

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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HOW STRONG IS RELIGION- FAR RIGHT TIE IN OKLAHOMA CITY INCIDENT?

Attempting to trace the actions and motivations in the Oklahoma City bombing to the esoteric and fragmented world of the far right has proven difficult; for one thing, it is not clear the suspects had strong connections to far right political or religious groups. In examining the possible religious ideologies behind the Oklahoma City incident, however, the media has focused on the more apocalyptic and racist-based elements of the religious far right. The Los Angeles Times (April 29) reports that a significant number of far rightists use Christian symbols and terminology to support their social-political views. Most frequently they see the U.S. government and what they call the "new world order" as carefully planned plots by Satan to establish his rule on earth. Such a victory would destroy Christianity, and with it the white race. Using imagery from the Book of Revelation, such militant rightists teach that world history is headed towards a final apocalyptic catastrophe unless the keepers of the faith—that is, themselves—intervene with power and force to destroy Satan once and for all. An important element in the far right subculture is the Christian Identity movement, which weaves white supremacist and anti-Jewish teachings together with Christian apocalyptic millennialism.

But it is another matter whether such views can be found within the militias, a movement that has recently received wide attention because of the suspects' association with its members. An article in the Washington Times (April 27) notes that the militia movement has been the least ideological part of the far right. It has arisen in most states built largely on the idea of gun-owner rights and self defense. Michael Barkun, a Syracuse University specialist on the far right and Christian Identity groups, says that the "militia literature I've seen suggests that there is always some kind of religious belief, even in the ones that are secular." The leader of the much publicized Michigan Militia, for example, is pastor of a small Baptist congregation.

In the Village Voice (May 2), James Ridgeway writes that there is a broad coalition between many in the militia movement and other far right groups which adhere to Christian Identity teachings. He adds that a 1992 conference which sought to draw together the disparate elements of the far right, featured a subsection called "The Divine Ways and Means Committee." This committee came to the conclusion that the "means for Christian men to bring about Divine judgement is not limited...to the actions of the body politic. In such cases, God's Word also provides precedent for what is today termed vigilante action." Ridgeway adds that such subsequent incidents as the raid on Waco provided further fuel to such views that "positive action" should be taken against the government,

leading to the eventual formation of militias in Montana and Michigan (there are now militias active in 20 states).

In the current issue of Reason (July), a libertarian magazine. Writer Mack Tanner criticizes the way the media tended to link bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh to the militia movement and then to connect the militias with far right groups espousing far right racist and identity teachings. In studying militia literature and interviewing militia members in nine states (including alleged extremist militias found in Montana and Idaho), Tanner found little of the antipathy toward government, racism, antisemitism, and vigilante advocacy common in extreme far right groups. For instance, half of the San Diego militia are Jewish. He did find that many militia members are "fundamentalist Christians who home school their children and see their militia work as an extension of their religious life." Militia members also tend to espouse conspiracy theories, although such theories do not have the "racist edge" of most far right groups and rather focus on fear of the "new world order" and government intrusion in their lives, especially after the government raids in Waco.

Tanner concludes that militias are being stigmatized by anti-right wing organizations in the same way that the Branch Davidians were branded as dangerous cultists by professional anti-cultists. He adds that "the most effective way to reduce militia members' paranoia would be to hold full, public hearings on Waco--the incident that galvanized many activists." Dean Kelley, consultant on religious liberty for the National Council of Churches, also suggests in the Los Angeles Times article that the federal government and private citizens should establish direct communication with the far right. James Tabor of the University of North Carolina says that "We don't hear a buzzword yet, like 'cult'. But I'm afraid the right-wing political groups are going to be lumped into one category as if they're all the same." (Reason, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034)--*Erling Jorstad contributed to this report.*

SEEKING
TRADITION:
YOUNG ADULTS
ADOPTING
CONSERVATIVE
CATHOLICISM

The following report is based on part of a study the editor of RW recently conducted of young adults adopting or returning to traditional Christian faiths, namely in the Catholic, Protestant (Reformed), and Eastern Orthodox traditions. The study, which hopefully will appear in book form within the next year, was originally an M.A. project in Sociology at Fordham University. Next month's issue will feature a report on Eastern Orthodox converts and returnees.

American Catholic young adults are often portrayed as modern individualists who pay little heed to tradition or church authority as they pick and choose their own beliefs. Most conservative Catholics, meanwhile, are thought of as elderly and usually nostalgic for the "good old days" before the Second Vatican Council changed things. Many studies have shown a high degree of dissent among baby boomer and baby buster Catholics. But in investigating the various conservative movements and groups making an impact on American Catholicism and talking with their participants, one finds that "young" and "conservative" are far from mutually exclusive terms. Surveys of the current generation of Catholic seminarians and priests show they are more conservative on many issues than previous generations. A spate of new conservative Catholic publications have been founded in the last decade often with strong support and leadership from baby boomers and busters, including Catholic World Report, Inside The Vatican, and the Latin Mass.

most racially diverse organizations, with 27 percent of its staff Hispanic, African American, or Asian. (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187)—*Erling Jorstad contributed to this report*

COMMUNITY LIFE WANING AMONG HARE KRISHNAS'

Although the Hare Krishnas were largely monastic in lifestyle through the 1970s in the U.S., today most second generation members of the movement have forsaken the robes, shaved heads and cloistered life to live and work outside the temples, according to the Cult Observer (Vol. 12 No. 3). Hare Krishnas or ISKCON have been in the country for 29 years and there are now approximately 500 to 1000 second generation members, ranging in age from 16 to 30 years of age. Most of these younger members see themselves as congregational rather than communal members of the group, and "are in college, getting jobs, starting new families, and minimally involved in temple life," according to the Philadelphia Inquirer-based article. Although these younger members interviewed in the article describe their involvement in ISKCON as "marginal," not taking the vows of the Hare Krishnas their parents did over two decades ago, several still said many of the faith's teachings are deeply ingrained.

The movement toward nuclear families will likely accelerate the process of secularization among the Hare Krishnas, as well as transform them into an American denomination, according to a study in the journal Sociology of Religion (Summer). E. Burke Rochford of Middlebury College writes that the Hare Krishnas changed their communal emphasis in the 1980s because of economic decline in the movement. The growth of the nuclear family during this period brought with it a reduction of members's involvement in the collective life of the religion while still being personally committed to ISKCON as a religion. Rochford adds that the Hare Krishnas are likely to become "institutionalized as a denomination serving the religious needs of an expanding congregation of married people and their families...In the hands of individual believers, Krishna Consciousness promises to become fragmented, having relevance and meaning primarily within the sub-world of American family life." (Cult Observer, P.O. Box 2265, Bonita Springs, FL 33959; Sociology of Religion, Marist Hall, Rm. 108, Catholic University in America, Washington, D.C. 20064)

CURRENT RESEARCH: *Recent Findings On Religious Attitudes And Behavior*

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD EDGES OUT SBC IN FASTEST GROWING CHURCH SURVEY

* The Assemblies of God ranks first among America's fastest growing churches, while the Southern Baptists fell out of its leading position for the first time since 1980, according to the annual survey published in Church Growth Today newsletter (Vol. 9 No. 6). The survey, conducted by John Vaughan of Southwest Baptist University during the period of 1992-1993, found that 85 of the 280 fastest growing Protestant congregations were Assemblies of God, followed by 24 United Methodist and 22 Southern Baptist churches. Vaughan notes that the recent survey was the first time United Methodists have ranked second on the listing. The fall of Southern Baptists in the listing may be due to "saturation of worship center space, failure of SBC churches to respond to requested information, or perhaps is a reflection of the distraction and disruption resulting from the decade of internal redefinition of priorities between moderate and conservative segments within the denomination." (Church Growth Today, Southwest Baptist University, Bolivar, MO 65613)

adults emphasize the authority of the pope, they appear to be choosing the older model of "male headship" in marriage.

* Echoing recent talk of a growing Catholic-Protestant evangelical alliance, most of the young adults interviewed expressed a desire for better relations with other conservative Christians. Although all respondents upheld Catholicism as embodying the most truth, a common view was that "culture war" issues as abortion and gay rights were drawing together all Christians. As Michael, a 35-year-old musician, said, "I'm...inclined to finding common ground with those of like mind. I don't see doctrinal barriers that are significant in light of other things more threatening, such as secularism."

**PROMISE KEEPERS
GROWING,
EXPANDING
MISSION**

The men-only evangelical group Promise Keepers (PK) continues to grow and attract criticism, but the organization may also be having a less publicized role in fostering racial reconciliation among evangelicals, according to reports. Started in 1990, PK has continued its unparalleled expansion within American church circles. So far, 278,600 men have attended PK rallies in seven cities. Critics have pointed out that in essence PK is countercultural, advocating male leadership in marriage as opposed to equality. In an analysis in the Los Angeles Times (May 6), PK leaders respond that their interdenominational approach is what men in America today want to support in their search for identity in a rapidly changing world. By way of illustration, the recent convention in Anaheim attracted not only the evangelical community, but for the first time a significant number of Catholic and Mormon men. Indeed, a few Navajo Indian leaders have expressed interest in PK programs. Observers suggest that the PK program has tapped into a deeply felt male need for fostering the virtues of sexual integrity, parental responsibility, and devotion to church programs.

Rodolpho Carrasco reported on the Los Angeles Promise Keepers convention in May for the Hispanic evangelical HABBM News Service (May 7) and found at first that the general tone of the meetings was toward "male leadership in the home." One speaker, Raul Ries, suggested that Christians need to get back to single income, male breadwinner, wife-at-home model. "The Promise Keepers audience in general has tended toward theological conservatism as well as political conservatism, a Focus on the Family type crowd," Carrasco writes. But there was also a good deal of emphasis on the biblical injunction for men to "love their wives as Christ loved the church," rather than strictly on male headship. Many women have also reported that their marriages are better for their husbands attending PK conventions.

A less well-known facet of Promise Keepers is its emphasis on racial reconciliation. Hispanic Christians were openly welcomed and took part in the L.A. convention, with several hymns sung bilingually. E. V. Hill preached on alleviating racism in the church and was enthusiastically received. Carrasco adds that such programs could provide a foundation for racial reconciliation. "The next time a racially-tinged civil disturbance occurs in our nation, there will be half a million white Christian guys who can pick up the phone and call their Latino or African-American brother and say, "Hey, what's going on? What can I do?" A report on racial diversity in evangelical organizations in Christianity Today (May 15) confirms Carrasco's observations. Promise Keepers rated among the

charismatic prayer groups, and the Latin Mass. After their conversions and reawakenings, these young adults struggled to find a church home and often have remained dissatisfied with parish life. James still characterizes his relationship to parish life as "ill-defined" as he moves between Latin Masses in different locations and involvement in his neighborhood parish. "It's an inconvenience to have to seek out all these beautiful trappings in the church today," he said. Scott, a 28-year-old stock broker, converted to Catholicism from Judaism several years ago, said, "I haven't found a parish where I feel I belong, where I'm comfortable. I usually go to two churches in the area, but I'm also looking for a good church where you get the feeling that there's a lot of faith, where the priests are not watering down the faith...I'm willing to travel a [moderate] distance to find a parish like that."

The emphasis on choice and selecting one's beliefs and practices found among more liberal young Catholics strikes a responsive chord among the conservative young adults, although in a different key. While seeking to adhere to a comprehensive tradition, the conservative young adults find that in today's pluralistic church, they have to be selective about where they worship, what Catholic school to send their children, and from which priest they should seek guidance in order to keep their traditional faith alive and strong. The young adults interviewed also shared with their more liberal counterparts a disdain for "rigid" styles of teachings and leadership. When Tara, a 30-year-old dancer, first went to speak to a priest about converting to Catholicism, she was troubled by the emphasis on rules and regulations, including the prohibition of birth control. "If it's presented as part of a deeper order of things, it's a lot easier to swallow. You just can't tell people to do it. You have to tell them why."

As might be expected, the conservative young adults were different from others in their age group for their opposition to liberalism and dissent in the church; in fact, opposing such dissent and the friction it caused in relationships was the most troubling part of being Catholic for them. Elizabeth said she "feels bad that some Catholics don't understand the truth and they encourage those outside the church to bash it...If you say you're Catholic and then go against church teachings, why do you want be part of it. Why bother with belonging if you don't believe it?" The tensions these young adults felt in the church often involved generational conflict. Most agreed that the older baby boomers instigated harmful changes in the church and society. While this generation gap has been found "twentysomethings" in general, the conflict among Catholics appeared more serious. The respondents often expressed the view that the Vatican II church discarded many distinctive Catholic traditions partly as a result of the demands for change and liberalization by the older baby boomers during the late 1960s.

Other findings from these interviews that may shed some light on the phenomenon of young adult adoption of traditional forms of Catholicism include:

* There was a widely shared view that wives should be submissive to their husbands in marriage and the differences between the sexes strongly maintained. The nurturing role of women and male leadership in the family was emphasized. At the same time, most of the young adults interviewed supported women having careers and agreed--especially the women--that husbands and wives are equal in marriage. In the last several years, Pope John Paul has taught that the view that women should be in submission in marriage is not authentic Catholic teaching. Even though these young

Most of the Catholic religious orders which have recently been founded or reconstituted, such as the Franciscan Sisters of Renewal, are strongly conservative (often returning to traditional habits) and are attracting an impressive number of young adults as compared to the declining established orders with a more liberal orientation. The church has also attracted a growing number of young conservative converts (often from evangelical and mainline Protestant churches) who were drawn to Catholicism through the charisma and staunch orthodoxy of Pope John Paul II. Young adults are also influential in the movement to revive the Latin Mass and other traditional Catholic practices. Charles Coulombe, a young Catholic traditionalist speaker and writer, estimates that as much as 40 to 70 percent of the audiences at his lectures are younger than 35 years old.

While it may be true that these young conservatives do not make up a majority among Catholics of their generation, they are far from insignificant in a church where the leadership is moving in more conservative directions. Who are these conservative Catholic young adults and how do they maintain their faith in a pluralistic and modern church? As surveys have shown that young Catholics are the most strongly affected by the dissenting and consumerist currents in the church, one may also wonder what differences and similarities these young adults have with their counterparts who are picking and choosing beliefs and practices. To answer these and other questions, the editor of RW conducted in-depth interviews with 10 young adults (between the ages of 23-35) selected from a parish where the Latin Mass is celebrated and from a conservative lay Franciscan order in New York. While the sample of individuals cannot be said to be statistically representative of the phenomenon of young adult adoption of conservative Catholicism, the case studies do illuminate significant segments of this movement. The groups from which these young adults were selected represent many of the views and concerns found in the wider conservative Catholic movement.

What stands out in the young adults' accounts of adopting a more traditional form of Catholicism is the sense of searching and discovery. Although most of the young adults grew up as Catholics, their journeys toward conservative and traditional Catholicism represented something of a conversion for them, not unlike accounts of born-again Christians who speak of moving from the darkness of their sinful past into the light of salvation. Many of them spoke of a time when they accepted or were taught "liberal" views, but then arrived at the truth. One such returnee is James, a 31-year-old reporter with a financial newspaper. He grew up in a devout Catholic home, but during his teen years came to believe that many church teachings could be viewed as "metaphors" rather than actual truth. While studying in Ireland during college, he came across Medieval English literature. In such works he discovered the "richness of the church and the liturgy...I was never exposed to that in parochial school. I was never presented with the central thesis of Christianity and how it was so instrumental in the growth of civilization." Like most of the other born-Catholics, Elizabeth, a 25-year-old accountant, said she was deprived of orthodox Catholic teachings in her childhood and youth. "In catechism we just learned that God is love...I didn't grow up hearing about sin. There was nothing on the saints and Mary. I feel sad for my own generation."

It was often through channels outside of ordinary parish life that many of these young adults moved to a more traditional faith—Marian apparitions (such as in Medjugorje in the former Yugoslavia), Catholic

CONVERSION-
BAPTISM LINK
WEAKENING AMONG
SBC CHURCHES

* A survey of recently baptized Southern Baptists finds that 60 percent of the respondents reported having been baptized before, with 40 percent of adults reporting a first-time commitment to Christ as the primary reason for being baptized. The denominational survey also found that among those baptized before, 33 percent said the earlier baptism had taken place in a Southern Baptist congregation, according to a report in the Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record (April 22). Although baptism for Baptists is supposed to be a symbol of conversion, the survey--conducted among 1,358 adults baptized in the SBC during 1993--found that only 40 percent cited a first-time commitment to Jesus as the primary reason for being baptized; another 40 percent said they were rededicating their lives to Christ; 14 percent said they were baptized as a membership requirement for an SBC congregation. The findings are said to indicate a lack of clarity about baptism among Southern Baptists as well as show that those who rely on baptism figures as an indicator of church growth may need to rethink this strategy and place a greater emphasis on activating people after their initial baptism.

GROWING
INTEREST IN
MIDDLE WAY
BETWEEN MODERN
AND TRADITIONAL
MARRIAGE

Although arranged marriages appear to be on the decline, there is a trend of believers from various religions seeking a new middle way between traditional and modern relationships based strictly on choice, according to Hinduism Today (May). The decline of interest in arranged marriages even among religious believers with a strong tradition of this practice is evident from a survey of Hindu students in the United Kingdom where 70 percent of the respondents planned to have a "love marriage." But the newspaper adds that reports from "Hindu communities in India, Jewish families in Australia, Vietnamese and upscale Pakistani Muslims show another powerful trend in mature fellowships. Smart young adults worry that a blind marriage based on purely economic, community or astrological points may lead a couple into a loveless wasteland for life. They worry equally about the love marriages they see leading couples into a hell of unresolvable differences initially glossed over in the heat of passion, only to end in divorce."

The newspaper reports that the "new trend combines 20th century personal choice with old-fashioned scrutiny. Basically, couples are engineering their own arranged marriages more, letting families do it less, yet using many of the same tools grandpa would have." In India, initial screenings of potential mates take place through family go-between or "marriage consultancy" companies. Due to the rise of women's status, "compatibility issues are taking on new dimensions. Girls expect more participation in the arrangement." Dating is based on "frank discussions" and is usually unchaperoned, chaste and "investigative." Parental consent before and after engagement is common. "Through all the discussions, the attitude that 'marriage is forever' seems unshakable," the article concludes. (Hinduism Today, 107 Kaholalele Rd., Kapaa, HI 96746-9304)

HOLISTIC
MEDICINE PUT
INTO PRACTICE
IN MAINLINE
CHURCH
DEVELOPMENT
WORK

Ecumenical church-sponsored development workers in Central America are turning to holistic medicine--techniques that their respective church bodies once condemned as "witchcraft" and superstition, according to Ecumenical News International (April 25). "Natural medicine," which draws on folk remedies and indigenous religious healing traditions, has become increasingly popular in Central America as part of the drive to revive

cultural roots. CEDESCRI, an ecumenical development organization in Guatemala, started working with herbal medicine three years ago, "sharing information on plants with local people, along with Bible readings and discussions analyzing the root causes of illness," reports Josephine Carlsson. The organization works within the traditional Mayan worldview, with its emphasis on "harmony between human beings and nature."

At the Lutheran University in San Salvador, El Salvador, there is a three-year degree course in natural medicine, offering courses in acupuncture and herbal medicine. Sonia Vado, a doctor who set up the program, says the courses also address what she calls "family medicine"-- a holistic view of health that encompasses mental health and good family relations. [The mainline Protestant and Catholic involvement in holistic health appears to be a part of their recent concern with indigenous culture and spirituality. Thus the long-time agenda of liberation theology to analyze the "root causes of poverty" has been expanded to also focus on the "root causes of illness."] (Ecumenical News International, P.O. Box 100, 150 route de Ferney, CH-1211, Switzerland)

**TECHNOLOGY
KEY TO
MODERATION
AMONG IRAN'S
MUSLIMS**

There is a growing movement of Muslims in Iran who with the help of computer technology are challenging the concepts of Islamic rule that revolutionized their nation under Ayatollah Khomeini, according to the Wall Street Journal (May 11). The nerve center of what the newspaper calls a movement of "new wave mullahs" is on the top floor of a theological seminary in Qom, the Muslim center of learning, where "dozens of turbaned men with beards and bare feet peck at personal computers. Byte by byte, the young clerics--wired to the world via Sprintnet and other networks-- are computerizing the full text and commentaries of all seven branches of Islamic law, including specific answers to some 12,000 religious questions...For years, many Iranian clerics opposed automating the scriptures; the mullahs feared that easier access to the texts would erode their pre-eminence in Iranian society," reports Peter Waldman. Ali Korani, one of the "new wave" mullahs involved in the computerization project, agrees that the spread of information will "inevitably lead to a more moderate climate." Korani adds that the predominant view of the most influential mullahs is that "we've been hurt by being part of the government. We should return to our original role as spiritual leaders." Yet Waldman notes that the Clinton administration does not recognize this growing pluralism in Iran, instead viewing the nation as a monolithic Islamic republic.

Religion Watch

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