

# What in the WORLD!

A news service from Bob Jones University helping believers be wise as serpents and harmless as doves

## religion

**Stanley Fish is a prominent public intellectual whose work is read** and commented on by thousands via his *New York Times* blog.

But Fish, though not a Christian himself, recently took his overwhelmingly irreligious blog audience to task for its naivety about the relationship between science and faith. Hundreds of comments to his post about religion taught Fish that his readers believed that “religion is a fairy tale, hogwash, balderdash, nonsense and a device for rationalizing horrible deeds.” The majority opinion is easily summarized by a few lines from commenters. One wrote, “Science is based on observation, religion is based on opinion.” Science, another said, “simply reports facts.”

Fish pointed out, simply and effectively, that what counts as “facts” is determined by the framework of beliefs one already has. Atheist Richard Dawkins believes there’s no God because he has already decided to believe that the natural world is all there is. Christians believe that creation testifies to the glory of God because they already believe that God made the world. Everyone has such beliefs lying at the foundation of all their thoughts.

Fish quotes another well-known atheist, Christopher Hitchens, who urges the world to “leave hold of the doctrinaire and allow your chainless mind to do its own thinking.” Fish responds that “there are no chainless minds, and it’s a good thing, too. A chainless mind would be a mind not hostage to or fettered by any preconceptions, a mind that was free to go its own way. But how could you go any way if you are not anywhere ... ?” (*New York Times*, 5/17/09)

“**More than 100,000 Britons** have recently downloaded ‘certificates of debaptism’ from the Internet to renounce their Christian faith,” reports Agence France Presse. England is, like a number of other countries, a land where many people who were baptized as infants in the state church now repudiate the Christian faith.

Spain, likewise, has seen a court case in which one Valencian man won the right to file for “debaptism.”

Italy saw a similar battle and a similar outcome in 2002 when the Union of Rationalists and Agnostics there sued for debaptism rights.

Argentina, too, has recently seen a “Collective Apostasy” campaign by some of the nation’s secularists. (breitbart.com, acc. 3/29/09)

**A Church of England cathedral in Liverpool recently played John Lennon’s** worldwide mega-hit from 1971, “Imagine,” on its church bells.

The lyrics of the pop song read, “Imagine there’s no Heaven. / It’s easy if you try. / No hell below us. / Above us only sky. / Imagine all the people / Living for today.” It continues, “Imagine there’s no countries, / It isn’t hard to do. / Nothing to kill or die for, / And no religion, too.” (dailymail.co.uk, acc. 5/16/09)

## society

**World-famous scientist Stephen Hawking** is known for his work on black holes and for his best-selling book, *A Brief History of Time*. He is a professor of mathematics at Cambridge University. His brilliance has led him, however, to a confidence that science will supplant religion.

He recently told the *New Scientist*, “Science is increasingly answering questions that used

to be the province of religion. The one remaining area that religion can still lay a claim to is the origin of the universe, but even here science is making progress and should soon provide a definitive answer to how the universe began.” (news scientist.com, acc. 3/18/09)

**Christians aren’t the only ones complaining that sexualized images of girls** in entertainment media are having a negative effect.

According to the BBC, an American Psychological Association task force has concluded that “the media’s portrayal of young women as sex objects harms girls’ mental and physical health” and that “magazines, television, video games and music videos all have a detrimental effect.”

“As a society, we need to replace all of these sexualised images with ones showing girls in positive settings—ones that show the uniqueness and competence of girls,” says Dr. Eileen Zurbruggen, chair of the task force and associate professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Professor Andrew Hill, professor of medical psychology at the University of Leeds, agrees: “If you look at teenage magazines, it’s all about sex,” he says. “We are a visually absorbed society—our views of people are dominated by how they look.” (news.bbc.co.uk, acc. 2/20/07)

## government

**There’s good news and bad news for the ongoing abortion battle** in the United States, says Yuval Levin, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. The good news is that “Defenders of the *Roe* regime seem incapable of making a case for themselves.”

President Barack Obama’s recent commencement address at the University of Notre Dame—and the resulting controversy over the honorary degree the Catholic institution awarded the pro-choice Democrat—provide fodder for Levin’s argument.

Obama is, Levin says, “a cause for short-term pessimism: His policies have so far been true to his pre-presidential record, and there is every reason to expect they will continue to be. And that he can often clothe his substantive extremism in the garb of rhetorical moderation—that he can step back and describe the controversy with apparent distance even as he himself pulls hard for one side—further strengthens his cause.”

However, Levin goes on to say that Obama’s “speech should leave pro-lifers optimistic, because it illustrates the transformation of the abortion debate over the past 15 years.” The president’s argument for abortion included references to the duty of the strong to protect the weak. That’s a massive plank in the pro-life argument. Obama also praised protecting the sacredness of human life—another key pro-life point. He even proposed setting up a conscience clause for pro-life doctors.

President Obama is nowhere close to switching sides on abortion. “Between Supreme Court picks, policy decisions (on stem cells, conscience protection, taxpayer funding of abortion and beyond), and personnel appointments, the Obama years look to be a dark time for pro-lifers,” Levin says. But abortion opponents are making significant gains. (*National Review*, 5/18/09)

## The Chinese Public Security Bureau (PSB)

**arrested 18 house church Christians** on April 30, reports Voice of the Martyrs. “The Christians were taken to the PSB office in Xinye city and each forced to pay a 1000 Yuan (about \$150 US) fine,” says VOM.

VOM reports that Chinese officials are now holding 16 Christians, including 10 preachers. (persecution.com, 5/5/09)

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**Gay marriage is a continually evolving political situation in the U.S.** Here's a current snapshot, including dates when legal decisions went (or will go) into effect:

*States where same-sex marriage is legal:*

- Massachusetts, Nov. 18, 2003
- Connecticut, Oct. 10, 2008
- Iowa, April 27, 2009
- Vermont, Sept. 1, 2009
- Maine, Sept. 14, 2009

*States which allow for same-sex civil unions granting rights similar to those of marriage:*

- New Jersey, Jan. 1, 2009
- New Hampshire, Jan. 1, 2009

*States that have given limited rights to same-sex civil unions (no dates provided):*

- Hawaii
- Colorado
- District of Columbia
- Oregon
- Washington
- Maryland

(Multiple sources, including LambdaLegal.org, acc. 5/20/09)

**Voice of the Martyrs reports that two Indonesian families** were recently evicted from their homes after leaving Islam and becoming Christians.

One family was served an eviction notice from their Muslim landlord after returning from a baptismal service. The father of the family also lost his job.

Another family in another village in West Java, Indonesia, was also evicted for the same reason around the same time. "They were

summoned by a Muslim leader [in the village] and told they should leave the village because Christians make the village unclean," reports VOM. (persecution.com, acc. 5/20/09)

## religion

**There's a "trendy Christian infatuation with cultural interaction"** today, says Carl Trueman. Case in point: Trueman found an evangelical Christian movie reviewer urging believers to see the Oscar-award-winning film *Milk*, which is about an early gay rights activist and which "depicts homosexual contact and celebrates the gay lifestyle," Trueman says.

"I'm not sure how watching this kind of thing can be exegetically justified in light of Eph. 5: 1-3," he says. He warns that sometimes "culture takes over and Gospel all but vanishes." (*reformation 21*, Feb 2009)

**"A century ago, most well-educated Americans knew the Bible deeply,"** says self-described "lax, non-Hebrew-speaking Jew" David Plotz. "Today, biblical illiteracy is practically universal among nonreligious people." Catholics don't read it, he says; Jews know only the first five books; "only evangelical Protestants read the whole Bible obsessively."

So Plotz decided to read every word—and blog about it for the liberal online magazine *Slate*. Plotz got excited about how many common English words and phrases were suddenly more meaningful once he saw them in their original context: *shibboleth*, *handwriting on the wall*, and even *Jezebel*.

"Not to sound like a theocratic crank, but I'm actually shocked that students aren't compelled to read huge chunks of the Bible in high school and college, the way they must

read Shakespeare or the Constitution or Mark Twain," he says.

Plotz, however, found that he disliked the God of the Old Testament. And as a Jew, even an agnostic one, he couldn't bring himself to believe in Christ. (*Slate.com*, acc. 3/3/09)

**"More than ever," reports the *New York Times*, "America's atheists are linking up and speaking out."** They are meeting on the Internet and connecting in real life; they are advertising publicly and banding together in formal groups.

Those who marked "no religion" on the American Religious Identification Survey were the only category that has increased in all 50 states over the last 18 years. These are not all atheists or agnostics, but the *Times* turned up anecdotal evidence even from the Bible Belt that atheists are gaining in numbers.

When a group in South Carolina called Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry recently paid for a billboard reading "Don't Believe in God? You Are Not Alone," they expected to provoke a flood of animosity. Instead, over 100 people arrived for a humanist get-together, and the leadership had to decide whether or not to find a bigger meeting space. (*New York Times*, 4/27/09)

## society

**The rise of Internet video on YouTube** has not diminished Americans' television-viewing hours, according to research firm comScore. Instead, we're just making *more* time for video on a screen.

Randall Stross, a technology columnist and professor of business at San Jose State University, suggests that U.S. culture may have passed a "tipping point . . . in the competition between print and screen." Stross says, "Consumers are increasingly avoiding newspapers—and books, too—because the text mode is now used so infrequently that it can feel like a burden. People are showing a clear preference for a fully formed video experience that comes ready to play on a

screen, requiring nothing but our passive attention."

Stross adds some statistics to back up his case. The average American household includes 2.7 persons—and 2.9 television sets. And each of those average Americans watched 142 hours of television per month in 2008, an increase of five hours over the previous year.

Stross adds, "We are so smitten with screens that we often can't bear to choose one over another: 31 percent of Internet use occurs while we're in front of a TV set." (*New York Times*, 2/8/09)

## Sometimes non-Christians demonstrate more wisdom than Christians.

The tiny Buddhist nation of Bhutan, nestled in the mountains between India and China, looks askance at the Western values of materialism and consumerism. "You see what a complete dedication to economic development ends up in," says Bhutanese government official Kinley Dorji, referring to the global economic crisis. Bhutan's prime minister, Jigme Thinley, cuts even deeper in his criticism of America and Europe: "Greed, insatiable human greed" caused the current crisis, he says.

And yet the isolated Bhutanese are not immune to the temptations of the West. They introduced television for the first time 10 years ago, and it has had deep cultural effects. "Before June 1999 if you asked any young person who is your hero the inevitable response was, 'The king,'" Dorji says. "Immediately after that it was David Beckham, and now it's 50 Cent, the rap artist. Parents are helpless." (*International Herald Tribune*, 5/6/09)

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