

What in the WORLD!

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

religion

Despite the economic downturn, the Prosperity Gospel is alive and well.

The *New York Times* sent a reporter to the Southwest Believers Convention in Fort Worth, Texas, where he encountered prosperity luminaries such as Kenneth Copeland regaling large crowds with stories of the luxury God wants to give His people on earth. Copeland's wife preached, "God knows where the money is, and he knows how to get the money to you."

The basic prosperity gospel is simple, summarizes the *Times*: "If you have sufficient faith in God and the Bible and donate generously, God will multiply your offerings a hundredfold." You drop money, like seeds, into the hands of the prosperity preachers, and you'll reap a benefit.

The *Times* reporter talked to one couple who, though \$102,000 in debt, recently gave Copeland nearly \$4,000 to purchase a jet and high-tech equipment for his television ministry.

The wife defended their gift. "I remember Copeland had to once fly halfway around the world to talk to one person," she said. "Because we're partners with Kenneth Copeland, for every soul that gets saved, we get credit for that in heaven."

One religion professor quoted in the article called Copeland and his ilk "spiritual pickpockets." (*New York Times*, 8/15/09)

society

Hollywood actor Brad Pitt has distilled the arguments of many Americans against religion. Asked by Bill Maher of *Comedy Central*, "What is it about religion you don't like?" Pitt responded, "You know, I grew up in a religious family, in a religious community, and

it just doesn't make sense to me. It just doesn't work for me in the long run."

Pitt continued, "I never wanted to step on anyone else's religion and their beliefs—that's what's great about our country—until I started seeing it defining policy. ... Like gay marriage, you have a group of people telling other people how to live their lives, and you can't do that."

Pitt had a message for any Christians who were watching: "I just say ... you really have to check what country you're living in because the freedom that allows you to practice religion is the same freedom you're stepping on. That's not right. And I want to add that if there was a nation of gay married couples who were telling you you couldn't practice your religion, I'd be speaking up for you too. So, let's stop the nonsense." (*latimesblogs.com*, acc. 8/16/09)

The New Atheists want scientists to stop pretending that reason and faith are friends.

This contemporary crop of God-disbelievers—typified by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens—want "defenders of reason to be far more confrontational and blunt." They want scientific institutions "to stop putting out politic PR about science and religion being compatible."

One of their number, P.Z. Myers, has a very popular science blog in which he regularly lambastes the Christian faith, its proponents and its God. And Richard Dawkins provocatively titled his most famous book *The God Delusion*. (*latimes.com*, acc. 8/11/09)

government

Some conservatives are taking up the pro-gay cause.

One prominent lawyer, who

defended Ronald Reagan in the Iran-Contra affair, successfully argued George W. Bush's election case in 2000 and defended Republican counterterrorism policies after September 11, is now preparing for what he considers an even more important legal battle: he's going to try to get same-sex marriage legalized nationwide.

Liberal disbelief notwithstanding, Theodore Olson, Esq., winner of 44 of his 55 Supreme Court appearances, argues that he is being consistent with conservative principles of blind justice. The *New York Times* points out that Olson joined the Republican party in the 1960s, "long before the rise of the religious right and its focus on social issues." Olson, in contrast to the Moral Majority, "gravitated toward a particularly Western brand of conservatism that valued small government and maximum individual liberty."

Olson has argued that marriage is simply a part of the happiness the American constitution guarantees all citizens, not just heterosexuals. Voters cannot infringe on others' constitutional rights by passing referenda against gay marriage, he says.

Olson has now been hired by Hollywood film director and Democratic Party activist Rob Reiner. Opening arguments in this case began in August. (*New York Times*, 8/18/09)

An Oregon couple has sued a Portland medical practice for telling them—wrongly, it turned out—that their child did not have Down Syndrome. They would have aborted their girl had they known that she did in fact have the disease.

They are suing for more than \$14 million "to cover the costs of raising her and providing education, medical care, and speech and physical therapy for their daughter," reports the *Oregonian*.

The couple "feel very strongly that what happened to them was wrong," says their lawyer. "They were given incorrect information, and their lives have changed because of it."

But a "wrongful life" lawsuit like theirs is

controversial. High courts in about 30 states have allowed the suits, but some states have prohibited them.

Pro-lifers have a consistent take on the issue. In the words of one pro-life leader quoted by the *Oregonian*, "It is never wrongful for a baby to be born."

When prenatal testing reveals a condition like Tay-Sachs disease, which commonly kills children by age 3, many people choose abortion. But, says the *Oregonian*, "ethicists wonder about the morality of such a decision when the condition is deafness, blindness, a cleft lip, obesity or a propensity to develop breast cancer or have a heart attack later in life—all of which can be identified in the womb." In fact, one long-term study found that 28 percent of women who found out their unborn child would be born with a cleft lip or mouth deformity chose abortion.

Angela Jarvis-Holland, director of the Northwest Down Syndrome Association in Portland, has a 10-year-old son with Down's. She is concerned about a "tyranny of perfection" which may lead parents to choose abortion because of any number of testable abnormalities. "If you keep growing the list, where and when do we grow uncomfortable about that list?" Jarvis-Holland asked. "I'm not sure where this is taking us." (*oregonlive.com*, 6/13/09)

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Seven members of the Hameed family of Gogra, Pakistan, died this summer. Six were burned to death by a mob. One, a grandfather, was shot by the same mob. All were killed because they were Christians.

The attack came after Muslim rioting over the alleged desecration of a copy of the Quran. A group of Muslims 20,000 strong charged around the area for eight hours, burning and looting more than 100 Christian homes. The Hameeds were the only Christians to die, but 20 others were injured.

The Hameeds lived near the entrance of their Christian community and so were the first targets reached by the entering mob. The attackers came during the family's breakfast and shouted insults through the windows: "Dogs!", "American agents!"

Grandfather Hameed Pannun Khan, 75, opened his door to see what was going on and was shot in the head. The mob rushed into the house as the Hameeds fled to an inner room. From that room, they could hear their belongings being looted—a refrigerator, a cupboard. They could also hear more taunts. "They said, 'If you come out, we'll kill you,'" said Ikhlaq Hameed, 22, who managed to escape.

Then plumes of smoke began coming underneath the door. The Hameeds dared not flee right away; but when they finally did, the burning roof collapsed. Six family members—including Musa (6) and Umayya (13)—perished in the flames. (*New York Times*, 8/3/09)

society

"Scientists will often portray the Big Bang as if it were known fact, but it isn't," says Brian Clegg, a Cambridge-educated science

writer. "It's a theory within a very speculative field of science, cosmology, which is about as speculative as it gets. I'm not saying the Big Bang theory isn't true, but it's a work in progress."

Time magazine asked Clegg, "What are some of the theory's major flaws?" Clegg answered, "There's an expectation that the Big Bang should have produced a rippling effect, almost like an aftershock, where we could see subtle variations in gravity that have carried on ever since then. A lot of money has been spent on experiments to try and detect these gravity waves and they literally have never, ever found anything. Even if they do exist, they're probably not at levels we could detect. And why did it happen at all? There is no sensible answer for the Big Bang unless you move over into the religious side and say, 'Well, it began because God began it.' That's why quite a lot of scientists are nervous about the Big Bang. They quite prefer having something that doesn't require somebody sort of poking a finger in and saying, 'Now it's starting.'"

Commenting on Clegg's recent book, *Before the Big Bang*, the *Time* interviewer admitted, "I was disturbed to read that many scientists refuse to question the Big Bang theory because they'd built their careers on it." Clegg explained, "The fact is science is like any other social network. It's a lot easier to go along with the crowd. Every now and then there's a revolution in science, a paradigm shift, like when Einstein came along, but it's so easy to lock people into a particular way of thinking, of trying to build on the ideas that are in vogue. In the end, there is almost a fashion in science—ideas that are in, ideas that are out." (*Time*, 8/13/09)

Having fewer children is a much more effective way to diminish your carbon footprint than driving less or recycling—so say two scientists in a recent journal article. ("Carbon footprint" refers to the amount of carbon someone releases into the atmosphere, a factor which many scientists believe contributes to global climate change.)

The authors of "Reproduction and the Carbon Legacies of Individuals" in *Global Environmental Change* argue, "While population growth is obviously a key component of projections of carbon emissions at a global level, there has been relatively little emphasis on the environmental consequences of the reproductive choices of an individual person."

Cultural commentator Al Mohler observed about the article: "The logic of this argument is clear and chilling. The leap from scientific analysis to proposals for public policy is almost sure to come. How long will it be before prospective parents are warned that their decision to reproduce could be catastrophic for the environment? Should we now expect a cap-and-trade proposal for babies?"

He continued, "Anti-natalist philosophies have been around even longer than arguments over ecology and sustainability. Given our biblical responsibility for environmental stewardship, Christians should indeed be thoughtfully engaged with the entire nexus of questions related to carbon emissions, climate change and respect for the earth. Nevertheless, when we begin to measure babies in terms of a 'carbon legacy' and a projected threat to the environment, we abandon the biblical worldview. Human beings cannot be reduced to a 'carbon legacy,' and the gift of children must never be seen as an assault upon the earth." (albertmohler.com, acc. 8/12/09)

government

Two persecuted Christian women in Iran have refused to deny their faith in a Tehran court. Maryam Rustampoor (27) and Marzieh Amirizadeh (30) were imprisoned five months

ago. They have been charged with converting to Christianity from Islam.

Elam, a Christian organization in Iran, relays some bits of the conversation that occurred in the courtroom.

The prosecutor, Mr. Haddad, asked the two women if they were Christians.

They replied, "Yes, we are Christians."

Mr. Haddad said, "You were Muslims, and now you have become Christians."

Maryam and Marzieh replied, "We were born in Muslim families, but we were not Muslims."

Mr. Haddad urged, "You should renounce your faith verbally and in written form."

The women answered, "We will not deny our faith."

Mr. Haddad later sent the women back to prison, warning them to think about their options. Maryam and Marzieh said, "We have already done our thinking." (elam.com, 8/9/09)