

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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BOSNIAN CRISIS CREATES NEW ALLIANCES, NEW POLITICAL ROLES

The crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina has created unique religious and cultural alliances among American groups, and has also brought into focus the political roles of Islam and Eastern Orthodoxy during this conflict, according to recent reports. The Washington Post (May 14) reports that the strangeness of such alliances was visible early on, when Jewish, Christian and Muslim organizations in January issued a joint demand for military intervention in the Balkans; as one Protestant minister pointed out, "It's not very often that you hear a bunch of clergymen get together to demand surgical military strikes." On the interfaith front, "some of the get-acquainted work had already been done after the gulf war experience," writes Amy Schwartz. Aside from the avoidance of discussion of Middle East affairs, Jews and Muslims have found greater common ground on other issues, such as the shared experiences of assimilation, through the Bosnia concern [confirming a trend toward more cooperation between Islamic and Jewish groups; see July-August '92 RW] One Jewish official says, "The fear of abandonment--that the world is abandoning Muslims in Bosnia--has a lot of resonance for Jews."

One of the more unusual coalitions that has developed out of the protests on behalf of Bosnia involve American Muslims and feminists. The pan-Islamic American Muslim Council has hired a women convert to Islam as a liason to a wide network of humanitarian and feminist groups, such as the National Organization of Women (NOW). It was the feminist groups that were instrumental in getting the "rape motels," and survivor stories into the press and in classifying rapes as war crimes. One Muslim organizer says, "We disagree with maybe 80 percent of what they stand for, but on the other 20 percent, we can work together." The feminist side experienced its own culture shock when it was learned that women attired in Islamic garb ("hejab") would be on a NOW platform. Schwartz concludes that the most difficult aspect of these new alliances will be to "transfer the urgency of a genuine, desperate, overarching goal...to a wider friendship that can last."

The significant Muslim concern over Bosnia has grown into an extensive ethnic patchwork, "not all of which are used to working together even within Islam," says an organizer. The American Muslim magazine The Minaret (May/June) partially agrees with that assessment, adding that the crisis "prompted an increase in Muslim political activism (Muslims who had been quiet before wrote letters to government officials for the first time), and Muslims took a step toward creating a national structure for

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political mobilization." But there is also a good deal of criticism and dissatisfaction in the magazine about how the American Muslim community responded to the Bosnia crisis. One article argues that if Muslims had spent "just a fraction of the millions they donated to relief on media and lobbying campaigns and on gaining access to politicians, they could have convinced the American government to help Bosnia." Since the U.S. Islamic mobilization effort was channelled through mosques and Islamic centers, the message did not reach the large majority of American Muslims who are non-attenders. The Muslim leadership itself comes in for criticism, as it is "still busy fighting each other on petty issues such as control over mosques, carpeting the houses of worship, dinners for already fed people...and accusations and counter-accusations against each other. Interestingly, the Muslim leadership in the United States has yet to meet once to discuss either Bosnia or any other issue concerning the Muslim community..."

Meanwhile, the American and international Eastern Orthodox community has often been portrayed as largely silent about Bosnia, if not supportive of Serbian fellow Orthodox believers in the struggle. The National Council of Churches has been more hesitant than usual in joining the coalition described above mainly because its Orthodox members have petitioned U.S. President Bill Clinton against the use of military intervention in the Balkans. But in the magazine First Things (June-July), Ukrainian Orthodox writer Anthony Ugolnik writes that the American media and critics have failed to "publicize and empower the few brave voices" among the Serbians. Serbia's Orthodox leader Patriarch Paul "has spoken frequently and with great spiritual discernment of the hostilities in the Balkans...Greeted by thin and treacly American media attention, he has visited the United States for assistance in his appeals for peace." One Catholic relief worker managing Orthodox relief efforts in Belgrade says that the Serbian Orthodox Church is the "only real institutional survivor in Serbia...the State could not digest it. And the only moral voice in Serbia which cannot be silenced belongs to Patriarch Paul. The West needs to hear him."

Ugolnik adds that the "Patriarch, however, is an 'Old Calendar' traditionalist even by Orthodox standards; he does not attract the wand of visibility which American commentators reserve for the lights of religious liberalism. The American media ignore Patriarch Paul and inadvertently legitimize, with their camera and wire reports, the den of thieves in the Serbian political arena." But the Balkan conflicts have also served to greater unify the various Eastern Orthodox churches. Ugolnik writes that International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), "for the first time, is capable of coordinating often competing Orthodox jurisdictions in a coherent, professional relief effort. Throughout Eastern Europe, Orthodox institutions, unlike the corrupt residues of a failed Marxism, prove most capable of delivering aid efficiently. And in Belgrade, IOCC representative Robert Pianka, who shares his Catholic tradition with the Croats, is able to direct Orthodox aid to reach Muslims under Serbian control." (*The Minaret*, 434 South Vermont Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90020; *First Things*, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010)

THE THEOLOGY BEHIND HILLARY CLINTON'S 'POLITICS OF MEANING'

As Hillary Rodham Clinton's role has grown in her husband's administration, observers have sought to uncover some of the religious motivations and underpinnings in her politics-- and they've found a lot. The Washington Post (May 6) reports that while Hillary Clinton is often

portrayed as a liberal feminist, her political positions and philosophy are more complex, often rooted in theological reflection. Recently Clinton has been speaking of the need to develop a "politics of meaning, and when she describes what we need, it reads like a mixture of ancient wisdom, biblical teaching and communitarian thinking, with some of Reinhold Niebuhr's pragmatism thrown in." Hillary Clinton is said to hold to this basic religious philosophy (which is often called "communitarian"): "Life has a transcendental meaning...And in order to find it, you have to be involved in something bigger than yourself, linked to a higher purpose...Excessive individualism and materialism must give way to selflessness. This means that bean-counting and rights-based liberalism will probably need to end," writes Martha Sherrill. The First Lady draws inspiration from the writings of communitarian philosopher William Galston (now working with the Clinton administration) and Michael Lerner, the editor of the liberal Jewish magazine Tikkun.

"A practicing Methodist all her life, she is also the embodiment of the church's values, its social perspective and sense of purpose." Sherrill notes that with her recent talk of values and religion, "old-line liberals are starting to sound a little disappointed in our new First Lady." A profile on Hillary Clinton in the New York Times Magazine (May 23) delves deeper into her worldview, and also concludes that her liberalism is derived from religiosity, combining a "progressive" social agenda with moralism. Two of the most significant theological influences on Clinton's thinking are the writings of Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr-- specifically Tillich's teaching that alienation and a crisis of meaning are today's primary spiritual problems, and Niebuhr's view that political change requires a legitimate use of power. But the evangelical newsweekly World (May 22) sees Clinton's liberal Methodism as the determining factor in her political philosophy. Diane Knippers of the neoconservative Institute on Religion and Democracy is quoted as saying: "I see Hillary Clinton's values as consistent with the values of many United Methodists I know. They are sincere and well-meaning, eager to please everyone, and they want to make the world a better place. But they, like other liberal Christians, can be very naive about human nature." (World, P.O. Box 2330, Asheville, NC 28802)

PSYCHOLOGY'S INFLUENCE GROWING IN EVANGELICALISM

While most public attention on evangelicalism has focused on its involvement in politics, a more quiet yet profound transformation is occurring among evangelicals over their involvement in the "therapeutic revolution," according to Christianity Today magazine (May 17). In the past decade, Christian psychology, especially as practiced in the field of counseling, has moved to the very center of American evangelical identity. Its influence can be found everywhere--from best seller lists to televangelism, not to mention the burgeoning number of Christian therapists. The citadel of evangelicalism, Wheaton College in Illinois, has just created its first doctoral program, and it is in psychology. Yet, pervasive as it is, the therapeutic surge has produced its share of criticism. The basic issue centers around the extent to which the Bible, as interpreted by evangelicals, is in itself sufficient to furnish answers to the issues faced in therapy, and whether the knowledge and insight gained over the last century by secular psychologists can be integrated into therapies which honor biblical authority. Influential evangelical leaders such as Martin and Diedre Bobgan, and megachurch

pastor John MacArthur among others say that the Bible is an all-sufficient authority for meeting any human needs; they say that once people of faith seek to integrate human knowledge into its sacred teachings, they bring dishonor to that faith.

However, over the years, the likes of author-broadcasters James Dobson, Charles Swindoll, and Charles Stanley seem to be winning the support of like-minded believers as they balance the use of academically responsible secular research with an attempt to evaluate such teachings in the light of scripture. In applied counseling situations, several major clinics and hospitals are becoming recognized as the pacesetters for those who see the need to go beyond Biblical literalism to incorporate responsible new therapies. Among the leading clinics are Minirth-Meier, Rapha, and New Life centers. So too, major evangelical seminaries such as Fuller, Biola and Trinity offer accredited programs based on an interchange between biblical teaching and the mental health field. Foes and supporters both agree that the danger in such a 'revolution' is the possibility that therapy will begin to dominate the expression of evangelicalism. Traditional theology, education, mission work, and evangelism could well be relegated to a secondary position. To guard against such a transformation, leaders and practitioners alike are currently evaluating just how far the revolution should go. As matters stand now, the pro-therapy faction seems to be in command but are aware that their critics will always be nearby. (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187)--By Erling Jorstad, contributing editor of RW and professor of History at St. Olaf College

UNITED PENTECOSTALS PROVING CONSERVATIVE CHURCHES DON'T ALWAYS GROW?

A division between denominational traditionalists and those more attuned to modern life is breaking apart the United Pentecostal Church, according to Charisma magazine (May). "Reacting to what they consider authoritarianism within their denomination, more than 200 pastors in the United Pentecostal Church have severed ties with the group and formed a new alliance, the International Network of Ministers. The split occurred after the UPC leaders voted to enforce a holiness code that, among other things, prohibits pastors from watching television and forbids female church members from cutting their hair or wearing makeup. Observers say that it is only a matter of time before many pastors leave the 500,000 member UPC in protest. But top UPC officials say they must demand conformity to their conservative traditions to prevent a moral drift in their congregations," reports Lee Grady.

One veteran pastor says, "Being in the UPC is like being in a time warp. All you have to do to be considered 'holy' is stay behind the styles 30 years. The UPC is in a declining mode. If they don't reform their days are numbered." Grady notes that UPC's growth has slowed in the U.S., yet it is growing in the Third World. Many of the larger UPC congregations also appear to be opposed to the code. [The view that strict churches with an otherworldly approach tend to grow while more lax and "worldly" churches decline in members has become increasingly accepted among sociologists and other observers. But the UPC case, as well as that of traditional fundamentalist churches being out-grown by evangelical congregations adopting contemporary "seeker" models (see May RW), suggests that this is not an iron-bound law. Perhaps the key to such growth is in demanding a high level of commitment (such as in many

megachurches' small group ministry emphasizing "discipleship" and spiritual growth) without appearing "old-fashioned" and outside of the cultural mainstream] (Charisma, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746)

AMERICAN MISSIONS MORE COOPERATIVE, CROSS-CULTURAL

A "sea change in world missions" is taking place, according to the evangelical World magazine (May 8). The magazine quotes the evangelical World Vision's recently released missions handbook (1993-95): "For the first time in five decades, the reported number of people [in world missions] from the United States has fallen from 50,500 in 1988 to 41,142 in 1992." The reversal and the size of the decline do not necessarily mean that U.S. missions are losing their force, but rather that career or long-term mission service has declined [see January RW for more on the decline of long-term missionaries and the growth of short-term workers]. Such decline is also due to new cooperative mission efforts: the yearbook includes such new categories as "fully supported non-U.S. [missionaries] serving outside their home country," which means cross-cultural missionaries that are related to U.S. agencies, but are not from churches in this country. There is another group of about 3,000 from other countries serving outside their homelands and partially supported from within the U.S. It is also noted that the amount of money given through U.S. mission organizations has remained stable (around \$2 billion) over the four years since the previous edition of the handbook. While American missions are increasingly cooperating with other countries, it appears that missions in South Korea are coming into their own. The magazine reports that there has been a 57 percent jump in Korean overseas missionary personnel (now totaling 2,576) in a two-year period.

MINORITIES REPORTED TO BE INCREASINGLY CONVERTING TO JUDAISM

Increasing numbers of black, Hispanic and Asian people are embracing Judaism, according to the New York Times (May 17). People from such minority groups are not converting because of a Jewish spouse, but "because they believe it offers a sense of community, respect, love and inner peace that they did not find in other religions," reports the article. Based on a survey taken from 1988 and 1990, sociologist Egon Mayer estimates that there are about 2,000 of such converts. This is slightly more than one percent of the 185,000 people who have converted to Judaism in the U.S. (mainly stemming from the influence of Jewish spouses). Most of the minority converts learn about and reach out to Judaism on their own rather than being recruited by ethnic Jews. Although most Jewish denominations are open to new believers, minority converts, like white converts, tend to join the Orthodox and Conservative branches - groups they feel are the most authentic and recognized among all Jews. Although ethnic Jews are at first surprised when meeting minority converts, such newcomers report that they eventually feel welcomed in synagogues.

CURRENT RESEARCH RECENT FINDINGS ON RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

* Nearly 80 percent of U.S. ministers and priests agree with the statement that the news media influence people's thinking and behavior more than religion does, according to a recent survey conducted by Vanderbilt University. Ecumenical Press Service (May 11-31) reports that

when the survey asked religion reporters and newspaper editors the same question, they disagreed by a 5 to 3 margin. Los Angeles Times religion reporter John Dart, a visiting scholar at Vanderbilt, said that those ministers identifying themselves as conservative evangelical were the most pessimistic about the influence of religion in public life, with the overwhelming percentage of these ministers viewing news reporting as biased against ministers and organized religion-- a judgement widely rejected by the journalists surveyed. Dart does not agree with those who blame discontent with religious news coverage in the media on an "irreligious, non-believing press," citing a recent survey finding that "religion writers tend to be more religious than the general public." (Ecumenical Press Service, Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland)

* Four American teenagers in 10 (39 percent) describe themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians, representing a four percentage point increase since 1988, according to Emerging Trends (May), the Gallup newsletter on religion. By comparison, 36 percent of adults in the Gallup survey say they are born-again or evangelical Christians. The newsletter notes that the ranks of evangelicals usually grow as the population ages and increasingly claim born-again experiences. Instead, the recent survey shows that there may be "lapsed evangelicals" and "recovered evangelicals." Teens aged 13 to 15 show a higher than average tendency to claim evangelical status (at 42 percent), but the number of adherents decreases as people grow older. "It is only by age 50 that people regain evangelical commitment in larger numbers again (44 percent). In fact by age 65 the number of evangelicals levels off again to 42 percent of the population," according to the newsletter.

Other findings in this issue show that teens are less likely to believe in the creationist view of human origin (that humanity was created in its present form within the last 10,000 years) than adults-- 35 percent versus 46 percent. Another survey finds that there has been a substantial increase in teen approval of interfaith marriage from a 1988 finding: 72 percent approved of Protestant-Catholic marriages in 1988, compared to 87 percent today; approval of Jewish and non-Jewish marriages went from 75 percent in 1988 to 86 percent today. (Emerging Trends, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 215, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542)

* The number and quality of friendships within congregations does heavily influence the decision as to which church members attend-- but not in the expected way, according to a recent study. The Catholic magazine Church (Spring) cites a recent study in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, where questionnaire results from five different Baptist congregations show that those churches with the highest numbers of church friends per member were either stable or declining. The study says that newcomers found these churches "cliquish." (Church, 299 Elizabeth St., New York, NY 10012-2806)

* A recent study of 14 Western Christian and Jewish countries finds religious belief strong everywhere except East Germany and the Netherlands, with the majority in these countries rejecting belief in God. Sociologist Andrew Greeley analyzes surveys of various countries (Germany, Ireland, Britain, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Israel, Slovenia, New Zealand, United States, Netherlands and Poland) from the International Social Survey Program, and confirms past findings: The United States and Ireland register the highest in belief in God, followed by Italy, Israel, Britain, and New Zealand. The study, which is cited in the National

Catholic Reporter (May 28), also finds religious renewal in Eastern Europe. Greeley says that although there is not a massive return to religion in this region, there is an "invisible revival in belief in life after death which has not been observed, as far as we know." Belief in life after death is higher among younger people in these countries (as well as West Germany and Israel) than among the middle-aged. There has also been a growth in church attendance in Slovenia and Hungary (in 1986 six percent of Hungarians reported regularly attending church compared to 19 percent in 1991). Greeley also finds that those who pray and believe in life after death are more likely to oppose the death penalty. (National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 419281, Kansas City, MO 64141).

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE INCREASINGLY ACCEPTED BY GOVERNMENT HEALTH PROGRAMS

The growth of alternative medicine, including such practices as the Hindu-based ayurveda methods, homeopathy, and acupuncture, is now reaching mainstream American medicine, particularly government health programs. In the U.S., a new government Office of Alternative Medicines has been set up to make recommendations for testing these various new methods. Hinduism Today newspaper (May) reports that this trend has international dimensions. The Australian and German governments have in recent months declared ayurveda a legally bona fide means of medicine. Slovakia, Italy, Spain and other European nations are discussing doing the same, according to the newspaper. The Health Minister of the Canadian province of Quebec, Marc Yvan Coté, recently claimed that 86 percent of his constituents have faith in these alternative medicines, and 45 percent have sought help from an alternative practitioner at least once [the New England Journal of Medicine recently found that one-third of those in the U.S. reported to have sought alternative treatments] "This is a true social phenomenon," Coté says. Quebec's physicians were reported to have been the most enthusiastic inquirers into such alternative health practices when an American ayurveda practitioner recently visited the province. (Hinduism Today, 1819 Second St., Concord, CA 94519)

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT-EVANGELISM LINK ALSO DEVELOPING IN CANADA, UK

Last month's cover story reporting that urban evangelical churches are increasingly linking social development and evangelism mostly focused on U.S. congregations. This trend, however, is also evident in Canada and Great Britain. The Canadian evangelical magazine Faith Today (March-April) reports that "For decades now, Canadian churches have more or less chosen to be engaged in either evangelism or ministries of social concern--but rarely both. Now there are signs, especially in the downtown sectors of cities such as Halifax, Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton, that the two are becoming effectively and credibly balanced. And charismatic groups, often criticized in the past for their alleged detachment from social concerns, are in a number of cases leading the way in 'mercy ministries' to the poor and marginalized." Meanwhile, in England, "charismatics are developing some of the country's most significant mercy ministries," according to the American Charisma magazine (June). "Ministries like LINKS International, Peckham Evangelical Churches Action Network (PECAN), Jesus Action, and ACET-- AIDS Care, Education and Training--are helping set the pace for Christians in Britain. All of these groups are linked to the charismatic 'house church' movement that

began in the 1960s," reports the magazine.

Such ministries, which involve working with AIDS patients, international relief and community development and neighborhood assistance projects, sometimes combine social concern with evangelism, but often they are viewed as ways for Christians to serve others and "be a prophetic people," says one charismatic leader. Those involved in such ministries often claim to be in the tradition of such British reformers as William Wilberforce and William Booth, writes Michael Pannell. Often these ministries are seen as having a better success rate than government programs. The PECAN coalition of churches organized an employment preparation program that has produced a 30 percent success rate. The government's program falls behind at 10 percent. ACET, started by Dr. Patrick Dixon as a one-man ministry to AIDS patients, is now the largest independent provider of home care to AIDS patients in England, with 400 volunteers of various denominations. Six out of 10 British high schools use ACET's AIDS education material (which adheres to conservative Christian standards of sexuality). and the ministry's work has spread to Ireland, Thailand, Uganda and Romania. (Faith Today, Box 8800, Stn. B, Willowdale, Ontario M2K 2R6 Canada)

ROLE OF WOMEN BEING REVIEWED, DEBATED IN FORMER SOVIET UNION

The role of women in church ministries are changing in the former Soviet Union, although not fast enough for visiting Western Christians who have experienced culture shock in the East. Christianity Today magazine (May 17) reports that women have traditionally been limited to activities such as singing in the choir, but more recently have gained entry into church education programs for children. Yet the same traditional attitudes prohibiting women from leadership in Russian Orthodoxy still dominate the evangelical churches-- sometimes in ways that would even surprise a Western Protestant fundamentalist. Some churches, for example, prohibit married women, however not their single counterparts, from teaching Sunday school. Mark Elliott of the East-West Institute for Christian Studies says the women in ministry issue is a "powder keg," adding that "women are so repressed that it has not dawned on the men that there is a problem." But activist groups are forming, and women are "increasingly coming into contact with other cultures that present a challenge to the status quo," reports the magazine.

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