



# RELIGION WATCH

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A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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## IS A "NEW" NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT EMERGING?

With the completion of the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire U.S. presidential primaries, both bitterly fought battle grounds for the New Christian Right in 1988, there are signs that a new, leaner but more sophisticated Christian Right movement is emerging in the '92 campaign. While not embracing the 1980's style of the Moral Majority and Pat Robertson for President campaign activity, this new movement is nonetheless growing in conservative circles. This can be seen in such Christian Rightist publications as the Christian American (December), where, having virtually conceded that George Bush does not qualify for leadership because of his lackluster record on conservative issues, there is more of an emphasis on building strong blocs of support within targeted states and creating pressure to enact specific legislation. Leading the way is the Christian Coalition, a new creation by Pat Robertson who is using old and new supporters to register like-minded voters in states such as California to support the old Christian Right agenda of family values, a strong military, and the restoration of religious exercises in public schools with less fanfare and expense than previously, according to the Los Angeles Times (January 25).

Already, considerable door-to-door work has been completed in California as well as some of the 15 states slated for "Super Tuesday" primaries this month. Bush himself is talking more about the issues championed by President Ronald Reagan, but he has not yet challenged the Christian Coalition. Perhaps it is not too early to say Robertson is using the organization to keep alive hopes for a run in the 1996 presidential race. Meanwhile, just how fragile is the support for Bush among the Christian Rightists? John C. Green, director of the Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron, and observer of the New Christian Right, says that conservative Christian activists are increasingly pragmatic; "the one's who aren't have left the movement." Green told RELIGION WATCH that most New Christian Right activists are waiting for the 1996 elections to carry out their agenda, and in the meantime they are supporting moderate and electable Republicans such as Bush. "They want to show that they are politically effective and can get things done," Green says. In an article in the Christian Century magazine (February 26), it is reported that a dissatisfaction with Bush could even push many evangelicals--if not their political leaders--over to the Democratic camp.

Richard Cizik, a public policy analyst for the National Association of Evangelicals, says evangelical voters, heavily concentrated in the South,

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may "decide to vote their pocketbooks" and choose a Democrat such as Bill Clinton, "particularly since he is from the South." Pat Buchanan, however, is more likely to get strong support from the ranks of conservative Christians, especially from conservative Catholics since he is a fellow Catholic and strongly anti-abortion. The National & International Religion Report (February 24) quotes Michael Schwartz of the New Right's Free Congress Foundation as saying that Buchanan has a "Catholic visibility that can be of great benefit to our community." One Catholic Buchanan campaign operative says he and many Catholics favor him because "Pat believes that the roots of our current crisis are religious and moral, not economic." In Georgia, Buchanan's team has been "wooing evangelical voters for months," and now conservative Christian activists dominate Buchanan's field staff. But Green has doubts that there will be a strong Catholic or conservative Protestant vote for Buchanan. "There is a residual anti-Catholicism among evangelicals, perhaps not among the leaders, but among the followers." On the other hand, "Catholics have usually been internationalist in concern, while Buchanan is isolationist," Green says. But he adds that Buchanan "needs the New Christian Right. Such support can add muscle to his campaign in urban and suburban areas," where many evangelicals now live.

--This report was written with Erling Jorstad, contributing editor to RW who has authored books and articles on the Christian Right

## CHRISTIAN BOOK PUBLISHING EXPERIENCING DECLINE, ECUMENISM

Christian book publishing is experiencing a downturn after a decade of prosperity while also becoming more ecumenical and general reader-oriented, according to Publishers Weekly (February 10). The magazine notes a number of trends that are impacting the Christian book industry, which often reflects current issues in the American Christian community. While some publishers are finding the maxim that economic bad times are often good times for religious bookselling holding true, others are struggling under financial pressures. The number of Christian book titles being published annually is dropping, and those that are being published are not reaching the market. While Catholic publishers are increasing somewhat the number of adult titles, their children's titles last year dropped from 105 to 40. Nevertheless, publishers are still gravitating to "sex-related spirituality"-- a development that started with feminist books and is now moving to the popular area of male spirituality; the book, "Wildmen, Warriors and Kings, Masculine Spirituality and the Bible," by Patrick Arnold is one such best-seller.

In reponse to the rush of books on spirituality and addiction in the 1980s a "new virulent strain of Menninger-itis seems to be running through the religious publishing community," writes William Griffin, referring to psychiatrist Karl Menninger's classic "Whatever Became of Sin?" "Somewhere in the bustle [of books on the recovery movement] sin has been overlooked and some publishers are trying to locate it." Meanwhile, "Ecumenism has become fashionable and is finding its way slowly into religious books that make a broader-than-denominational appeal-- a trend that will most likely continue well into the next century," writes Griffin. Catholics are no longer interested in reading just Catholic books or Jews, Jewish books. "Everybody's borrowing from everybody else, and it's a much bigger pot," says Tom Cahill of Doubleday. Even the strongly evangelical Protestant Baker Book House is planning a cooperative publishing effort with the Catholics. Other trends include a

move to "escapist" books, such as novels; at least three-quarters of the Evangelical Christian Publishing Association's membership is now publishing Christian novels. Continuing a development that started in the 1980s, many publishers are trying to bring out books that will impact the wider society rather than just the Christian community. (Publishers Weekly, 249 W. 17th St., New York, NY 10011)

## MARIAN IMAGE BEING PUT TO USE IN ANTI-ABORTION BATTLE

The image of the Virgin Mary is becoming a potent symbol among Catholics in the fight against abortion, according to the Hartford Courant newspaper (February 1). "Veneration centered on an image, known as Our Lady of Guadalupe, is being used by Catholics in the right-to-life movement just as Our Lady of Fatima was used to call forth Catholics to pray 'for the conversion of Russia,'" writes Gerald Renner. The identification of this image of the Virgin Mary with anti-abortion protests started when a mystic in Washington state claimed to see a vision in which Mary promised to end legal abortion if the Guadalupe image visits every state and people pray the rosary. A photograph of the original Guadalupe image (which is claimed to be miraculous and is enshrined in Mexico) is now on a national tour of Catholic churches. So far, church officials have kept a distance from this movement, illustrating the church's ambivalence toward pious folk movements that sometimes veer out of the hierarchy's control, says Notre Dame historian Thomas A. Keselman. "Promotion of the Guadalupe image as an anti-abortion symbol shows how personal devotion to the mother of Jesus often meshes with the Catholic Church's larger political goals, from victory over communism to reversing liberal abortion laws," Renner writes.

## PAGAN-BASED BELIEFS GAINING GROUND AMONG AMERICAN FAR RIGHT RACIALISTS?

A new form of nature worship and a disavowal of Christianity is gaining ground among far right racialists groups, according to the American Information Newsletter (January), a digest of conservative news and trends. The movement, known as "creativity," is reported to be "splitting the Klu Klux Klan and other White racist groups." The "politico-religious" philosophy practices a spirituality based on nature and race. The newspaper of the creativity movement, "Racial Loyalty" (based in Otton, N.C.) is cited as condemning "Jew-spawned Christianity [as] the deadly mind poison which destroyed the glorious White Roman civilization and is currently destroying all the White Race." The new religious movement is also anti-nationalist, holding that ultimate loyalty must be to race. According to the newspaper, the creativity movement is growing among white racialists due to recent passage of "ethnic preference legislation," such as last year's employment quota bill. (American Information Newsletter, 2408 Main St., Boise, ID 83702)

## NEW HOME ALTARS SHOWING "MIX-AND-MATCH" RELIGION

Home altars, a common feature in Buddhist and Latin Catholic homes, are finding a new appeal among Americans seeking a spiritual influence in their home lives, according to the New York and Long Island newspaper Newsday (February 27). A home altar is usually a make-shift table or platform set aside for spiritual devotions, usually with candles and

spiritual ornaments or images. Along with the more traditional home altars, today there is an interest in "goddess altars, Santeria altars, New Age altars, Zen altars, Native-American altars, or a combination of several traditions," reports Denise Flaim. These altars are viewed as a "place of focus and springboard to the divine...and see it as a remedy to an individual sense of spiritual emptiness." Bill Barbanes, co-owner of Manhattan-based Altar Egos, a "yuppie botanica" that sells metaphysical paraphernalia, says "Home altars are becoming more popular in all spiritual practices, as people spend more time praying at home these days." Commenting on the eclectic approach that many people use for these altars he adds, "Our approach is, "This is America. You can mix and match."

## CURRENT RESEARCH: NEW FINDINGS IN RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES

\* Judging by the recent survey of the class entering college in September, 1991, the clergy shortage is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. In the U.S. Department of Education's biennial survey on social, economic, political and religious characteristics, it was found that only 0.2 percent of students indicated as a probable career choice that of being a minister, priest or other clergy position. The survey, cited in the Chronicle of Higher Education (January 22), found that 1.1 percent stated their father was in the clergy. In other findings, some 4.5 percent chose their particular college because of its religious affiliation. In the past calendar year 82.7 percent had attended a religious service at least once. Twenty nine percent claimed the "born again" experience, while 71 percent responded with a "no" to that question. The denominational preferences of the students went this way: Baptist, 17.6 percent; Buddhist, 0.3 percent; Eastern Orthodox, 0.4 percent; Episcopal, 2.1 percent; Muslim, 0.3 percent; Jewish, 1.5 percent; Mormon, 0.3 percent; Lutheran, 6.7 percent; Methodist, 8.8 percent; Presbyterian, 3.9 percent; Quaker, 0.3 percent; Catholic, 33.3 percent; Seventh Day Adventist, 0.3 percent; United Church of Christ, 2.1 percent; Other Protestant, 4.3 percent; Other, 5.5 percent; None, 12.3 percent. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1255 23rd St. NW, Washington, DC 20037)-- By Erling Jorstad

\* A recent informal study of Southern Baptist youth shows a dramatic increase in premarital sexual involvement between 1984 and 1991. The study, conducted by M.B. Fletcher, professor of philosophy at Southern Baptist-related Carson-Newman College, found the number of males reporting premarital sexual intercourse increased from 55 percent in 1984 to 70 percent in 1991. An even sharper increase was reported among females. Baptists Today newspaper (January 23) cites the study as showing that 27 percent of females admitted they had engaged in premarital intercourse in 1984, whereas 53 percent admitted to being "sexually experienced" in 1991. The study is the result of Fletcher's frequent surveys of students enrolled in a human sexuality course he has taught at the college since 1984. The findings are close to those of a recent national survey of high school students conducted by the Centers for Disease Control, which showed that sexual activity is on the rise at all high school grade levels, and that 72 percent of students are sexually active by the time they leave high school. Fletcher says 88 percent of the students at his college are Baptist, with most coming from the conservative theological tradition of churches in southern Appalachia. (*Baptists Today*, 222 E. Lake Dr., Decatur, GA 30030)



\* Many observers have noted that the Catholic charismatic movement has lost much of its momentum in the last decade. In celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Catholic charismatic movement's birth, New Covenant magazine (February) provides a reader survey and overview of this group, confirming reports of its gradual decline. At most 150,000 Catholics attend charismatic prayer meetings (the estimate is based on an average of 30 people attending each of the 5,000 prayer groups listed in the 1990 Prayer Group Directory)-- a figure which contrasts sharply from a 1980 Gallup Poll's finding of nine million American Catholics claiming to be charismatic. It appears that many charismatics no longer see it necessary to join with others in the prayer groups; the magazine cites a recent survey of readers from the Chariscenter USA Newsletter which shows that a slight majority--51 percent--do not consider themselves members of a prayer group. Overall, "there's little doubt that a large percentage of deacons, CCD teachers, youth workers, parish council members, school teachers, lectors, eucharistic ministers, and social outreach workers are men and women who were once involved in the charismatic renewal and have now moved on to something else," writes Jim Manney.

Such evidence of charismatic slowdown includes: "steep declines" in the sales of such primary charismatic literature as "Life in the Spirit Team Manual"; a decline in attendance at the national conference from 30,000 in 1976 to 6,300 last July; and a circulation drop of New Covenant, often considered the flagship magazine of the movement. Manney notes that such developments may also signal that the movement is no longer monolithic; for instance, while the numbers at the national conference are down, several regional conferences routinely draw crowds as large as the national conference does. A random survey of the New Covenant readership adds further detail to the Catholic charismatic profile. Forty two percent of respondents say the charismatic renewal is weak or nonexistent in their area, while 45 percent say it is strong or fairly influential. Those from New York and the Mid-Atlantic states were more likely to report the movement's strength, while those from the Midwest, West and, surprisingly, New England more often said the charismatic presence in their area was weak. The survey shows that charismatics drifting away from the prayer groups have moved toward heavy involvement in their parish: 93 percent are involved in at least one parish activity, and 54 percent are involved in three or more. The survey also finds that over 80 percent of these charismatics are over age 40, and that abortion is the issue of most concern. (New Covenant, Box 400, Steubenville, OH 43952)

\* Despite a sharp decrease in belief in biblical literalism among Americans during the past 30 years, almost half of the population continue to believe in the tenets of "creationism," according to recent Gallup polls. Emerging Trends (January) the Gallup newsletter on religion, reports that the belief that the Bible should be taken literally in all instances has dropped from 65 percent in 1963 to 32 percent today. But this does not mean that the American public is totally rejecting the belief in the Bible as God's revelation. Between 1963 and 1991, the number of those who view the Bible as only an ancient chronicle of myths and precepts has grown only slightly, from 11 percent to 16 percent. But in another poll, nearly half of the adult population of the U.S. (46 percent) was found to take the "biblical creationist" position that "God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years. Only one person in 10 goes to the opposite extreme

in claiming that "man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life and God had no part in this process." Four adults in 10 hold to the view that "man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process, including man's creation." There was found to be a "very strong" correlation between the level of education and belief in creationism: Among college graduates, only one in four held to creationism. (Emerging Trends, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 213, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542)

## SCHISM IN JAPANESE BUDDHIST GROUP DEVELOPING OVER MONEY, CLERICALISM

A sharp division has broken out between Nichiren Shoshu sect of Japanese Buddhism and its lay organization, known as Soka Gakkai, over financial, political and religious issues, according to the New York Times (February 10). The rift has been simmering for several years in Japan's largest religious organization, but last November the conflict escalated when leaders of Soka Gakkai were excommunicated and ordered to disband by Nichiren Shoshu's chief priest Nikken Abe. The group refused to disband and stopped sending its members to pilgrimages to the Nichiren headquarters temple near Tokyo. The conflict in some ways resembles conflicts in Western religions over clericalism and the role of the laity. Soka Gakkai, which claims a membership of eight million families, views Nichiren Shoshu priests as corrupt and clinging to "outdated doctrines to create a totally priest-centered world." Soka Gakkai's gradual takeover of certain religious functions, such as officiating at weddings and other ceremonies once reserved for priests, has also rankled the parent Buddhist body.

At issue also are the billions of dollars in revenue and the political influence wielded by Soka Gakkai. The lay group has been gradually siphoning money away from the priesthood as it takes on functions which involve financial contributions. "Back in the 1950s, Soka Gakkai was a voice for the underprivileged, like the Communist party. Today it has become prosperous, conservative and pro-establishment," says religion specialist Shin-ichi Nakazawa. The latest conflict involves Soka Gakkai's political party, the Komeito, which is now providing important support to Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's drive to permit the Japanese military to take part in the United Nations peacekeeping forces. Nichiren Shoshu clergy are accusing the party of selling out on its Buddhist pacifist principles. "They used to be antiwar, but they're becoming so dirty from all that money," said a sect spokesman.

## ISLAM GAINING LEADERSHIP IN POST-GULF WAR MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA

The period after the gulf war has shown Islam to be gaining social and political influence in the Middle East and North Africa, but that doesn't mean that a monolithic Islamic "fundamentalism" will gain a stronghold in these regions, according to The Christian Century magazine (February 19). R. Scott Appleby, associate director of the Fundamentalism Project, which studies fundamentalistic movements in world religions, writes that with the collapse of Marxist socialism; with the "myth of Arab nationalism given the lie by the policies of Egypt during the gulf crisis; with the Ba'th party spent as a pan-Arab unifying force beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq, [Arab] rulers, whose power is based exclusively on military might, find themselves bereft of authenticating ideologies to bolster their sagging regimes." Arab secularists are now rethinking the

concept that a shared ethnicity and language can create political order in the region, while Muslims feel confirmed in their view that only Islam can create such unity. But Appleby does not see such Muslim confidence as leading to an Iran-like political fundamentalism.

The recent case of Algeria, where the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) gained enough votes to assume a commanding majority in Parliament, has been cited by the media as showing the spread of a worldwide Muslim fundamentalist movement that is challenging democratic forces. [More recently, the FIS has been dissolved by the secular Algerian government, although many observers are forecasting that the fundamentalists will eventually come to power.] But Appleby writes that Islamic fundamentalism may work itself out differently in Algeria and the rest of North Africa than expected. For one thing, the FIS, in contrast to the stereotype of violent fundamentalist Muslims, disavowed violence as a response to the recent coup by the government. The situation in Algeria may come to resemble the model of compromise with secular governments and economies that characterizes Saudi Arabia or "that of Egypt, where lip service, public ceremony, co-opted senior ulama (men of religion), and occasional deferential rulings of secular courts serve as a panacea in lieu of the actual implementation of Islamic law. Because either of these options stands a better chance of preventing large-scale North African emigration to Europe, either seems preferable to the importation of an Iranian-style theocracy, backed by Iranian-style patronage, to Algeria or to neighboring and now very nervous Tunisia and Morocco." (*Christian Century*, 207 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, IL 60605)

## THE GULF WAR GIVING CHRISTIANITY MORE ACCESS IN MIDDLE EAST?

The gulf war has served to expand the Christian presence and missionary activity in much of the Middle East, according to Christianity Today magazine (February 10). Most of the missionaries and Christian groups that were evacuated from the Middle East have returned to the region, and there has not been the strong anti-Western backlash that many feared. "Indeed, many agencies are reporting new opportunities for Christian ministry that came both directly and indirectly as a result of the war," reports Kim Lawton. Christian relief groups have been active in refugee camps in Turkey, Iran and Iraq. There have been reports of a new interest in Christianity in some Muslim areas of Iraq, especially through the work of Jordanian Christians. The most surprising new opening has been in the "tightly closed Islamic society of Kuwait, where Christian churches are allowed only for the international workers living there." But Muslim-Christian interactions, which only a few years ago were discouraged, are now accepted, and many Kuwaitis are inquiring about Christianity and its differences with Islam. (*Christianity Today*, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187)

## EVANGELICAL EXPLOSION IN LATIN AMERICA STARTING TO FIZZLE OUT?

During the past several months there have been signs that the much reported evangelical Protestant explosion in Latin America may not be so powerful [see September RW for report on slow-down in evangelical growth in Costa Rica]. The evangelical missionary newsletter Pulse (January 10) reports that the "easy conversions and spectacular growth of the past are

disappearing." Randall Wittig, an evangelical official and editor, notes that while the evangelical churches in Argentina have the reputation as the fastest-growing outside of China, such highly touted figures as Argentine evangelist Carlos Annacondia "does not get the crowds he got five years ago," and that Omar Cabrera's Argentina "megachurch" (known as the second largest congregation in the world) "has not grown as it has before." The evangelical expansion has taken place largely among Latin America's poor, and Wittig thinks that evangelicals have made a "quick profit from social misery." He also decries the fact that most of those Latin Americans who become evangelicals do not progress socially [an observation that conflicts with some specialists who have claimed that evangelical involvement in Latin American often leads the poor to social and economic advancement]

Already there is an "alarming loss of converts through the back door in Costa Rica and Argentina due to disillusionment." Ironically, the rise of Latin American evangelical political leaders and their drive for better economic opportunities and more secular governments (mainly in opposition to those governments making Roman Catholicism the official religion) "may be introducing conditions hostile to the spread of evangelical Christianity," according to Wittig. Pointing to Chile, he says, "the growing economic and social stability has really hindered the growth of the church." But Wittig adds that "the small growth that there is in Chile--for the first time in the history of Chile--is more among the middle class and the lower upper-class [than the poor]." To build up strength for the future, he advises evangelicals to "leave their barrios" and reach out to the middle class. (Pulse, Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60184)

**CORRECTION:** Last month's cover interview with Mikhail Kazachkov of Open Christianity managed to change the spelling of his name in mid-article to the incorrect "Kazachov."

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