

what in the WORLD!

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

religion

“American evangelicalism, for all the good it has done, is in need of a modern reformation,” says Warren Cole Smith, author of the new book *A Lover’s Quarrel with the Evangelical Church*. “There is something toxic in the soil of the evangelical garden, and the poison has been building up over time, tainting everything. It is evident in our . . . indulgence of greed and envy in the form of careerism. It’s there in the hypocrisy of religious-right political leaders [who are] quick (and right) to condemn big government and its corrupting power, but who think that the big ministries and megachurches they have created are somehow immune to the same corrupting power.”

Smith “longs to see a church that . . . values spiritual depth over bragging rights and is shaped more by the words of Scripture than by the whims of youth culture.”

Smith relates his own personal disappointments in evangelicalism, especially the moral and spiritual failures of many who “fed on [the] pabulum” of “Christian music, rallies and all the accouterment[s] found in a modern Christian bookstore.”

Smith says that the Christians he knew “who were still growing in faith twenty years after they were first planted in this garden [of American evangelicalism] had, almost to a person, transplanted themselves outside of the evangelical milieu in some significant way.” (religionblog.dallasnews.com, acc. 5/9/09; *A Lover’s Quarrel with the Evangelical Church*, Colorado Springs: Authentic, 2009)

Secularists are alarmed about the war-mongering that they perceive religion to be guilty of in the world. Denouncing and repudiating

the Bible and the Qur’an are two popular ways of countering that perceived threat. And so is co-opting or reengineering.

Robert Wright, former philosophy and religion professor in Ivy League institutions, opts for the latter two approaches in his recent book, *The Evolution of God*.

Wright offers a rereading of the Old Testament in which he discovers a “hidden code” that may persuade the major monotheistic religions of the world to stop fighting. But along the way Wright says that the Hebrew Bible records God’s “mood changes” and “bursts of moral growth.” He hopes that God can grow morally today so the world can have peace.

In Wright’s telling of Scripture’s storyline, the prophets of Israel “aren’t necessarily monotheists; they don’t deny the existence of gods other than Yahweh. They seem to be what scholars call monolatrists, insisting that Israelites worship only one God.” He says that King Josiah was trying to quash “domestic political rivals” when he reinstated worship of Yahweh. “In ancient times, political power flowed from the divine. Prophets who could claim to speak for a god with a large following thus had influence. If that god was Yahweh, those prophets would be concentrated in the King’s court, since Yahweh was Israel’s national God. But prophets of other gods were less amenable to the King’s control and so a threat to his power.”

Wright notes that Isaiah foretells a time of peace when God “shall arbitrate for many peoples” and “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” But, he says, “This happy ending is hardly assured.” People on this earth will have to work at it. (*Time*, 6/15/09)

society

Scott Klusendorf, President of Life Training Institute and former Director of Bioethics at the apologetics organization Stand to Reason, offers advice for pro-life advocates as an experienced apologist.

He recommends that pro-lifers arm themselves against common arguments from the pro-choice side, including “You can’t impose your morality on others.” Klusendorf explains that this argument collapses under its own weight: it is itself an effort to impose a particular morality on the pro-life side.

Klusendorf also suggests a way to speak graciously with someone who says, “I’m personally opposed to abortion, but I still think it should be legal.” He says he asks such people why they personally oppose abortion. They always reply that it kills a human baby. “At that point, I merely repeat back their words. ‘Let me see if I got this straight. You oppose abortion because it kills babies, but you think it should be legal to kill babies?’” Klusendorf notes that Stephen Douglas used the same logic with slavery in his 1858 debates with Abraham Lincoln: it is inconsistent to say that while you are personally opposed to owning slaves you would not object if your next-door neighbor chose to purchase one.

Klusendorf notes also that the pro-choice side commonly assumes what it is trying to prove, that the unborn are not fully human. “Arguing that abortion is justified because a woman has a right to control her own body assumes there is only one body involved—that of the woman,” he says. Similar is the “coat hanger argument, which states that women will die from illegal abortions if laws are passed protecting the unborn.” Klusendorf points out that “unless you begin with the assumption that the unborn are not human, you are making the highly questionable claim that because some people die attempting to kill others, the state should make it safe and legal for them to do so.” (issuesetc.org, acc. 6/19/09)

government

“The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed,” wrote David in Psalm 103. And Isaiah called on God’s people to “relieve the oppressed.”

Iran’s people are oppressed—under the regime of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the incumbent who recently claimed victory in hotly disputed elections. Here are two Iranians’ own comments about recent events in their nation:

Kaveh, a student: “I live in the dorms at Tehran University. I was asleep when Basij militiamen entered my room early Monday morning, demolished everything and started beating us. A man with a long beard broke my notebook and said: ‘It is destroyed, this book that you were using against Islam and Ahmadinejad.’”

Alirezah, a family man: “I left my home in Tajrish along with my family at 3 p.m. to head to the protest on Monday. . . . My hand was hanging out of the taxi window with a little green ribbon—the color of the reformists—tied around my finger. One of the militiamen told me to ‘throw that ribbon away!’ When I refused, 15 people attacked me inside the car. They beat me with their batons and tried to pull me out. My wife and my daughter who were sitting in the back seat cried and held me tight. I also held myself tight to the chair. As they tried to shatter the car windows the driver went out and explained that he is just a taxi driver, we are just his passengers, and he hadn’t done anything wrong. After about five minutes they left us alone.” (*Wall Street Journal*, 6/19/09)

The Federal government now extends health care and other benefits to the homosexual partners of federal workers. (*Washington Times*, 6/17/09)

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American evangelicalism has sometimes taken the approach of trying to “make the Bible relevant,” says Mike Osborne in the *Baptist Bulletin*. For example, we see, among many other similar products in the Christian marketplace, New Testaments made to look like teen girls magazines. But “if we try to make the Bible relevant by adding extrabiblical attractions, we actually undermine the sufficiency of Scriptures. . . . The whole effort begins to look like a parent making airplane noises to get the baby to eat the mashed carrots: ‘Come on, now, it’s not so bad.’”

“The task for the Christian,” Osborne says, “is not to make the Bible relevant to the culture” but instead to demonstrate the relevance it already has because it is the Word of our Creator God. But that means Christians have to “understand the Bible and . . . the culture.” (*Baptist Bulletin*, 5/1/09)

The Church of England has launched a series of seeker-sensitive worship services targeting young people, who are abandoning the church at an alarming rate. Archbishop Rowan Williams and others—targeting the same problem—have also written a book called *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*.

The book details a Holy Communion Service that begins with a YouTube clip promoting a United Nations anti-poverty campaign. After the video, says a review of the book, worshippers are asked to “approach the altar and rub sea salt on their fingers to represent tears, before walking around and meditating at eight ‘prayer stations’ representing themes such as ‘gender equality’ and ‘environmental sustainability.’”

The book also discusses what are called “U2charists,” services which feature the spiritually tinged music of the rock band U2.

David Houlding, prebendary at St. Paul’s Cathedral, doesn’t think any of the preceding is a good idea. “All this is tosh,” he said. “It’s just a passing fad, irrelevant, shallow and pointless. There’s no depth to it and it’s embarrassing because it’ll make people think that we’re eccentric and silly.” (*London Telegraph*, 6/13/09)

Worldwide Anglicanism includes everything from Bible-believing evangelicals to Anglo-Catholics to female priests to openly gay clergy—and at least one agnostic bishop, Richard Holloway.

Bishop Holloway of Edinburgh, Scotland, says that he’s not sure God exists. But, he adds, “I am not trying to persuade people in the church to adopt my angle. I just want space enough to be honest about my own convictions.”

The bishop still presides at communion, explaining the apparent discrepancy by suggesting, “It very much depends on the interpretation you put on it.”

Holloway still values ethics, he says: “I want people to live as though life had eternal meaning. Even if you don’t believe in a God of unconditional love, choose to live as though there were [such a God].” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5/20/09)

Men are standing up in evangelical groups across America to complain that the very people who are supposed to have the firmest hold on the Gospel, to be Bible people, are losing their grip on the truths of God’s Word.

Daniel L. Akin, president of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, recently described his denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, with these words: “Seduced by the sirens of modernity we have jettisoned a word-based ministry that is expository in nature. We have, in our attempt to be popular and relevant, become foolish and irrelevant. Skiing across the surface needs of a fallen, sinful humanity, we have turned the pulpit into a pop-psychology sideshow and a feel-good pit stop. We have neglected preaching the whole counsel of God’s Word and the theology of God’s Word. Too many of our people know neither the content nor the doctrines of Scripture. Preaching the cross of Christ and the bloody atonement accomplished by his death is the exception rather than the norm.”

Akin stresses that many pastors misuse the Scripture they profess to honor: “If the Bible is used at all, it is usually as a proof-text out of context with no real connection to what the speaker is saying.”

Akin calls on Southern Baptists to repent, though his call is surely not limited to Southern Baptists: “For those of us who profess to believe both the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture, there must be in our pulpits what I call ‘engaging exposition.’ That is, there must be preaching that is biblical in content and dynamic in delivery, preaching that is expositional and theological on the one hand, and practical and applicable on the other. We must advocate an expositional method with a theological mindset under an evangelical mandate. It is preaching that models for our people how they should teach the Bible.” (crossway.org/blog/6/24/09)

government

“The process of building a country ruled by law has suffered a serious setback” in China, says the watchdog group Human Rights in China. That’s because several lawyers representing human rights victims—including house church Christians—have not been

allowed to renew their licenses. Over a dozen lawyers who had defended religious and ethnic minorities and political dissidents have suffered this act of heavy-handed authoritarianism.

This government action matches the prediction of Gao Zhisheng, a well-known Christian human rights activist, who “once said that every human rights lawyer (in China) would eventually become a human rights case,” according to Compass Direct.

One of the recently disbarred Chinese lawyers was representing a house church Christian now suffering arbitrary detention, Alimjan Yimit. The Chinese Public Security Bureau’s trumped-up (according to Compass Direct) charges against Yimit failed to convince a Chinese court, but the bureau may circumvent the court system by sending Yimit directly to three years of reeducation through labor. (Compass Direct, acc. 6/12/09)

society

The History Channel is touting a new “icon of evolution,” the fossil of a primate they have named “Ida” (EE-da). Promoters are calling the fossil a “global event” that “changes everything.” Ida is “going to rewrite history books.” It is a “landmark.” It’s the one fossil “that will be compared and shown as an early primate for a long, long time.” Ida is “something like the holy grail or lost ark.”

“This is a transitional fossil like Darwin was dreaming of,” they claim. Because of Ida, science will “need to explain the early evolution of primates in a new way.” Ida promises “to change everything we thought we understood about the origins of the human species.” (history.com, acc. 5/25/09)