

What Happens in Maryland Stays in Maryland

☒ Lately I've been discussing the battle over the marriage definition with friends and parishioners.

I have been amazed by a new collaboration between former political rivals in all of our urban, minority communities.

The largely white religious right is literally becoming a melting pot of diversity as far as this marriage issue is concerned. Huge numbers of blacks and Hispanics of faith are starting to feel that there is a "not so subtle" media attack on the nation's most fundamental institutions. They realize that many movies and TV sitcoms have gone out of their way to express support of so-called "gay rights."

They marveled at the number of celebrities that have jumped on the bandwagon for same-sex marriage. Two weeks ago 8, a play about Prop 8 produced by Rob Reiner, trotted out Hollywood's finest—including Brad Pitt, George Clooney, among several openly gay actors and actresses. The entertainers read selected testimonies of traditional marriage which have never been released to the public. The point of the play was simply to ridicule traditional marriage supporters and "expose the bigotry" of the traditional point of

view.

Live Free or Die: A Promise

What would you do if someone was threatening to kill you?

Imagine

that this person not only hated you vehemently, but was thought to

have killed many of his own family members in cold blood. You know

for a fact he owns several weapons and strongly suspect he has been

attempting to purchase more. On top of all that, he publicly proclaims his desire to kill you on a regular basis. Would you take

his threats seriously?

The scenario I described might sound like the setup for a terrible

summer movie, but it almost exactly parallels the behavior of Iran

toward Israel and the United States over the past several years.

Iran's leaders—President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—have openly declared their intention to “wipe Israel off the map” on numerous occasions.

Less publicized are statements like Ahmadinejad's from 2008:

“Today, the time for the fall of the satanic power of the United

States has come, and the countdown to the annihilation of the emperor

of power and wealth has started.” Their intentions toward the United States and Israel could not be clearer.

Class Warfare African-American Style

✘ *The New York Times* recently featured an innovative MBA program at George Washington University. Not only was the course of study designed to enhance the professional business skills of its participants, it hoped to teach personal business and economics to people vulnerable to personal financial failure.

Who were they? Astute cultural analysts? Children of single-parent households? Convicted felons? People with learning disabilities? No, one of the groups targeted by GWU was retired professional athletes, especially those who played in the NFL. GWU understands something that numerous political ideologues do not: Personal financial management skills must be acquired if personal or business wealth is to be sustained. In other words: “It’s one thing to make money, but it takes skill and training keep it.”

Why would the academics target athletes and other professionals

with volatile incomes? The answer is simple: Moving from boom to bust has landed scores of athletes and entertainers in the “poor house.” After watching this year’s Super Bowl, it’s especially hard for most Americans to say the word *poverty* in the same breath as professional football or award-winning entertainment. Nonetheless the tension between potential, passion and poverty is illustrative of America’s current national financial dilemma. The U.S. is still the richest nation in the world, but we are in danger of squandering our blessed position of influence and our prosperity.

Rewriting History: The Victor’s Privilege

✘ The last few years I have been repeatedly disappointed by the bickering and pettiness displayed by our legislators, political pundits and candidates for office. I have longed for representatives who are informed and articulate, who habitually seek the best laws and results for the land. Unfortunately, the history I have reviewed recently suggests that we may be more like our forefathers than we

would like to believe.

Those who long nostalgically for more civil times should not read some of the pamphlets distributed during the election of 1800 when Jefferson defeated Adams! Neither should they watch the movie *Conspiracy*, which discusses the way Washingtonians accused of working with John Wilkes Booth were unfairly stripped of their rights and executed. Although the political process was fraught with danger and contention, there were also many leaders who paid a real price for their convictions.

For example, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has loomed larger than life in the hearts and minds of Americans since his assassination in 1968. The massive monument which now stands on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., is a physical manifestation of the spiritual giant he has been to so many of us over the past two generations. Today's leaders can only hope to capture a fraction of the respect from his followers and fear from his opponents that Dr. King commanded during his lifetime. Yet this was never the life that he sought for himself. Indeed, if there is one lesson we can learn from this man today, it is that the best leaders are often reluctant to bear the burden of leadership, because they understand the cost is so high.

America's Way Out

✘ The role of the church in the public square has been the subject of many recent debates. Much of the concern about Christians and the **evangelical church** has centered on how we will use our considerable secular power at the ballot box. While I agree that the church should fully engage in the democratic process, there is much more we can offer the American public.

This article is something of an open letter to the Christian community. After weeks of reflection upon our current national problems, I arrived at a blinding flash of the obvious. My epiphany is that our spiritual standing before God is our greatest gift to the nation. In a manner of speaking, we have friends in "high" places. We are the ultimate insiders.

When we **pray** and believe things happen. Unfortunately, we have not always understood the **ways of God**.

We often pray when we should lobby and we lobby when we should pray.

For example, during the Bush presidency there has been more prayer

offered up for the nation than ever. As a result of all the prayer the

Lord did many good things. In addition, he also allowed things to occur

which could bring the rest of the nation to her knees. There is a war raging in Iraq, the economy is in shambles and energy costs are soaring. Our national woes may cause millions to lose confidence in **false gods**, humanistic ideologies and even their own abilities.

Defying Political Labels: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Legacy

✘ On Oct. 16, the new memorial for Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) was finally completed. There was only one problem with the work: The wrong words were carved on the statue. The tone of the phrase misrepresented "the spirit" of the fallen leader. After a huge controversy, the memorial leadership decided to change the writing on the statue.

This change was legitimate. Unfortunately an illegitimate expression occurred this past week. Politico reported that Tavis Smiley had been disinvited from the 20th annual MLK luncheon, hosted by the Peoria Civic Center. Why? Mr. Smiley has said publicly that President Obama had not done enough for black Americans, which,

according to the center, upset some people. He was replaced by reliable liberal Michael Eric Dyson.

In later interviews, Mr. Smiley noted that only a small handful of the 1,500 ticket holders for the event complained about his comments, resulting in his ouster from the luncheon. He also made it clear that he supports President Obama, but as a journalist feels obligated to hold him accountable for his actions in office. While I may disagree with Mr. Smiley on some issues, I certainly agree that his honest appraisal of President Obama's performance should not disqualify him from speaking at a luncheon honoring Dr. King.

Charming the Cobra: Education and Race

☒ Much political noise has been made about providing grants and/or loans for higher education. For minorities, these programs are seen as invitations for full participation in the American system. Many Americans believe changing the higher education equation for minorities is the only way to “level the playing field” economically for America's minorities.

More specifically, liberals often believe solving the education conundrum is mandatory for our future. Conservatives, however, almost universally declare that the education gap can be addressed by neither federal programs nor funding. They both are probably correct in this situation.

Solving America's education gap is tantamount to our nation fighting a cobra. In cobra fighting, you have two choices. First, you can charm the cobra (typically by playing music), and prevent him from striking you today. Secondly, you can choose to attack him like Rikki Tikki Tavey, the mongoose of Rudyard Kipling fame, and solve your problem permanently. Dealing with our educational woes at the university level, while the majority of minority children are vastly unprepared for life, simply charms the cobra.

Hornets in the Middle East

☒ When I was about 10 years old, I fell into a hornets' nest. The hornets got caught in my clothing. The more I fought, the more they stung me. Later I counted about 20 stings. It was a painful few days, but I survived. Every now and then, I see someone caught up in a flurry of painful but meaningless activity. I am reminded of my childhood experience and often use the age-old expression, "They fell into a hornets' nest."

Most Americans agree that President Obama fell into a Middle Eastern hornets' nest during the last few months. Despite the toppling of totalitarian states and the possibility of the establishment of new democracy, it is difficult to see a realistic end to the terrorism, bloodshed, and warfare in this important region of the world.

The death of Osama Bin Laden marked a symbolic end to America's war on terrorism. National jubilation is the only way to describe our corporate feeling about the demise of this "arch enemy" of everything Americans stand for. Perhaps this euphoric victory led the administration's foreign policy strategists into a subtle state of hubris. This false feeling of power may have convinced them that they could actually advance the peace process by imposing the US will on the Palestinian/Israeli peace process.

The entire nation is aware that on Thursday May 19, the president declared Middle Eastern peace talks could only progress if Israel would agree to return to their 1967 boundaries. After a veritable maelstrom of rebuttals, the president's international policy team realized the error of their ways. Therefore, the next Sunday morning (5-22-11) the president retracted his peace talk ultimatum. He even went so far as to claim that he was misquoted. His clarification speech occurred at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC) annual meeting in Washington, DC. Despite the public acquiescence of former Prime Minister Netanyahu, the president seemed to create even more controversy. As I walked through the more than 11,000 pro-Israel advocates, I heard everything from motherly articulation of forgiveness to numerous people declaring they would never vote for President Obama again.

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New York Marriage Madness

✘ New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has begun traveling his state on what he calls his “People First Campaign.” This not an effort to hear from his people, as the name would imply. Cuomo is actually attempting to sell three policy agendas. The following quote tells the story in his own words, “Our entire team is...speaking directly to New Yorkers...about the issues that can move this state forward...We need to pass a property tax cap, ethics reform, and marriage equality during this legislative session and time is short.”

For social conservatives the most alarming aspect of this campaign is the fact New York’s Senate blocked a same-sex marriage bill in mid-2009.

The bill was stopped because of an amazingly motivated electorate’s desire to maintain traditional marriage. Instead of listening to the will of the people, Cuomo’s website carries this rhetoric, “...it is time to for our state to retake our leading role in guaranteeing equal rights for all. This is

about civil
rights and equality.”