

AIDS activists but often by people inside their own newsrooms.

Journalists played up the threat to heterosexuals for various reasons, Boldt says. Some were just ignorant or credulous. Others may have realized that it improved the chances of a page-one by-line. Others may have feared criticism if they bucked the trend.

Free-lance writer Michael Fumento was relentlessly attacked for his *Myth of Heterosexual AIDS* (1990), Boldt notes. Gay activists and public health officials called him and his book “irresponsible,” “mean-spirited,” “myopic,” “homophobic,” and “sex-

ist.” AIDS activists, according to Fumento, mounted a nationwide campaign to keep his book out of bookstores, and to a considerable extent, succeeded. Ironically, Boldt says, Fumento’s book is praised in some recent books by gay authors who have come to realize that “the anybody-can-get-it strategy” dilutes the efforts made for homosexuals.

Did the *Wall Street Journal* exposé finally put an end to the myth of heterosexual AIDS? “Probably not,” Boldt says. “Reporters long familiar with the story say that too many people now have too much invested in keeping the myth alive.”

## *Junk Mail Juggernaut*

“Direct Mail: The Real Threat to Newspapers” by John Morton, in *American Journalism Review* (Nov. 1996), 8701 Adelphi Rd., Adelphi, Md. 20783-1716.

The rise of the Internet and its endless electronic offerings has partisans of newspapers deeply alarmed. Morton, a newspaper analyst with a brokerage firm, says that they ought to worry instead about a far more mundane threat: junk mail.

Encouraged by the U.S. Postal Service, Morton contends, direct mailers have sapped desperately needed advertising revenues from newspaper publishers and forced them into costly battles that divert them from their main mission. Ten years ago, newspapers claimed nearly 27 percent of all advertising revenues, while direct mail received 16 percent. By 1995, however, newspapers’ share had dropped to 22.4 percent, while the direct mail take grew to 20.4 percent.

Morton traces the rise of junk mail to the transformation of the U.S. Postal Service into a quasi-independent agency during the 1970s. At first, a revenue-hungry Postal Service increased the third-class postal rates

paid by direct mailers. Many advertisers fled to newspaper publishers, who could deliver the advertisers’ full-color brochures and coupons with the morning paper. Realizing its mistake, the Postal Service reversed course, not only trimming rates but allowing mailers to put several circulars in one package. A junk mail boom was born.

Now, says Morton, legislation is pending in Congress that would allow the Postal Service to offer even deeper discounts to high-volume mailers while raising first-class postal rates. The newspaper industry charges that first-class mail, while accounting for only 54 percent of the Postal Service’s volume, already pays 70 percent of the service’s costs. Letting the Postal Service have its way, in this view, would be tantamount to meddling in the marketplace. But even if the legislation does not pass, says Morton, junk mail will remain a far bigger threat to newspapers than anything cyberspace may have to offer.

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### *Is There a Place for Theology in Academia?*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

Most of America’s private colleges and universities long ago undid the close ties they had at birth to Protestant denominations. Although “the trappings of Christian

institutions” were maintained into the 20th century, political scientist Isaac Kramnick and historian R. Laurence Moore, both of Cornell University, note in *Academe*

(Nov.–Dec. 1996), “one by one the things that had upheld their Christian mission vanished. Ministers disappeared from the rosters of faculty and administrators. Compulsory chapel and prayer services fell into disuse and were then abandoned. Committed study of religion retreated to divinity schools that were increasingly isolated from the central concerns of major universities.” Now, a move is afoot to drive theology out of academia entirely.

The North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR) has been pushing for more than a decade for a dramatic redefinition of religious studies—one “that would likely put out of business most of the 1,236 undergraduate theology and religion programs at U.S. colleges and universities—or else marginalize those programs to the point of irrelevance,” writes Charlotte Allen, a contributing editor of *Lingua Franca* (Nov. 1996).

The 50 or so dues-paying members of NAASR and their allies would shift the study of religion out of the humanities and into the social sciences, Allen says. They want to make “the methodological atheism of the natural sciences . . . de rigueur for religion professors as well.” Explains Donald Wiebe, an NAASR board member who teaches at Toronto’s Trinity College, “There’s the *academic* study of religion, and there’s the *religious* study of religion—we believe in the academic study of religion.”

Critics accuse Wiebe and his NAASR colleagues of “reductionism.” Their stand, says Luke Timothy Johnson, a professor of New Testament studies at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology, in Atlanta, “reduces the religious impulse to the interplay of political power or a social movement. . . . It’s like someone who’s tone-deaf trying to explain music.”

The NAASR, Allen notes, “is a tiny David to [the] Goliath” of the 8,000-member American Academy of Religion (AAR), the leading trade organization and learned society for religion scholars. However, the NAASR and its allies recently won a major victory. In its 1995 evaluation of research-doctorate programs at U.S. universities, the Washington-based National Research Council included religion for the first time—and, taking the NAASR line, excluded schools, such as New York City’s famed



*In the late 1930s, the students at Princeton University filled the chapel pews.*

Union Theological Seminary, that do not offer Ph.D.’s in religious studies, as opposed to doctorates in theology. A council staffer maintains that a doctor of ministry degree reflects professional training more than academic research. Barbara DeConcini, executive director of the AAR and a professor of religion and culture at Emory, however, disagrees. “There’s no gap between theology and research. It’s like a dissertation on Immanuel Kant that might consist of speculative reflection on ideas within Kant’s philosophy. Humanistic research is in large part interpretation.”

Theology deserves a place in the academic curriculum just as much as feminism or Afro-American studies do, William Scott Green, a professor of religion and Judaic studies at the University of Rochester, argues in *Academe*. Theology “is a religion’s version of what secular ideologies call theory. . . . If we can have feminism in the classroom, we can have religion and theology there too.”

“In one form or another,” Green says, “the problem of God is virtually coextensive with Western intellectual life, and there is a rich and elaborate tradition of rigorous academic thinking about the possibility, plausibility, and meaning of divinity.” What a sad comment it would be if universities were to decide that such “serious and persistent” questions were beneath their consideration.