

# what in the WORLD!

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

## government

**The Chinese church actually grew under Communist oppression** during the decades after most Protestant missionaries left in 1951. But Christianity's resurgence in the world's most populous nation is, sadly, not just a movement of the Spirit of God. It is also polluted by human sin, particularly the burgeoning attraction China has toward the capitalism of the West. "It would be naïve to conclude that the appeal of Christianity has nothing at all to do with the appeal of Western culture in China today," says Brent Whitefield of ChinaSource. Whitefield also quotes the international magazine *The Economist*, which said, "In much of Christianity's former heartland [the United States], religion is associated with tradition and ritual. In China, it is associated with modernity, business and science."

The fact is, however, that much of Christianity's expansion in China has occurred outside the real centers of Western influence. A 1999 *Washington Post* article said that "across China, people are struggling to redefine notions of success and failure, right and wrong, good and evil. The quest for something to believe in has become so universal and profound that it is one of the unifying characteristics of life in China." Christianity has been the answer many people have arrived at.

Government persecution of Christianity is certainly an ongoing issue in China, but at the same time Protestant Christianity has established a nationwide, permanent presence there. This brings both opportunity and danger. (chsource.org, acc. 9/30/09)/18/09)

## society

**The first ever International Blasphemy Day** took place recently at the Washington, D.C., office of the Center for Inquiry, a secular humanist organization.

"My point is not to offend, but I realize it can offend, because religion is such a polarizing topic," said artist Dana Ellyn, whose contributions to the Blasphemy Day include paintings mocking the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Each of the three atheists quoted by Religion News (itself a secular organization) made a point of insisting that they did not desire to offend others—but that they wouldn't mind if it happened. "We're not seeking to offend, but if in the course of dialogue and debate, people become offended, that's not an issue for us," said Justin Trottier, a Toronto coordinator of Blasphemy Day and executive director of the Ontario chapter of the Center for Inquiry.

The Center for Inquiry chose the date for the inaugural Blasphemy Day because it was the day in 2005 when the controversial Muhammad cartoons were published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. These cartoons proved highly provocative to Muslims around the world.

International Blasphemy Day was also celebrated with a blasphemy contest and The Blasphemy Challenge, in which people are encouraged to record denials of faith and put them on YouTube. A typical submission: "Hi, my name is Ray and I deny the Holy Spirit. (pause) No lightning. Maybe next time." (religionnews.com, acc. 9/24/09)

## religion

**Be harmless as a dove** when you critique the modern church, says theologian John Frame. In his review of Michael Horton's *Christless*

*Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*, Frame reminds fellow theological conservatives that it is a serious thing to claim that professing Christians are "Christless" and embrace an "alternative gospel."

"To be Christless is to be doomed to Hell (John 3:36). And if someone preaches an 'alternative gospel,' contrary to the gospel preached by the apostle Paul, he is to be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9). People who preach 'another gospel' are not Christian friends who happen to disagree with us on this or that matter. Rather, they have betrayed Christ himself. The whole church ought to rise up against such persons and declare that they are not part of the body of Christ and that they have no part in the blessings of salvation. Indeed, if they do not repent, they have no future except eternal punishment."

Frame notes that Horton backs off from saying that the American evangelical church has reached this point. He says only that it is "well on its way." That may well be, replies Frame, but "we should be wary of cocksureness and dogmatism. We ought to discuss these matters in an atmosphere of brotherhood, charity and civility."

Frame takes aim at Horton's claim that the American church tries to make the Gospel relevant. Surely, Frame says, the American evangelical church "needs to put more emphasis on man's sin and the saving grace of Christ." But that doesn't mean it's wrong to apply the Bible to people's lives in areas where they feel they need help, and it doesn't mean it's wrong to try to explain the Gospel in such a way that contemporary people can understand it.

Frame warns people who love the Gospel to defend it in a just and theologically careful manner. (frame-poythress.org/frame\_articles/2009Horton.htm, acc. 10/21/09)

## Celibacy is not working for Catholic priests.

The *New York Times'* accomplished religion journalist Laurie Goodstein recently told the story of a woman who had conceived a child with an American Catholic priest, Rev. Henry Willenborg. That child, Nathan, is now 22 and a cancer patient, and his father has never been an active presence in his life. Father Willenborg baptized his own child, but he ended his relationship with Nathan's mother eight months after he was born.

"I've always called him Father Henry—never Father, never Dad," said Nathan. "I always felt he picked religion over me."

Willenborg's superiors in the Order of Friars Minor, commonly known as the Franciscans, never did anything but send him to a treatment center for priests with sexual addictions. (They did also give Nathan's mother a lump sum of money for Nathan's upbringing.) Immediately upon Willenborg's return from the center, he resumed his immoral relationship with Nathan's mother and then just as quickly ended it.

Willenborg is now the senior pastor of Our Lady of the Lake, a large Wisconsin parish of nearly 1,400 set on Lake Superior.

A landmark study cited by Goodstein estimated that 20 percent of American Catholic priests were involved in ongoing heterosexual relationships. Another 8 percent to 10 percent were involved occasionally.

Father Willenborg sat for an interview but said, "We've been very caring, very supportive, very generous over these 20-something years. It's very tragic what's going on with Nathan, but, you know?" Then he trailed off and ended the interview. (*New York Times*, 10/16/09)

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Greenville, South Carolina 29614.  
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## religion

**"I rarely meet the young Christian who needs to be exhorted to engage their culture,"** says Fred Sanders. "They seem to consume what everybody consumes, and are in general agreement with the zeitgeist that a steady stream of entertainment is the Fifth Freedom that our forefathers fought for." Sanders asks for a "gospel reason" why he should have to scour through the lists of top movies, TV, and music "to find something worth paying attention to." (firstthings.com/blogs/evangel, 10/21/09)

### Canards—groundless beliefs—abound in discussions of homosexuality and Scripture.

David Juhren, leader of a gay community center in White Plains, N.Y., offered two to the *New York Times* recently: "The Bible has been translated twice already, and there's a lot lost there," he said. "In its current translation, it's an abomination for two men to sleep together, but it's also an abomination to go down to the Red Lobster and order a shrimp cocktail."

Canard 1: Many people speak as if the Bible was translated from some ancient language (they don't know which) into another language, which was in turn translated into another language, and so on down through the centuries. Modern translations, in their view, are many steps removed from the originals, which are now lost in the mists of time.

The truth is that all responsible translations are translated directly from the original Greek and Hebrew. There is no evidence that the Bible has ever done anything but condemn homosexuality—as well as gossip, lying and any other way of denying God's rule in the world.

Canard 2: Many people speak as if Christians are obliged to follow every law in the Bible, even and especially those given to ancient Israel.

Non-Christians, of course, generally miss the differences the Bible makes between Israel and the church. The Gospel of Mark explicitly sets aside the dietary laws that Moses gave to Israel after the Exodus (Mark 7:19), so shellfish and pork are no longer proscribed (cf. Acts 10:14–15). The New Testament, however, repeats the Old Testament's opposition to homosexuality, notably in Romans 1:26–28 and 1 Corinthians 6:9.

Human rebellion extends even to the interpretation of texts. (*New York Times*, 4/2/09; *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man*, Ambassador-Emerald, 1999; *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach*, IVP, 1994)

## society

**"There is a creeping anti-natalism in America that has made having large families a radical act,"** writes Jonathan V. Last in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Last points to the Duggar family, fundamental Christians who have 19 children (one of whom is still in the womb). The world at large considers them not just odd, but "positively freakish." Mrs. Duggar has borne 10 times the number of children women in her demographic group (non-Hispanic whites) normally bear (1.85). Even in the days before birth control, women didn't usually reach 19. In 1800, the average number for an American woman was 7.

But that was a different day, Last says. Infant mortality was much higher, so people had to bear more children to reach the size they desired for their families. And abortion, of course, has reduced the number of American

children by nearly 50 million (Last notes, by comparison, that the Baby-Boomer generation numbers 75 million.) Even delayed first marriage and car-seat laws have had an effect on fertility, shortening a woman's childbearing years and limiting the size of affordable vehicles, respectively. (online.wsj.com, 9/18/09)

**More American kids are "coming out" as homosexuals and at younger and younger ages,** says an article in the *New York Times Magazine*, claiming that the culture has clearly changed so that some kids who aren't even allowed to date can "come out" openly to their friends without fear.

The prominent journalist who wrote the article, Benoit Denizet-Lewis, himself a homosexual, has written several other expansive pieces on similar topics for the *Magazine*. And he offers a studied impression of what has happened to make coming out possible even in middle school: Denizet-Lewis says that a shift occurred at the turn of the millennium. The gay magazine he worked for began receiving letters from young men who were proud of their homosexuality, not ashamed and isolated.

"What had changed?" he asks. He points to what were in his view "increasingly accurate and positive portrayals of gays and lesbians in popular culture." But he also points to the fact that "most teenagers were by then regular Internet users. Going online broke through the isolation that had been a hallmark of being young and gay." (*New York Times Magazine*, 9/23/09)

## government

**Asia Bibi is a Pakistani Christian and belongs to one of only three Christian families in the Muslim village of Sheikhpura, near the city of Lahore.**

Asia is in prison for her faith. She works on a farm owned by Muhammad Idrees with many other local women, who pressure her to convert to Islam. One day the women had an

intense religious discussion. Asia told the women that Jesus had died on the cross for their sins and that He is alive while Muhammad is not. "Our Christ is the true prophet of God," she reportedly said, "and yours is not true."

The other women were enraged at this and began to beat Asia. Some men locked in her in a room, and then the mosque loudspeakers boomed with Asia's sentence: her face would be blackened and she would be led through Sheikhpura sitting on a donkey.

Christians called the police, who took her into custody before this punishment could be carried out and began the process of charging her with blasphemy. Asia's husband, Ashiq, and two daughters have been able to see her. (persecution.com, acc. 10/21/09)

### A Colombian pastor has been martyred by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Pastor Manuel had been pastoring for eight years in the difficult area of Chopal village. FARC had closed many other churches, but when FARC guerillas made an appointment in September to meet Pastor Manuel, he thought they might be giving him authorization to have services like he had asked.

Instead, they shot Pastor Manuel outside his home five times. One guerilla fighter who had gone inside the house with the pastor's wife and family yelled, "Make sure that dog stays dead."

Pastor Manuel's wife cleaned his bloody face, dragged his body underneath a tree, and began to preach from her Bible through her tears to everyone who came by. Her 10-year-old son told her, "Don't worry, Mom. Dad died for Christ and now he is with Christ." (*Voice of the Martyrs*, acc. 10/21/09)

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