

# What in the WORLD!

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

## society

### **The New England Journal of Medicine**

recently published an editorial in opposition to doctors' involvement in capital punishment. The editors said that court "justices should not presume that the medical profession will be available to assist in the taking of human lives. We believe that . . . all responsible members of the medical profession, when asked to assist in a state-ordered execution, will remember the Hippocratic Oath and refuse to participate."

"It is encouraging to see the reference to the Hippocratic Oath—which, unfortunately, is not taken in most American medical schools," says Richard John Neuhaus of *First Things*, "but the editors' reading of that venerable text is, to put it gently, very selective." That is, Neuhaus says, their appeal to Hippocrates is ironic considering their unequivocal support for abortion. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, 1/24/08; *First Things*, Apr 2008)

**A growing number of adolescents** are transitioning from one gender identity to the other, reports the *New York Times*.

But a newer aspect of the current climate among "transgendered" people is the idea that they can transcend gender. They prefer not to identify as male or female at all: "I think gender is a spectrum—gender is more complicated than [biological] sex," says Rey, born female but now a young "transman" profiled in the *Times* article. Rey says she thinks everyone has "their own gender," just like everyone has a personality.

Says another person who no longer identifies as a female: "My identity is fluid; it may evolve and fluctuate."

Rey adds: "My brain is not gendered."

There's this crazy gender binary that's built into all of life, that there are just two genders that are acceptable. I don't want to have to fit into that." (*New York Times*, 3/16/08)

**What is "deconstruction,"** the academic movement associated with postmodernism?

Stanley Fish, leading popularizer and explainer of deconstruction in the United States, writes in his regular *New York Times* blog that deconstruction denies that objective discourse about the state of the world is even possible. "The program of drawing closer to a truth independent of" our own talk about truth is impossible. The mere fact that we have to use language, a human creation, to talk about truth means we will never have direct access to it.

Fish shrugs: "That's a loss, but it's not a loss of anything in particular. . . . All we lose . . . is a certain rationalist faith that there will someday be a final word, a last description that takes the accurate measure of everything."

But that's exactly what we will have—and already have in part, says Mark Thompson, author of *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture*. The "God Who is there" has revealed Himself to mankind, and He uses language—a medium He created—to do it. Clarity in interpretation of the Bible may be "hard-won" at times, Thompson says (citing 2 Peter 3:16), but God's Spirit goes powerfully with His Word. God will give a final word. (fish. blogs.nytimes.com, 4/6/08; *A Clear and Present Word*, InterVarsity Press, 2006)

**Colleges around the country** are having to engage in a new kind of affirmative action: not enough men are making it into freshman classes.

Women on college campuses "tend to win more honors, join more clubs, do more volun-

teer work," says Nancy Gibbs in *Time* magazine.

She quotes an associate dean of students at a New England university which is 60% female: "We sit and talk about why no men are applying for leadership roles." (*Time*, 4/3/08)

## religion

**"An Anglican vicar has rewritten the most famous biblical tales** because he wants to make them more 'accessible' to modern readers," reports the *Daily Mail*.

"I wanted to write a book that tells the most important Bible stories in a way that relishes them rather than tries to make any particular religious point," says Robert Harrison. "After all, who knows what the point is?"

Theologian Justin Thacker of the (British) Evangelical Alliance said: "In trying to communicate the stories to a contemporary audience some of the essential features and message may have been lost." (*Daily Mail*, 3/26/08)

**Bad theology has led to the death of an 11-year-old girl.** A family influenced by the teachings of a self-proclaimed prophet recently let their child die rather than take her to a doctor.

That prophet, David Eels of Unleavened Bread Ministries, writes on his website that there is universal physical healing available in Christ's atonement: "I am not condemning those who use doctors or medicine. I am offering the good news that Jesus has already healed you almost 2,000 years ago."

Eels also commits a simple logical fallacy on his site when arguing against modern medicine. He claims that etymology (the origin of a word) determines its meaning: "'Witchcraft' or 'sorcery' in the New Testament is from the Greek word 'pharmakeia'; English 'pharmacy'— Healing through the use of drugs."

A couple in the northern Midwest apparently took Eels' claims seriously. They prayed over their 11-year-old daughter as she lay dying from a treatable diabetic blood condi-

tion. She died before authorities became aware of the situation. (*Wausau Daily Herald*, 3/27/08; americaslastdays.com; acc. 4/18/08)

**Gretta Vosper , minister** of Toronto's West Hill United Church, has written a new book, *With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important than What We Believe*.

In it she contends that "the Christian church, in the form in which it exists today, has outlived its viability and either it sheds its no-longer credible myths, doctrines and dogmas, or it's toast," according to Toronto's *Globe and Mail*.

Scholars have long agreed that the Bible is not "the authoritative word from God for all time," Vosper says, but rather "a human project filled with contradictions and the conflicting worldviews and political perspectives of its authors." She complains that churches and clergy aren't open about this with their congregations; they want to hang onto the Bible somehow.

Vosper "wants salvation redefined to mean new life through removing the causes of suffering in the world," says the article. Resurrection, she says, should be redefined to mean "starting over" or "new chances." God should not be viewed "as an intervening all-powerful authority who must be appeased to avoid divine wrath." Instead, she says, congregations should "work together as communities to define God—or god—according to their own worked-out definitions of what is holy and sacred." (*Globe and Mail*, 3/22/08)

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## government

**The British House of Lords voted recently to abolish** England's laws against blaspheming God.

"It is crystal-clear that the offenses of blasphemy and blasphemous libel are unworkable in today's society," said Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Kay Andrews. (*Los Angeles Times*, 3/6/08)

## society

**Many college students are not comfortable with the sexual licentiousness surrounding them**—even the students who participate in it.

Boston University scholar Donna Freitas conducted a national survey of 2,500 students, asking them questions about their sexual activity, from kissing to the casual immorality now frequently called "hooking up." Freitas found that "41% are profoundly upset about their behavior." Students "who chose to describe a hook-up experience (the question was optional) used words like 'dirty,' 'used,' 'regretful,' 'empty,' 'miserable,' 'disgusted,' 'ashamed,' 'duped' and 'abused' in their answers."

No one in any of the religious and non-religious schools Freitas surveyed said their peers "valued saving sex for marriage." Less than one in ten "said that they felt that their friends wanted to reserve sex for committed, loving relationships."

Freitas expected left-leaning students taking a course she teaches (called "Spirituality & Sexuality in American Youth Culture") to reject the conservative view that immorality is hurtful to those who practice it. But, she says, her class "ate up" Wendy Shalit's famous article

"A Return to Modesty" and "was equally attracted to some evangelical dating manuals, like *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris."

Freitas's students "seemed shocked," she says "that somewhere in America there are entire communities of people their age who really do 'save themselves' until marriage, who engage in old-fashioned dating with flowers and dinner and maybe a kiss goodnight. They reacted as if these authors describe a wonderful fantasy land." (*Wall Street Journal*, 4/4/08)

**America has redefined sin**, reports *USA Today*. "What is unacceptable has changed," says Barry Kosmin of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society & Culture at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. "Racism and sexual harassment, which were not sins in the past, are now. Adultery and addiction are just bad or sad behavior. And commercial sex is a no, but breaking the bonds of marriage is not."

*USA Today* notes that popular television evangelist Joel Osteen, pastor of the largest church in the United States, "never mentions sin in his TV sermons or best sellers." "I never thought about (using the word 'sinners'), but I probably don't," Osteen told Larry King in an interview. "Most people already know what they're doing wrong. When I get them to church, I want to tell them that you can change." (*USA Today*, 3/19/08)

**A shooting in Sri Lanka has left a pastor dead** and his wife critically injured. Samson Neil Edirisinghe, 37, was gunned down in front of his two-year-old son. His wife, Shiromi, 31, was shot as well. "Initial evidence suggested the murder was a contract killing connected to Edirisinghe's

ministry in Ampara," says a Christian news service. (*Compass Direct*, 2/21/08).

**A student at Yale has induced her own abortions for an art project.** Aliza Shvarts, a senior, purposefully became pregnant multiple times and then "[took] abortifacient drugs to induce miscarriages," says the *Yale Daily News*.

For her senior art project Shvarts plans to display videos of (and blood from) her miscarriages. She says, however, that she is not aiming for shock value. "I hope it inspires some sort of discourse," she says. "Sure, some people will be upset with the message and will not agree with it, but it's not the intention of the piece to scandalize anyone."

Choose Life At Yale member Jonathan Serrato, a junior, says, "I feel that she's manipulating life for the benefit of her art, and I definitely don't support it. I think it's morally wrong." (*Yale Daily News*, 4/17/08)  
*Update: After her story provoked outrage around the country, Shvartz told Yale officials that she made up her story of multiple abortions as a "creative fiction."* (FoxNews.com, acc. 4/17/08)

## religion

**John M. Buchanan is pastor** of Fourth Presbyterian Church in downtown Chicago and editor and publisher of liberal-mainline periodical, *The Christian Century*.

Buchanan was recently interviewed by the *Christianity Today* organization about preaching. Buchanan says preachers "need to be very careful before claiming they are God's mouthpiece. I think the preacher needs to be suggestive and not declarative. There are times in history when people (like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King) were called with some authority to say, 'This is wrong.' But we need to be cautious." (*Leadership*, Winter 2008)

**Voodooists in Haiti**, a land where poverty and hunger reign, have elected as their leader ("supreme master") a 72-year-old

Haitian who once studied chemistry in New York City and biochemistry at the Sorbonne.

"Haiti has long been a battleground for Christian missionaries who view voodoo as devil worship and work tirelessly to convert the population to Christ," says the *New York Times*. "Voodoo, like Christianity, has one god, but it incorporates pagan elements that make Christians uneasy: casting spells and worshiping spirits seen as the major forces of the universe."

"We Haitians want to move forward in life," says Max Beauvoir, the new supreme master. "We need to find our identity again, and voodoo is our identity. It's part of our collective personality." (*New York Times*, 4/5/08)

**Easter 2008—once again dozens of Filipinos had themselves "crucified,"** being nailed to crosses temporarily (none died) to atone for their sins. Many others whipped themselves till blood flowed. Meanwhile, "hawkers [were] selling beer, ice cream and souvenir whips," says the *Daily Mail*.

The government warned participants that they should use sterilized nails and whips and should get tetanus shots. "If we can't stop flagellants from whipping their own flesh, the best thing these penitents can do is ensure that their whips are clean and well maintained," said Health Secretary Francisco Duque. "We are not trying to go against tradition because whipping has somewhat already become some form of atonement for sins for some of us." (*Daily Mail*, 3/22/08)

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