

Religion Notes: Scholars Urged to Address Present

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Scholars Urged to Address Present

By JOHN DART, *Times Religion Writer*

Phenomena such as the Christian right, Islamic fundamentalism and international religious strife might be better understood by the public if religion scholars would lend their commentary and expertise more often, an academic leader claims.

American scholars in religious studies "are still writing term papers to each other" rather than developing ways to contribute insights, charged Walter H. Capps of UC Santa Barbara, president of the Council of the Study of Religion, in the October issue of the council's bulletin.

The bulletin goes to about 15,000 members of a dozen academic societies for teachers of religious studies in universities, colleges and seminaries.

"The rationale we frequently offer to justify the academic study of religion is that it is impossible to understand a particular culture without coming to terms with its religion," Capps wrote.

World 'of the Past Tense'

"I believe this is so. But if we mean this, why don't we scholars of religion know more about culture?" Capps asked. Too many scholars, he said, focus their inquiry to "the world of the past tense."

Besides the reluctance of many teachers to apply their background knowledge to contemporary situa-

tions, Capps said, few thinkers in religious studies are coming up with new comprehensive theories of religious behavior.

Rather, he said, "currently, we are looking primarily to anthropology, and there, most specifically, to the work of the speculative anthropologists like Victor Turner, Mary Douglas and Clifford Geertz," he said.

"Our field," Capps said, has not produced general theorists except for a few such as Paul Tillich, a theologian, and Mircea Eliade, whose speciality was myth and histories of religion. Religion specialists have since the 19th Century have relied on fundamental theories from outside religious studies—by sociologists Max Weber and Emile Durkheim and psychotherapists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, for example.

Not Approached Directly

Weber's influence, and those of others, Capps said, seems to confirm "that it is nearly impossible to approach religion directly. Religion will always be studied through the avenue of something else."

Newsmaking socio-political change may provide avenues for new theories and useful comments, Capps indicated. He cited the advice of Reinhold Niebuhr to future ministers to use both the Bible and the newspaper as source materials.

Most of his criticism, Capps said, was aimed at the largest religion scholars group, the American Academy of Religion.

Less known to him, he conceded, is the work of members of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which will hold its annual meeting next weekend jointly with the Religious Research Assn. in Baltimore.

Seminars and papers are scheduled by the two groups on the Moral Majority, the new religious movements, religious beliefs of congressmen and the effect of clergywomen on church volunteerism, among other topics. Philip Hammond, a UC Santa Barbara colleague of Capps, is chairing a session on "Socio-political Consequences of the Current Evangelical Movement."

In addition to the canonization ceremony in New York City Nov. 1 for **Czar Nicholas II** and 8,000 other victims of the Russian revolution, a similar service will be held Nov. 8 in Los Angeles at Holy Transfiguration Russian Orthodox Cathedral.

Father **Stephan Hill** of the Holy Twelve Apostles Russian Orthodox Chapel, who will participate in the Los Angeles services, said, "It is time that American Christians and indeed all Christians worldwide recognize the extent of the vast

slaughter which took place and is still taking place today in the Soviet Union."

The ceremony in New York City will be the largest of its kind since the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia was established in 1920.

Many Lutheran churches will observe Reformation Sunday tomorrow, including a joint service 4 p.m. for Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod churches at St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Riverside. Only the first 3,000 persons will be seated for an American Lutheran Church-backed Reformation fiesta at 4 p.m. next Saturday at the old Nazarene College auditorium in Pasadena, where the Rev. **Lloyd Svendsbye**, president of Luther Seminary, will be the speaker.

Susan Ruth of Baldwin Park told this anecdote to *The Lutheran magazine*: A 5-year-old was helping me on a church cleanup day. We discovered a penny on the floor. "Pick it up and put in in your shoe," I said. "It will bring you luck." Feeling guilty about telling such a tale, I tried to retract. "It's not *really* lucky," I told the child. "I know," she replied. "Now if I found \$300—that would be lucky."