

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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JEWISH RENEWAL IMPACTS MAINSTREAM JUDAISM

The "Jewish renewal" movement, comprising a wide range of groups with roots in the 1960s promoting spirituality and social change outside of organized Jewish life, is increasingly influencing mainstream Judaism, according to a cover story in the Jewish magazine Moment (December). What has come to be called "Jewish renewal" started as a movement based around the "havurah"-- intimate prayer and study fellowships formed as an alternative to mainstream synagogues, often employing contemporary music and home-grown liturgy. Today the renewal encompasses feminist, ecological, healing and spirituality groups that blend Judaism with New Age and other spiritual currents, as well as the social action often expressed in the Jewish magazine "Tikkun". Today there are several hundred havurot, ranging from groups of 20 to 30 to those like the 300-member Havurot of South Florida in Miami. Renewal ideas are actively promoted by the Philadelphia-based "Aleph" (the Alliance for Jewish Renewal) headed by philosopher Arthur Waskow, as well as by the Reconstructionist branch of Judaism, which has been strongly influenced by such currents. "Because of high intermarriage rates and falling affiliation, federations, synagogues and major Jewish community organizations are paying increased attention to the issues of Jewish renewal," reports Rodger Kamenetz.

He adds that the American Jewish Congress in Los Angeles has established a Jewish feminist center to advocate on behalf of abortion rights and feminist curricula in Jewish day schools. Conservative synagogues are now allowing members to form havurot. Some observers even see traces of the Jewish renewal movement spreading to Orthodox Judaism, such as in new Orthodox women prayer groups and the newly observant Jews who have come from yoga and other disciplines and who have imported to Orthodoxy a concern for health care and "concern for the feminine," according to renewal leader Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. But it is especially feminism that is the strongest influence within the renewal movement. Women are having a major impact on Jewish renewal liturgy; in most havurot, inclusive prayers (altering references to God such as "He" and "Father") are used, and Reform and Conservative synagogues are not far behind. On a more radical note, the traditional emphasis on God's transcendence is being downplayed in favor of his immanence in renewal liturgy. For instance, one liturgical work reads, "Let us bless the wellspring of life" instead of the traditional, "Blessed art thou O Lord."

The leftist political component of the renewal movement is strongly evident in the new book Jewish Renewal (Grosset/Putnam, \$25.95) by Michael Lerner. As the editor of "Tikkun," Lerner gained fame for his

writings on the "politics of meaning," a theme picked up by Hillary Clinton in calling for greater community and moral values. Lerner calls Jews to "transform" and heal the world on "personal, social, and communal levels." He criticizes both secular Jewish activists for downgrading the religious sensibilities of many Jews, and Jewish leaders for aligning themselves with capitalism and individualism and ignoring new forms of the faith. Jewish renewal is probably the most comprehensive Jewish "worldview" movement to emerge in some time; what are its chances of gaining the support of American Jews? In the Moment article, Kamenitz predicts the renewal "will come to be seen as a research and development laboratory for the entire community and that its vital innovations in liturgy...feminist theology, and spiritual intimacy will continue to spread." However, when historians examine the influence of the renewal on American Judaism, "they will see shades of difference rather than a revolution," says Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University and critic of some aspects of Jewish renewal. Sarna told RELIGION WATCH that the renewal has brought into American Judaism a new emphasis on healing and music, and, through its feminist thrust, has "forced traditional Jews to remember that God is neither male nor female." But he adds that "by the time [the renewal] hits the mainstream, it will be greatly toned down so it doesn't scare off the more traditionalist elements in the ranks." (Moment, 4710 41st St., Washington, D.C. 20016)

RELIGIOUS RIGHT REGAINS HOLD ON ELECTORATE

The overwhelming victory for the Republican Party in gaining control over both houses of Congress was helped considerably by the political savvy and campaigning of the religious right. Long considered dormant as a national force after Jerry Falwell disbanded the Moral Majority, the coalition of conservative Christians and Jews came together in the 1994 elections to demonstrate that they have become a major force in elective politics. Pat Robertson's group, the Christian Coalition states it spent over \$2 million in distributing 33 million voter guides to 60,000 churches across the country. Time magazine (November 21) estimates that religious right endorsement helped Republicans win in at least 50 close campaigns. The liberal People for the American Way, stated that 60 percent of all candidates approved by the religious right won their races. Although no one set of issues united all rightists, they did support those candidates endorsing their positions on school prayer, abortion, welfare reform, anti-gay laws, and federal funding for the arts.

The most tangible impact of the religious right is evident among those Republican leaders who have called for a constitutional amendment allowing voluntary prayers in public schools. The prospect of passing such a measure is uncertain since it needs 2/3 approval by both houses and 3/4 approval by state legislatures. Still, the issue is back on the front burner of political agendas; office holders will not be able to avoid taking a stand on the issue. On the down side for the religious right, the centerpiece candidate of the movement's campaign, Oliver North, was defeated by what the Minneapolis Star Tribune (November 10) called a major referendum on religious right issues. Other losers with religious right backing found that support to be of little direct benefit, according to the Time article. What seems clear is that the religious right now has direct access to the mass media through leaders such as Speaker Newt Gingrich and chairman Jesse Helms. It has found a set of issues which bring in votes and financial support. The Republican nominee for President in Campaign '96 will face the difficult task of

holding that support while not alienating those Republicans outside the religious right's circle of endorsement.-- *By RW Contributing Editor Erling Jorstad, a long-time chronicler and observer of the religious right,*

CHURCH ACTIVISM BEHIND LATINO RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The recent fight over California's anti-immigrant Proposition 187 during the elections showed the emergence of a church-based movement for Latino rights, according to the weekly newsletter of Pacific News Service (November 14-18). Although the bill passed, Proposition 187, which aims to cut off welfare to illegal immigrants, ignited activism among religious leadership that will prove to be far more powerful for the Latino cause than more radical voices on these concerns, writes Ruben Martinez. "A hint of that power could be seen at Delores Mission, a tiny Catholic parish in East Los Angeles, where unprecedented political organizing increased Latino voter turnout tenfold," he reports. The Catholic Church was the most important actor in the cause, with Los Angeles' Cardinal Roger Mahony directing his parish priests to "become unabashed crusaders from the pulpit" against the bill. Martinez argues that Latino Protestant evangelicals share common ground with Catholics on this issue, as "evangelical churches have long since operated a cross-border network of fellow worshippers that recognizes no political frontiers."

The Latino community in California has been divided between recently arrived (and often illegal) immigrants and those of the second and third generations, as well as between feuding Mexicans and Central Americans. While the "nationalist flavor of many of the demonstrations" served to alienate both whites and non-whites, making the effectiveness of such a new "civil rights" movement questionable, the churches are better able to "bridge the gaps between radical students and more mainstream voices." Martinez ventures that a "church-state battle may be shaping up, to the surprise of those who saw abortion as the battle to end all American religious wars. If the constitutional questions are decided in favor of the pro-187 camp, this state could see massive campaigns of civil disobedience led by Latino faith communities." (Pacific News Service, 450 Mission St., Room 506, San Francisco, CA 94105)

AUTHORITIES, MEDIA MISHANDLE SOLAR TEMPLE AFFAIR?

The recent deaths and destruction of the Order of the Solar Temple in Switzerland and in Canada under its leader Luc Jouret left more questions than answers about the group, but the mishandling of the incident by the authorities and, in some cases, the media, follows in the pattern of the Waco incident of two years ago, according to the Millennial Prophecy Report (November), a newsletter that analyzes millennial thinking and literature. The Order of the Solar Temple (OST), which blended together occult, New Age, and mystical Christian teachings, was destroyed by Jouret, with its members either committing suicide or being killed by the shadowy leader. As in the destruction surrounding David Koresh in 1993, where the "obdurate failure to try to understand is paralleled by the Swiss police's failure to release even a transcript of the tape found attached to the door" of one of the burning houses of members. The police reportedly dismissed the tape as a meaningless "lecture on astrology."

Editor Ted Daniels writes that the tape could have been the group's

"suicide note, and scholars with expertise in astrological symbolism should have the opportunity to hear and decipher it. This is just the kind of material the FBI at Waco dismissed as 'Bible babble.' Had they attended to it, they might have been able to assure a peaceful resolution there." {He adds on this issue that "attempts by responsible scholars to offer seminars on new religions at the FBI Academy receive a polite brush-off; they apparently don't want to learn."}. Most of the media, without some awareness of such movements' "internal logic and dynamics," were double-minded in covering the matter. According to alternative religion writer Erik Davis, the media reported that Jouret was both a "crazed occult messiah and a cynical huckster manipulating rich lemmings." Once Jouret's body was found, it was no longer possible to see him as a con man, "and the press was baffled... Suddenly Jouret achieved a perverse integrity," viewing him as something of an apocalyptic satanist. While the apocalyptic part is right, Davis says that the OST was in no way satanic. Most of its occult teachings and practices were borrowed from Gnostic Christianity, the Kabbalah, Rosicrucianism and hermetic freemasonry. (Millenial Prophecy Report, P.O. Box 34021, Philadelphia, PA 19101-4021

ENGINEERS PREDICTING THE MILLENNIUM

The recent predictions made by evangelical radio commentator Harold Camping that the world would end in September of 1994 may be part of a trend toward more methodical, non-visionary prophesies of the end-times, according to the Millenial Prophecy Report (October). Editor Ted Daniels writes that unlike many apocalyptic seers, Camping "claims no visions or even hunches. Instead, he worked methodically through the Bible using mathematics to reach his conclusions..." Daniels notes that Camping's training and career has been in civil engineering. "This is interesting because, at least in recent times, a disproportionately high number of prophets have been engineers." While he can't account for this development, Daniels adds that "in the material sciences it is the physicists who get all the glory, while the engineers 'merely' make their insights work. As the Rodney Dangerfields of the material world, they may crave even greater discoveries than Einstein's. They have honorable precedents. Isaac Newton speculated intensely on the timing of the End." Daniels notes that another engineer now in the prophetic spotlight is Robert Collender. Collender, of Glendale, Calif., has recently composed a 791-page work called "The Prophetic Compendium," which includes a 52-page key to prophetic texts in the Bible and claims to have identified the date of the end of the world.

QUAKER GROUPS DRAWING YOUNG PEOPLE

There is a recent increase of young people involved in Quaker groups and activities, according to the Gainesville Sun newspaper (November 5). Such liberal and unprogrammed (emphasizing silent services) Quaker groups as the 12,000-member Philadelphia Yearly Meeting have been experiencing the "graying" of membership found in other declining mainline groups. But in recent years, teenage Quakers have made their presence known, "clamoring for retreats to meditate and pray," reports Deborah Kovach Caldwell in a Religious News Service-based article. "It doesn't mean we're due for an enormous spurt of numbers. What it does mean is we have a youth program that speaks to the needs of many youths," says Peggy Morschek of the Quaker Information Center in Philadelphia. The article reports that a group of youths have revived the Burlington Quaker Meeting in New Jersey,

which had closed in 1991, reopening the 300-year-old building and transforming it into a retreat center. Caldwell writes that the "new interest among teens tracks a larger trend in religion across America: As couples have children, they join congregations, and the youngsters develop spiritual and community interests of their own." Many of the teens may not be members of their meetings, but are very active in the Quaker groups nonetheless. The youth programs are part of wider effort at membership growth, called "outreach," that started about 10 years ago. Such efforts to gently attract outsiders to Quakerism include meetings sponsoring self-help and recovery groups.

LONG-TERM PASTORATE FINDING FAVOR

A growing number of clergy and church leaders are finding that long-term pastors and thriving churches go hand-in-hand, according to the San Jose Mercury News (October 15). "Even denominations that historically have moved their pastors every few years are starting to look at the benefits to both clergy and congregations when pastoral tenures are longer rather than shorter," writes Judy Tarjanyi. For instance the Catholic Diocese of Toledo, Ohio, now keeps its pastors in assignments for six-year terms, with options for renewal. Studies conducted at the Bathesda, Md.-based Alban Institute found that more can be accomplished during a long-term pastorate that would not happen if the pastor is there only a few years. "It takes at least three to four years to develop relationships...and to build up a reservoir of trust and credibility that makes it possible for the pastor and lay leadership to move together without a lot of hassle," says Rev. Ed White, a consultant with the institute. In contrast, constant turnover in leadership can be debilitating to a congregation. One disadvantage, however, to long-term pastorates is that pastors are not as likely to be put on a pedestal after the congregation gets to know them. But that can also work as an advantage in keeping the pastor humble.

MINOR SEMINARIES SEE SHARP DECLINE

As with the decline of Catholic priests, the number of high school, or minor, seminaries that have served as incubators for vocations has dropped sharply in the last two decades, according to Christian News (November 14). The number of minor seminaries in the U.S. has declined from 133 in 1968 to only nine today. One high school seminary official says that "What happens is that resources become scarcer, and this is one place where cuts are made." In contrast to the 1950s and 60s when the ranks of priests and seminarians were high, today few high school seminarians stay the course to ordination. A study is cited of the Los Angeles Archdiocese showing that while rising costs continue to outpace financial resources to run the minor seminary, no more than five percent of its entering freshmen during the next decade would be likely to finish 12 years of training before ordination. It is noted that some high school seminaries have been growing in recent years, often through an influx of Vietnamese youth (who continue to gravitate toward the priesthood; see November RW). Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles said that his archdiocese will try to compensate for the loss of its recent minor seminary by forming groups of priesthood prospects at Catholic high schools and through other recruitment strategies. (Christian News, Rt. 1, Box 309A, New Haven, MO 63068-9568)

**BLOOD ATONEMENT
HOLDS ON IN
MORMON WEST**

The concept of "blood atonement," which holds that a person who murders another must shed his own blood and die in order to be forgiven by God, still retains a hold on the Mormon culture of Utah, according to the Salt Lake Tribune (November 5). The notion of blood atonement is disavowed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as a doctrine of the church, although some early Mormons leaders did preach this view. The newspaper reports that the "idea continues to be used by defendants, lawyers and family members associated with capital crimes." In the past decade, potential jurors in every Utah capital homicide case were asked if they believed in the concept of blood atonement. In 1992, attorneys for convicted murderer Richard Worthington tried to exclude people who believed in the doctrine from serving on the jury. In October, attorneys for condemned child-killer James Edward Wood argued that his defense was undermined by a visit from local Mormon leaders who talked to him about the shedding of blood. In response to this case, an LDS official denied the doctrine as it has been popularized, claiming that Christ fulfilled any need of blood atonement. Writer Peggy Stack Fletcher reports that, regardless of official teachings, blood atonement has become part of Mormon lore in Utah. Mormon leaders who espoused this teaching in the mid-1800s introduced the firing squad as a means of execution; Utah is still one of only three states that offer a firing squad as an execution choice.

CURRENT RESEARCH: Recent Findings On Religious Attitudes And Behavior

**DENOMINATION
COUNTS MORE THAN
GENDER IN
LEADERSHIP**

* A recent study finds that denominational background is more decisive than gender in determining the style of pastoral leadership. The study of 4,000 pastors, conducted by Hartford Seminary, found that among liberals, female and male Unitarian clergy are most likely to share power in the church with congregation members. The National & International Religion Report (November 28) notes that the researchers discovered that among conservative denominations such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of God, clergy are more apt to take an authoritarian style regardless whether it is a clergyman or clergywoman at the helm. The newsletter reports that another study of United Church of Christ pastors in Wisconsin found that while a pastor's sex continues to be a divisive issue for many congregations hiring new ministers, there is little difference among the genders in leadership styles. The study, conducted by researcher Mary Claire Klein of Marion College in Fond du Lac, suggests that men and women pastors could be equally nurturing or equally strong administrators. (National & International Religion Report, P.O. Box 21433, Roanoke, VA 24018-0145)

**CATHOLIC GIVING
AFFECTED MORE
BY DECISION-MAKING
THAN DISSENT**

* Catholics have long lagged behind Protestants in their giving rates, but a recent study debunks some of the traditional reasons used to explain this pattern. The "American Congregational Giving Study," conducted by Dean Hoge, Michael Donahue, Patrick McNamara, and Charles Zech, found that Catholic giving remains low on an individual basis; the typical Catholic household gives only \$386 a year to support the church, compared to the Assemblies of God's \$1,696, Baptists' \$1,154, Presbyterians' \$1,085, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's \$746, according to the National Catholic Reporter (November 18). The Catholic low giving rate has been attributed by such sociologists as Andrew Greeley to increased anger and dissent by liberal Catholics protesting such measures as the Vatican prohibition of birth control. But the new study, which is based on a survey of 10,000 church members, found that

Catholics are not giving less because of dissatisfaction with church teachings. Rather, such a pattern is related to a preference among the laity that lay leaders handle the parish funds rather than priests. If financial decision-making was more democratized at the parish level, such dissatisfaction could be addressed. It was also found that the stronger the orthodox belief and faith, the higher the giving, except among Catholics. (National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 419281, Kansas City, MO 64111)

DUTCH REFORMED LOSING INFLUENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Dutch Reformed Church has lost its place as the religious and moral standard bearer in South African society since apartheid has been dismantled, reports the Long Island newspaper Sunday Newsday (November 6). "With the collapse of the white minority rule, the once powerful church is increasingly sidelined, groping clumsily for a way to repudiate its own history. In the race for change, it has fallen behind even the formerly ruling National Party, which created apartheid and later was forced to dismantle it. At the height of its influence, the church was often described as the National Party at prayer," writes Dele Olojede. Unlike in years past, the church's quadrennial synod was barely noticed by most of the local press. At the gathering, the denomination committed itself to uniting its members regardless of race and issued an unprecedented acknowledgment of cruelty to its "prophetic voices"-- in other words, those who were ostracized and even defrocked for speaking out against apartheid.

But critics say that the church has hardly moved beyond the same "general declarations of intent that began with its finally conceding in 1986 that apartheid is a sin." University of South Africa theologian and church member Adrio Konig says the "Dutch Reformed Church only follows the political process. Four years ago, they decided to unite with black [Reformed] churches but did nothing. Now that we have a democratic society, they are saying again that they will do so." Church officials say that the process of reuniting with their black brethren is slow because the conservative membership still needs some convincing, with each of the body's 1,200 congregations having to be consulted. Konig, however, says the "Dutch Reformed Church has isolated itself, and the best it can do is follow the society. It is no longer relevant to South African society at large."

CHARISMATIC REVIVAL AMONG GYPSIES

There is a growing movement of conversions among Gypsies to evangelical Christianity, with many attributing such a revival to biblical prophecies, according to Ecumenical News International (November 7), an interfaith weekly news service. The Gypsy or Romany people have traditionally practiced folk religious practices while outwardly adopting the faiths of their host country, such as Islam and Catholicism. But more recently Gypsies have been converting en masse to charismatic Christianity. Huge conventions of Christian Gypsies are becoming regular events. In all, 44 countries are said to be caught up in the new Romany interest in Christianity," writes Ted Harrison. Gypsy Christian leaders are claiming that such a revival among their people had been foretold in the Bible. They cite the parable of the wedding feast in the Gospel of Luke which says that the last guests to be invited to acknowledge Christ

would be from the highways and by-ways-- in other words, the Gypsies.

British Gypsy church leader Jackie Boyd says, "[First he came for the Jews, then he came for the gentiles and now, as prophesied in Luke, he is coming for the Romanies." Although all of the Romany families in Europe are said to be touched by such currents, one of the biggest revivals is taking place in France. More than 25 percent of the country's estimated 280,000 Romanies claim to be "born again." Boyd, who pastors the Light and Life Gypsy church in Kent, says that the conversions have brought radical changes in lifestyle for Romany people. "I know of people who have thrown their crystal balls away and renounced telling fortunes. Others have begun to trade honestly, whereas in the past they may have bought and sold on the edge of the law." It is not uncommon to see Christian stickers and symbols on Romany Christians' wagons in the United Kingdom. Gypsy churches are also being established among new converts. (Ecumenical News International, P.O. Box 2100, 150 route de Ferney, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland)

DIVERSE ETHNIC GROUPS CLAIM JEWISH ROOTS

Various ethnic groups from around the world are increasingly seeking to reconnect with their Jewish ancestry and be recognized as Jews, reports the Washington Post (November 26). "There's a reawakening of Jewish consciousness all over the world in places you never imagined," says Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee in New York. Two groups recently pressing for inclusion in the Jewish family are Ethiopians in a region called Guhion and Brazilians who believe they are descendents of Marranos--Sephardic Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity during the Inquisition and immigrated to Latin America in the 1500s. It is claimed that the 4 million inhabitants of the Ethiopian region have always been Jews and never relinquished Jewish practices, even though they also attend Ethiopian Orthodox churches. These Ethiopians do not want to migrate to Israel but rather to have their homeland as a "last frontier of the Promised Land." It is estimated that 8,000 to 10,000 of Brazilians with Marrano ancestors want to "shed their Christian identity and become Jewish again." Other groups seeking to regain their Jewish identity have been identified in China, Tibet, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Nigeria and Somalia. Bayme says that millennialists interpret this surge as a sign that the end of the world may be near. Biblical and Talmudic sources claim that at the end-times, the 10 lost tribes of Israel will be reunited.

Religion Watch

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