

# what in the **WORLD!**

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

## religion

**“Evangelicals and Catholics are not polar opposites but are both within the spectrum of Christian faith and commitment,”** says Southern Baptist leader Timothy George.

George made the comment while engaged in a formal discussion with Frances Beckwith before an audience at Wheaton College. Beckwith was elected president of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2006 but ended his presidency early in order to convert to the Catholic Church. Beckwith had been raised Catholic, but said that he did not learn much about Jesus there. His desire to follow Jesus led him to Protestant evangelicalism as a young man.

Beckwith explained some of the reasons for his reversion to Catholicism. “Once I understood apostolic succession and the authority of the Magisterium, a lot followed.”

George, while remaining a Southern Baptist, is a leading ecumenist, who has been an integral part of all the Evangelicals and Catholics Together meetings since the first in 1994. George related to the Wheaton audience a conversation he once had with the primary Catholic architect of those meetings, the late Richard John Neuhaus.

Neuhaus said, “You Protestant evangelicals want to talk about orthodoxy, but you have orthodoxy on the cheap. You want the Trinity and Christology, but you don’t want the pope and the Magisterium.” George responded, “The problem is that you Roman Catholics have orthodoxy with a surcharge.” (*christianitytoday.com*, acc. 9/9/09)

**The percentage of female pastors in the U.S. has doubled** in the last ten years, from 5 percent of Protestant senior pastors to 10 percent.

Nearly six in ten of those female pastors is a member of one of America’s mainline denominations: American Baptist Churches, United Church of Christ, Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist Church or Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (*barna.org*, acc. 9/14/09)

## society

**“The scope of Islamic laws appears to have widened in Malaysia** over the past few years,” reports the *New York Times*, pointing specifically to the government’s decision to bar Muslims from converting to other religions. (*New York Times*, 8/25)

**America is divided over evolution**, but the secular materialistic worldview—the belief that matter is all there is—is not the most popular view among Americans.

The most recent public opinion poll by the Pew Research Center shows that “63 percent of Americans believe that humans and other animals have either always existed in their present form or have evolved over time under the guidance of a supreme being.”

Those who believe that “life evolved solely through processes such as natural selection” make up only 26 percent of the U.S. population.

The survey also found that about two-thirds of Americans “support teaching creationism alongside evolution in the classroom.” (*pewresearch.org*, acc. 2/4/09)

## government

**In an effort to cut teen pregnancy rates, a British government leaflet is advising parents not to insist that one choice is right and another wrong.**

The leaflet says to parents, “Discussing your values with your teenagers will help them to form their own. Remember, though, that trying to convince them of what’s right and wrong may discourage them from being open.”

Simon Calvert, deputy director of the Christian Institute, said of the leaflet, “The idea that the government is telling families not to pass on their values is outrageous. Preserving children’s innocence is a worthy goal. We would like to see more of that kind of language rather than this amoral approach.”

Linda Blair, clinical psychologist, took the opposite view: “We do not know what is right and wrong; right and wrong is relative, although your child does need clear guidelines.” (*The Sunday Times*, 2/22/09)

**“When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law,”** Paul wrote, they show “the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness” (Rom. 2:14–15).

So when reality television starlet Kourtney Kardashian, pregnant with her boyfriend’s baby, started thinking about abortion, her conscience was pricked despite her pro-choice views. “I definitely thought about it long and hard, about if I wanted to keep the baby or not . . . I do think every woman should have the right to do what they want, but I don’t think it’s talked through enough. I can’t even tell you how many people just say, ‘Oh, get an abortion.’ Like it’s not a big deal.”

“I looked online, and I was sitting on the bed hysterically crying, reading these stories of people who felt so guilty from having an abortion.”

She realized, “all the reasons why [she] wouldn’t keep the baby were so selfish.” She elected to keep her child. (*people.com*, acc. 8/19/09)

**North Korea has reportedly executed a Christian woman.** Her alleged crimes were distributing Bibles and spying for foreign countries.

Reports from and about North Korea are by nature difficult to substantiate, but South Korean activists report that Ri Hyon-ok, 33 and a mother of three, was executed publicly in a city close to China on June 16. Authorities also sent her family—husband, children and parents—to prison after the execution.

Voice of the Martyrs also received an anonymous threatening fax—apparently from North Korean officials at that nation’s embassy in Finland—warning that “something very bad will happen” to VOM if they keep giving out the Gospel in North Korea.

Many thousands of Christians are believed to be held in North Korean gulags. The government enforces a personality cult adulating the current leader and his deceased father. Christianity is banned. (*Christian Post*, 7/24/09)

**The Swedish government** has issued new standards for accreditation, which may mean that evangelical institutions attempting to train pastors in that country will no longer be legally allowed to grant degrees.

“The actual report was a serious blow against all theological education in Sweden,” said Stefan Gustavsson, general secretary of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance. “The underpinning perspective seems to be old-fashioned Enlightenment thinking that theology is not real science and therefore eventually should not be part of the university.”

*Christianity Today* comments that “a short time ago, Sweden remained homogeneous and optimistic about the possibilities that science and secularism could build a model society. Then religion became a sensitive subject, prone to misunderstanding.”

Up until 1994, the only place to get formal theological education in Sweden was in the state-owned universities. Now the government is taking a step back toward that position. (*Christianity Today*, 8/5/09)

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## government

### A New Hampshire court has sent a 10-year-old professing Christian to public school against her mother's will.

Amanda Kurowski's parents are divorced. Her mother, with whom she lives most of the time (in Meredith, New Hampshire), is a Christian and was homeschooling her. Her father, whom she sees on regularly scheduled visits, is not a Christian and objected to this homeschooling. Per prior agreement, a mediator—a New Hampshire court—was called in to settle their schooling dispute.

The court noted a few points in Amanda's mother's favor:

- Amanda's homeschool curriculum is reviewed and approved by the local school district.
- The girl regularly undergoes standardized testing to assess how her academic achievement compares to that of her peers in public school.
- Teachers of the art, Spanish, and physical education classes Amanda has taken in the Meredith public school indicated that "she is an active participant in the classes and is adapting well and making friends and keeping up with the work."

However, a counselor sent in to evaluate Amanda found her "to lack some youthful characteristics." Namely, "she appeared to reflect her mother's rigidity on questions of faith." Amanda even attempted to witness to the counselor, who ultimately "concluded that Amanda's interests . . . would be best served by exposure to a public school setting in which she would be challenged to solve problems presented by . . . the social interactivity of children her age." The counselor further recommended that Amanda be

exposed to "different points of view at a time in her life when she must begin to critically evaluate multiple systems of belief and behavior." Noting that Amanda's father felt similarly, the court agreed that "exposure to other points of view will decrease Amanda's rigid adherence to her mother's religious beliefs"

In spite of concluding that the evidence showed that "Amanda is generally likable and well liked, social and interactive with her peers, academically promising, and intellectually at or superior to grade level," the judge was concerned that Amanda "has not had the opportunity to seriously consider any other point of view" than her mother's. The court order took it as a "premise" that such exposure was one of the reasons for education. (telladf.org, acc. 9/18/09)

## society

### Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?

Evolutionary theory has an answer: natural selection. For example, from a book review in the prominent international magazine, *The Economist*: "The ichneumon wasp paralyzes its prey without killing it and lays its larva inside this convenient source of fresh meat, to eat it slowly alive. This is just one striking instance of the immensity of pain in the animal kingdom, which defies explanation except via the unyielding calculus of competitive survival."

Christians aren't the only people who find this answer unsatisfying, but they have done the best job explaining why. "Natural selection . . . has no purpose, no goal at all," says Christian author Nathan Wilson in his new book *Notes from the Tilt-A-Whirl*. "Survival is the result for some and death for others, but

there is nothing in this story to show that one is actually to be preferred over the other. Survival as good is just one of the axioms that's been adopted by the faithful."

Wilson points out that in an evolutionary worldview, "Matter exists, and it is shaped by chemical reactions as Time and Chance act upon it. You have no soul. You are simply a combination of chemicals. What you call 'death' is nothing more than a transition out of one combination and the beginning of another. Welcome to the leaf pile—you as mulch is no better or worse than you as man. When you begin and end is a pointless question."

Wilson also comments about the ethics that the evolutionary worldview gives rise to: "Because there is no God—no authoritative standard over creation—the badness of rape downgrades to a mere matter of societal taste. Ethnic cuisine, ethnic ethics. In God's absence rape is no longer fundamentally evil. In our country, you'll get confined to a cell (if caught and convicted), but that just means we enforce our taste, not that our taste has any real authority over anyone else." (*The Economist*, 9/3/09; *Notes from the Tilt-A-Whirl*, Thomas Nelson 2009)

### "As new tests become available, will babies with Down syndrome slowly disappear?"

This is the question posed by Brian Skotko, MD, MPP, a clinical genetics fellow at Children's Hospital Boston, in a British pediatrics journal.

Skotko said that there was a 15 percent decrease in U.S. births of babies with Down syndrome between 1989 and 2005. If there had been no prenatal testing, researchers would have expected a 34 percent increase in births—largely because women are waiting longer to have children, a known risk factor for Down syndrome. (ScienceDaily, 9/15/09)

**Absentee fathers** are a significant reason why teens engage early in immorality.

A University of Oregon study found that 63.2 percent of U.S. 14-year-olds with

completely absent fathers claimed to have had sexual intercourse, but 52.5 percent of children whose fathers were sometimes present made that claim. The number was 21 percent for children whose fathers were always present. (news.bbc.co.uk, acc. 9/16/09)

## religion

"Where does evolution leave God?" *The Wall Street Journal* recently asked a prominent atheist, Richard Dawkins, and a prominent religion professor, Karen Armstrong, to answer that question.

Dawkins answered predictably: "The kindest thing to say is that it leaves him with nothing to do, and no achievements that might attract our praise, our worship or our fear. Evolution is God's redundancy notice, his pink slip."

Dawkins' praise, worship and fear is clearly directed toward evolution itself: "Evolution is the universe's greatest work. Evolution is the creator of life, and life is arguably the most surprising and most beautiful production that the laws of physics have ever generated."

Armstrong, on the other hand, tries to wiggle. God lives in a realm separate from that of reason and science, the region of myth. So we shouldn't speak with certainty about Him: "There can never be a definitive version of a myth, because it refers to the more imponderable aspects of life. To remain effective, it must respond to contemporary circumstance."

Armstrong claims that literal interpretation of Scripture is a modern scientific invention. Religion should not be considered "an exact science but a kind of art form," she says. Religion, "like music or painting, introduces us to a mode of knowledge that is different from the purely rational and which cannot easily be put into words." (*Wall Street Journal*, 9/12/09)

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