

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

Volume 10 Number 10

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HOW RECEPTIVE ARE EVANGELICALS TO THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT- REPUBLICAN ALLIANCE?

Since the Republican victories last November, the Christian right continues to gain influence within the Republican Party on the national and local levels, but there is still some question as to what extent this movement represents American evangelicals. An article reviewing the election statistics from the 1994 elections in the *Christian Century* (July 5-12) magazine concludes that for the first time the majority of evangelicals identify themselves as Republicans. The Christian right "probably mobilized 4 million activists and reached 50 million voters-- a performance rivaling those of such traditional electoral powerhouses as the gun owners and labor unions...After years of quiet growth, the proportion of evangelicals among party activists is now the same as that of evangelicals among all Republican voters," write researchers John C. Green, James Guth, Lyman Kellstedt and Corwin E. Smidt. Although it was debated how influential the Christian right was in last November's elections, the four scholars maintain that its role was decisive. In races with heavy Christian right involvement, 30 Republican victories were won by margins of 5 percent of the vote or less--"close enough for Christian right help to have made the difference." The researchers add that the Christian right "is probably even more powerful in individual states" than on a national level.

The evangelical Republican vote was more than a matter of "natural ideological attraction," according to the article. The labor of Christian right organizations (especially the Christian Coalition) to mobilize evangelicals appeared to have an effect on voter turnout. For instance, only 54 percent of evangelicals who were not contacted by a religious group reported voting, but over 75 percent of those who were contacted said they voted. The researchers add that the evangelical Republican bloc may continue to grow. "Younger evangelicals are the most heavily Republican age cohort, particularly in the South." While the future of the Christian right will hinge on how the Republican congress will deal with its key social and moral issues, already there are signs that such activists are making an impact in this area. Politicians have shown wide support for the Christian Coalition's "Contract with the American Family." Within Congress, "freshman and sophomore beneficiaries of Christian right assistance have formed a 'Pro-Family Caucus.' Although the caucus has only 16 announced members, the founders expect to have 90 by the fall. The rhetoric of both the [Christian Coalition] and the caucus has been remarkably moderate, reflecting, at least for the moment, realism about the Christian right's strengths and limitations."

The researchers note that "intensive efforts by the Christian right and the Republican Party to attract religious minorities generated only modest gains among born-again African-Americans and Hispanics." While

most black Christians remain firmly in the Democratic camp, the 94 election did show an increase in black involvement in Republican politics and activism. Last November, 27 black Republicans ran for Congress-- nearly twice as many as in 1992. Several successful white Republican gubernatorial candidates also received as much as 40 percent of the black vote, which was once considered to be 90 or even 95 percent Democrat. City Journal (Summer), an urban affairs quarterly of the conservative Manhattan Institute, reports that these new black conservatives are different from the earlier generation of conservative African-Americans intellectuals, such as Shelby Steele and Glen Loury. They are more likely to be strongly religious and emphasize internal change over political change. They also share a determination to translate their ideas "into some kind of action, be it publishing, grassroots organizing, or working with troubled youth," writes Tamar Jacoby. The article cites Rev. Buster Soaries and his fast-growing first Baptist Church, Lincoln Gardens, N.J., as an example of such activism. With a ministry stressing community development, "Soaries likes to distinguish himself from what he calls 'generic conservatism' and its idea that 'market forces can solve all the problems.' For him the church is a kind of third way-- the only institution around that can enforce some 'Do not's' while also instilling hope for a better future."

Researchers Green, Guth, Kellstedt and Smidt found that "evangelical voters were conservative not only on social issues but on economic issues as well, leading even working-class evangelicals to vote Republican in unusually high numbers." A recent study, however, found that many conservative Christians are not very conservative on economic issues such as government spending on health care, minimum wage and federal policies that support corporations over unions. The study, written by Robert Robinson of Indiana University and Nancy Davis of Depauw University and based on 1,359 interviews, found that while there is a wide gulf between religious liberals and conservatives on social issues, the latter were "indistinguishable" from the liberals on racial issues and "slightly more liberal" on economic issues, according to an article in the St. Paul Pioneer Press (August 25). Robinson says Republicans are making a mistake in "assuming there is broad-based support among religious traditionalists for [conservative] economic policies." Another study conducted by U.S. News & World Report (July 10), suggests that the "religious" vote is not found solely among conservative Republicans.

The magazine polled 1,045 registered voters and identified seven "species" of voters according to cultural, economic, and foreign issues, such as abortion, crime, abortion, military spending, and government assistance to the needy. The results showed that the "seven groups are not arrayed along a one-dimensional line from conservative right to liberal left; instead, they can be thought of as seven separate galaxies, clusters of stars, some of which look close together from one vantage point but far apart when viewed from another... The survey, for example, found supporters of the Christian Coalition, Perot voters and African-Americans not clustered in single groups but scattered in many of them..." writes Michael Barone. Religious belief figured highly not only in the "conservative activist" group associated with the Christian right, but also among the "populist traditionalists," who are anti-corporation. The blue collar "ethnic conservatives," are the last remnant of "New Deal" Democrats, but they are also highly religious as well as anti-abortion. In contrast, the "liberal activists," (young, pro-choice and anti-big business), are the least religious, and the "agnostics"

(socially tolerant of most groups and conservative on economic issues) display "little or no religious belief." (Christian Century, 407 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, IL 60605; City Journal, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, NY 10017)

**CATHOLICS ADAPT/
MEGACHURCH
TO OWN NEEDS**

Megachurches are mainly a Protestant phenomenon but there appears to be growing interest and in some cases involvement in forming similarly large, multi-purpose, seeker-oriented churches among Catholics, according to the National Catholic Register (August 13). Catholic parishes could be considered the original megachurches, with the average parish in the U.S. still eight times larger than its Protestant counterpart, according to sociologist Dean Hoge. But other features of megachurches, such as their emphasis on hospitality and entertainment to draw in seekers and addressing contemporary social and psychological needs, are met with more ambivalence by Catholic parishes who fear the dimension of worship is being downplayed by their Protestant counterparts. But segments of the U.S. church are attempting to borrow and adapt features of the megachurches to the Catholic context. Matthew Pinto, a marketing consultant in San Diego, borrowed from the tenets of the megachurches in forming a thriving young adult ministry a few years ago. Such borrowing included using marketing to draw in newcomers, and giving visitors warm welcomes and a sense of involvement and participation.

At St. Timothy's Church in Mesa, Ariz., Fr. Dale Fushek did not consciously follow the megachurch model, but the parish's style of ministry parallels those of other large, growing Protestant churches in the Sunbelt. The parish has grown from 1,500 to 4,500 families in a decade, attracting many through its quality music and 100 active ministries, including ones that minister to social needs such as unemployment. The parish also has a strong evangelism program that includes reaching people through advertisements, radio spots and other marketing techniques. As other megachurches have established satellite ministries throughout the U.S., St. Timothy's founded a liturgy-based youth ministry program, Life Teen, that now boasts 300 chapters around the country. Although many megachurches have downplayed denominational background and doctrine, St. Timothy's emphasizes its Catholic identity. "We talk a lot about the role of the Pope in the Church and the authority of the Church. We talk about the Church's teaching on abortion and we're very strong with the kids about chastity," Fushek says. (National Catholic Register, 15760 Ventura Blvd., Suite 1201, Encino, CA 91436-3001)

**COOPERATION,
MODERATION MARK
DENOMINATIONAL
CONVENTIONS**

In contrast to recent years in which sharp controversy prevailed in several mainline denominational conventions, this past summer witnessed comparative calm and internal cooperation among the delegates. The Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, enjoyed a more united convention than in previous years. The major action of the convention consisted in a major statement of repentance by the 20,000 delegates (or "messengers") asking the black community to forgive them for centuries of organized and blatant racist discrimination by white Baptists. Among Lutherans, serious controversy was avoided by both the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Missouri Synod reelected the incumbent

President, Alvin Barry, with a 64 percent majority. The denomination also reaffirmed the strongly conservative position on the inerrancy of the Bible, a matter which split the church two decades ago. Among the ELCA delegates, potentially explosive division was avoided when the Church Council, the effective ruling body, stated it was deferring action on the highly controversial "Statement on Human Sexuality" for at least two years, reports the Minneapolis Star-Tribune (August 21). Since its release by a task force committee in 1993, the sexuality document had caused deep and bitter rancor.

Replacing the retiring ELCA Presiding Bishop Herbert Chilstrom for the next four years is Dr. George Anderson-- the odds-on favorite among moderates in a denomination that has been divided on social and theological issues. In something of a surprise, Bishop April Larson, the first woman elected to a bishopric in the ELCA, received one-third of the delegates' votes on the final ballot. Similar currents stressing unity were evident in the convention of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which, in contrast to earlier years, produced no media-grabbing controversy. The Star-Tribune article adds that such trends do seem to suggest that such controversial issues as sexuality, racism, and abortion can best be resolved by leaders before reaching the national convention floor where they would face an uncertain outcome. Only in the conservative, 200,000-member Christian Reformed Church did significant conflict emerge. After several years of attempting to overturn the denominational constitution's prohibition of the ordination of women, this summer the delegates to the church convention passed a "local option" ruling which grants jurisdiction for such ordinations to the local congregations, according to Christianity Today magazine (August). Conservatives in the denomination, as well as other conservative Reformed groups, have threatened to break fellowship with the denomination over this decision. (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187)--By Erling Jorstad, RW contributing editor.

**PAST LIFE
THERAPY FINDING
MAINSTREAM
ACCEPTANCE**

The teaching of reincarnation is finding increasing mainstream acceptance through psychotherapeutic techniques known as "past life therapy and research," according to Hinduism Today newspaper (August). The trend toward greater acceptance of Eastern-based reincarnation views was evident at the recent conference of the Association for Past Life Research and Therapies. Speakers and panelists came from a wide range of professions in the mental health field. The keynote address delivered by Dr. Brian Weiss was entitled, "Into the Mainstream." Like other past life therapists, Weiss said he discovered that regressing patients under hypnosis to release repressed traumas may uncover experiences not encountered by the patient in this life. While many Western-trained doctors may ascribe the phenomenon to the "collective unconscious," psychologist Rick Levy says that "more and more traditional therapists like myself are seeing the effectiveness of this work." While there is an attempt to "sanitize the field of all religious content, the idea of karma is often integral to the therapy," according to the newspaper. The conference featured workshops on going back to the "karmic roots" of sexual abuse, and Buddhist perspectives on past-life work in the West. (Hinduism Today, 107 Kaholalele Rd., Kapaa, HI 96746)

**EVANGELICAL
MARKETERS
TARGETING
HISPANICS**

Evangelical publishers and marketers are targeting Hispanics for their products in the realization that they are the fastest growing segment of evangelicals, according to Christianity Today (July 17). There is an "ever-increasing market for books, Bibles, music and videos aimed at nurturing the spiritual development of Latinos evangélicos," writes Andres Tapia. The Christian Broadcasting Network launched Spanish programming last year, and Focus on the Family now features Spanish versions of James Dobson's daily programming on 200 Spanish stations in the U.S. Kregel Publications in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has seen sales of its Spanish Bible-reference material increase an average of 25 percent a year. Record companies are also finding a Hispanic evangelical audience; such contemporary Christian musicians as Carman and Petra are producing Spanish versions of their albums. While producing material in Spanish is not new among evangelicals, most of the previous publications were translations into Spanish for missionary purposes in Latin America.

**NEW JEWISH
MUSIC STRESSES
IDENTITY, WITHOUT
APOLOGY**

New forms of Jewish music are aggressively stressing Jewish identity while blending traditional and modern styles, according to Moment magazine (August). Called "Radical Jewish Culture" or "Jewish Avant Garde Music," the new music taps into Jewish sources ranging from Yiddish folk music (known as klezmer) to new liturgical arrangements. The music, represented by such groups as the Klezmatics and Masada, "represents a newer, more 'in your face' brand of Jewish identity. Unlike the popular Jewish performers of their parents' generation--like Mel Brooks, Alan King, and bandleader Mickey Katz--who transformed the essence of Jewishness into being court jesters for the larger secular culture, these performers seem to have established a defiant stance to mainstream Christian culture. The Klezmatics' new album is called "Jews With Horns"...and Marc Ribot's band Schreck has a song called "Yo! We Killed Your God!" Alicia Svigals of the Klezmatics says that "Klezmer, yiddishkeit and the religion itself were rejected by many first-generation American Jews. In a way, we're going back to the culture of our grandparents and great-grandparents." Writer Joel Lewis notes that the worlds of official Judaism are gradually "recognizing this new Jewish consciousness." (Moment, 4710 41st St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016)

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

**CONGREGANTS
ACCEPT WOMEN
PASTORS WHILE
QUESTIONING
THEIR VIEWS**

* Having a woman pastor may create more positive attitudes towards women in the ministry among laity but it does not appear to change thinking on gender issues and other controversial issues related to feminism. That is one of the findings reported in the new book Women Pastors (Crossroad, \$14.95) by Allison Stokes and the Berkshire Clergywomen. The Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts have become unique for the high concentration of women clergy serving its Congregational (United Church of Christ) churches--50 percent of the congregations are served by women--making the region something of a laboratory for studying issues concerning women in the ministry. Stokes' survey of 181 congregants in the UCC churches in the Berkshires with women pastors showed a finding common in other research on women in the ministry: When parishioners have personal contact with a woman in the role of a pastor, they generally become more accepting of such leadership, claiming that gender becomes a less important issue.

But when it comes to such charged issues as feminism and the use of inclusive (female as well as male) imagery for God, there is more unrest and doubts among the laity. Stokes found that 90 percent of respondents held that women pastors should not be outspoken on women's issues. Sixty three percent believe that inclusive language in hymns, prayers, sermons, and scripture, is not important, and 83 percent do not appreciate hearing female metaphors for God. But 63 percent said they are "better able to think of the Divine in female terms as long as they are thinking abstractly," according to Stokes. She adds that younger people are more likely to accept inclusive language as well as those who "realize that the issue is important to their female pastors." If the women pastors of the Berkshires and their concern for the use of inclusive language is representative of other women clergy in mainline churches, then such congregations are likely to experience increasing division over this issue. Stokes writes that "Clergymen understand, as many in congregations often do not, that much is at stake in the use of language that is inclusive. The connection between the role of women in representing the Divine and the words we use in speaking of the Divine is inextricable."

**INDEX SHOWS
RENEWED STRENGTH
FOR RELIGIOUS
BELIEF, PRACTICE**

* Religious belief and practice in the U.S. appears to be regaining its strength after seven years of declining figures, according to the recent Princeton Religion Research Center Index. The index measures key religious beliefs and practices of the American public, including belief in God, church membership levels, and confidence in churches and the clergy, to provide an overall picture of the state of religion. The Princeton center's newsletter Emerging Trends (June) reports that the index stands at 658, a significant increase since the previous year when it hit an all-time low of 649. The current index score of 658 (out of the perfect score of 1000) is the highest recorded since 1987 (when the index reached 662). The newsletter concludes that "Gloom and doom predictions by some pundits that religion is declining in this country seem greatly exaggerated." (Emerging Trends, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 215, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542)

**SIGNIFICANT
DECLINE IN
BELIEF IN
CANADA,
GREAT BRITAIN**

* There has been a significant decline in religious belief in Canada and the United Kingdom during the past 10 to 15 years, according to a recent Gallup poll. Emerging Trends (June) reports that while nine U.S. residents in 10 believe there is a heaven, only six Canadians in 10 and half of those in the United Kingdom share this belief. During the past 10 years, belief among Canadians in God has dropped from 87 percent to 70 percent and in heaven from 71 percent to 61 percent. But the newsletter notes that "at the same time, Canadian belief in the devil rose from 33 percent in 1985 to 54 percent in 1995, while belief in hell has climbed from 39 percent to 54 percent during this period. The British decline in belief is similar to that of the Canadians. Between 1979 and the present, belief in God has dropped from 76 percent to only 61 percent. The British belief in heaven has declined from 57 percent to 50 percent. But belief in hell and the devil has increased from 22 percent in 1979 to 24 percent in 1995.

**WIDE RELIGIOUS
GAP BETWEEN
EAST AND WEST
GERMAN YOUTH**

* There are major differences between the religious beliefs of East and West German youth, according to a recent study conducted by the German Ministry for Youth. Surveys conducted since the fall of the Berlin Wall have found a lower level of religious belief and practice in the former East Germany than in the West-- a trait that appears strong among the younger generations as well. The German evangelical newsletter Idea (July

12) cites the recent survey as showing that 44 percent of young people (ages 14-27) in West Germany believe that God exists; in the East, the "believers" make up a mere 14 percent. While two-thirds of the younger population doubt the existence of God or a higher power, only 17 percent of the youngsters in the West share this view. In the West, 12 percent of the young people attend church regularly, while 44 percent attend occasionally, and 44 percent seldom or never attend. In comparison, four percent of Eastern youth regularly attend church, while eleven percent attend occasionally, and 85 percent seldom or never attend. (Idea, Postfach 18 20, D-35528 Wetzlar, Germany)

**NORTHERN IRISH
PROTESTANT YOUTH
DRIFT FROM
CHURCH**

* In Northern Ireland, there is a "significant shift away from [church] participation and attendance by Protestant young people," according to a study entitled "Profile of Irish Religion," conducted by the Irish Council of Churches. Quadrant (July), the newsletter of Britain's Christian Research Association, quotes the study as saying that the "Protestant churches face the prospect of becoming largely rural and suburban, middle-class, middle-aged, more conservative and smaller institutions." David Stevens, the author of the study, is more hopeful about the Republic to the south, where there is growth among the smaller evangelical groups. (Quadrant, Christian Research, Vision Bldg., 4 Footscray Road, Eltham, London UK SE9 2TZ)

**LEGIONARIES
EMERGE AS
INFLUENTIAL,
FAST-GROWING
ORDER**

The Legion of Christ, a conservative Catholic religious order, has been gaining attention for its steady growth of religious vocations in a period when most orders are losing members, as well as for its influence within the Vatican, according to the Rome-based Inside The Vatican magazine (May). The Legion of Christ (or the Legionaries) was started by Mexican priest Marcial Maciel in 1941 and has gained notoriety for its military-like discipline and demanding training, which can last up to 15 years, and its commitment to church teachings and the pope. There are 300 priests in the order and 3,000 more in training. The magazine says that "no other religious congregation has registered such rapid expansion in recent decades. Every 10 years, the number of vocations has doubled." The legion operates six seminaries, 80 schools, 98 mission centers, 10 universities, and 640 lay training centers in 15 countries. The organization runs a lay movement, Regnum Christi, which now numbers 45,000 members worldwide. Pope John Paul II and other Vatican officials hold the Legionaries in high esteem, which was evident when the group's new Roman university, Regina Apostolorum, was granted the sought-after status of "Athenaeum" in "record time." Observers have noted that since most members are still in training, the Legionaries' impact on the church is only likely to increase in the near future. (Inside The Vatican, Via delle mura, Aurelie 7C, Rome 00165, Italy)

**SERB MILITANTS
GAIN INFLUENCE
IN SERBIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

There appears to be a growing and influential faction within the Serbian Orthodox Church sympathizing with the anti-Muslim, nationalist Serbian movement active in Bosnia, according to the Christian Century (August 16-23). In a recent interview with the official magazine of the Orthodox church in Montenegro, Bosnian Serbian leader Radovan Karadzic for the first time openly speaks of his Orthodox faith and reveals the connections between some segments of the church and Serb militancy. Karadzic says that his military and political movement that has sought to

reclaim Bosnia and Herzegovina for Orthodox Serbs has been led by the Holy Spirit. "We have a firm belief that we are on God's right path and that [Bosnian Serb] folk will pay their debt to Serbdom and Orthodoxy...God gave us the gift of fate to accomplish this and, if he permits, we will save Serbia and Montenegro from devastation." He says that "We aim at healing, and healing requires wholeness. There is no wholeness without spiritual and worldly unity."

Karadzic adds that the "path to salvation for Serbs of the Muslim faith is to return to Orthodoxy," although he would not want to coerce people into the church. He wants the Orthodox Church to play the same prominent role in the former Yugoslavia as it does in Greece, and favors retaining Orthodoxy's old Julian calendar in order to remain distinct from Western Christians. More important than Karadzic's religious views is the question of why an official church publication would publish his ethno-religious views [Serbian Orthodox leaders have claimed neutrality in the conflict]. Paul Mojzes, a specialist on Yugoslavia, writes that nowhere in the magazine called *Svetigora* do the "editors indicate any reservations about the views expressed. To the contrary, the other articles in *Svetigora* are equally strident, pointing to the emergence of a militant Orthodox fundamentalism that previously had not been revealed to ecumenical visitors."

Religion Watch

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- *The Christian Right, the Republicans and the Evangelicals*
- *Catholic "Megaparishes"? Therapeutic Reincarnation*

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MAINSTREAM
ACCEPTANCE**

The teaching of reincarnation is finding increasing mainstream acceptance through psychotherapeutic techniques known as "past life therapy and research," according to Hinduism Today newspaper (August). The trend toward greater acceptance of Eastern-based reincarnation views was evident at the recent conference of the Association for Past Life Research and Therapies. Speakers and panelists came from a wide range of professions in the mental health field. The keynote address delivered by Dr. Brian Weiss was entitled, "Into the Mainstream." Like other past life therapists, Weiss said he discovered that regressing patients under hypnosis to release repressed traumas may uncover experiences not encountered by the patient in this life. While many Western-trained doctors may ascribe the phenomenon to the "collective unconscious," psychologist Rick Levy says that "more and more traditional therapists like myself are seeing the effectiveness of this work." While there is an attempt to "sanitize the field of all religious content, the idea of karma is often integral to the therapy," according to the newspaper. The conference featured workshops on going back to the "karmic roots" of sexual abuse, and Buddhist perspectives on past-life work in the West. (Hinduism Today, 107 Kaholalele Rd., Kapaa, HI 96746)

**EVANGELICAL
MARKETERS
TARGETING
HISPANICS**

Evangelical publishers and marketers are targeting Hispanics for their products in the realization that they are the fastest growing segment of evangelicals, according to Christianity Today (July 17). There is an "ever-increasing market for books, Bibles, music and videos aimed at nurturing the spiritual development of Latinos evangélicos," writes Andres Tapia. The Christian Broadcasting Network launched Spanish programming last year, and Focus on the Family now features Spanish versions of James Dobson's daily programming on 200 Spanish stations in the U.S. Kregel Publications in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has seen sales of its Spanish Bible-reference material increase an average of 25 percent a year. Record companies are also finding a Hispanic evangelical audience; such contemporary Christian musicians as Carman and Petra are producing Spanish versions of their albums. While producing material in Spanish is not new among evangelicals, most of the previous publications were translations into Spanish for missionary purposes in Latin America.

**NEW JEWISH
MUSIC STRESSES
IDENTITY, WITHOUT
APOLOGY**

New forms of Jewish music are aggressively stressing Jewish identity while blending traditional and modern styles, according to Moment magazine (August). Called "Radical Jewish Culture" or "Jewish Avant Garde Music," the new music taps into Jewish sources ranging from Yiddish folk music (known as klezmer) to new liturgical arrangements. The music, represented by such groups as the Klezmatics and Masada, "represents a newer, more 'in your face' brand of Jewish identity. Unlike the popular Jewish performers of their parents' generation--like Mel Brooks, Alan King, and bandleader Mickey Katz--who transformed the essence of Jewishness into being court jesters for the larger secular culture, these performers seem to have established a defiant stance to mainstream Christian culture. The Klezmatics' new album is called "Jews With Horns"...and Marc Ribot's band Schreck has a song called "Yo! We Killed Your God!" Alicia Svigals of the Klezmatics says that "Klezmer, yiddishkeit and the religion itself were rejected by many first-generation American Jews. In a way, we're going back to the culture of our grandparents and great-grandparents." Writer Joel Lewis notes that the worlds of official Judaism are gradually "recognizing this new Jewish consciousness." (Moment, 4710 41st St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016)

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

**CONGREGANTS
ACCEPT WOMEN
PASTORS WHILE
QUESTIONING
THEIR VIEWS**

* Having a woman pastor may create more positive attitudes towards women in the ministry among laity but it does not appear to change thinking on gender issues and other controversial issues related to feminism. That is one of the findings reported in the new book Women Pastors (Crossroad, \$14.95) by Allison Stokes and the Berkshire Clergywomen. The Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts have become unique for the high concentration of women clergy serving its Congregational (United Church of Christ) churches--50 percent of the congregations are served by women--making the region something of a laboratory for studying issues concerning women in the ministry. Stokes' survey of 181 congregants in the UCC churches in the Berkshires with women pastors showed a finding common in other research on women in the ministry: When parishioners have personal contact with a woman in the role of a pastor, they generally become more accepting of such leadership, claiming that gender becomes a less important issue.

But when it comes to such charged issues as feminism and the use of inclusive (female as well as male) imagery for God, there is more unrest and doubts among the laity. Stokes found that 90 percent of respondents held that women pastors should not be outspoken on women's issues. Sixty three percent believe that inclusive language in hymns, prayers, sermons, and scripture, is not important, and 83 percent do not appreciate hearing female metaphors for God. But 63 percent said they are "better able to think of the Divine in female terms as long as they are thinking abstractly," according to Stokes. She adds that younger people are more likely to accept inclusive language as well as those who "realize that the issue is important to their female pastors." If the women pastors of the Berkshires and their concern for the use of inclusive language is representative of other women clergy in mainline churches, then such congregations are likely to experience increasing division over this issue. Stokes writes that "Clergymen understand, as many in congregations often do not, that much is at stake in the use of language that is inclusive. The connection between the role of women in representing the Divine and the words we use in speaking of the Divine is inextricable."

**INDEX SHOWS
RENEWED STRENGTH
FOR RELIGIOUS
BELIEF, PRACTICE**

* Religious belief and practice in the U.S. appears to be regaining its strength after seven years of declining figures, according to the recent Princeton Religion Research Center Index. The index measures key religious beliefs and practices of the American public, including belief in God, church membership levels, and confidence in churches and the clergy, to provide an overall picture of the state of religion. The Princeton center's newsletter Emerging Trends (June) reports that the index stands at 658, a significant increase since the previous year when it hit an all-time low of 649. The current index score of 658 (out of the perfect score of 1000) is the highest recorded since 1987 (when the index reached 662). The newsletter concludes that "Gloom and doom predictions by some pundits that religion is declining in this country seem greatly exaggerated." (Emerging Trends, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 215, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542)

**SIGNIFICANT
DECLINE IN
BELIEF IN
CANADA,
GREAT BRITAIN**

* There has been a significant decline in religious belief in Canada and the United Kingdom during the past 10 to 15 years, according to a recent Gallup poll. Emerging Trends (June) reports that while nine U.S. residents in 10 believe there is a heaven, only six Canadians in 10 and half of those in the United Kingdom share this belief. During the past 10 years, belief among Canadians in God has dropped from 87 percent to 70 percent and in heaven from 71 percent to 61 percent. But the newsletter notes that "at the same time, Canadian belief in the devil rose from 33 percent in 1985 to 54 percent in 1995, while belief in hell has climbed from 39 percent to 54 percent during this period. The British decline in belief is similar to that of the Canadians. Between 1979 and the present, belief in God has dropped from 76 percent to only 61 percent. The British belief in heaven has declined from 57 percent to 50 percent. But belief in hell and the devil has increased from 22 percent in 1979 to 24 percent in 1995.

**WIDE RELIGIOUS
GAP BETWEEN
EAST AND WEST
GERMAN YOUTH**

* There are major differences between the religious beliefs of East and West German youth, according to a recent study conducted by the German Ministry for Youth. Surveys conducted since the fall of the Berlin Wall have found a lower level of religious belief and practice in the former East Germany than in the West-- a trait that appears strong among the younger generations as well. The German evangelical newsletter Idea (July

12) cites the recent survey as showing that 44 percent of young people (ages 14-27) in West Germany believe that God exists; in the East, the "believers" make up a mere 14 percent. While two-thirds of the younger population doubt the existence of God or a higher power, only 17 percent of the youngsters in the West share this view. In the West, 12 percent of the young people attend church regularly, while 44 percent attend occasionally, and 44 percent seldom or never attend. In comparison, four percent of Eastern youth regularly attend church, while eleven percent attend occasionally, and 85 percent seldom or never attend. (Idea, Postfach 18 20, D-35528 Wetzlar, Germany)

**NORTHERN IRISH
PROTESTANT YOUTH
DRIFT FROM
CHURCH**

* In Northern Ireland, there is a "significant shift away from [church] participation and attendance by Protestant young people," according to a study entitled "Profile of Irish Religion," conducted by the Irish Council of Churches. Quadrant (July), the newsletter of Britain's Christian Research Association, quotes the study as saying that the "Protestant churches face the prospect of becoming largely rural and suburban, middle-class, middle-aged, more conservative and smaller institutions." David Stevens, the author of the study, is more hopeful about the Republic to the south, where there is growth among the smaller evangelical groups. (Quadrant, Christian Research, Vision Bldg., 4 Footscray Road, Eltham, London UK SE9 2TZ)

**LEGIONARIES
EMERGE AS
INFLUENTIAL,
FAST-GROWING
ORDER**

The Legion of Christ, a conservative Catholic religious order, has been gaining attention for its steady growth of religious vocations in a period when most orders are losing members, as well as for its influence within the Vatican, according to the Rome-based Inside The Vatican magazine (May). The Legion of Christ (or the Legionaries) was started by Mexican priest Marcial Maciel in 1941 and has gained notoriety for its military-like discipline and demanding training, which can last up to 15 years, and its commitment to church teachings and the pope. There are 300 priests in the order and 3,000 more in training. The magazine says that "no other religious congregation has registered such rapid expansion in recent decades. Every 10 years, the number of vocations has doubled." The legion operates six seminaries, 80 schools, 98 mission centers, 10 universities, and 640 lay training centers in 15 countries. The organization runs a lay movement, Regnum Christi, which now numbers 45,000 members worldwide. Pope John Paul II and other Vatican officials hold the Legionaries in high esteem, which was evident when the group's new Roman university, Regina Apostolorum, was granted the sought-after status of "Athenaeum" in "record time." Observers have noted that since most members are still in training, the Legionaries' impact on the church is only likely to increase in the near future. (Inside The Vatican, Via delle mura, Aurelie 7C, Rome 00165, Italy)

**SERB MILITANTS
GAIN INFLUENCE
IN SERBIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

There appears to be a growing and influential faction within the Serbian Orthodox Church sympathizing with the anti-Muslim, nationalist Serbian movement active in Bosnia, according to the Christian Century (August 16-23). In a recent interview with the official magazine of the Orthodox church in Montenegro, Bosnian Serbian leader Radovan Karadzic for the first time openly speaks of his Orthodox faith and reveals the connections between some segments of the church and Serb militancy. Karadzic says that his military and political movement that has sought to

reclaim Bosnia and Herzegovina for Orthodox Serbs has been led by the Holy Spirit. "We have a firm belief that we are on God's right path and that [Bosnian Serb] folk will pay their debt to Serbdom and Orthodoxy... God gave us the gift of fate to accomplish this and, if he permits, we will save Serbia and Montenegro from devastation." He says that "We aim at healing, and healing requires wholeness. There is no wholeness without spiritual and worldly unity."

Karadzic adds that the "path to salvation for Serbs of the Muslim faith is to return to Orthodoxy," although he would not want to coerce people into the church. He wants the Orthodox Church to play the same prominent role in the former Yugoslavia as it does in Greece, and favors retaining Orthodoxy's old Julian calendar in order to remain distinct from Western Christians. More important than Karadzic's religious views is the question of why an official church publication would publish his ethno-religious views [Serbian Orthodox leaders have claimed neutrality in the conflict]. Paul Mojzes, a specialist on Yugoslavia, writes that nowhere in the magazine called *Svetigora* do the "editors indicate any reservations about the views expressed. To the contrary, the other articles in *Svetigora* are equally strident, pointing to the emergence of a militant Orthodox fundamentalism that previously had not been revealed to ecumenical visitors."

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