

## ***Thoughts are still just as pertinent today:***

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For this month's submission, I invited Ed Gilbert, a lay chaplain at the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara, to share some thoughts from a sermon he delivered in September of 2008. Thoughts which are still pertinent today.

### ***IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, LEVITICUS 18:22***

The Christian church has a tradition of *evolving theology* as the meaning of scripture is better understood with each generation. It is not static; it has adapted to change many times and indeed, continually, over the centuries. "God" is constantly revealing "God's" self to us in a variety of ways. The Unitarian Church seems particularly open to this ongoing revelation and change.

Unfortunately, not all churches are as welcoming and accepting as the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara. Misinterpretation of the Bible has led to generations of hate. Hate may not be a family value, but it certainly seems to be a sustaining one. How can you hate someone you've never met?

The good Rev. Fred Phelps, of the *Westboro Church*, and his supporters, picketed the funeral of *Matthew Shepard*, crucified on a fence in Wyoming Oct. 12, 1998. They stood by and yelled obscenities at Matthew's family and friends as they buried their loved one. [Phelps and the Westboro Church continue to protest and demonstrate their homophobic views to this day] Hate, the family value as Phelps reveals it, speaks to a flood of ignorance that must be damned, once and for all.

If Fred Phelps' efforts, along with his merry band of followers, weren't quite so dangerous, they would be considered a joke. But Fred Phelps is not trying to be funny. He is serious - *deadly, deadly serious!!* I wonder at the incongruity of the Rev. Fred Phelps, and others of his ilk, who sincerely believe themselves to be Christians. One cannot help but question if these happy literalists simply have not read their Bibles. Or are they just hopelessly misinformed?

The only concern, of those quoting Biblical texts, is to maintain their prejudices and to avoid having to change their destructive attitudes. Those whose religious security is rooted in a literal Bible do not want that security disturbed. Irrational religious anger demands a target. Sadly that target is so often gays and lesbians.

"In The Name of The Father - I baptize you", "In The Name of The Father - I run my sword through you", "In The Name of The Father - I burn you at the stake", "In The Name of The Father, *Matthew Shepard*, - we beat you to death". "In The Name of The Father ..... " - *such a useful turn of phrase.*

Biblical literalists, and homophobes, constantly drag out the old chestnut of one's sexual orientation being a "*choice*". Data suggests that homosexual orientation is not a matter of choice but rather a matter of ontology, that is, it is of the *being* of the individual, not of the *doing*.

To be a humanist is to affirm the sacredness of life. It is an eternal call to love, to live, and to be. It is an invitation to work for those things that create life and to oppose those people, those attitudes and those systems that distort life.

*In The Name of The Father* I denounce intolerance, hostility, prejudice, discrimination, bigotry, homophobia - and hate crimes. *Amen.*

Ed Gilbert, Lay Chaplain, the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara