

# What in the WORLD!

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

## religion

**“The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church called the evangelical notion that individuals can be right with God a ‘great Western heresy,’”** reports the Associated Baptist Press.

Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori told leaders of the Episcopal Church that there is a “great Western heresy—that we can be saved as individuals, that any of us alone can be in right relationship with God.” Jefferts Schori said this “heretical and individualistic understanding” has led people to neglect the environment and contributed to the global recession.

Al Mohler, Christian cultural commentator, finds this statement ironic because “the only heresy recognized in much of liberal Protestantism is the heresy of believing in the possibility of heresy.” In mainline denominations, the categories of heresy and orthodoxy have been declared “to be both out of date and out of style.”

So Mohler views Jefferts Schori’s statement as tragic. “The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church finally summoned the determination to apply the word *heresy*—and then applied this most serious term of odious rejection to the Gospel itself.” (abpnews.com, 7/9/09; albertmohler.com, 7/17/09)

**Former President Jimmy Carter has released a public explanation for his decision to sever his ties with the Southern Baptist Convention.** He blames the denomination’s alleged discrimination against women. “It was an unavoidable decision,” he says, “when the convention’s leaders, quoting a few carefully selected Bible verses and claiming that Eve was created second to Adam and was responsible for original sin, ordained

that women must be ‘subservient’ to their husbands and prohibited from serving as deacons, pastors or [military] chaplains.”

Carter said in a public statement, “We need to challenge these self-serving and outdated attitudes and practices.”

Carter asserted that “the carefully selected verses found in the Holy Scriptures to justify the superiority of men owe more to time and place—and the determination of male leaders to hold on to their influence—than eternal truths. Similar biblical excerpts could be found to support the approval of slavery and the timid acquiescence to oppressive rulers.”

The former president and long-time Sunday school teacher said he can find passages in the Bible “in which women are revered as pre-eminent leaders.” He added, “During the years of the early Christian church, women served as deacons, priests, bishops, apostles, teachers and prophets. It wasn’t until the fourth century that dominant Christian leaders, all men, twisted and distorted Holy Scriptures to perpetuate their ascendant positions within the religious hierarchy.” (theage.com.au, 7/15/09)

**“The ranks of nonbelievers are on the rise,” says ABC News,** “and as they seek out each other online and in small groups, they are increasingly looking to do more than just vent.” They’re getting organized.

“Some are adopting rituals themselves,” says ABC, including de-baptisms and weddings. “Others are organizing science-related outings or enrolling in community-service programs.”

“This is the transition moment right now,” says Dale McGowan, author of *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion*. “Some groups are really

diving in [to foster a robust sense of community], and some of them are holding their noses and standing on the diving board. They’re not quite sure what to do.”

“It used to be that these atheist groups ... met almost in hiding,” says American Atheists spokesman David Silverman. “Now they’re doing a lot more stands at town parties, a lot more trash pickups, a lot more blood donations—a lot more stuff that gets their group out and noticed.” (abcnews.go.com, 7/19/09)

## society

**After a high-profile divorce split a famous reality TV couple,** the *New York Times* asked a few academics to reflect on America’s fascination with reality television.

Christine B. Whelan, a visiting assistant professor in the sociology department at the University of Iowa, noted that some academic research into the reality TV phenomenon concluded that viewers love it “because, deep down, they believe someday they, too, might be a star.” But Whelan disagrees. “I’d argue it’s more base than that: reality television plays on our ugly, but very human, need to take someone else—especially the rich, attractive or famous—down a peg.” She provides examples of some of the horribly foolish things reality TV stars have done. “When the 911 nanny looks on disapprovingly as a family’s children melt down around helpless parents, we say to ourselves, ‘Can you imagine? At least I’m not that bad of a mother.’”

Does such poor behavior on the tube predict similar behavior among its viewers? Not exactly, says Whelan. “Just because more than 10 million viewers watched this week’s “announcement” [of a reality TV couple’s divorce] doesn’t predict a spike in divorces this year.” But, she argues, even if bad reality TV doesn’t herald an onslaught of bad behavior, it does herald an onslaught of worse reality TV. “Pushing the shock-value boundaries only moves one way—and if upping the ante on televised deviance follows the same pattern of pornography and cinematic violence, we are

unfortunately in for more (and worse) displays of heartbreak, idiocy and cattiness, all edited to amp up the anxiety.” (*New York Times*, 6/25/09)

## government

**“Legalized abortion was supposed to grant enormous freedom to women,** but it has had the perverse result of freeing men and trapping women,” says Richard Stith, professor of law at Valparaiso University.

Stith even found a radical feminist, Catherine MacKinnon, who had pointed this out long ago. “Roe’s ‘right to privacy looks like an injury got up as a gift,” she said, because “virtually every ounce of control that women won [from legalized abortion] has gone directly into the hands of men.”

Stith points out that “when birth was the result of passion and bad luck, some people could sympathize with a young woman who was going to need help with her baby.” The father might offer to marry the woman; if not, the woman’s own father would feel responsible. “But once continuing a pregnancy to birth is the result neither of passion nor of luck but only of her deliberate choice, sympathy weakens. After all, the pregnant woman can avoid all her problems by choosing abortion. So if she decides to take those difficulties on, she must think she can handle them.”

If that’s the case, birth will bring “blame rather than support.” The father will believe he bears no responsibility since it was the woman’s choice to bring the baby to term. Why should he have to pay child support for a child she chose to bear?

Even an employer may be less inclined to offer maternity leave: why should a business bear the cost of its employees’ poor choices?

“Elective abortion,” Stith says, “changes everything.” (*First Things*, July 2009)

Published by **Bob Jones University**, Greenville, South Carolina 29614. For free subscriptions: 864.242.5100, ext.3076

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**The Episcopal Church—the U.S. wing of world Anglicanism—has “voted decisively to allow ... the appointment, to all orders of ministry, of persons in active same-sex relationships,”** says N. T. Wright, Bishop of Durham, England.

Wright now describes international Anglicanism as a “slow-moving train crash.”

Many Episcopalians “have long embraced a theology in which chastity, as universally understood by the wider Christian tradition, has been optional,” says Wright. “That wider tradition always was counter-cultural as well as counter-intuitive. Our supposedly selfish genes crave a variety of sexual possibilities. But Jewish, Christian and Muslim teachers have always insisted that lifelong man-plus-woman marriage is the proper context for sexual intercourse. This is not (as is frequently suggested) an arbitrary rule, dualistic in overtone and killjoy in intention. It is a deep structural reflection of the belief in a creator God who has entered into covenant both with his creation and with his people (who carry forward his purposes for that creation).”

Pro-gay forces in the Episcopal Church have appealed for “justice.” But, says Wright, “Justice never means ‘treating everybody the same way,’ but ‘treating people appropriately,’ which involves making distinctions between different people and situations. Justice has never meant ‘the right to give active expression to any and every sexual desire.’”

Wright adds that “we must insist ... on the distinction between inclination and desire on the one hand and activity on the other—a distinction regularly obscured by references to ‘homosexual clergy’ and so on. We all have all kinds of deep-rooted inclinations and desires.

The question is, what shall we do with them? ... [T]he Prayer Book ... asks God that we may ‘love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise.’ That is always tough, for all of us. Much easier to ask God to command what we already love, and promise what we already desire. But much less like the challenge of the Gospel.” (timesonline.co.uk, 7/15/09)

**“The profound shifts in dominant media in the last half of the twentieth century** have profoundly misshaped the sensibilities of the typical American, and ... this, in turn, has led to a profound decline in preaching.” So reads the thesis of the provocative little book, *Why Johnny Can’t Preach*, by media specialist, former pastor and long-time New Testament professor T. David Gordon.

Gordon isn’t talking about liberals, but about people of the book, Bible-believing Christians. And seminaries, the usual suspects, can’t be blamed he says. A well-known crop of excellent Bible expositors is teaching many of our future pastors.

“The problem is the typical ministerial candidate when he arrives at seminary,” Gordon says. “Our culture has become increasingly aliterate.” It’s not that they can’t read but that they don’t. Even when people in our culture do read, “they read almost exclusively for information or content; they almost never read for the pleasure obtained by reading an author whose command of language is exceptional.” This makes for pastors who simply cannot interpret texts.

Gordon does place blame somewhere: “Our inability to read texts is a direct result of the presence of electronic media. The sheer pace of an electronic media-dominated

culture is entirely too fast. ... We become acclimated to distraction, to multitasking, to giving part of our attention to many things at once, while almost never devoting the entire attention of the entire soul to anything.”

Gordon urges pastors, future pastors and their people to work against the overwhelming torrent of their culture and gain a love for and an ability in reading. (*Why Johnny Can’t Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009; *Themelios*, July 2009)

## government

**In 2007, then-candidate Barack Obama told a group of Planned Parenthood activists**

that abortion is part of the “basic care” that his healthcare plan would provide for: “In my mind reproductive care is essential care. It is basic care, and so it is at the center, the heart of the plan that I propose. ... We’re going to set up a public plan that all persons and all women can access if they don’t have health insurance. It’ll be a plan that will provide all essential services, including reproductive services. ... We also will subsidize those who prefer to stay in the private insurance market except that insurers are going to have to abide by the same rules in terms of providing comprehensive care, including reproductive care.”

Conservative and liberal news outlets alike are reporting that President Obama’s proposed healthcare legislation is likely to stay true to his word.

Analysts quoted by the *New York Times* express “no doubt ... that coverage of abortion will be mandated, unless Congress explicitly excludes abortion from the scope of federal authority to define ‘essential benefits.’”

The *Weekly Standard’s* John McCormack reports that White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs told reporters that “the President and this administration agree that ... a benefit package is better left to experts in the medical field to determine how best and what procedures to cover.” McCormack notes that

any medical experts selected by the White House are likely to view abortion as part of “basic care” just as President Obama does. (*New York Times*, 7/19/09; *Weekly Standard*, 7/20/09)

## society

**Columnist Jessica Wakeman argues in a recent CNN piece** that there’s nothing wrong with deciding not to have kids and that a woman is not selfish to choose not to bear children. And “really,” she says, “what’s so wrong with being selfish?”

“Frankly, I am surprised when women use the word ‘selfish’ in this context,” Wakeman says. “After all, isn’t one of the upshots of feminism supposed to be that women have more choices than ever before and each of us is free to do what makes us happy?”

“Women should be allowed to care about pleasing ourselves—and only ourselves—without being judged,” she argues. “What is wrong with a woman being selfish? Really. Think about it for a second. Why shouldn’t we be selfish if it means we’re meeting our own needs and taking care of ourselves? What’s wrong with caring more about bringing pleasure to your own life than anything else?”

“Some women just want to have fun,” Wakeman says, “the same fun they’ve always had.” (cnn.com/living, acc. 7/9/09)