

what in the WORLD!

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

Religion

The year 2006 was the first that more women than men were ordained to be priests in the Church of England,

continuing a trend that began a decade ago.

Women priests, however, are aiming higher because they “feel that until women can become bishops they will not be taken seriously in other senior roles,” said an Anglican spokeswoman. (*BBC News*, 11/13/07)

Six prominent health-and-wealth ministries are under investigation by the U.S. Senate

“to determine whether they have illegally used donations to finance opulent lifestyles,” reports the *New York Times*.

Senator Charles E. Grassley (R, Iowa) sent a long list of questions about financial dealings to leaders the *Times* calls “some of the flashiest preachers now popular on television and the Internet.” The *Times* notes in addition that “many of them [are] proponents of the prosperity gospel—[which claims] that God will reward believers who open their hearts and wallets.” (*New York Times*, 11/7/07)

Atheists have begun to develop their own Sunday schools and summer camps to indoctrinate their youth, reports *Time Magazine*.

One mother who was interviewed said, “When you have kids you start to notice that your coworkers or friends have church groups to help teach their kids values and to be able to lean on.” So she packs her kids up and heads out with her husband every Sunday to the Humanist Community Center nearby.

The Sunday program at the center includes some of the trappings of Sunday school, including something like hymns. “I’m Unique and Unrepeatable,” sung to the tune of “Ten Little Indians,” is one example. (*Time*, 11/21/07)

Society

Science is science. Religion is religion.

Each should stay on its own side of the back seat. This is the thinking of many in America.

“The problem with this neat separation,” says physicist Paul Davies in a *New York Times* op-ed piece, “is that science has its own faith-based belief system. All science proceeds on the assumption that nature is ordered in a rational and intelligible way. You couldn’t be a scientist if you thought the universe was a meaningless jumble of odds and ends haphazardly juxtaposed. When physicists probe to a deeper level of subatomic structure, or astronomers extend the reach of their instruments, they expect to encounter additional elegant mathematical order. And so far this faith has been justified.”

Davies says he has often asked other physicists “why the laws of physics are what they are.” Some reply, “That’s not a scientific question.” Others say, “Nobody knows.” Davies finds that the most common response is, “There is no reason they are what they are—they just are.” But, Davies says, that’s faith!

Both science and religion have to believe “in the existence of something outside the universe, like an unexplained God or an unexplained set of physical laws.” Davies doesn’t accept religion’s claims. But science cannot claim the high ground: “Until science comes up with a testable theory of the laws of the universe, its claim to be free of faith is manifestly bogus.” (*New York Times*, 11/24/07)

“Public discussion of the Christian faith has changed—permanently,” says premier evangelical scholar Darrel Bock.

“Every Christmas and Easter season, a ‘blockbuster’ story proclaims the need to redefine Christianity,” Bock says. Debate over heretical views of the Gospels is no longer left in the rarefied air of academia; scholars are taking their views public through the media.

Bock notes that the media often reports such stories “with a specific agenda in mind.” And his experience teaching around the country has led him to believe that the church isn’t ready for these attacks. When, for example, a book such as *The Da Vinci Code* alleges that Jesus married and had a daughter in France, “many of us struggle to know how to respond.” He suggests of these public challenges to the Bible, “Why not see them as opportunities to discuss faith with friends and neighbors who will find them intriguing?”

Christians need to be ready to answer questions such as, “What about all those other Gospels that never made it into the Bible?” Or, “Don’t you know that history is written by the winners, and now that we can hear the losers, we need to revise the Bible’s story?” (*Christianity Today*, 12/12/07)

There is a moral divide between political parties in America. A recent poll conducted by YouGove/Polimetrix and reported in *The Economist* asked Democrats and Republicans some moral questions.

“Is sex between unmarried people morally wrong?” Only 26% of Democrats think so; half of Republicans do. Is prostitution morally wrong? Among Democrats, 68% say yes; 85% of Republicans agree. Homosexuality? It’s morally wrong according to 41% of Democrats, and 74% of Republicans. Pornography is considered morally wrong by 52% of Democrats as well as 77% of Republicans. Is physician-assisted suicide morally wrong? One third of

Democrats (35%) say yes; so do over half of Republicans (55%).

But neither party can rightly be termed the godless or godly party. A significant number of Democrats (36%) believe that the “correct explanation for the origin of the earth” is “the account of creation as told in the Bible.” Fully 16% can’t decide between creation and evolution. And nearly four out of ten Republicans say abortion is “not morally wrong or depends” on the circumstances. (economist.com, acc. 12/20/07)

A high school principal in Texas is the center of a community battle after he banned immorally suggestive dancing at school events.

Some parents support the principal, Jason Ceyanes, while others “defend the children of Argyle as ‘good kids,’ and say they should be trusted to dance and dress the way they want,” reports the *Wall Street Journal*.

The particular form of dancing at issue is called “freak dancing.” It’s a common form of dancing on music videos, says the *Journal*, and it “has been getting raunchier as videos keep pushing the envelope.” (*Wall Street Journal*, 11/19/07)

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government

Christian biologist Nathaniel Abraham has sued the prominent Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, a federally funded research center, for firing him after he refused to admit that Darwinian evolution was scientific fact.

Abraham, who now teaches biology at a Christian university, had been a Woods Hole employee for eight months but was dismissed after he told his superior he believed that the Bible gives a true account of human origins. (Reuters, 12/10/07)

religion

"It is now an unexamined assumption in many quarters: the best way to reach people [for Christ] is to be like them," warns Mike McKinley of 9 Marks Ministries. And he notes that the generation of super-hip youth pastors who came of age in the 1990s are now super-hip senior pastors. "But" he says, "there are ways in which a commitment to being cool can ultimately conflict with the call of a pastor."

McKinley cautions: "Don't sign up to be a pastor if you want to sound reasonable to most people or if you want to affect a cool detachment from people and ideas. The preaching of the cross is foolishness." He adds: "The more we understand the world (and its definition of what is compelling and cool), the less attractive we should find it. In fact, in a society that is increasingly morally and spiritually bankrupt, it may be our incongruity with the culture that serves to highlight the gospel." (*9 Marks eJournal*, Nov/Dec 2007)

The National Geographic Society

circumvented appropriate scholarly safeguards to release its famous "Gospel of Judas" story last year. This is the public charge issued by scholar April Deconick.

The Gospel of Judas, according to National Geographic's telling, is an early document that reveals that Judas didn't betray Jesus. Instead, as Deconick summarizes, "Jesus [asked] Judas, his most trusted and beloved disciple, to hand him over to be killed. Judas's reward? Ascent to heaven and exaltation above the other disciples."

But Deconick took her own look at the Coptic (a mostly extinct Egyptian language) text at issue and found significant flaws in National Geographic's translation.

"I think the big problem is that National Geographic wanted an exclusive," Deconick wrote in the *New York Times*. "So it required its scholars ... to not discuss the text with other experts before publication." Only after the story was released did other scholars get to look at the text. (*New York Times*, 12/1/07)

About half of the newest Southern Baptist Convention hymnal will consist of contemporary songs,

reports NPR. "The reason is that there's been a recent glut of praise and worship songs, many made popular on Christian radio," says NPR.

Many large SBC churches long ago threw out their hymnals. "They've moved to contemporary worship songs that haven't been around long enough to make the songbook," NPR says.

One retired pastor who's trying to help the SBC vet the theology of the new songs

says, "I love the old hymns because I think they're very good on theology. 'My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness'.... That's pretty good theology." He complains not that the new songs contain faulty theology but that they don't really say much.

Another pastor NPR spoke to is hoping the new songs will help him fill empty pews. He says of the contemporary music, "I think that it reaches a group of folks who may not be as familiar with church as our generation is." (NPR, 11/18/07)

society

The Golden Compass, a movie based on a popular children's book trilogy, opened recently to significant buzz but low ticket sales. The film is of particular interest to Christians because the author of the trilogy, Philip Pullman, is something of an anti-Christian crusader.

Alan Jacobs, evangelical literary critic, praises Pullman's "imagination and narrative drive," but he says, "for such gifts to be thrust into the service of a ... contemptuous ideology is very nearly a tragedy."

Pullman's ideology often erupts into little sermons within his story, says Jacobs. In one book an angel says that "she and the rebel angels, the followers of wisdom, have always tried to open minds; and Authority [God] and his churches have always tried to keep them closed."

In the trilogy, "Everyone associated with the Church is cruel, remorseless, and only rarely less than murderous," notes Jacobs. "Conversely, everyone outside the Church is blindingly righteous."

Al Mohler, Christian commentator, says that Pullman's less-than-subtle war on Christianity is not being exaggerated. But, says Mohler, Christians should not overreact. "The Christian faith is not about to be toppled by a film, nor by a series of fantasy books. Pullman has an agenda that is clear,

and Christians need to inform themselves of what this agenda is and what it means. At the same time, nothing would serve his agenda better than to have Christians speaking recklessly or unintelligently about the film or the books." (*Weekly Standard*, 10/23/00 [reposted 12/3/07 at FirstThings.com]; albertmohler.com, 12/4/07)

Americans don't read as much—or as well—as they used to, argues a long essay in *The New Yorker*.

The proportion of U.S. adults who are considered proficient in reading—able, for example, to evaluate opposing editorials--dropped from 15% in 1992 to 13% in 2003. That drop is not huge, but 15% is already an embarrassingly small number in a country where citizens are responsible for evaluating the policies of their elected leaders.

Television (with the recent help of other media) really does seem to be the most obvious culprit, according to plenty of circumstantial evidence cited by the *New Yorker* article. A study in the Netherlands found that highly educated people born in the age of television actually read less than poorly educated people born before its advent.

This shift from literacy back to "orality," a culture of the spoken word, has profound but totally unpredictable implications. Readers think differently from watchers. (*The New Yorker*, 12/24/07)

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