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Religion Newsmaker of the Year: President Obama

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NCR Today

Every year, on *Interfaith Voices*, I interview leading religion journalists about the top religion stories of the year just past, and about the top religion newsmakers of the year. This year, I talked with Kevin Eckstrom, Editor of *Religion News Service*, and Kim Lawton of *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly* on PBS TV.

Both of these top-notch analysts named President Obama as the "Religion Newsmaker of the Year." They cited his speech at Notre Dame University, his address to the Muslim world in Cairo, his faith-based outreach, and even his Nobel Peace Prize speech in Oslo, where he cited the just war theory, and for many, gave new voice to the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr. I agree with them. Whether you agree or disagree with the substance of what he had to say, he has become a consequential figure in the world of public religion and public theology.

Second in the running was Pope Benedict XVI, who has begun to "define" his papacy more sharply in 2009. We discussed his outreach to conservative Anglicans, but neither analyst thought that many "in the U.S. at least" would take him up on the offer. However, a comment by Kevin Eckstrom caught my attention: he said that there is a small but discernable movement in the other direction: dissatisfied Catholics joining the Episcopal Church.

A trend worth watching in 2010?

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