

## R.L. Stollar

Child Liberation Theologian, Child and Survivor Advocate

### Where's the Great Conversation, Gutenberg?

👤 R.L. Stollar 🕒 May 1, 2014

📁 American Christianity, Gutenberg College, LGBTQIA

🏷️ #GutenbergSex, anti-gay, biblical sexual ethics, Christian college, Ethics of Sex in the Bible, Great Conversation, Gutenberg College, Jack Crabtree, Summer Institute



When I graduated from Gutenberg College in 2005, I left a place that felt like a haven in American evangelicalism. I left a place that valued *dialogue*.

Gutenberg encouraged me **to engage in conversations with people and ideas**. While most of the staff were outspoken in their conservative Christianity, they felt their beliefs necessitated that students experience other beliefs. We didn't just read Christian textbooks about philosophers, scientists, and historians; we read those philosophers, scientists, and historians ourselves. We weren't given glib catch phrases against Darwinianism; we read Charles Darwin's own words from *The Origin of Species*.

We were given the gift of understanding the *people* behind ideas. This was all part of what Gutenberg called "the Great Conversation" for the second two years of the program. The history of ideas was a Great Conversation, and we were invited to be conversational partners.

But since last summer, when **the college's official Summer Institute** — an event intended to showcase to the public the strengths of our collegiate environment — was nothing more than a soapbox for one of their professors, I'm finding myself at a loss. Instead of valuing dialogue, the conservative Christianity of the school is taking center stage — and it's becoming more radical, more vehement, than I have ever encountered it.

The Summer Institute last year was nothing more than Jack Crabtree, the man who advised my senior thesis and **I grew to admire as a stellar philosopher**, presenting **an earth-scorched conspiracy theory** filled with **internally incoherent analysis** grounded in **"evidence" from Fox News' Todd Starnes**. And the only "dialogue" amidst Jack's monologue were **other professors taking issue with definitions and throwaway arguments**. No speaker — save **the one graduate allowed to respond** — challenged Jack's shoddy evidence or extremist positions.

When I first voiced my concerns, I was almost immediately contacted by one of the professors who asked me to "please stop commenting." I was "misrepresenting" the school's commitment to dialogue and thereby giving it a bad name. I quietly worried whether my alma mater, a school of dialogue, had publicly shape-shifted into a school of monologue.

**Yesterday, Gutenberg once again gave Jack Crabtree a platform for monologue.**

They introduced **a six-week series where Jack presents his version of “biblical sexual ethics.”** Which, honestly, appears to be nothing more than his “defense” of why he thinks being gay is a sin. **He puts gay people in the same category as cannibals, child rapists, and people who f@#\$ automobiles.** They are all on the same level of “morally disgusting” and “viscerally repulsive” to Jack. And even more bizarre — for a class that supposedly present “biblical” sexual ethics, Jack presents hardly any evidence from the Bible. It’s all his “worldview,” baptized as “biblical.”

I’m getting tired of this. I’m getting tired of hearing a professor from this institution — that I care deeply about — repeating lines, almost verbatim, from **people like Kevin Swanson.**

I mean, seriously, here’s what Jack said:

“Does love for my neighbor require that I want my neighbor to have and do whatever he wants to have and do? Clearly not...” “To the member of a tribe of cannibals, eating his enemies (though they are human beings) feels comfortably ‘right’ and ‘natural.’ Why wouldn’t it?”

And here’s what Kevin Swanson said just last month:

“The problem with this ‘love’ thing is you can define it anyway you want. Homosexuals love their friends and cannibals love their victims, they taste good.”

### **How did this place of dialogue so quickly transform into a nightmare from my homeschooling past?**

It is highly unlikely I could ever convince Jack that he has a warped view of the Bible on LGBT\* issues. After all, I’ve probably just fallen under the spell of the Satanic American Beast’s propaganda. It is also deeply painful to watch the college give sanction to what I consider blatantly hurtful, bigoted language and comparisons. (LGBT\* individuals have attended and graduated from here. Your choice of words has an impact.) But *at the very least* the college could muster what good will it has — good will it used to raise a significant amount of money from its dedicated alumni to keep it afloat — and show the world it still values dialogue.

The world is changing. People are becoming more accepting — and I believe rightly so — of LGBT\* individuals. This frightens Jack and makes him worried for our country's — and our souls' — future. But he's doing no one any favors — and Gutenberg is doing itself a disservice as an institution of higher learning — if he and it allow that fear and paranoia be what the school presents to the public. If he and the school succumb to fear, they succumb to their own Beast. Jack has strong faith in what he believes; let him demonstrate that — and put his faith to the test — by showcasing to the public a *dialogue*.

### **Where is the Great Conversation, Gutenberg?**

Where are the gay Christians, the ones Jack Crabtree compares to cannibals? Will they ever be invited into the Conversation? Or will they continue to be marginalized as the “morally disgusting” equivalent of child rapists? Where, on the reading lists of these events, are books like [Justin Lee's Torn](#)? Or [Patrick Cheng's Radical Love](#)? Where is the commitment to challenge our inherited Christianity, without chalking up people we disagree with to the *Worst Things Ever*?

If Gutenberg continues with giving a platform to extremist monologue, the school will descend into an echo chamber. And becoming an echo chamber would betray the very values that we alumni learned to love about our alma mater.

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For another alumni perspective on perceived changes (though not on LGBT\* issues specifically), see [“Dismissed by the Dismissive,” from House of Water](#).

### **Published by R.L. Stollar**

R.L. Stollar is a child liberation theologian and an advocate for children and abuse survivors. The author of an upcoming book on child liberation theology, *The Kingdom of Children*, Ryan has an M.H.S. in Child Protection from Nova Southeastern University and an M.A. in Eastern Classics from St. John's College. [View more posts](#)

## 28 thoughts on “Where’s the Great Conversation, Gutenberg?”

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### **TheGirlWhoWasThursday**

May 1, 2014 at 3:53 am



I don't really want to like this post. Because frankly I don't want what's happening to be happening. But thank you and yes..

<http://thegirlwh0wasthursday.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/dismissed-by-the-dismissive/>

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### **R.L. Stollar**

May 1, 2014 at 9:59 am



I hadn't read that post of yours. Thanks for sharing it!

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### **TheGirlWhoWasThursday**

May 1, 2014 at 11:37 am



I just finished it and saw you'd posted this 😊

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### **zuscrab**

May 1, 2014 at 9:06 am



So, you are joining the conversation. I think that's great! I would like to see you take one of the books you mentioned, perhaps, and give another point of view. I, personally, would welcome clarification from all sides of this conversation!

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**R.L. Stollar**

May 1, 2014 at 12:20 pm



Thanks, zuscrab. I appreciate the invitation, but I don't really feel like it's my place to give another point of view in this situation. I'd rather let those individuals who this debate impacts deeply and personally – and who aren't being heard from – give their own points of view. Those books I mentioned would certainly be a good place to start. This blog post from Justin Lee could also be a good starting point:

<http://gcnjustin.tumblr.com/post/83553224973/homosexuality-its-not-what-you-think>

There are many LGBT\* people (Christians, too!) in the Eugene community, and there are LGBT\* people who have graduated from Gutenberg (and perhaps some currently attending) who are the ones I believe we should be reaching out to. I think we should let them speak for themselves and be taken seriously.

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**zuscrab**

May 1, 2014 at 2:33 pm



Yes, sir. I would like to see a response from the LGBT Christian community as well. I'm not sure why you feel like they are being

excluded from the conversation. If you were sitting in Friday Discussion this week I'll bet you and others might "get into it" with Jack. I'm guessing he would welcome the debate. Every time one of the guys teaches I think they open themselves up to "discussion", which is good, yes? It certainly doesn't bother me that you disagree with Jack. Perhaps you could respond, from a Biblical/Philosophical perspective about where this post most troubles you. BTW, my mother is lesbian. This issue has been on my table for a long time.

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**R.L. Stollar**

May 1, 2014 at 5:32 pm



If all people are doing is talking *about* marginalized groups, and never giving them the opportunity to *talk for themselves*, they will feel/be excluded. It's not enough to say, "Hey, we're going to talk about you – and talk about why we think you're in the same category as child rapists – but hey, you're welcome to join in on that conversation!" I mean, that's not an invitation *I'd* be eager to accept, and I (1) consider myself already part of the Gutenberg community and (2) am not gay.

And I agree – in general – that the professors open themselves up to "discussion" in classrooms, and even in the evening programs. (Some are more or less open than others, of course; it varies from person to person.) But I'm not talking about the classroom. That's the least of my concerns here. I'm talking about how the college is choosing to represent itself to the world – and, even more importantly, the messages it is sending through those choices.

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**whitechocolatelatte**

May 1, 2014 at 4:46 pm



zuscrab, when I was at Gutenberg, I heard this a lot, that tutors were open to disagreement, and I think that on many levels that's very true. Whenever I took them at face value on that comment and disagreed, I never felt attacked by them for it.

However, presenting a 6-week series of one person's opinion on the biblical perspective of gayness is not structured in a way that fosters discussion and understanding of other views. Such a goal could be accomplished by including short readings or presentations of a counterpoint at each session, or by presenting the event(s) as based on a topic, with several speakers who present different perspectives, rather than only having Jack's opinion presented as biblical to the exclusion of all others.

Why are events at Gutenberg focusing on Jack's opinions so much? Why are they not focusing on multiple perspectives on relevant topics or authors? If they are anything like the alumni, current and future students will perceive this as the presentation of a dominant narrative rather than an invitation to critical thought, empathy, and discussion. Because students respect the tutors and want to appropriately value their contributions, a student who disagrees or is unsure will likely feel her or his disagreement is inappropriate, regardless of Jack or any other tutor's openness to discussion, because s/he is younger, still learning, and interacting with some of these ideas for the first time. If conversation and dialogue is to be valued still at Gutenberg, more voices should be invited and represented. The current format does not suggest openness as much as it does a kind of philosophical approach to evangelism, so I think that restructuring events could really help convey an openness to other perspectives.

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**zuscrab**

May 1, 2014 at 7:06 pm





whitechocolatelatte, those are good suggestions. I will pass them on to the powers-that-be if they haven't seen this dialogue.

I may see this a bit differently than you. Under the Gutenberg organizational umbrella there are some really different tasks. The first is the college whose goal is to educate its students by reading the best books in every subject and helping students learn by discussing the major opinions offered throughout history about our culture. Another part of the umbrella is the arts. Art Project focuses primarily on how to think about the arts in a Christian arena. The third project is McKenzie Study Center, a carryover organization from before Gutenberg's beginnings. This project is focused on biblical classes in world-view studies. It attempts to offer a variety of topics to the wider community. It is not doing the Gutenberg thing. The classes, like the one in question in this post, are not intended to be Gutenberg style classes. They are and always have been one teacher presenting his/her opinion of his/her personal study of the Bible or biblical related topics. Attendees of these classes are always encouraged to question and argue with the teacher. In the early days the controversy came from conservative Christians who didn't think the teachers were conservative enough and didn't appreciate the academic nature of the work they were doing. Jack's current series of talks is under this MSC umbrella. They are his opinions and result from his years of study and his social concerns. The talks are not meant to be a Gutenberg thing. That doesn't mean that he doesn't welcome discussion and disagreement, but without being in attendance discussion is difficult. (It seems to me that having these talks available instantly on the web complicates discussion and must be frustrating for you former students. Interested people used to have to order tapes, wait 6 months, try to hear a poor quality audio. Perhaps mostly interested people went to this kind of trouble.) Other tutors have and will continue to offer classes to the wider community. Jack just happens to have the most energy and time right now I guess. It doesn't bother me that Jack presents his perspective on these issues. And it doesn't bother me that R.L. Stollar disagrees with Jack and presents his perspectives on this blog, sometimes at the exclusion of opposing opinions. I may not agree with one or both of them, but both perspectives are great food for thought and I appreciate them both. I think it would be great if Gutenberg could continue to offer satisfying classes to its alumni, but I'm not sure what that would look like or what its responsibilities are.

It is a generational shift that Jack's thought is now perceived as the "presentation of a dominant narrative." I personally really value your generation and its emphasis on empathy as well as critical thought and discussion. It really enjoy watching that happen on these blogs.

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## whitechocolatelatte

May 1, 2014 at 11:33 pm



zuscrab, thanks for your response. I'm a little confused about why you would consider these exceptions I'm taking to be a generational difference, when the importance of engaging ideas on their own turf is something that I learned at Gutenberg, not that I'm trying to import into it. That's what's concerning me — never, before last summer was I aware of an entire Summer Institute being dedicated to one tutor's idea, especially an idea that was represented in a way that seemed antithetical the the care and precision with which I've known Jack to express himself. This, along with this series being promoted on Gutenberg's web page and facebook as a Gutenberg event. This series is billed as "what the Bible has to say" about sexuality, a no-cost Gutenberg evening class, where donations will be accepted to the college.

<http://blog.gutenberg.edu/.../the-ethics-of-sex-in-the.../>

I'm not looking for Gutenberg to offer classes that are up my alley, particularly, but I am very concerned with what seems to be a narrowing of the field of conversation and what comes across as the acceptable range of opinions welcomed at the Gutenberg table. I want to be able to speak proudly of Gutenberg as a place where real dialogue happens, and where ideas and people are both given respect. . . .it just doesn't seem like that's happening these days, and I'm concerned about it.

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**Noah Crabtree**May 2, 2014 at 2:20 am

I don't really understand the concern with one professor presenting his opinions in the format of a lecture series. That is what a lecture series is. I feel privileged to have enjoyed the discussion format of Gutenberg – now being in a mainstream graduate degree program, discussions are not a part of the curriculum. ALL classes are formatted as one professor giving his/her opinions. Professors differ from class to class, of course, as do tutors at Gutenberg. I think this format can actually be better suited to some topics, because it allows each member of the conversation to deliver a more complete and in-depth presentation of their position. The result is a conversation at a larger scale. Is this different than one great books author writing a WHOLE book about his opinions?

The impression that Jack's views receive undue stage time is, I think, a distortion caused by the controversial nature of Jack's views. I see regular blog posts, articles, and lecture series by other tutors posted online regularly. Recently Gutenberg hosted a 'theory of education' seminar which was highly publicized and which Jack's views were not a part of. I am sure that Gutenberg invested a similar amount of resources into this event as Summer Institute, and much more than Jack's current series. But since the theory of education is not a particularly sensitive issue for most people, it falls in the shadow of Jack's presentations.

whitechocolatelatte, I think the generational difference that zuscrab is pointing to is not about "engaging ideas on their own turf," but about the standing of Jack's views in relation to dominant / marginalized narratives. There is an undercurrent in this article, although I am sure you did not intend it, Riot, that Jack's views should not be allowed in the dialogue because they reflect the dominant narrative of evangelical Christianity's opposition to homosexuality and therefore limits the power minority groups in social dialogue. I think this is the basic idea of deconstructionalism (I use this word intentionally in place of 'Postmodernism' since the latter has become something of a derogatory term and lost its original meaning—I am not trying to name-call or label, just clarify)? In this sense the generational gap is significant, since Jack's views would certainly not have been pigeonholed as reflecting the

dominant worldview twenty years ago when Gutenberg started, as seems to be increasingly the case since last Summer Institute. I remember this exact same class being offered my freshman year and much of the dialogue revolved around Jack's (at the time controversial) view that homosexual acts were not any 'more sinful' than other sinful acts.

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**zuscrab**

May 2, 2014 at 10:02 am



FYI, I am uncomfortable making this post all about supporting Jack. He says things all of the time that make my blood boil, when I understand what he is saying 😊 Jack likes the controversy. He says things all of the time in a way that are meant to be inflammatory. And it is!

I, personally, am proud of Gutenberg because of the education that it gives you students. You guys are amazing! You worked hard and received an education that has few equals. I love to read your posts and watch you work through issues with such precision. I am awed listening to your conversations with each other! There will always be people and things that you don't like at Gutenberg. You may come to a place where you disagree with everything about "their" theology and politics and how they represent themselves on the web and their branding and who they associate with...or don't associate with. Gutenberg didn't try to brain wash you into a particular way of thinking. Heck, the tutors often don't agree with each other. But, they gave you a great education and taught you how to think and study and write and express yourselves. They care a great deal about you as people and will always consider your thoughts. That is what you can be proud of.

From my own selfish desires, I want to continue to read what you are thinking. I want to read your reactions to Jack and to each other. It is not so helpful to me when you just react and then don't do the work of writing a response, but your passionate, knee-jerk reactions are also interesting and informative. They give me a peak into your souls, your hearts, your compassion. You are so willing to be exposed. Perhaps this

is something, at least in part, that came from the confidence that Gutenberg gave you to know and speak your mind. I envy that!

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**whitechocolatelatte**

May 2, 2014 at 8:24 pm



Hello Noah, zuscrab, I hope it's ok to respond to you both together.

I didn't mean to come across as suggesting that lecture series are never appropriate, even at a discussion-based school like Gutenberg. Sorry for the confusion. I'm saying that for the school to present multiple events featuring Jack's opinions as the focal points will inevitably reflect as something the school endorses or at least is not concerned about. Jack seems fond of sparking controversy and – in the case of this series and the Summer Institute – has included controversy involving incredibly marginalizing language for members of the community.

Your responses seem to be something along the lines of, "Well, Gutenberg hasn't changed, it's the culture that's changed." But what does it say about our ability to learn from and relate to each other if we can't be aware of how we come across and work to do so in a way that engages others? I can't speak for Ryan, but I wouldn't say that Jack shouldn't present his views, but I would wonder what kind of place Gutenberg appears to potential students – and what kind of place she is shaping herself to be – if a sensitive topic is treated just like any other even when it's clear comparing gay people and cannibals is just plain inappropriate. In his Summer Institute paper, Jack made it clear that he wasn't interested in coming across as compassionate or interested in others' perspectives. He said he had decided X, and if you didn't see it, there just wasn't any point in talking more about it.

When I was at Gutenberg, our series on sex included multiple speakers, and Jack's thoughts about gays did not take up much of the post-class chatter – it was a blip. Here and during the Summer Institute, it seems that Jack is all but uninterested in how we should deal with our own sexuality, but is quite invested in how we should think (and vote) about other people's sexuality. This is so based on the "biblical worldview,"

which he makes assertions about but does not every say where he's getting these values or principles. So here and at the Summer Institute, Jack is not just presenting an opinion in an intentionally rude and inflammatory way, he's not even including bases for argument, so it's turtles all the way down, as far as it's being explained.

So there are several things here I take issue with:

(1) Jack is choosing to present himself on a potentially very hurtful issue (and one that people have been beaten or killed over) in a way that seems calculated to rile people up as much as possible.

(2) As opposed to a lecture where a speaker is presenting an interpretation and showing his or her intellectual work in coming to those conclusions (his series on Romans would be a good example of this), Jack is here presenting opinions that no one can argue with other than to say that his amorphous idea of the biblical worldview is wrong—but we don't know where he's deriving it from, so the discussion stalls there.

(3) Gutenberg, by highlighting these events as part of the Gutenberg experience is communicating to the world that these methods do not phase them—in fact, they are models of what your students will be learning to do when they come here. Again, this may be a community event, but it is publicized on the internet, with audio and handouts to boot. If it's something that can't possibly be understood other than in that context, then it shouldn't be put out on the interwebs for everyone to see and hear.

I love Gutenberg and look back at my time there as one of the most decisive periods of my development. I love the tutors and have always respected their commitment that their faith did not have to be held at the expense of their intellectual integrity or their general human kindness. I want these things for future students. I want Gutenberg to keep hold of this vision, rather than turning into one of the other classically minded Christian colleges I decided not to attend.

Further, the last thing I would consider these opinions is the product of a knee jerk reaction, especially when I've read Jack's whole Summer Institute paper and discussed it at length with several alumni, but if you can let me know how I can present my disagreements in a way that you'd find less offensive or that you'd feel was less of a personal attack on the tutors, I'm happy to hear it.

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**Peter Wierenga**

May 4, 2014 at 3:22 am



I'm a little bit confused by the way you are characterizing Jack's comments and his rationale for his comments about sexuality "here and in the Summer Institute".

The thrust of his comments at the Summer Institute were not specifically about human sexuality at all. To read that as being the focus of his paper would be to reflect a significant misunderstanding of his paper.

And I'm not sure how you can come to conclusions about Jack's line of reasoning with regard to a biblical view of sexuality after just one week of a six-week class. Did you listen to the class last Wednesday or a recording of the class? Did you download and read his outline for the first week of class? Or are you basing your comments about what Jack is saying in the class strictly on Ryan's comments? Do you think there might be more in the next five weeks of class and discussion that would paint a more complete picture of what Jack thinks is the biblical view of human sexuality?

As I observed to Ryan down below, the suggestion that Jack compared gay people to cannibals is just plain wrong.

So I have to wonder if you are engaging with what Jack has actually said on the subject in class this last week (and what he has not yet said) or are you just engaging Ryan's characterization of what Jack said in class?

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**whitechocolatelatte**

May 22, 2014 at 2:45 pm



Peter, I didn't initially respond to this comment you posted on May 4 because I felt like your aggressive questioning of the basis for my opinions was inappropriate, as was the assumption that I'm unable or unwilling to ground my thoughts in what someone actually said.

Gutenberg professes to teach us how to think, and as an alum, I am surprised that a proponent and representative of the school would assume any graduate of the program would be so lazy or insincere as to jump uncritically onto a bandwagon regarding something so meaningful to us as Gutenberg. I am disheartened that you would assume this about me with no other evidence than that I came to conclusions that differed from yours.

Because of this, I will not defend myself by presenting the precise hours and sources of study that have led to my perceptions for your approval, but I am happy to discuss actual assumptions or arguments I am making and/or feel that Jack is making. I am also uncomfortable telling you who I am now, since you seem to be assuming the worst about anyone who is expressing disagreement with Jack's choices in this series.

To respond to the substance of your comment:

(1) I never stated or assumed that Jack's SI paper was focused on homosexuality. He did make comments about gay persons in his paper, and I was referring to those comments.

(2) As I've stated elsewhere, my concern and alarm is not based on a couple of hours of Jack talking. My concern is cumulative and relates to what I see as a shift in Jack's approach over the past several years. I believe Ryan's summary of it in the "Evolution of Jack Crabtree on Homosexuality" gives a good summary of how his recent presentations strike me as different than previous ones.

I do not wish ill to you, Jack, or Gutenberg. I am concerned that the shift in rhetoric on Jack's part is damaging not only to the school but to its relationship with alumni, who, as TheGirlWhoWasThursday exemplified, are feeling dehumanized in a way that reminds them of a destructive fundamentalism they thought they had left behind.

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Pingback: [Rare Who-Roast-Beast](#) | [House of Water](#)

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**deanna**

May 2, 2014 at 3:05 pm



I'm just waiting for there to be an open dialogue at/around Gutenberg about Orthodox Christianity, because a significant number (for the size of the school) of former and present students have recognized a preparation in this dear college/arts/study-center community for entering into the interpretation of reality that is found in the Orthodox church. I'm not trying to argue about that; I'm just sayin'...

But while I'm here, as someone with a close family member who is gay, I'll mention that many years' experience has shown me how tough talking about this is. We're a big, extended family in this culture, and, from whichever perspective one approaches homosexuality, one can see his/her siblings doing what is wrong, what is unjust. This is most difficult, because, if I dwell on this wrong I see my siblings doing (whichever way I interpret the right and wrong of things), I find myself tempted to judge them, and this is the same as doing the wrong I see.

The hard thing to say in this situation is like something I've read recently, that a man said when he was walking along and saw two of his brothers doing wrong: First, he thought, "Look what great evil they are doing!" Then he thought further, and said to himself, "They are sinning today, I will sin tomorrow. They will repent, but I know myself to be a hard man, unrepentant, egotistical, and thus, I won't repent. I will be punished since I am worse than these two. And what do I have to do about these careless sinners, since I am a much greater sinner?"

I don't think this way, and I really wish I did, because knowing myself, I know I do greater wrongs than anyone else.

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**R.L. Stollar**May 2, 2014 at 3:56 pm

I'm just waiting for there to be an open dialogue at/around Gutenberg about Orthodox Christianity, because a significant number (for the size of the school) of former and present students have recognized a preparation in this dear college/arts/study-center community for entering into the interpretation of reality that is found in the Orthodox church. I'm not trying to argue about that; I'm just sayin'...

I think that would be an awesome dialogue to have, especially as a public event. And especially with the classical, Great Books approach to education which Gutenberg advocates for, there are many allies of that approach from within Orthodox (and Catholic) Christianity. You could easily find a diverse group of people to speak to and interact with that topic.

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**Elizabeth Steeb**May 3, 2014 at 3:25 pm

Deanna, I thought your post was beautiful. I just wanted to say thank you for writing it.

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**Elizabeth Steeb**May 3, 2014 at 3:15 pm

Ryan, I am puzzled by the approach you are taking. So much of what you stand for (and why you state that Gutenberg was so meaningful to you/is your alma mater) is the difference between debate/discussion. You claim that you are still thankful for what GC taught you, what the tutors patiently went through with you and for you, but here you are, posting inflammatory and inevitably demeaning comments to Gutenberg, rather than having a discussion with Jack or Gutenberg (since your comment here is directed at Gutenberg—more so than Jack). This approach feels a lot more like a debate approach than a discussion. Except there is not even an opponent in your debate—it's just a one-way match. I understand stumbling upon an angering article and venting via this online audience that seems to give our entire generation so much catharsis. But, the thing that keeps confusing me is: you have a relationship with Gutenberg. If not with the staff itself, with all of its surrounding members (alumni, students, past staff—with Jack). If you still hold debate as a dehumanizing way to communicate...then what is this blog post supposed to be? What is your goal in writing this? You strike me as a very intentional person. It seems like your critiques are usually to people or organizations who don't seem to take thought into what they are doing. So there must be a reason why you think this is something good to do with an organization who is very meaningful to you, who you still interact with, who you have a relationship with and to. What is it?

I am confused about some of your claims in your post. For example, you claim that a GC professor told you to stop commenting the last time you wrote an article. Who was that? I am very curious to know which of the tutors did, and what their exact wording was...because I am getting the feeling that you are making a lot of (what seem like convenient) assumptions. For example...you say that the only person who responded negatively to Jack's paper this last S.I. was the only alumni who was ALLOWED to respond. Huh? Where did you get that information? The word went out that anyone was welcome to write a response. Toby was the only one who followed through with it. Did you check up on your information? Also, you say at one point something about Gutenberg's good will –“good will it used to raise a significant amount of money from its dedicated alumni to keep it afloat.” Again...huh? The alumni fundraising event was (and was clearly stated and the e-mail you received from me) wholly prompted by me—a fellow alumni, Class of 2009, who knew that other alumni wanted to give but felt what they could give was not enough. From conversations I, Elizabeth, personally had with other alumni, it was obvious to me that we all felt the contribution we made did not do much, but that if we thought about it as an alumni fund—rather than thinking about it as small individual

contributions—we could indeed support an organization that we are deeply thankful for. We knew that we were able to attend GC because of someone else's donations....why not allow for others to have that chance, too? That's the truth behind alumni donations. Your comment was demeaning and painted GC to be an organization that is just feeding off their poor, marginalized alumni, all in the guise of good will. ...really?

I know those are all small details in what seems to be a bigger complaint, but what I am trying to draw from them is: where is the great conversation for you, Ryan? If you are so concerned, as you claim you are, why not call up Jack? David? Ron? Dick? Why not come join the conversation on an open Friday discussion? It seems to be that you are either misunderstanding GC, or GC is misunderstanding something else. So...why not call them up? Why have this online one-way debate match, instead?

It doesn't seem very different than your complaint to Jack. Lectures—and blog posts—do not leave as much room for discussions as conversation does. I am okay with all the different forums that we have available for communicating ideas. If you are advocating for the discussion/great conversation environment only...then please do join in at Summer Institute and MSC classes.

Lastly...personally, I would be more concerned if GC did not allow Jack to give a talk on what he believes is true. That would be scary to me. If GC is ultimately about truth (which you agree with)...then why not engage with what Jack is saying? Even if we don't agree...especially if we don't agree. I am glad GC is still putting pursuit of truth first—even if I don't agree with their views.

Lastly (ok...for reals this time), I hope it's not necessary to say that this is not personal. I like you, Ryan, and I would like to get to the bottom of what you are thinking. This blog post just feels so unapproachable to me that I am not sure what to do with it. Am I supposed to be doing something with it? What are you intending with it? Whatever you are trying to say is getting lost amidst the provocative statements you make.

Do you really want Gutenberg College to tell Jack to shut up?

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**R.L. Stollar**



May 3, 2014 at 4:48 pm

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Thanks for the comment, Elizabeth. I appreciate your interest in engaging.

Before I answer your specific questions, let me present you with an alternative situation. Let's say that Gutenberg advertised and hosted – as a Gutenberg event that was broadcast via its website, blog, and a live-stream accessible by the entire world – an event where one of its professors compared people in interracial relationships to child rapists. Or an event where one of its professors said being clinically depressed was the result of personal sin. I assume – and I hope – that you would be outraged.

Would Gutenberg have the right to host such an event? Yes. Could Gutenberg make a case (whether you and I agree with that case) that allowing such outrageous ideas was an expression of academic freedom, and somehow – as a consequence – educational? Yes. Would either of those facts have any bearing on how damaging those ideas have been, are, and continue to be to whole groups of people? No. Absolutely not. What is “good” for academic freedom is not necessarily kind or loving. I also believe that the way we interact with unkind and unloving ideas, in the name of academic freedom, can be responsibly stewarded by an institution in specific ways that acknowledge how those ideas have hurt people.

I'm not sure where you stand on LGBT\* issues. So it's entirely possible you would reject any and every comparisons between (what I consider to be) bigoted conversations about LGBT\* relationships and bigoted conversations about interracial relationships; you might also believe mental illness is the result of sin, so you might not see why saying something natural – like a mental illness – is a sin gives us cues for why saying something else natural – like people being gay – is a sin is extraordinarily damaging. I don't know. We haven't talked about any of that. Hopefully, however, you understand at least one of these alternative situations and understand the point:

*If a college advertises and hosts – as a college event broadcast via its website, blog, and a live-stream accessible by the entire world – an event where one of its professors makes extremely damaging remarks, outrage is justified.*

Hopefully we can agree on that principle, though we may disagree on whether that principle applies in this specific situation. If you think being gay is a sin, I profoundly disagree, but that's not the point. The point is there comes a point where "debate" and "dialogue" are only so helpful. The moment they are used as an excuse for an institution to promote certain ideas in certain ways that have caused people to be bullied, abused, discriminated against, and even commit suicide, that's the moment I cease to support them. That doesn't mean I don't value academic freedom, debate, or dialogue; it means I value other things more than those things. Since we live in a country that does constitutionally protect academic freedom, but still doesn't protect certain marginalized groups from being bullied even on grade school playgrounds, I'm going to side with the latter, not the former.

As far as my approach and my target go, yes, I am focusing more here on Gutenberg, obviously. And I think it's important to distinguish the Gutenberg community – people you and I both love dearly – and Gutenberg as an institution. It's hard to make that distinction since Gutenberg is so small and such a tight-knit community. It seems that every time I speak up with a critique of something "Gutenberg" does, people take it personally. My critiques are critiques of Gutenberg as an institution, and – no matter how much we want to feel it's a community, a commune, a family, etc. (which I feel too!) – it's more than that. It is an academic institution and I am one of its alumni. What Gutenberg publicly broadcasts to the world as an institution is important. It reflects on you, it reflects on me, and it reflects on everyone that has graduated from it. When my alma mater publicly broadcasts shoddy philosophy and history with ridiculous "evidence" from a discredited Fox News talking head (via last Summer Institute), or hurtful, bigoted comparisons (via this current series), I believe I am responsible to speak up. I believe you are responsible to do so, as well. If you and other alumni desire to be responsible stewards of our alma mater's legacy, then you – and I – must speak up when that institution does not represent its own core values or choose to represent itself as having hurtful values.

As far as some of your specific questions are concerned...

If you still hold debate as a dehumanizing way to communicate...then what is this blog post supposed to be? What is your goal in writing this? You strike me as a very intentional person. It seems like your critiques are usually to people or organizations who don't seem to take thought into what they are doing. So there must be a reason why you think this is something good to do with an organization who is very meaningful to you, who you still interact with, who you have a relationship with and to. What is it?

You answered the question yourself, actually. Namely, I am observing "people or organizations who don't seem to take thought into what they are doing." And this case, it is Jack and Gutenberg. Since Jack and Gutenberg *publicly* represented the college in a certain way, I feel I have to make a public response. I'd be happy to talk to anyone privately as well, but the fact is, I'm in a different state and private conversations aren't sufficient when countering public statements. I've also made my own public statements about what I love about Gutenberg.

I am confused about some of your claims in your post. For example, you claim that a GC professor told you to stop commenting the last time you wrote an article. Who was that? I am very curious to know which of the tutors did, and what their exact wording was...because I am getting the feeling that you are making a lot of (what seem like convenient) assumptions.

That was a direct quotation, and I also explained the context of the quotation in the next sentence (namely, "misrepresenting" the school's commitment to dialogue). I'm not interested in saying who it was, because I don't have any interest in putting that person on blast. That would be needlessly personal.

For example...you say that the only person who responded negatively to Jack's paper this last S.I. was the only alumni who was ALLOWED to respond. Huh? Where did you get that information? The word went out that anyone was welcome to write a response. Toby was the only one who followed through with it. Did you check up on your information?

The emphasis in that sentence wasn't on the "allowed." It was on the "no speaker." But I can see how I miscommunicated there. I apologize for that. And actually, if I did want to emphasize something in that inserted clause, it would be "graduate," not "allowed." I am well aware that Toby was explicitly invited to respond, and I think that's awesome. I'd love to see

more of that. I also absolutely loved Toby's talk. In fact, I've taken to using his "orphans of the culture wars" quite a bit. 😊

Also, you say at one point something about Gutenberg's good will – "good will it used to raise a significant amount of money from its dedicated alumni to keep it afloat." Again...huh? The alumni fundraising event was (and was clearly stated and the e-mail you received from me) wholly prompted by me—a fellow alumni, Class of 2009, who knew that other alumni wanted to give but felt what they could give was not enough.

I love your commitment to the school, Elizabeth! And I thoroughly apologize if you felt that was in any way meant to be a dig on you or the alumni that so generously supported Gutenberg. If I wasn't unemployed at the time, I would've donated to the school, too.

My critique about "good will" is about the fact that many alumni feel marginalized by the school and teachers. Many alumni shared my frustrations over the Summer Institute. I happen to be the one writing blog posts about it, so naturally I'm getting the attention here. But I don't want to be the focal point. There is growing frustration among alumni. Like the case with the professor quotation above, I don't feel I have any right to say any more than this But people are getting unsettled with how the college is stewarding its legacy as of late. That's what my comment about "good will" referenced.

And, again, I am sincerely sorry if you felt I was attacking you in that comment.

Where is the great conversation for you, Ryan? If you are so concerned, as you claim you are, why not call up Jack? David? Ron? Dick? Why not come join the conversation on an open Friday discussion? It seems to be that you are either misunderstanding GC, or GC is misunderstanding something else. So...why not call them up? Why have this online one-way debate match, instead?

Well, I mean, honestly, two of these are simple:

- 1) I live in Los Angeles.
- 2) I don't have a working phone.

Beyond those more immediate factors, I don't feel welcome to do so. My family's history with Gutenberg already makes me feel distant. (Though I



should stress that my family's history does not motivate me in any of my critiques. They just add a hue of distrust.) I've made personal efforts — years ago — to be involved and they weren't welcome. Friends of mine — Gutenberg alumni, namely — have experienced the same thing. We don't feel our voices are welcome. You seem to think this is all about me vs. Gutenberg. It isn't. I happen to be the only one publicly saying these things. Which, trust me, I don't enjoy at all.

Do you really want Gutenberg College to tell Jack to shut up?

No, absolutely not.

One final thought, Elizabeth: you seem to be approaching this whole situation as if I am being bitter, or vindictive, or — as you put it — “inflammatory.” I would point you, however, to the central and emboldened question of the piece:

*How did this place of dialogue so quickly transform into a nightmare from my homeschooling past?*

This is a real and desperately important question to me. I am alarmed, frightened, and brokenhearted by what I am seeing from my alma mater. *That* is where I am coming from.

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**spanishwithelizabeth**

May 3, 2014 at 8:01 pm



Thank you for your response, Ryan. Let me give it some thought before responding back to you.

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**Elizabeth Steeb**

May 4, 2014 at 10:34 am



First, thanks for your response, again. I appreciate your willingness to engage back.

I think your response was helpful in understanding what you are doing. I think it is slightly different than what I thought you were doing—so that definitely helped me understand you better. Thank you.

I have a few clarifications that I would like to make—mostly because some of the things you understand me as saying (partly because I was not very clear as to where I was coming from) would be pretty hurtful things for me to say, and I would like to clear those up.

To respond to your initial comment: my issue isn't about how outrageous or not Jack's talk is—or how justified or not people are in their outrage. I understand how outrageous and hurtful it sounds, and don't need a series of different outrageous example explained. Perhaps I should have emphasized that more in my response. My main concern was that I did not understand how this medium was a good approach to address these issues/engage with each other. I think you responded to that in what you said to me. It is not as if I am defending Gutenberg's rights to host whatever they want (honestly—I am not sure how that decision ought be made); and I certainly don't see things as you vs GC, or me vs you, or anyone vs anyone. While I am positive that there is a lot of personal feelings/fears/beliefs attached to my response, I don't think I am taking it personally, as you said. I am not Jack. I am not Gutenberg. And even if I was, I hope that I would be able to differentiate between someone's critique/response and who I am—although that is very hard to do.

My alumni donation comment was just one more confusion over what you were attributing to GC that didn't seem true—it is not meant to be about me or how other alumni feel. The Summer Institute was very difficult for me, too. Don't misunderstand me—it is not a “me vs the rest of you” scenario, either. I am also part of this whole issue. I also have my own things to work through; but it read to me like you think GC was taking money from the alumni who it also hurt, when it was ACTUALLY JUST me who initiated that and therefore that sentence—and the sentiment that it implied—was untrue. And no, I did not in the least felt like you were attacking me. I don't even see how you could have been—so no worries there.

Lastly, please understand that I do not find you bitter or vindictive. Those are not concepts that I attach to “inflammatory”, the word I used. To be honest, I found Jack's S.I paper to be doing a similar thing. It was so difficult for me to even try and understand WHAT Jack was saying in the midst of such inflammatory comments—let alone what my response

to what he believed was. I don't think of either of you as vindictive or bitter. But I think you both have a tendency to write in inflammatory ways. I admire both of you for the courage that it takes to put your controversial topics out into the world. It is a scary thing, and you are both opening yourselves up for hurtful reactions back. I hope I did not come across as that. I sincerely admire the courage that you both possess.

I am sure there are other alumni who feel hurt by GC—I don't see how that could not exist. Personally, I would just much rather deal with these topics through conversation than through the interwebs—especially with how damaging I think it can be. That being said, I encourage you to contact GC in a more direct way. I think we all should—including myself. I really don't see it as a you vs GC, or even certain groups of alumni vs GC. We all have our own shit that we have been processing since GC/youth/childhood/life. Even if you don't have a working phone—I am sure there are other ways you can think of contacting someone directly (letter/e-mail come to mind.)

Thanks, again, for engaging back with me. It did help me understand your point/point of view better, and I appreciate that. I think that if there is anything else for us to say, I would prefer for it to happen in a more personal/direct manner. Maybe next time you are in town, or you can e-mail me if you'd like (elizabethpanzachi@gmail.com).

With care and respect,

Beth

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**whitechocolatelatte**

May 4, 2014 at 11:06 am



Hi Elizabeth,

I realize you are responding to Ryan, but it seemed like you were addressing me in your last response, so I was just curious what you meant.

*I think you both have a tendency to write in inflammatory ways.*

Was this about me? If so, could you tell me what you're talking about here, especially if you have specific examples of this? If you'd feel more

comfortable, you can email me or inbox me on FB. 😊

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**Elizabeth Steeb**

May 4, 2014 at 11:14 am



Hi Whitechocolatelatte,

Not at all. The “both” in there was Jack and Ryan. I am sorry that was confusing. I was really just responding to Ryan. I am not sure what your e-mail or FB account is, but if you would also like to talk more, feel free to e-mail me at the address I gave in my response above. :o)

Sorry for any confusion there. Totally just talking about Jack there.

Take care!

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**Peter Wierenga**

May 4, 2014 at 2:58 am



Okay, I'll throw in my two cents worth. From your Facebook posting and from your comments in your blog post and from your response to Elizabeth it seems as though some of what has motivated you and what caught the attention of “whitechocolatelatte” was your suggestion that Jack put being gay in the same category as being a cannibal.

I was in the class. He didn't.

The class was structured as a discussion with a large amount of time spent and some additional expenditure made to attempt to make it possible for people who are not in Eugene to be included in the discussion and to raise any questions (or disagreement) that they might have. This was actually done during the class as happens at every Gutenberg or McKenzie study

center event I have ever attended. Questions were asked. Disagreements were expressed. Dialogue took place.

But your characterization of Jack's position as one in which someone who is gay and a cannibal are in the same category is either willfully untruthful or is negligently misleading.

In your blog post you quote directly from Jack's outline which you seem to have in front of you. You said this:

"I mean, seriously, here's what Jack said:

"Does love for my neighbor require that I want my neighbor to have and do whatever he wants to have and do? Clearly not... " "To the member of a tribe of cannibals, eating his enemies (though they are human beings) feels comfortably 'right' and 'natural.' Why wouldn't it?" "

What your ellipses conveniently leaves out from Jack's outline (which I also have in front of me) are 17 other distinct points that Jack made in between the two parts that you quoted. These are points of greater or lesser importance to him but clearly there was an entire line of discussion and argument that he was trying to develop that you have unfortunately left out of your blog post and thus you are badly misleading your readers. And the point of his discussion was simply not to equate being gay with being a cannibal.

You know Jack. I'm guessing that you probably have listen to or read much of what Jack has to say on the specific subject of homosexuality. Ryan, you have to know that you are badly mischaracterizing Jack's position.

It would be perfectly legitimate for you to take issue with Jack's position that homosexual sexual activity is a sin. But if you have listened to other things Jack has said on the subject or things that have been said by others in the Gutenberg community, you would have clearly heard it said that homosexual sexual activity is no greater sin than any other. Indeed you would have heard Jack or others willingly list their own sins as being no worse then homosexual sexual activity.

So in Jack's argument he is simply not equating being gay with being a cannibal. But if you want to bring in the sensational reference to cannibalism then to be more accurate with what you have heard from Jack and from others around Gutenberg you would have to acknowledge that Jack

could just as easily have put himself in the same category as a cannibal. Indeed, in the context of a discussion of homosexuality I have heard Jack put himself in the same category as a homosexual in terms of his understanding of both the pervasiveness of sin and the NON hierarchical nature of sin.

So if you are trying to suggest that Jack is saying that being gay is “as bad” (i.e. “evil” or “sinful”) as being a cannibal then you would be more warranted to say that Jack has in fact said that Jack himself is “as bad” as someone who is gay.

So if you want to have a discussion about whether or not homosexual sexual activity is a sin that is one thing. Join the discussion. Perhaps we could open a Skype session with you and others during the Wednesday night class some time.

But be fair to the discussion and the development of a line of reasoning and don't take something completely out of context as you did and suggest it means something completely different than the speaker intended to mean.

With regard to dialogue within the Gutenberg community taking place with members of the LGBT community, surely you are aware that kind of discussion takes place regularly and respectfully and frequently. You know these Gutenberg people. How could you expect anything other than that?

I can speak for myself and say that I have read Justin Lee's book. I have accessed and listened to as many of his podcasts as I have been able to find through iTunes. I have read other books written by gay Christians and listen to many podcasts and lectures by gay Christians and read many articles by gay Christians. I am quite confident I am not the only one in the Gutenberg community who has availed him or herself of those resources.

So I agree completely with the idea of having a dialogue. So, if this is a subject about which you and others would like to have a dialogue, let's figure out how to make that happen.

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[\*\*TheGirlWhoWasThursday\*\*](#)



May 6, 2014 at 12:18 pm



Mr. Wierenga,

if I understand correctly, some forms of cannibalism are practiced as a burial custom- because the people involved believe that this will protect the soul of their loved one after death. I don't think that what happens to the body changes what happens to the soul after death. But to the people who do believe this, having no access to other information, wouldn't their own consciences stand witness against them if they didn't commit cannibalism? Thus depriving their loved ones (in their minds) of salvation?

Perhaps Jack is 'as bad as a cannibal' in the vast and overarching sense in which God has, by default, damned all He has made. But the specific act of homosexuality, practiced by a person who has studied it out and has made certain to the best of their ability that it causes no harm, is very different than the action of someone who intentionally goes out to destroy their enemy, and, having killed them, consumes them as well.

Yes, Jack's line of argument involved other things and was about other things. I believe it was the carelessness and the callousness with which Jack threw the comparison into his other arguments to which Riot was objecting.

Jack really wasn't even being fair to cannibalism. Let alone gays.

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