
over, nearly 11 million CNN viewers had switched back to the Big Three broadcast networks. For CNN, it has been downhill ever since. Only with the O. J. Simpson murder case did the network get some transient relief. In the last year alone, CNN viewership has tumbled by 25 percent. By May, only 370,000 TV sets were tuned to the channel at any given time. More people watch ABC or CBS at 3 A.M. than watch the Atlanta-based cable news network during daylight hours.

Rosenstiel, a national correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, sheds no tears for CNN. The network could have revolutionized TV journalism; instead it has only diminished it, he says. Although it broadcasts around the clock, its news shows are not much longer than the 22-minute network broadcasts. Much of CNN's programming is "strangely tired and unimaginative," Rosenstiel complains. Not only that, he says, but CNN has contributed to the "loss of control" by other major news organizations over what they broadcast or print. The result has been a general "rush to sensationalism" and an overemphasis on interpretation of the news instead of old-fashioned newsgathering.

Established by entrepreneur Ted Turner in 1980, CNN soon realized that it could sell its oceans of news footage to hundreds of local

TV news operations. Local affiliates of the Big Three then forced them to share their own previously jealously guarded footage, Rosenstiel says. This put local news directors—many of whom had "far lower standards than their network counterparts," according to Rosenstiel—in a position to call the shots as to what footage got aired and what became "news." When Gennifer Flowers's claim to have had a long affair with candidate Bill Clinton surfaced in a supermarket tabloid during the 1992 presidential campaign, the Big Three news divisions, seeking to verify her claim, decided not to run the story that night, but local affiliates decided otherwise: The story aired.

CNN also has distracted print journalists from their primary job, Rosenstiel contends. After the cable network's Gulf War scoop, newspaper editors made sure to have the 24-hour news network constantly on view in their newsrooms. "Editors who watched CNN all the time started to assume that their readers were watching, too," Rosenstiel says. Believing readers had already absorbed the main news about the Midwest floods of 1993, for example, editors at the *Chicago Tribune* "barely covered" the disaster. Falling for the "myth of CNN," Rosenstiel says, editors are giving up hard news for stories based on "analysis" and "attitude"—or, as one detractor puts it, for "soufflé journalism."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

An Islamic Reformation?

"Islam and the West" by Brian Beedham, in *The Economist* (Aug. 6, 1994), 25 St. James St., London, England SW1A 1HG.

Sooner or later, a clash between Islamic fundamentalism and the West is all but inevitable, some thinkers on both sides warn. And it could be sooner: If the murderous Islamic rebels in Algeria gain power, there may be a domino effect in North Africa—and rancorous political conflict, at least, between Islam and

Europe. But if the worst can be avoided on the southern side of the Mediterranean, the prospects brighten for peaceful coexistence, argues Beedham, a journalist and former foreign affairs editor of the *Economist*. The religious revival now under way in the Muslim world, he believes, could well lead to reformation and democracy, paralleling what happened in the West centuries ago.

It is not the Koran—the word of God as revealed to and transcribed by Mohammed in Arabia 1,400 years ago—that stands in the way of democracy, sexual equality, and a modern

economy in the Muslim countries, Beedham points out. Rather, it is the exclusive power that a small group of men—the scholars of Islam, the ulema—possesses to interpret the Koran. “The Koran may be the voice of God, but only about 80 of its 6,000 verses lay down rules of public law, and not many of those 80 have obvious application to today’s world. Interpretation is needed,” Beedham writes.

Most popular discontent in the Muslim world today is directed at corrupt politicians, and many religious leaders have discredited themselves by backing the strongmen. In the

eyes of “radicals longing to revive the old vigor of Islam,” much of the clerical establishment is “weary, compromised, and contemptible.”

Most Muslims still are willing to leave *ijtihad* (interpretation) of the Koran to the scholars—but slowly, Beedham believes, that may be changing. Already, a number of “forward-looking Muslims,” such as Abdullahi An-Naim, a Sudanese lawyer who spoke at a recent seminar in Kuala Lumpur, are making the case that Muslims must start thinking of *ijtihad* as a function of the whole people, not the special right of a scholastic elite. Beedham hears echoes of the 16th-century Prot-

The Return of Natural Law

Ordinarily, it should not be left to judges to say what natural law requires, the late Russell Kirk, author of *The Conservative Mind* (1953), argues in *Policy Review* (Summer 1994). Natural law is “derived from divine commandment; from the nature of humankind; from abstract Reason; or from long experience of mankind in community.”

Not since Associate Justice Joseph Story adorned the Supreme Court of the United States, early in the 19th century, has any member of the Supreme Court had much to say about natural law. Nevertheless, in recent decades a number of Supreme Court decisions seem to have been founded upon natural-law notions of a sort. I think, for instance, of the Warren Court’s decision (the opinion written by Chief Justice Warren himself) that congressional districts within the several states must be so drawn in their boundaries as to contain so nearly as possible the same number of persons within the several districts—a matter previously left to the discretion of state legislatures. . . .

As [Orestes] Brownson remarks, the natural law (or law of God) and the American civil law are not ordinarily at swords’ points. Large elements of natural law entered into the common law of England—and therefore into the common law of the United States—over the centuries; and the Roman law, so eminent in the science of jurisprudence, expresses the natural law enunciated by the Roman juriconsults. No civilization ever has attempted to maintain the bed of justice by direct application of natural-law doctrines by magistrates; necessar-

ily, it is by edict, rescript, and statute that any state keeps the peace through a system of courts. It simply will not do to maintain that private interpretation of natural law should be the means by which conflicting claims are settled.

Rather, natural law ought to help form the judgments of the persons who are lawmakers. . . . The civil law should be shaped in conformity to the natural law—which originated, in Cicero’s words, “before any written law existed or any state had been established.”

It does not follow that judges should be permitted to push aside the Constitution, or statutory laws, in order to substitute their private interpretations of what the law of nature declares. To give the judiciary such power would be to establish what might be called an archonocracy, a domination of judges, supplanting the constitutional republic; also it surely would produce some curious and unsettling decisions, sweeping away precedent, which would be found highly distressing by friends to classical and Christian natural law. . . . Left to their several private judgments of what is “natural,” some judges indubitably would do mischief to the person and the republic.

estant reformers in these ideas.

"For the enthusiasts of Islamic revivalism," Beedham notes, "as for men like John Wycliffe and Jan Hus in the years before the start of the Reformation, going back to the roots means a return to the presumed simplicities of the early days of the religion, a new embrace of the religion's first writings." Just as a multitude of sects came into being during the pre-Reformation period in Europe, so the Islamic revival has produced a large number of more-or-less autonomous groups devoted to good works (health clinics, canteens, basic schooling) in the slum-suburbs of the big Muslim cities.

Beedham sees further parallels. In the early 16th century, gold and silver imported from the New World had a destabilizing effect on Europe's economy, but the new riches offered the possibility of long-term prosperity; massive purchases of Arab oil by the industrialized world are having a similar impact in Muslim countries. Finally, just as cultural intercourse with the Arab empire long ago renewed Europe's connection with its intellectual roots in classical Greece, so today the flow of Western culture and technology into the Islamic world may foster great intellectual change. And it may not take as long to happen. New ideas now travel

faster, Beedham observes, "and the people of today's Muslim countries are on the whole much readier to absorb" them than were the pre-Reformation Europeans.

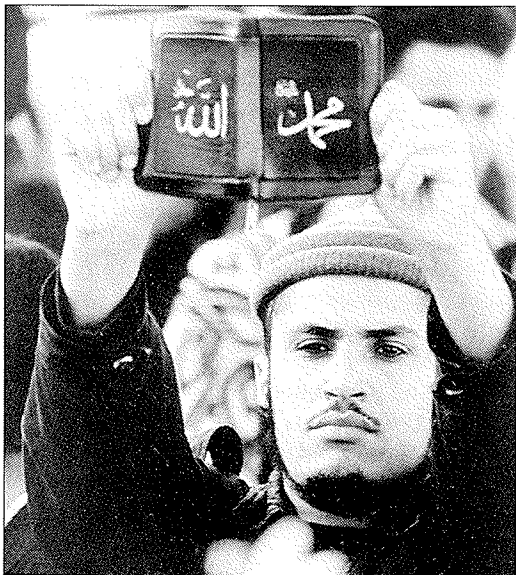
The Strength Of Strictness

"Why Strict Churches Are Strong" by Laurence R. Iannaccone, in *American Journal of Sociology* (Mar. 1994), 5835 S. Kimbark, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

While membership in virtually all of the "mainline" Protestant churches has declined during the last three decades, the ranks of Mormons, Pentecostals, and other more conservative denominations have rapidly expanded. Iannaccone, an economist at California's Santa Clara University, claims that their secret is in their strictness.

"Strict churches proclaim an exclusive truth—a closed, comprehensive, and eternal doctrine," he notes. "They demand adherence to a distinctive faith, morality, and lifestyle. They condemn deviance, shun dissenters, and repudiate the outside world. They frequently embrace 'eccentric traits,' such as distinctive diet, dress, or speech, that invite ridicule, isolation, and persecution." Mormons abstain from alcohol and caffeine, Jehovah's Witnesses refuse blood transfusions, and Seventh-Day Adventists avoid eating meat. Why, the economist asks, would a rational person not turn to one of the less demanding faiths in the religious marketplace?

The answer, he argues (leaving theological questions aside), is that the strictness serves a rational purpose: It screens out "lukewarm" adherents. They are what economists call "free riders," who take more than they give. "Church members may attend services, call upon the pastor for counsel, enjoy the fellowship of their peers, and so forth, without ever putting a dollar in the plate or bringing a dish to the potluck [supper]." Their presence in the congregation reduces the collective levels of participation and enthusiasm. "One need not look far," Iannaccone says, "to find an anemic congregation plagued by free-rider problems—a visit to the nearest lib-



Are Islamic rebels on the march to power in Algeria?