christians are said to be misunderstood and discriminated against in society generally and especially in the mainstream media. If gay people get equal rights, they fret, why churches will not only be forced to marry them, but will also be prohibited from condemning the "gay lifestyle."

(Interestingly, however, despite Mollie's 2010 post, the other GetReligion bloggers haven't adopted her world-upside-down definition of "gay-friendly." They routinely refer to the Episcopal Church and other liberal religious groups as gay-friendly; of course, they mean that in the most condemnatory sense imaginable.)

According to the GetReligion bloggers, the opponents of equal rights for gay people should never be referred to as homophobes or bigots, but should be acclaimed for their love of gay people even (or especially) as they work to deprive us of civil rights.

One could go on and on about the homophobia at GetReligion, but I will point out merely that the bloggers there have severely criticized the mainstream reporting on the Uganda "kill-the-gays" bill, especially the suggestion that Evangelical Christians have anything to do with it (despite conclusive evidence implicating them in the lethal legislation). Sarah Pulliam Bailey even went so far as to claim that poor Rick Warren was "bullied" into denouncing the bill, which he did so only reluctantly. (Yes, the real victims of the Uganda "kill-the-gays bill" are, you guessed it, Pastor Rick Warren and Evangelical Christians!)

Oh, and the real victims of bullying in the schools are not the students who are driven to suicide by rampant homophobia, but, again, you guessed correctly, the *religious* kids.

On the heels of the suicides of gay teens Asher Brown and Tyler Clementi in October 2010, Terry Mattingly confessed that he too was bullied. "I was a pudgy, non-athletic boy in sports-mad Texas and, to make it worse, I was a musician who sang in classical choirs (boy soprano, no less)," he confided. But, he added, "these weren't the main reasons I was bullied. There was something even worse to those bullies—I was a preacher's kid."

That's their answer to Dan Savage's charge that the pandemic of anti-gay bullying is related to the hateful rhetoric of religious leaders. Their self-pitying, self-indulgent, morally bankrupt response to the suicides of gay youth would be shocking were it not so predictable.

For all the real horror and disgust that GetReligion evokes, I confess that I find it amusing in a macabre way, and, yes, addictive. Many of the postings are fascinating in their contortions and dishonesty in the same way an open wound is fascinating.

Perhaps even more amazing than the blog postings is the obtuseness of the comments left by the devoted readers of GetReligion.

One cannot but be stunned by the combination of arcane knowledge and moral ignorance displayed in the comments of people with names like Deacon John Bresnahan, Martha, Julia, FWKen, Perpetua, and Bram. They know all about the differences between a verger and a vicar, an oblate and a friar, but very little about love and justice, and they are eager to spread misinformation and lies. They and the other church ladies of whatever sex who comment on almost every posting seem to have little life outside the blog.

Most of my attempts to post there are spiked, so I mostly observe rather than participate in the discussion. But I admire the handful of pro-gay commenters—especially the ones who post under the names dalea, Dave, and Jason Pitzl-Waters—who in the face of hostility repeatedly call attention to the lies and biases of the homophobic bloggers and commenters, usually in politer terms that I could ever muster.

The Sad Case of David Blankenhorn

Like GetReligion, FamilyScholars is also funded by right-wing sources, yet strives mightily to appear nonpartisan and mainstream. FamilyScholars describes itself as "the online site for engagement for the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values."

In glbtq circles, the Institute for American Values (IAV) gained prominence through the anti-same-sex marriage activism of its founder and president, David Blankenhorn, who was the star witness for the proponents of California's Proposition 8 at the

Schwarzenegger v. Perry trial, which resulted in federal Judge Vaughn Walker's declaration that Proposition 8 is unconstitutional.

Long before the Prop 8 trial, Blankenhorn had positioned himself as a cultural warrior opposed to marriage equality. He carved out a distinctive niche as someone who supposedly had no animus against homosexuals but was nevertheless adamantly opposed to same-sex marriage.

It must have seemed like a no-brainer career move for Blankenhorn to enter the fray as an activist against marriage equality. After all, at the time he embarked on his crusade, the polls were overwhelmingly opposed to same-sex marriage. The debate would provide an opportunity to raise his profile, promote his institute, sell some books, and pocket lucrative speaking fees.

And he must have thought that he could easily inoculate himself from charges of prejudice simply by saying that he believed in the "equal dignity of homosexual love." Why, gay people, so used to being demonized by the religious right, would likely even be grateful for his respectful tone as he campaigned against their rights.

Notwithstanding that he frequently appeared at gatherings sponsored by intensely homophobic groups, he repeatedly described himself as a "liberal democrat." Indeed, in September 2008, on the eve of the vote on Proposition 8, which deprived gay and lesbian couples of the right to marry, he wrote an op-ed for the *Los Angeles Times* entitled "Protecting Marriage to Protect Children" that began, "I am a liberal democrat. And I do not favor same-sex marriage."

The title of this op-ed fed into Prop 8's fear-mongering campaign strategy to depict gay people as dangerous to children. Indeed, the title echoes the name of Anita Bryant's organization of the 1970s, "Protect America's Children," which implied that gay men were child molesters intent on "recruiting" America's children.

By presenting himself as an anti-homophobic opponent of same-sex marriage, Blankenhorn helped craft the message that one could oppose same-sex marriage without being a bigot (even as he also subliminally stoked fears that gay people were out to harm children, one of the bigoted messages skillfully disseminated by the Prop 8 campaign).

At the Prop 8 trial, the proponents were unable to use the religious and blatantly homophobic rhetoric and unfounded libels they used in their successful electoral campaign. Hence, they were in desperate need of a marriage expert whose opposition to same-sex marriage was allegedly not based on either animus against homosexuals or religious beliefs. Blankenhorn, thus, was an ideal choice to be their expert witness.

Blankenhorn was likely compensated handsomely for his testimony at the Prop 8 trial. However, he was soon to discover that there were downsides to the exposure he so eagerly sought and received.

In the first place, his prominence in the fight against marriage equality led to his credentials coming under scrutiny, particularly the fact that despite touting himself as a nationally recognized expert on marriage, he has no Ph.D. in a relevant field and has published only a single peer-reviewed scholarly article, and that article had nothing to do with marriage.

Most damagingly for his reputation as an expert, he was cross-examined by skilled attorney David Boies, who sliced-and-diced his testimony to a fare-thee-well.

Despite having asserted over and over again in various speeches and publications that allowing gay men and lesbians to marry would damage the institution of marriage, under oath a tongue-tied Blankenhorn could not articulate what this damage would be. Nor could he cite any harm that the institution of marriage has suffered in those jurisdictions where same-sex couples have been allowed to marry for more than a decade. Nor could he explain straightforwardly his social science methodology. (Apparently, Blankenhorn just reads a lot and the studies he likes, he likes, and the studies he doesn't like, he doesn't like.)

Many observers believe that Blankenhorn's poor performance on the stand (especially as compared with the testimony of real experts, like Harvard historian Nancy Cott, in favor of same-sex marriage) contributed greatly to Judge Walker's decision.

Indeed, in that decision, Judge Walker flatly rejected Blankenhorn's expertise and his testimony as "inadmissible opinion . . . that should be given essentially no weight." He remarked that "None of Blankenhorn's opinions is reliable" or supported by evidence or methodology.

Blankenhorn's activism also attracted the attention of critics such as Jon B. Eisenberg and Frank Rich, as well as many gay bloggers, who ridiculed his ineffectual testimony.

In *Salon.com* Eisenberg questioned whether Blankenhorn was the liberal democrat he claimed to be or just posing as one. He pointed

out that the Institute of American Values was generously supported by a "coterie of ultra-conservative Republican foundations, including the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Scaife Family Foundation, and the Randolph Foundation. These foundations supply funds for a network of right-wing Republican think tanks that promote a variety of causes such as the elimination of gay marriage, abortion rights and embryonic stem-cell research; prayer in public schools; creationism and deregulatory free-market economics."

In his *New York Times* column, Rich also pointed out that the Institute of American Values is financed by ultra right-wing foundations and that Blankenhorn and his wife receive handsome compensation from these sources.

But, most devastatingly, Rich demolished Blankenhorn simply by refusing to play by his rules. He failed to respect the barrier that Blankenhorn so painstakingly worked to construct between himself and anti-gay bigots.

In fact, Rich specifically connected Blankenhorn to the infamous George Rekers, who also testified against gay rights for large fees but who was exposed as a hypocrite and fraud for hiring a "luggage handler" from Rentboy.com. Moreover, Rich speculated that the proponents of Prop 8 employed Blankenhorn "as their star witness [only because] no actual experts could be found (or rented) to match his disparagement of gay parents."

The criticism of Blankenhorn stung.

Soon before Judge Walker handed down his historic decision, Blankenhorn told Duncan Osborne of *Gay City News*, "I'm losing friends, being told I'm on the wrong side of history, I'm like Bull Connor," he said, adding "This is the single worst experience I have had in my public life."

He also made the preposterous claim that he had resisted getting involved in the campaign against same-sex marriage: "I feel like the issue hunted me down," he said.

This statement is utterly unconvincing. No one forced Blankenhorn to accept the large payments he no doubt received for his anti-same-sex marriage activism, which long predated the Prop 8 trial. He certainly knew that this activism would ingratiate him with the conservative foundations that support his institute.

He was, however, undoubtedly sincere when he lamented that "My children wake up and see me called a bigot in the pages of the *New York Times*." The term *bigot* obviously sticks in Blankenhorn's craw, especially as implied in the columns by Frank Rich. (Rich, it should be pointed out, never actually called Blankenhorn a bigot, despite Blankenhorn's overwrought claims.)

In what may be the most humiliating gambit in this whole affair, Blankenhorn stooped to recruiting thirteen IAV colleagues and collaborators to contribute to an open letter to the *New York Times* protesting Rich's columns; attesting to Blankenhorn's credentials; and declaring that he really isn't a bigot.

This open letter, which the *New York Times* refused to print, remains online near the masthead of FamilyScholars.org, so apparently Blankenhorn doesn't grasp how embarrassing it is to pressure colleagues to solemnly attest that one is not a bigot.

Even more absurdly, his close friend Maggie Gallagher (who serves on the board of IAV and who occasionally blogs at FamilyScholars.org) took to the blogosphere to voice her support in a *National Review Online* post.

Did it not occur to Blankenhorn that if he has to rely on Maggie Gallagher's testimony that he is no bigot, the odds are pretty swell that most people will assume that he is indeed a bigot? Having Maggie Gallagher swear that you are not a bigot is like asking Bernie Madoff to certify that you are not a crook.

Blankenhorn and many other opponents of same-sex marriage, including those at GetReligion, suffer from a peculiar brand of *chutzpah*: they want to deprive us of equal rights but also desperately want us to think well of them. Not only do they want to harm us, but they also want us to say what good people they are as they do so.

For me, that is a bridge too far.

FamilyScholars.org

FamilyScholars.org is actually managed not by David Blankenhorn, but by his associate Elizabeth Marquardt, who is vice president for family studies and director of the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values. Although Blankenhorn occasionally blogs at FamilyScholars.org (most recently to call attention to a publication by his good friend Glenn Stanton of Focus on the Family, who has a long record of anti-gay statements and positions), Marquardt is a constant presence, hovering over all the activity like a mother hen.

The topics at FamilyScholars.org are fairly broad, including some very responsible posts by blogger Amy Zietlow on end-of-life issues, but the recurrent topics include marriage, adoption, and, especially, donor conception.

Roy Edroso has speculated that IAV's current emphasis on donor conception comes from the realization of social conservatives that, in the post-Don't Ask, Don't Tell era, "the Gay Menace will not long survive as a subject of outrage or fundraising tool. So some of the more adventurous among them have begun working on new frontiers."

"The folks at Family Scholars," Edroso continued, "have found a rich vein: the menace of test tube babies. Actually it's the test tubes that are the menace—at least some of the babies are growing up to complain of the stigma of their in vitro origins."

Still, FamilyScholars has by no means abandoned the subject of same-sex marriage.

A couple of pro-same-sex marriage guest bloggers post occasionally at FamilyScholars, most notably Barry Deutsch, who, among other excellent posts, has brilliantly deconstructed the nutty arguments against same-sex marriage by Roman Catholic Princeton professor Robert George, who is yet another homophobic member of the IAV board.

But the overwhelming number of posts about same-sex marriage at FamilyScholars are by conservatives opposed to the phenomenon. The bloggers frequently post links to articles by Maggie Gallagher, Margaret Somerville, Glenn Stanton, Robert George, and others opposed to same-sex marriage, as well as to truly dreadful blogs such as "The Opine Editorials," "First Things," and that maintained by the National Organization for Marriage.

With good reason, Edroso described FamilyScholars as a "victimology circus." Like the folks at GetReligion, the bloggers at FamilyScholars constantly portray themselves as victims. Not only does Blankenhorn see himself as victimized by being considered a bigot, but all the regular bloggers also cast themselves as victims of one thing or another, especially of "political correctness," which they evoke often in the most inappropriate ways, usually simply to complain when other people exercise their own free speech rights to criticize those who work against equal rights.

In one of his first posts on FamilyScholars, Blankenhorn wrote about the pain he felt at being called a bigot. I sympathized with this post until he couldn't resist his natural tendency toward self-aggrandizement, and declared, "At the Prop 8 trial in San Francisco, there should have been dozens of experts with Ph.D.'s and high-toned academic affiliations on the stand saying what they believe to be true about the meaning and importance of marriage. But they weren't there. They took a pass because they did not want to be called bigots."

The purpose of this post is pretty transparent: it is to portray a courageous Blankenhorn as being forced into pocketing the hefty check he undoubtedly got from the proponents of Prop 8. Despite his meager credentials, only he, the narrative goes, was brave enough to stand up to those bullies who imposed their brand of political correctness on all those cowering academics who were afraid to say what they really believe. This post is among the earliest of a long series of posts that assert or imply that advocates of equal rights for gay people intimidate others.

Like Blankenhorn, Marquardt also paints herself as a victim at the drop of a hat. For example, she frequently whines that the books turned out by the IAV are not taken seriously by scholars since they have not been peer-reviewed or that others express suspicion of the institute because of its reputation for anti-same-sex marriage activism.

In one of her most characteristic posts, Marquardt responded to an article in which a lesbian mother, whose child was born as the result of artificial insemination, proposed that U. S. passport forms be revised to use the terms "parent 1" and "parent 2" rather than "mother" and "father." Such a change would be helpful to same-sex couples who are raising children and would in no way inconvenience others.

Tellingly, however, Marquardt saw this modest suggestion as earth-shaking, breathlessly asking, "Does same-sex marriage require that we redefine parenthood—and change the very words we use for *all* families, *all* children?" The answer she found to her tremulous query was, unsurprisingly, a resounding "Yes."

Quite apart from the facts that the term "parent" hardly redefines parenthood and that most parents of children actually do refer to themselves as parents, this mean-spirited and overwrought response serves a purpose. Marquardt's pretense to be injured by the suggestion that our government recognize the diversity of our society is simply a way to claim her own status as a victim.

In another post, Marquardt hysterically claimed that she would be arrested if she announced in Harvard Square that she was opposed to same-sex marriage.

But the biggest drama queen at FamilyScholars is not Elizabeth Marquardt, but her protege, Alana Stewart (who posts as "Alana S."), the source of a great deal of unintended merriment.

A young woman with the emotional maturity of a 14-year-old, Alana is so narcissistic and unguarded in her babbling that she cannot help reveal all sorts of unattractive aspects of herself, including her gaming the system to get the government to pay for her travel across the country.

She regularly exposes embarrassing details about her family life and her long-suffering parents, or more accurately her ineffectual, infertile "social father" and her selfish mother who purchased one child in the adoption market and bought sperm to bear another. (These characterizations, I hasten to add, are Alana's, not mine.)

Notwithstanding the fact that she herself has sold her eggs, she is adamantly opposed to surrogacy and other forms of artificial reproductive technology. Identifying as "first-person afflicted" (the ultimate soubriquet for the victimology circus that is FamilyScholars), Alana portrays herself as having been severely damaged by being conceived as a result of artificial insemination.

Edroso awarded Alana second-place in the *Village Voice's* "10 Best Rightblog Rants of 2010," for her riff about what she does not tell people (even as she proceeds to tell people): "You know what I am afraid to tell people? I'm afraid to tell them that my dad was a sperm donor. To me, that is creepy. To me, that sounds disgusting. To me, there is something wrong with that. It embarrasses me. So for the most part, I don't tell anyone. I tell them my dad is dead."

She is given to making the most outrageous statements, such as describing adoption as "human trafficking" and telling an adoptive father that he is not a real father, just "raising someone else's unwanted kid."

She has equated the donation of eggs and sperm with murdering people to harvest their organs. On the day of Elizabeth Edwards' funeral she speculated that Edwards had used donor eggs to conceive her younger children, and therefore the children were not REALLY hers, because, after all, the only connections that matter are biological ones.

Most recently, she opined that "We might eventually need a Taliban-like implementation of social guidelines in order to prop up the millions of us with spongy spines and confused ideas on love." Yes, of course, a few executions, some regular beatings, and confining women, barefoot and pregnant, to the kitchen is likely to stiffen those spines and clarify all those confused ideas on love.

She is the ultimate cyberbully in her over-the-top attacks on others, and like most bullies she cannot bear criticism. Whenever any commenter pushes back against this little fascist, Marquardt sweeps in to protect her as though she were some porcelain figurine notwithstanding the fact that she has the sensitivity of a jackhammer.

Marquardt for reasons not apparent to me promotes Alana as a talented writer, yet her prose is actually about as nuanced and thoughtful as Ann Coulter's.

The other major blogger at FamilyScholars is Karen Clark, whose obsession is donor conception. She is also opposed to same-sex marriage, she repeatedly informs us, but her primary activism is directed toward banning surrogacy and artificial insemination.

Clark is not as outrageous as Alana, but she just isn't the brightest bulb in the chandelier. She gets flustered when she is challenged and, despite talking about how valuable it is to debate ideas, usually abruptly closes down the comments board whenever someone poses some question just too hard for her to answer or too challenging for her to contemplate.

The undercurrent of meanness that surfaces frequently in Alana's posts also finds expression in many of the commenters, such as Polly, who memorably described the newborn child of Elton John and David Furnish as "a human tragedy."

There are indeed a lot of loony commenters at FamilyScholars, including but by no means limited to people who post under such names as Marty, Renee, Ki sarita, Chairm, and On Lawn. But they are readily countered by thoughtful commenters such as Peter Hoh, La Luba, Jeffrey, Heman, Brian, Phil, Ralph, Ampersand, and others. Indeed, despite the conservative bias of most of the bloggers, the liberal commenters tend to dominate the discussions, no doubt to the chagrin of the hosts.

Conclusion

I hope that I am now over GetReligion and FamilyScholars. Although

these sites have provided some amusement, they have taken up too much of my time and sapped too much of my spirit.

Still, visiting these sites has taught me something about how the opponents of equal rights see themselves and how they want to frame the issues. They obviously sense that, however slowly the process seems to us, they are losing the culture wars, and this pains them greatly. They consequently see themselves as victims—victims of "political correctness," victims of unfair media characterizations, victims of a changing society in which they are often seen as bigots and haters and in which they are increasingly irrelevant.

The opponents of equal rights mostly lack empathy for the people they harm, yet they express hypersensitivity to any pushback. They possess inexhaustible reservoirs of self-pity.

They think it perfectly reasonable for them to say all sorts of negative things about gay people, but very unfair for gay people to respond harshly to them. When they say that gay people are sinful or that gay couples pose a danger to children or to the institution of marriage, they are convinced that they are not attacking anyone personally, just making general statements or "institutional" arguments that no one should be offended by.

Yet more and more gay people are unwilling to accept these excuses and abide by those rules. When homophobes say that we are unworthy to enjoy full citizenship in the United States or that allowing us to marry would somehow damage the institution of marriage, they are attacking us personally and individually, as well as collectively, and we have every right to take such messages personally.

However, if someone challenges them or calls them unpleasant names, they squeal like stuck pigs, accusing their critics of enforcing "political correctness" or stifling free speech.

Actually, they have little appreciation of what free speech entails. They seem to think it means consequence-free speech, not understanding that people are held responsible for what they say and the positions they take and that their adversaries also have free speech.

Over the two years I have spent monitoring these sites, I have noticed some changes. GetReligion's bloggers have grown somewhat less flagrant in their homophobia, and the commenters often go out of their way to say they harbor no hatred for homosexuals (always followed by a "But . . ."). Some of the bloggers at FamilyScholars now tend to be almost apologetic about the fact that they oppose same-sex marriage, and some reiterate the mantra that they support gay rights, just not same-sex marriage.

(Elizabeth Marquardt's post entitled "I Support Gay Rights But Oppose Gay Marriage" elicited a wonderful response by a commenter named "Mookie" who began by writing, "I support your right to transportation, just not riding on this bus. I support your right to water, just not your right to drink from this fountain. I support your right to serve in the military, just not the U.S. military. I support your right to work, just not at any establishment in which I might see you. I support your right to visit each other in the hospital, just not if it offends anyone. I support your right to live together, just not to protect each other. I support your right to give your inheritance to each other, just not tax free like heterosexual couples. I support your right to make medical decisions for each other, just not without paying thousands to attorneys. I support gay rights, just the ones I feel you deserve . . . and none of the ones that heterosexuals have.")

What is most frustrating about visiting GetReligion and FamilyScholars, however, is the realization that communication with these people is pretty high impossible. They simply don't see us as real people who are harmed by their words and actions.

Notwithstanding the merriment provided by the sheer lunacy frequently expressed at GetReligion and FamilyScholars, spending too much time at these sites can be depressing. That's why I need to overcome my addiction. Are there 12-step programs for blog addicts?

I plan to spend more time at my favorite sites, where sanity prevails and the struggle for equal rights is passionately but fairly and honestly and honorably chronicled.

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About Anonymous

Anonymous is a bureaucrat who spends a lot of time on the Internet. He lives in a state that provides no protections against employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender expression.

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