

# ASK SCOTT

Downloaded from the *Loud Family / Music: What Happened?* website and re-ordered into Jan-Dec

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2004 (Year 8: from May 2004 Scott had a lay-off until June 2006)

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**January 5, 2004**

**Scott, I saw your show in NYC a couple years ago... it was great.**

**What do you think about the cute ex-Beatle having another kid at 63?**

**William Pollock**

**Scott:** Thanks -- I enjoyed that show a lot (the Knitting Factory, right?).

I think Paul probably knows more than most men about being a good dad and husband, and I assume he'll do a great job. I haven't heard of any of Paul's children playing instruments, so maybe he's worried about being the only Beatle yet to contribute a next-generation supergroup member.

happy new year!

--Scott

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**January 12, 2004**

**Scott, you don't by chance be the same Scott Miller that happened to be in the Marine Corps, early seventies? I had a friend named such that was really smart and from California; just a thought.**

**Scott:** Different Scott Miller. I was about five years too young to be in the Marine Corps then. And thank you for calling me smart; it must be obvious I fish for that compliment!

**On another thought, congrats on keeping me guessing as to what the hell you're gonna record next. Come back to St. Louis if you get the time and the money's right.**

**Steve Graham**

The money's right for me, I'm just sometimes not right for the money.

thanks for writing

--the increasingly other Scott Miller

**Scott, You are Loved.**

**Scott:** Smooches back!

**I want you to know that there is someone who loves you very much. That's important to know in the "dog eat dog world" in which we live. We spend our lives trying to earn love and respect and somehow we never seem to "measure up." It's wonderful to be loved without reservation, without having to earn it. We are loved, not because we are good, not because we have lived up to expectations, and not because we've tried to live a good life, but we are loved just like we are... faults and all. God has put a high value on our lives in that He gave His Son to die on a cross to pay the penalty for all our sins. He has a very high purpose for your life!**

Woah, slow down, person or spam engine Emory Ausley. I think we need to be a little more reflective about the *good news* of people dying on crosses.

**After 42 years of struggling with the meaning of life and what the purpose of my life should be, I met a man named Jesus and He changed my life. It has been wonderful to be loved unconditionally and to finally realize the meaning of life itself. I'm writing you to share this love and to let you know that you are a very special person in the sight of God. He only wants good for you and wants to help you in all of your trials.**

I sincerely think that's wonderful. It would be interesting, special person that I am, to be told some of the details of this meaning being given to life. It's inspiring that anyone would give his life for another, but I feel decidedly uneasy thinking that someone would have to die for me, Scott Miller, to bring meaning to my life. The Jesus who stopped the stoning of a woman caught in adultery seems to be trying to teach the world not to locate the meaning of life in people dying on crosses, and in similar situations. So let's please approach the subject with a bit more respect for the complexity of Jesus' issues.

**The Holy Bible tells us in the book of Romans, chapter 3 verse 23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 reads "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 10: 9-10 goes on to read, "Because if you confess the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses unto salvation."**

Who is your audience? Unbelievers who will nevertheless accept proofs based on the New Testament? You do see the problem there, right?

**If you haven't already experienced His love, you can by praying this simple prayer and by believing in your heart that He has answered it to the fullest. "Father, I come to you as a sinner. I repent and ask you to forgive my sin and to come into my heart and take control of my life. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and enable me to be the person that you want me to be. Please use me to help others and help me to realize and fulfill the purpose for my life. Thank you Jesus for dying to pay the penalty for my sin. I accept your sacrifice for my salvation. Enable me by the power of your Holy Spirit to live a life that will be pleasing to you. Amen."**

Thank you, that is lovely -- right up until "thank you Jesus for *dying*," which, again, has a troubling ring to it. Dare I say, a pagan ring: "thank you, human sacrifice, for appeasing the angry god in our stead." My personal study of Christianity leads me to agree with those who think it's subtly but significantly wrong that God ransomed his son to himself. It lets humanity off the hook. If we cannot understand ourselves to be potential crucifiers, we are not saved.

**If you prayed this prayer KNOW that you are now in the family of God and accepted into His Kingdom. It's that simple. This is the beginning point of a new relationship with Him. I encourage you to get a hold of a Bible and explore the person and characteristics of God that's revealed there. You can easily find one online simply by going to any search engine and typing in "the bible online."**

Does such a sudden and simple conversion really work for people? How wonderful for them! But on behalf of most people I know, I must warn you that there are those of us who hear this sort of ancient-sacred-text-based supernatural death threat, and take it for strong evidence that Christians are coercive wackos.

**I would like to encourage you to forward this email to anyone you know. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16)**

**God Bless You.**

***Emory Ausley***

And you. Consider your email forwarded to some more of *the condemned*.

--St. Scott the Underpromoted

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***January 19, 2004***

**Scott, ya'know, it's been awhile since we (as in faithful followers, aka "fans") have heard from you. What gives? but don't use that line as Young Fresh Fellows beatcha to it. Get your ass back in the studio along with Zak and put out (sexual innuendoes included) something *we* can absorb and become influenced by! Go to work!**

***Steve Graham***

**Scott:** You know you're getting old when you can't spot sexual innuendo even after someone points it out.

Thanks a lot for writing and offering encouragement! To review, I did continue putting out full studio albums for as long as it was a viable business venture for fifty people or however many were involved, but buyers do vote with their feet in such matters and it turned out

not to sustain farther than it did. I'm looking into participating in a few projects where the stakes are lower.

hope Zak Starkey starts returning my calls,

--Scott

**Scott, I stumbled across a Loud Family web site that had your email address on it, and I thought... what the fuck. I'm sitting at my kitchen table (which, this being NYC, is also my desk, the living room center, etc.), listening to *Tinkers To Evers to Chance* because I couldn't decide whether to listen to *Big Shot Chronicles* or *Lolita Nation*. I know you've moved on to other things, but I must say this: you created some of the best and most lasting pop music in the history of pop music. These words must be of little sustenance, given that, well, they are just words and do not reflect the taste of a nation at large.**

**Scott:** Thanks. I do appreciate it. I'm enjoying the situation where I'm no longer on the radar of the kind of people who don't want to hear what my music does, so when I hear from someone, it's almost always to say something nice.

**My discovery of Game Theory is thanks to Byron Coley and his fanzine, and his recommendation, over and over again, or all of your records.**

**Now, who the fuck am I to be writing to you? No one, really. A fan. A former writer. Our paths crossed twice: Once in Chicago when I interviewed you for *Jet Lag Magazine*, and once again via telephone when I was co-editor and co-publisher of the late *Catharsis Magazine* out of Norfolk, VA (check it out on the internet ... there's some stuff about you posted).**

You know, I think I remember you.

**After *Tinkers*, which is a commendable compilation, I lost touch with your work. I heard the Loud Family shortly after you released the first CD, but didn't love it, so, given where I was going at the time, it was only natural for me to let my interest wane. For that I apologize. I have no idea to this day what the Loud Family sounds like, except that I remember vaguely not liking it when it was coming from a tinny car stereo in a Toyota driving back from a Faithhealers show in Provincetown, RI. I did manage to astonish everyone in the car, though, when I said that it sounded like Game Theory. Good ear, they all said.**

**Whatever.**

**I thought of the Loud Family as targeting people who were a little out of sync with the times, musical taste wise, but I think we overachieved in that area.**

**So, 15 years after the first time I saw you play live, I sit here, in my living room/kitchen/rec room/multi-media chamber, listening to the velvet sound of your voice and the fluid hook-laden flow of the music that engulfs it, and, well, I'm as fucking impressed today as I was when I first heard "Erica's Word" way back when. Again, of little**

consequence, is this hope I have that in a few years, Game Theory will be rediscovered, and, just as the Replacements wrote about Alex Chilton, some degenerate rock band (I say that with love, mind you) will memorialize your records in their songs, and kids will flock to the old CDs and maybe even vinyl to figure out what it was about. Sure, don't plan your retirement on that, but still... it could happen, couldn't it?

All of this is to say two things: (1) Hello, had to reach out to you; and (2) Thanks for the great music that has kept me in good company for all these years.

*George Paaswell*

That's a really nice message. Thanks so much!

--Wane County

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*January 26, 2004*

Scott, there's something I want to ask you that just popped into my head today.

I've done my own projects, musical and otherwise of course, and when I get finished, they tend to acquire a compressed glitter and shine, a completion, to where I don't like anyone messing with it when I'm finished. For that matter, I'm not always so crazy about hearing their critiques either. I get the feeling "That's what it's supposed to be, so don't screw with it", and when I'm feeling saucy, there's the addendum "Okay then, do your own and see how we all like it, smartass."

When I listen to your music, ever since 1985 when I got *Real Nighttime*, I have that same feeling of compressed completion, as if someone had toiled over every nuance to the extent that any change would diminish the whole. Knowing how many people are usually involved in a recording project (or any project for money), I find it fascinating that this feel could have been preserved.

Was I supposed to feel that way? Did you?

Say it's so,

*Ken S.*

**Scott:** Hi, Ken -- many thanks for listening since 1985. You have earned the name of "survivor."

You're right, I fuss over every aspect of an album. I never just do my job and let other people do theirs; I interfere and think I know better when I probably don't, and I act like the world is paying terribly close attention to what I do. I've never really been in the position where someone from the label tried to change an album I thought was finished, but I have to think my ensuing unrelenting snittiness would have worn them down.

For some reason, I don't often feel like negative comments from critics are inappropriate. Even when I think a reviewer is frankly underqualified to assess music, I tend to think I failed fair and square to get something across.

It could be that the core of what you're talking about when thinking "that's what it's supposed to be, so don't screw with it" is something that gets clearer to me the older I get, and that's that audiences tend to conceive of the function of entertainment as being simpler than it really is. The naive model is that to the extent that the artist expresses the human experience lucidly, charmingly, and professionally, all is well and the listener enthusiastically accepts the results. But in some respects, what is swallowed that easily is actually ineffective. It's only what comes across as arch, wimpy, off-putting, disappointing, inappropriate, out-of-it, etc., that offers the opportunity of actually imparting something -- of actually teasing someone into growing a little. Some albums are easy illustrations. No doubt there was a lot of desire to "screw with" *Pet Sounds* and turn it into something that made a lot more 1966 listeners happy, at the cost of gutting its personal integrity and power to critique culture.

Still, I can hardly be so bold as to presume that my albums are worthwhile in that way, short as I am of a like community of heavy-hitting critics testifying to their worthiness.

powerless to vote myself back on the island,

--Scott

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**February 2, 2004**

**Scott, I'm a big fan, so forth and so on.**

**It is my understanding that you've made it clear that you aren't interested in re-releasing any of the GT catalog. True dat?**

**Scott:** No, I've been pretty consistently open to re-releasing the GT catalog, and have offered my cooperation when people have approached me about doing it. Most of it did have one round of re-release in the the 90s. The way I understand it, the only thing standing in the way is that the masters are physically inaccessible -- in the Capitol Records vault -- and the individual who owns the masters, Scott Vanderbilt, has not been able to coordinate obtaining them. Or maybe there's more to it than that; one tends to get news of when and why things heat up, but when and why they fizzle out stays relatively quiet.

**We'd love to know what you think of the idea. We just never got the balls up to write and ask until now. We've been kinda scared.**

I'm told I'm pretty approachable when I'm not behind the wheel of a car.

**But the absence of new LF music prompted me to write...**

**Scott Born**

thanks for being interested,

--Road Worrier

**Scott, my name is Josh. I've been a fan of you and your music for years. I just happened to be mindlessly surfing the internet and came across the Loud Family's website. I'm really not the type of person to email musicians/artists, but what the hell??**

**Scott:** I email musicians/artists. Is there a stigma I should know about?

**I really don't expect a response as I'm sure you have better things to do, but I very much want to say that I truly admire your music. While my musical tastes have changed radically over the last 20 years, I have never been able to stray from the music you produced. Game Theory and The Loud Family are in many ways the music I grew up with. Okay, enough, I'm sure you hear this all the time and it's boring. However, I do want to thank you.**

Let's at least prove I don't have better things to do.

**Also, I enjoyed looking at your list of top albums from 1966 - 1999. We do share similar musical tastes. I was intrigued by the fact that you listed Guadalcanal Diary (another great band) from 1985 (*Walking in the Shadow of the Big Man*) and 1986 (*Jamboree*), but did not have what I believe to be their best album, 1987's *2X4*.**

It must be a good sign that certain people generally agree with my selections but are flabbergasted at a particular omission. It means we must be remarkably close in most respects, which seems like a miracle, since my tastes must be out of the ordinary. At least, I look at something like the Village Voice polls and think they've been about two thirds incomprehensible since 1980.

**I would be most interested in any commentary you have on this matter... again I'm sure you have better things to do than email some guy in Cincinnati about old Guadalcanal Diary albums.**

The stimulating commentary to be had on this subject is: I've never heard *2X4*!

**I thought I saw somewhere on the LF website that you are no longer musically active. I hope I misunderstood. There are so few really talented musicians/songwriters out there. I always saw Game Theory and the Loud Family as a welcomed oasis in a vast desert of really bad music.**

How nice of you -- but that's just not true. There's been quite a bit of great music all along; you just have to do a little digging.

**Okay, enough from me. Thanks again for the music. I would love to hear something new!**

***Joshua Wolk***

Thanks for that, too. I have one eye open for little musical contributions I might be able to make here and there.

listomania,

--Scott

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**February 23, 2004**

**Scott, I had the pleasure of seeing Loud Family a couple of years ago at the 40 Watt in Athens on the last tour. I got the chance to talk with you after the show. One thing has bothered me since then and I can't seem to get it out of my head. Magnetic Fields were the headlining group and I remember commenting to you that your set was way too short. You seemed to be insulted in some way. I just wanted to say I was sorry if you were.**

**Scott:** Ohhhh. You thought my *set* was way too short!

**Keep on Rockin'**

**Joe Graves**

**P.S. Thanks for *Lolita Nation*. It is my number one record.**

Thanks much. I'm still rockin' -- maybe not so hard that people shouldn't bother knockin', but that is as it should be.

--Scagmetal Fiend

**Scott, if you remember, I'm your big Pittsburgh fan (you responded to me once). You and Ian Anderson are my favorite songwriters -- and I went all the way to Chicago to see and hear you play live. (I'm working poor... it was a big deal.)**

**Scott:** I'm indeed honored!

**So, looking through our local "alternative" paper tonight I see a "Scott Miller" coming here. Oh my gawd am I psyched! A bit more research and I have to guess that it is not *you* who is going to be here March 4, 2004. (There is a Scott Miller and the Commonwealth who I guess are the ones coming here. They sing about trains, or something. Unless you correct me... and thus give me something to look forward to...)**

You are right, I am the non-train Scott Miller, and fortunately for train song fans it is not I who will be there March 4th.

**Oh well. It did cause me to look for you again (I knew you were dumping the music after *Attractive Nuisance*) and at least I found your DVD and live CD, which I just ordered. I'm glad about those. And I'm very glad to see the Loud Family web site is still kind of active... hope springs eternal.**

Kind of active? My friend, the party never stops here. We cannot get Paris Hilton to go home.

**I've not read the more recent posts yet... just found it, ordered the new stuff, and wrote this e-mail. It's been a while since I looked at your site. I mean, I can respect your decisions regarding the music. But... you *have* to know by now that a lot of people really, really like your music! Please, think about giving us more, or at least some more live recordings...**

Thank you. I keep an open mind. It takes a fair amount of time, work, and cooperation to put out good songs and I have no incentive at this point to put out half-baked ones.

**I also found that software co. bio with you in a toy car and without curly hair. Well, I'm glad you drive a Lexus... but I'm really kind of bummed.**

Uh, Jeremiah, I drive a used minivan. You must be talking about [the site I just found](#) by searching on +"Scott Miller" +Lexus +software. I'm now computing that a couple of people have asked about this site in the past, and I am not that Scott Miller; his reference to Game Theory is apparently a joke -- possibly a downright hoot for fans of "Joe Satriani and Rush (pre-1983)."

**I listen to your music regularly. I'm sorry you didn't "make it" in the music biz, but look who does! You aren't like them! It seems like you are financially comfortable... please, give us more.... I don't mean to sound or be obnoxious, but... well... you *are* one of my favorite songwriters. How am I supposed to respond?**

**Y'know Scott, my little hamster friend died yesterday, after living with me for two years. Thinking you were touring again really made my day. Thinking I was going to hear you play live, right here in Pittsburgh, really got me going. I *am* happy about the DVD and live CD, but really man... your music is great. Can't we please have some more???**

**Come to Pittsburgh and play for me! :-)**

**With nothing but love, respect and full acceptance of whatever you want to do,**

**Your big fan,**

***Jeremiah McAuliffe***

You're too kind, and I am now inspired.

For Ian! For the little hamster! For pre-1983!

--Scott

**Scott, a quickie: The backwards track on "Self Righteous Boy" sounds like a snippet of "Don't All Thank Me." Is it?**

**Jack Lippold**

**Scott:** You know, I honestly don't remember. I get curious myself about what that backward vocal is saying. Statistically speaking, it's probably something about Satan or Paul McCartney.

snosamehtybdellortnocsitforchsanhoj,

--Scott

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**March 7, 2004**

**Scott, everyone writing to you wants to talk about other people's music... and I'm no different. You once wrote:**

**I've discovered how easy it is to cheapen your past work by trying to sound good to people. People have good noses for pandering and very bad noses for true artistic worth [...]**

**which is a very thoughtful statement on its own; but do you think this has any relevance to the fuss that has been made around the Liz Phair album?**

**David Thomas Lynch**

**Scott:** Hi, David. Thanks for writing. I don't have the latest Liz Phair, so no comment I could make would be too valuable. Interestingly, when I was in L.A. doing the sessions with Aimee Mann, our working day would consist of Aimee and me going into the studio with Michael Lockwood to work on our thing, while Aimee's husband, Michael Penn, went into another studio to produce the Liz Phair album. (To answer an obvious question, I have no idea if my session with Aimee will ever surface).

I guess some of the Michael-produced material is on Liz's album, but then I guess she hired Avril Lavigne's producer to score hits, and has in fact had a hit with the record.

I've liked all her other albums a whole lot, and that hit that goes "why can't I breathe whenever I think(?) about you?" is pretty good, so I'm at a bit of a loss to explain why I haven't gotten the album yet. It really has nothing to do with thinking she might cheapen her past work if she has a hit. In my quote above, I'm not concerned that a hit -- or crummy newer work -- *actually* cheapens past work, just that it makes a lot of people *feel* the past work has been diminished, so they avoid it, and I don't want to give thoughtful people a reason to avoid my work if I don't have to. I'm one of the people for whom the past work won't really be cheapened.

I guess it breaks down like this: for me to buy an album, I either have to know of at least one song that musically knocks me out, or I have to have faith that the album is by a first-rate artist who generally speaks to me. The hit is good but it falls pretty far short of being a knockout, and I've developed the impression that all Liz would care to communicate to me is

some adjustment or other to my idea of what she, Liz Phair, is all about. This is pretty different from feeling she wants to share her experience of life with me. She's at times a very insightful individual, but I've somehow accrued the feeling that she's been given over to the idea that the task of life is to take the variety of people in front of one, and arrange them so that they provide gratification. She doesn't long for them to know what she knows or feel what she feels.

thanks again for writing,

--Scott (self-titled)

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**March 15, 2004**

**Scott, I listened to *Days For Days* all day today.**

**therefore**

**must spew**

**LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE**

**Where when how what why are (aren't) you guys playing again?**

**Sandy Zwart**

**Scott:** Hi, Sandy. Thank you so much for spewing, of all things, love.

As it happens, Alison and I are playing a show together in San Francisco on April 12th at a place called the Rite Spot. It'll be mostly two different sets of solo stuff, but don't be too surprised if we get together and drop some "Islands In the Stream" science on a few numbers!

I have no idea whether you're a (SF) Bay Area person or not, but I'll try to do a *Days For Days* song in your honor just in case. As for recording, I don't know. Alison and I talk about doing something. There seems to be hope that I have a project coming up with some original material from me, Anton Barbeau, and Jeff MacGregor of the Solipsistics, but I can't make any claims about what commercial form, if any, it might take. There's an Aimee Mann collaboration thing in cryogenic suspension. I'm hoping to do something with Bradley Skaught, with whom I've done a little cowriting from time to time.

just don't ask what cowriting has to do with the Rite Spot,

--Scott

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**April 12, 2004**

**Scott, I'm very excited to discover (just in time) that you'll be playing here in San Francisco on the 12th. I was listening to *Lolita Nation* this evening and preparing to send you an "Ask Scott" letter. I sat one table behind you at Gabe's Oasis in Iowa City back in the late '80s but wasn't able to muster the courage to talk to you. I think Full Fathom Five or the Dangtrippers opened for GT that night. I sort of had a crush on Ms. Thayer at the time (I was already a Game Theory fan).**

**Scott:** I'm sorry we didn't get the chance to talk, although it's just as well that we didn't get the chance to talk about the crush on Ms. Thayer.

**You performed a searing solo version of "You Can't Have Me" as an encore. Years later I caught up through the website and was pleased to see you connecting with fans. I'm leaving San Francisco soon (heading back to Iowa) and am really happy that you are playing at the Rite Spot this Monday.**

Along with sets by Alison Faith Levy and Victor Krummenacher!

**You probably have the set list ready, but would you consider playing "Where You Going Northern", "Chardonnay" or "Together Now, Very Minor"?**

Let's see. "Where You Going Northern" -- probably too much to learn. "Chardonnay" -- sadly or luckily, I think I've lost all record of the original so-called long version lyrics, and that's really the way it should be played. But in any case, too much to learn. "Together Now" I could conceivably blunder through. Maybe if I get an encore.

**Also, for years I thought you were singing "Hey Jude" on "We Love You Carol and Alison" when it was actually "They Need You"!**

You are correct. I cannot always be stopped from singing "Hey Jude" but was that time.

**I was 24 years old listening to *Real Nighttime* and found myself wondering if the reason my life hadn't taken off was because I wasn't yet 25. I found out later that age didn't play that big a role in how life unfolds, but that took years to discover. Thank you so much for music that still resonates, Scott. I'm looking forward to seeing you and Alison on Monday night.**

**Warm regards,**

***Russell Scheil***

Thanks a lot for such a nice email. I hope you say hello at the show tomorrow. You can expect some fine entertainment tomorrow, and I'll be greatly disappointed with Alison and Victor if they don't provide it!

we want you in SF but I suppose Hey Jude back in Iowa,

--Scott

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*April 26, 2004*

**Scott, I too am deeply indebted to Rene Girard for stimulating my cortex and, more importantly, sharing a wisdom which has very positive and practical effects on my daily life, rather than simply remaining locked up in an ivory tower. I also got a lot out of the Girardian Gil Bailie's [Violence Unveiled](#), and notice that you have a lot of good things to say about Bailie both in your columns and in interviews.**

**So, without intending to stir up too much turbulence, I have to ask you: are you aware of Bailie's recent missives to members of the [Cornerstone Forum](#) coming down on abortion rights and gay marriage?**

**Scott:** Yes, I subscribe to the forum and always greatly appreciate Gil's insights even when I don't agree with his positions.

**Mind you, I certainly don't expect all you "progressive artistic types" to be straitjacketed into thinking the same way about everything; e.g., I respect Bob Dylan and surmise that a tremendous amount of reflection has gone into his spiritual journey, his non-PC views on some issues notwithstanding. Also, I am aware of Girardians who are pro-gay (James Alison) and others who support abortion rights (Eric Gans, who, unlike Bailie, does not equate abortion with human sacrifice).**

Well, that's kind of a loaded way of putting it, even though I think you're right, that Gil and Girard do both talk about abortion having a "sacrificial" dimension. I think the gist of Gil's position is that it's irresponsible to consider pregnancy -- which one would terminate if it occurred -- a calculated risk in the more or less unexamined quest for sex, always more sex. Which is perfectly reasonable to me, and cause for reflection on how responsible I may have been at every point in my life. But their positions do seem more extreme than my own, and I'm not confident I understand them well enough to interpret them correctly.

Gil's opposition to gay marriage is closer to a clear-cut case of something with which I'd disagree. To reason that the family is the rock of civilization, and that the redefinition of marriage so as to defocus from family-building is an anthropological disaster may well be true -- what do I know? -- but if you asked me how that is a Christian rather than a pagan concern, I don't think I could tell you.

Here is an excerpt from Gil's March 31st message to subscribers:

Until the mid-20th century, it was quite obvious to everyone that marriage was about having, loving, and raising children. With the disconnection of heterosexual sex from child-bearing and the attendant familial responsibilities, marriage, it seemed, was mostly about sex, and sex, it seemed, was mostly about -- well -- sex, that is to say, about physical pleasure. If marriage is about sex and sex is about pleasure, then there is absolutely no reason to limit marriage to one man and one woman, nor to limit it to two people rather than three or five; nor, for that matter, to rule out, say, adult incest. To sever sexuality from natality and to assume that marriage is about sex and that sex is about pleasure, is to render heterosexuality morally and anthropologically indistinguishable from homosexuality, and

homosexuals can hardly be faulted for pointing this out. Thus does the spirit of this age operate: encouraging anthropological pipedreams of the most absurd and irresponsible sort, and bringing us to ruin for snapping at the bait.

You could probably pin me down to the attitude that marriage is mostly about sex. Without beginning to deny that other considerations are extremely important, I would say that if you pick two people entirely at random, the best gauge of their unsuitability for marriage would be the absurdity of their having sex with each other. So I ought to consider this something of a direct rebuke from someone I consider to be very much my intellectual superior on the general subject. The problem is that I just don't understand it very well. For one thing, wouldn't the concern about "sever[ing] sexuality from natlity" apply as well to any childless marriage as it would to homosexuals? The fact of society recognizing the validity of a childless couple's marriage commitment does not in my mind pose any sort of threat to familial responsibility just because it disconnects heterosexual sex from child-bearing. Now, a royal house of ancient Greece or Persia would *certainly* tell you about the anthropological ruin of inattention to matters of bloodline, but would Jesus? The Jesus of "Who are my mother and my brothers?/Any who do God's will"? So I think I need to hear the case specifically against homosexual marriage where there's a one-to-one commitment.

I interpret the Christian grounds Gil seems to be giving as "be not conformed to the spirit of the age," which in this case is a little broad for me to know what to do with it. If the spirit of the age is racial equality, should I oppose racial equality? The bottom line here could be kind of a Catholic thing: faith in papal edict should be the end of the discussion; but that would *really* be putting words in his mouth that he didn't say, so I'm just left a bit unsure of what to make of it all. I should at least add that out of context this makes Gil appear a good deal more homophobic than I otherwise take him to be (great fan of W.H. Auden that he is).

**So, I guess what I'm asking is, how do the implications of Girardian theory effect *your* politics, and, without meddling too much, your ethical decisions in general?**

I'd had an inchoate sense of the supreme importance of both Christianity (mostly from reading T.S. Eliot) and societal scapegoating structures (mostly, I guess you'd say, from writing "poetry" seriously for a long time), and Girard put a lot of the mysterious elements together into a breathtakingly lucid cultural theory. I have Gil to thank for both a far better reading of Eliot than I could have ever managed myself, and I guess shared credit for my discovery of Girard (with my friend Bob Lloyd who was then at Stanford University Press).

Just understanding the radicality of the change Christianity has made to Western (and world) consciousness -- whether you love Christianity or you hate it -- makes world events a lot more intelligible. I've also tried to study other major religions as much as I can, to understand where people's ultimate concerns lie.

One Girardian concept I find applicable in the real world once in a while is "structural innocence," which Kierkegaard touched on when he said "the crowd *is* untruth." Pontius Pilate's famous utterance "What is truth?" epitomizes the attitude that there's no real right and wrong in life, it's always in effect ultimately a matter of deciding whose interests coincide with your own. But the revelation -- and it's really Judeo-Christian revelation -- is

that it's possible to decide innocence according to the cultural benefit accruing to those deciding the guilt. It's a hard concept to articulate and I wouldn't nominate myself for the job, but here's a very freewheeling paraphrasing of Kierkegaard: "we may not know what truth is, but I sure as hell saw them making the lie that opposes it with my own two eyes."

**Hoping all this contributes more to gathering than scattering of thoughts on the the subject! ([Lk 11:23](#), a passage well elucidated to me in a Bailie essay, I have to say.)**

La paz sea contigo,

**Don David de Vigo (Spain)**

Thanks very much for writing. You mentioned Bob Dylan, and I'm reminded of an interview from about 1983 where he was asked a kind of smartass question that went something like "how can you believe in the Bible when it told people to condemn homosexuals, and that would mean condemning your friend Allen Ginsberg?" I think he said something very close to "It didn't tell *me* to condemn homosexuals, it told *them*." Amazing damn answer, I thought.

more blathering than scattering,

--Scott

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**May 10, 2004**

**Scott, one of my favourite writers is Marcel Proust. Have you read his work?**

**Xavier**

**Scott:** Yes, I've read the first volume, *Swann's Way*. I thought it was wonderful, and I've gotten even more out of it in retrospect since reading Rene Girard's commentaries. I thought it was a fairly difficult read, though; I have doubts that I'll be able to find the time to get through all of *A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu*. I've only read it in translation, but Proust (or so it appears) used very long sentences to render very long descriptions. This was a man who could talk for several pages about how the light hits a steeple. In my twenties, I struggled not to be bored by some of it; I think now I'd have a better sense of how he was knitting the described events into the larger cloth. Failing reading it all, I currently have the more modest goal of reading the first volume in French; I've read one novel in French now (the 1950 sci-fi classic *Ravage* by Rene Barjavel) and I'm gathering the impression that while Proust for a native speaker is difficult, and Proust translated to English is difficult, Proust in French for a non-native speaker isn't *doubly* difficult. French doesn't seem to be at its most challenging during a careful, ornate description; it's at its most challenging when someone tosses off a quick idiom and you're supposed to know all the implications, but you don't.

Where it moves along is where Proust captures personalities and human nature, starting with the salient feature of childhood -- the initial-condition for adulthood -- being an insatiable neediness for attention and validation. The book certainly leaves many indelible impressions. I'm thinking of the way he describes the woman with the manufactured way of

laughing at the dinner table, where she always throws her head back with her mouth open for a couple of silent seconds before emitting the laugh.

As for writing about unrequited love, he's up there with Todd Rundgren.

--Marcel Voyager

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**May 24, 2004**

**Scott**, I only just now discovered your site, even though I'm a longtime listener of Game Theory and Loud Family. (Not an aggressive web-surfer, I guess.) My comment: I'm so blown away by reviewing [the list of "favorite albums."](#) It's like you've been listening through secret headphones into my life. Wild. I realize it is partly explained by the fact that we're nearly the same age, but still uncanny seeming on first reflection. On second reflection, maybe there are legions more of us around... In any event, thanks for all yr terrific music over the decades, and best of luck.

**Chet Hertz**

**Scott:** Thanks; it's fun hearing from like-minded people. I sometimes imagine what fun it would be to have the means to operate a radio station which each day picks a fairly random date from the past, and plays what radio actually *should* have been playing in that era. I think it would be great to observe how accessible people would consider a lot of it today; there's no reason the average "Free Bird"-yelling middle American shouldn't have been going nuts for "Try Try Try" by Julian Cope in 1995 or "Red Morning Light" by the Kings of Leon in 2003.

--secret head

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*Ask Scott took a break from here until mid-2006.*