

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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**EVANGELICAL-
CATHOLIC
COALITION
GOES BEYOND
ACTIVISM:
AN ANALYSIS**

In the last five years Catholics and evangelicals have gone beyond their joint work on anti-abortion activism to focus on such diverse issues as euthanasia, school choice, youth chastity programs, marriage counseling and divorce prevention [see March RW]. Now it appears that such a partnership is taking a step beyond moral and social issues to address more sticky theological concerns. A recent declaration called "Evangelicals And Catholics Together" has gained the attention of the press and is serving both as a herald and as a promoter of this development. The declaration, which was issued by the Institute on Religion and Public Life in New York at a press conference RELIGION WATCH attended last month, is noteworthy for several reasons. The document serves as the first attempt to spell out what the evangelical-Catholic convergence will mean for American religion and society.

The statement minces no words about which issues the new alliance is targeting. They include: the restoration of religion-based moral values in American public institutions, such as the courts; the importance of religious freedom here and abroad; increased effort to curb abortion, euthanasia, and population control; parental choice in education; support of the free market "because it accords with a Christian understanding of human freedom" (though it can be subject to "grave abuses"); renewed appreciation for Western culture and support for extending democracy and human rights around the world. Such a platform could be seen as somewhat selective in content, revealing a conservative political agenda that is not wholly accepted by many Catholics and evangelicals. Other less "conservative" issues, such as the environment, are not mentioned in the statement. The organizers and signers of the document did include such neoconservative leaders as Richard Neuhaus, George Weigel and Michael Novak. Yet it might be more accurate to say that many (though not all) of the above positions have served as the key rallying points for recent grassroots Catholic-evangelical activism and coalitions and that such causes have gained a good measure of support among influential leaders in both traditions.

The signers of the declaration include evangelical moderates such as Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary; Elizabeth Achtemeier of Union Seminary in Virginia; evangelical author and critic Os Guinness, and Mark Noll of Wheaton College, as well as such conservatives as Pat Robertson and Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ. The Catholic participants are also a mix of moderates and conservatives, such as San Francisco's Archbishop Carlos Sevilla; Joseph Fitzpatrick, a Fordham University sociologist and specialist on Hispanic Catholics; and conservative scholar James Hitchcock. Throughout the

document there is the view that evangelicals and Catholics need each other's help to withstand the onslaught of secularism and relativism. Several speakers at the press conference pointed to Pope John Paul II's recent encyclical "The Splendor of the Truth," which argues for the return to moral absolutes, as further convincing evangelicals of their need for closer connections with Catholics. More importantly, in going beyond social issues, the document seeks to draw an unprecedented truce between Catholics and evangelicals on missions and proselytizing. The statement notes that the "two communities in world Christianity that are most evangelistically assertive and most rapidly growing are Evangelicals and Catholics." Throughout the world, Catholics have looked on the burgeoning evangelical movement as an invasion of the "sects" and, in some cases, have attempted to clamp down on the Protestants through political power. Evangelicals, on the other hand, have often not been hesitant to label Catholics as non-Christians and to draw converts away from the Catholic Church. The document recommends that both camps desist from such coercion, castigation and "sheep stealing" and recognize how both faith communities have a role to play in the advancement of Christianity. In giving an example of how such cooperation might work, Neuhaus said a Roman Catholic evangelized under an Assemblies of God missionary would not be urged to leave Catholicism and find a Protestant congregation.

While there will always be competition between Christian groups, Neuhaus' scenario is not that far-fetched considering the current level of cooperation between Catholics and evangelicals in the U.S. But it is another matter to think that such partnerships will form easily outside of North America, particularly in conflicted areas such as Latin America and Eastern Europe. Apart from a few international groups, such as Youth With A Mission and Prison Fellowship (which is led by Charles Colson, a drafter of the statement), there has been little inclination for evangelicals and Catholics to cooperate or even take a hands-off approach in mission activities. If the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" statement had been drafted a decade ago, when such U.S.-based denominations as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Assemblies of God (leaders from both bodies helped draft the declaration) dominated the mission field in Latin America, it probably would have carried significant foreign impact. Today, evangelical groups in Latin America have become increasingly independent of their North American counterparts, forming their own denominations and networks [see RW December 1992]. While Neuhaus mentioned that the statement is being translated into Spanish and other languages and that international evangelical leaders have signed on, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" may play very differently in Peru than in Peoria. (The declaration will be published in the May issue of First Things magazine, 156 Fifth Ave., Suite 400, New York, NY 10010)

***FUTURE CATHOLIC
WORSHIP BLENDS
TRADITIONAL AND
MODERN***

Catholic parishes and worship are changing, but there may be as much a recovery of the past as there will be innovation in such a process. This is one of the conclusions of a recent issue of the liberal Catholic World magazine (March/April) devoted to the future of Catholic worship. Richard Vosko, a designer and consultant for Catholic worship, writes that contemporary churches have lost the sense of familiarity found in older parish structures; they are based more around communal worship than on individual devotional practices found in older churches where, for instance, one could venerate a favorite saint or light a candle. In the

near future, Vosko sees new structures emerging: parishes will be much larger, accomodating between 5,000 and more at a single liturgy, as the numbers of Catholics grow while the numbers of priests shrink. Already suburban churches are proving too small. Vosko adds, "Communities will not necessarily cohere around these megachurch centers. Instead, smaller neighborhood churches will emerge to provide much-needed spiritual and material sustenance... The church of tomorrow will be a district center serving many parishes. Older church buildings will be utilized for social services and only secondarily for worship."

These new structures will pay more attention to visual aids and images; "The entire worship space will be designed to stimulate the senses. The incorporation of mobile art, holography, computer projections [and] natural scents will trigger the full sensual capacity of the community..." Other sectors of these new church centers will incorporate the older elements of individual devotional practices, such as displaying images of saints, while also including space for support groups, "data base biographies in order to interact with holographic images of religious folk heroes," and inner and outer gardens, according to Vosko. A less futuristic article reports that lay preaching is also changing Catholic parish life. "With increasing frequency, lay men and lay women are being invited to break open the Word of God in their communities," writes Patricia Hughes Baumer. While the priest shortage may be one factor in such a development, there is also the belief among some that large and diverse parishes need an equally diverse team of preachers. For instance, the Pax Cristi Catholic Community in Minneapolis, a pioneer in lay preaching, stipulates that its preaching team has to be gender balanced. Other articles in this issue advise parishes to expand their "ritual repertoire" from focusing only on communion to including more popular devotional practices, such as new forms of prayer and healing services. (Catholic World, 997 MacArthur Blvd., Mahwah, NJ 07430)

**SPIRITUALITY
OF PLACE'
FINDING
WIDE HEARING**

A phenomenon known as the "spirituality of place" is said to be on the "cutting edge" of spirituality for its attempt to link geography with a non-institutional religious faith. Such a spirituality is one among several forms emerging that focus on ordinary human experience outside of religious institutions-- ranging from spiritualities of the environment and sexuality to popular culture [see February RW]. The spirituality of place teaches that "human beings aren't the only bodies ensouled," and that a "symbiosis should exist between people and the places in which they dwell," according to the National Catholic Reporter (March 25). Architects, city planners and psychologists have been occasionally involved with such a spirituality for years, and now "from all sorts of disciplines there's growing interest, I think prompted by the fact that we've done such a terrible job of creating places that are supportive of human dwelling," says Elizabeth VanderSchaaf, founder of the two-year-old Placeways Institute at the College of St. Catharine in St. Paul, Minn.

Placeways and the Dallas Institute for the Humanities and Culture are the two leading centers for promoting the spirituality of place. Gail Thomas, founder of the Dallas Institute, said that her organization has spiritualized matter and teaches that "the world is ensouled and that there is a living spirit at work within all things in the universe." Unlike religious environmentalism which claims that God has a special relationship with wild nature, the spirituality of place often focuses on the urban arena and how humans interact with their surroundings. Those

involved in the movement speak of cities as having souls characterized by special "myths" and they often work in urban renewal projects to turn such visions into realities. For instance, St. Paul is said to have a history of a meeting point of transportation, making its particular myth the connecting of far off places. The city of Dallas arose out of a struggle against nature and is identified with the Greek myth of Pegasus, which emphasizes a high sense of aspiration. The current issue of Values & Visions magazine (Volume 25 Number 1) suggests that the new spirituality covers rural as well as urban contexts. The magazine reviews the large number of books now being published which concern the spirituality of place, including Kathleen Norris' "Dakota: A Spiritual Geography," and the works of agrarian philosopher Wendell Berry. (National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 419281; Values & Visions, 15 W. 24th St., 10th Fl., New York, NY 10010)

JEWISH LIFE ON CAMPUSES DECLINING

There is a "changing and declining Jewish world on college campuses," reports Jewish Currents magazine (March). The magazine reports that the Council of Jewish Federations is reviewing its commitment to Hillel, the Jewish student organization on campuses. Hillel is running a deficit of 1.5 million and there are a declining number of students using the group's services. At the University of Maryland, with 6,000 Jewish students, only about 125 are in touch with Hillel weekly. Out of the 3,600 Jewish students attending the University of Wisconsin, only about 10 percent participate in Hillel programs. In explaining the situation, one former Hillel director says, "When Hillel came into existence, Jewish students didn't feel comfortable mixing with non-Jews." Now they "mingle un-selfconsciously with others." (Jewish Currents, 22 E. 17th St., Suite 601, New York, NY 10003-1919)

SCHOOL PRAYER FINDS NEW LIFE IN COURT

The religious right quietly continues to expand its influence. In recent months at least nine state legislatures have passed or are seriously considering passing legislation to allow a form of voluntary prayer in the public schools. That issue, long a basic foundation issue for the movement, has continued to attract widespread public interest (as reported in January RW). Now, according to an analysis in the New York Times (February 22), the issue of prayer in the schools has gained new momentum by attracting high-placed friends in the state legislature and on the federal court bench. The right changed much of its strategy when it found that by working through the federal courts and state legislature, rather than in presidential campaigns and media blitzes, it could make significant progress.

Its first major breakthrough came in 1992 when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth District of New Orleans ruled prayers in public schools were allowable when they were spontaneous, student-led, nonsectarian, and did not proselytize. The Court later endorsed that ruling by refusing to hear appeals by such anti-right groups as the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way. As of the spring of 1994 two states have passed pro-prayer laws, wording the expression as "moments for meditation" rather than explicitly calling them prayers. Several other states are on the brink of similar approval, according to the Times. Opponents claim that the 'meditation' phrase only cloaks what will

be actual religious exercises in public schools, a practice forbidden by the Supreme Court for over 30 years.-- *By Erling Jorstad, RW Contributing Editor, Professor of History at St. Olaf College.*

CURRENT RESEARCH *Recent Findings On Religious Behavior And Attitudes*

* The recently published 1994 Yearbook of American And Canadian Churches shows a clear trend towards a leveling off of membership in all major denominations. Citing available 1991-92 statistics, editor Kenneth Bedell comments that both the rapid growth among conservative churches over the last few decades and the serious decline in membership and enrollment in mainline denominations has ended. In other words, no one is group is growing nor declining very much. A report in the Washington Post (March 19) on these findings shows that during 1991-92, the Mormons grew only by 2.16 percent; the once spurting National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., grew just 2.5 percent during those years. The largest denomination, the Roman Catholic Church grew by just 1.63 percent. At the same time, such mainline bodies as the Episcopal Church actually grew by some 20,000 members. The largest Lutheran body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, lost only 0.2 percent of members, while the more conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod grew by less than 0.1 percent. In explaining these figures, specialists say that in evangelical circles the general population increase has diminished, leveling off their growth. Among mainliners, the total number of "lukewarmers" have already left, leaving the committed in place.-- *By Erling Jorstad.*

* A major study recently released by professors at the Candler School of Theology says that five major alterations have been occurring with the black churches since the civil rights upheavals of the 1960s. The National Christian Reporter (February 25) reports that the study, which included a national survey of black ministers and a focus study of two Atlanta congregations, finds a declining importance of denominations, once an anchor of identity for blacks. Further, the women's movement has increased tensions as the greater leadership role given to women in some black churches has contributed to the male exodus from the church. Third, the researchers found African-Americans no longer accept the older, white Jesus portrayed in Sunday School books; today they respond strongly to culturally relevant symbols. Next, the black churches demonstrate a far greater sensitivity to inner city social and economic problems of fellow blacks than they did a decade ago. Finally, African American preaching, once considered a fine art form with evocative emotional imagery, is now focusing more on Bible stories and the educational needs of young people, requiring the preachers to assume more of a teaching role in the pulpit. All in all, the study demonstrates how the black churches have remained loyal to core beliefs while being open to major social and cultural transformations. (National Christian Reporter, P.O. Box 222198, Dallas, 75222)--*By Erling Jorstad*

* Religious belief and ritual can be an important tool in rehabilitating refugees who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, according to a recent clinical research. The largest number of refugees suffering from this syndrome have been Cambodian women who experienced torture, rape, starvation and witnessed grossly inhumane acts. When many of these women emigrated to America they found little relief from Western medicine of their their unexplained pain and other symptoms and often sought care

from traditional healers in their communities. Psychotherapists Judith Shepherd and Shotsy Faust of San Francisco General Hospital started a support group for these patients and found that their symptoms were caused partly by the lack of opportunities to mourn the death of family members in ways appropriate to Cambodian religion and culture," according to Second Opinion (January), a quarterly on religion and health. Shepherd and Faust write that religious upbringing may cause "patients to believe they will suffer emotionally if they are unable to participate in appropriate religious rites for ensuring the proper transmigration of relatives' souls from this world to the next." The therapists arranged for a Buddhist ceremony to commemorate one patient's dead relatives in order to bring about healing. They enjoin other clinicians to examine the beliefs of ethnic patients and "honor appropriate cultural and religious rituals." (Second Opinion, 211 E. Ontario, Suite 800, Chicago, IL 60611)

* Christian leaders on fictional television are not so much portrayed negatively as they are viewed ambiguously and as having little purpose, according to a recent study in the journal Sociology of Religion (Spring). Thomas Skill and James D. Robinson of the University of Dayton studied the content of 260 fictional episodes on the four American commercial TV networks during a five week period in late 1990. The researchers found that TV portrays a Christian leader that is "neither the loving, compassionate and self-sacrificing missionary...nor is this leader the fast-talking, Bible thumping, somewhat shady televangelist type." Rather, on television a Christian leader is "infrequently seen and more than occasionally involved in nonreligious activities that are unlawful. Christian leadership is predominantly a white, male, and Catholic image (80 percent of the leaders are characterized as Catholic)." The Christian leaders also tend to have an ethical standard based more on the situation rather than in some overall belief system. Skill and Robinson conclude that in the "world of television, Christian leaders are little more than convenient mechanisms for moving a story around other more interesting, attractive, and nonreligious characters." (Sociology of Religion, Marist Hall, Rm. 108, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20064)

* A national poll conducted in February by Louis Harris Research shows continuing and often increasing animosity and ethnic and religious stereotyping among America's major minority groups. The Los Angeles Times (March 5) reports that the poll finds that more than four in 10 blacks and Latinos and 27 percent of whites concur with the stereotype that Asian Americans are "unscrupulous, crafty and devious in business." Nearly half the Latinos and four in 10 blacks and whites agree with the statement that Muslims "belong to a religion that condones or supports terrorism." An official with the National Conference of Christians and Jews, which sponsored the poll, says that the findings show that much work needs to be done within the churches and synagogues as well as other educational institutions to reduce racial tensions.--*Erling Jorstad*

* Religion continues to receive scant coverage among the major U.S. television networks, according to a recent content analysis of TV news. The study, conducted by the conservative Media Research Center, found that just 212 stories focused on religion out of a total of 18,000 nightly news shows broadcast by ABC, CBS, NBC, the Cable News Network, and the Public Broadcasting Service. The study found a similar ratio on the networks morning and magazine news shows, according to a report in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. (March 5). The religion stories that were

covered tended to show religious groups and their leaders as "cold, intolerant, and oppressive," according to Media Research Center chairman Brent Bozell.

* Those who earn lower incomes in Canada are the most likely to be religiously devout, according to a recent poll. A survey for Canadian Television and Maclean's magazine found that 69 percent of Canadians who earn less than \$20,000 a year said their belief in God helps them with their daily lives, while only 46 percent of those earning over \$60,000 a year made the same claim. The average percentage of Canadians claiming God helps them in daily living is 59 percent. Christian Century (March 2) reports that the Canadian findings are "nearly identical" to responses to a similar question asked of people in the U.S. by the Gallup Poll. (Christian Century, 407 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, IL 60605)

* Only one in three countries have total religious freedom, according to a recent investigation by Christian Solidarity International, a human rights organization based in Zurich, Switzerland. The German evangelical newsletter Idea (March 3) reports that 53 of the 158 countries examined by the group had little or no restrictions on religious freedoms. Among them were Japan, Australia, New Zealand, most parts of Europe, and North America. In 41 countries, religious minorities are constantly harassed; 54 countries show continuing discrimination; in 10 countries, among them the five republics of former Yugoslavia, not enough information was able to be gathered. The strongest pressure is reported to be on Christians in the Islamic states of North Africa, on the Arabic Peninsula, in Western Asia and in communist states such as China and North Korea. The most restrictions on religious minorities continues to be in Saudia Arabia, where Islam is the state religion. (Idea, Postfach 18 20, D-35528 Wetzlar, Germany)

* It is often claimed that there is a sharp division in Israeli society between the religious (usually meaning observant Orthodox Jews) and the secular. But a recent survey of Israeli Jews reveals that the great gulf believed to exist between the observant Jews and the rest of Israel is not nearly as large as some have believed it to be. The newsletter Inside Israel (Vol. 14 No. 3) cites the survey of 2,400 Israelis conducted by the Gutman Institute for Social Research which shows that those who are not religious are not exclusively secular. The study reveals that 14 percent of respondents were "strictly observant," while 24 percent said they were "observant to a large extent." The largest group said they were "somewhat observant," leaving only 21 percent who would declare they were "totally non-observant." The researchers conclude that "while there is a sense of tension between groups with different degrees of religiosity...and an antipathy to hereditim [ultra-Orthodox Jews] and the anti-religious, the talk of the religious-secular polarization is vastly exaggerated." (Inside Israel, Box 22029, San Diego, CA 92192-2029)

**TAKING INTO
ACCOUNT ISLAMIC
FACTOR IN
WORLD MARKET**

The continuing growth of Islam around the world is prompting many observers to ask what this development will mean to the global economy. As with most other economic and social issues, that question can elicit several different answers. An article in the Utne Reader (March/April), a digest of the alternative press, says that Islamic teachings are often perceived to conflict with many free-market practices. Traditional interpretations of the Koran have long ruled against the pursuit of

wealth for its own sake, speculation and charging interest in banking and called for the sharing of wealth with other Muslims. But various Islamic business leaders interviewed in the article, originally published in the magazine *Global Finance*, say that Islam and capitalism are complimentary; Islam's emphasis on social justice and meeting the needs of families serves as a corrective to the more individualistic aspects of the free market. The article [and *Utne Reader's* reprinting of it] suggests that those hoping for a "third way" between capitalism and socialism may now be paying close attention to Islam's marriage of "private enterprise with social justice and a sense of...community." The *Economist* (December 25) reports that Islamic banks have been founded from Jordan to South Africa in recent years and have been reaping success. "Thanks to the principle of risk-sharing, the banks enjoy a more exalted standing than rival institutions, so much so that some western banks are dabbling with Islamic finance and pondering its applicability elsewhere."

In the libertarian magazine *Reason* (April), Tom Bethell writes that many Islamic countries' failure to insure property rights will prevent them from experiencing significant economic growth in the world market. Today it is not unusual for corrupt regimes to threaten citizens with the loss of property, including homes and businesses, which convinces many in the Muslim world not to risk economic ventures. Such problems may stem from a host of religious, ethnic and social factors, but Bethell adds that there is nothing in the Koran that is inimical to private property or free markets. The Koran itself often blesses commercial and economic development. The prohibition against interest is not ingrained in the sacred text, but is the result of subsequent Islamic interpretations of usury. Many Muslims believe that such views cannot be reversed today because they would violate the teaching that one has to submit to earlier interpretations of the Koran. But Bethell writes that some Islamic scholars in the U.S., such as those at the International Institute for Islamic Studies in Herndon, Virginia, are now making the case that reinterpretations of the Koran are valid, especially concerning the issue of interest. In fact, the "fundamentalist" Muslim view that one should go back to the Koran rather than being obliged to accept more recent interpretations might prove to be "economically liberating" for the Muslim world. (*Utne Reader*, 1624 Harmon Pl., Minneapolis, MN 55403; *Reason*, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034)

Religion Watch

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