

# People

News in the [November 2, 2004](#) issue

The conservative Institute on Religion and Democracy, a Washington-based critic of mainline denominations, has elected author and philosopher **J. Budziszewski** as the chairman of its board of directors, succeeding theologian **Thomas Oden** of Drew Theological School. Budziszewski, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, is a convert to Catholicism from the Episcopal Church but was described in an October 8 news release as “committed to renewal to Christian orthodoxy” in the mainline Protestant denominations. In another IRD news release October 7, the United Methodist Action subcommittee announced that it officially urged a “gracious exit” for Methodist congregations and pastors who want to leave the denomination long divided over whether to allow gay clergy and same-sex union rites. Meanwhile, the board of the Confessing Movement, an independent conservative Methodist group, rebuffed those seeking a split, announcing that it intends to “remain within the United Methodist Church and to work for its theological renewal together with all who confess the apostolic Christian faith.”

**Theodoros Horeftakis**, the Cretan-born head of the Orthodox Church in Zimbabwe, has been elected as the new patriarch of Alexandria by the Egyptian-based church’s governing body, becoming leader of hundreds of thousands of Africans in his denomination. Horeftakis, who has taken the title Theodoros II, succeeds **Petros VII**, who died September 11 in a helicopter accident in Greece.

**John L. Esposito**, a Georgetown University professor who has tried to build bridges between Christians and Muslims, has been awarded the highest civil honor given by the Pakistani government. Esposito was one of 14 foreigners among the 130 people receiving the Hilal-I-Quaid-I-Azam Award recently announced by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. Esposito is the founding director of Georgetown’s Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and the author of more than 30 books.

**Jacques Derrida**, the influential yet controversial thinker whose name became synonymous with “deconstruction” in analyzing texts, died in Paris of pancreatic cancer October 8. He was 74. The Algerian-born writer divided his time between Paris and the U.S., where he lectured at Yale University, the University of California

at Irvine and other universities. Verbose, ambiguous and usually unwilling to answer his own challenging questions about the presumed meanings in written works, Derrida nevertheless excited many admirers in philosophy, literary theory and religious scholarship. "Both his acolytes and his detractors agree that Derrida made a phenomenal contribution to Western philosophy," wrote the *Times* of London.