

# RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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## LITURGICAL INTEREST GROWING AMONG EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

During the past several years there has been some movement of evangelicals, mostly intellectuals, to embrace more liturgical church traditions, such as Anglicanism and Eastern Orthodoxy [see December 1986 RELIGION WATCH]. But more recently, the move toward liturgical worship and traditional observances appears to be taking place within formerly non-liturgical evangelical churches and denominations, as well as outside them.

The Twin Cities Christian (March 8), a newspaper for evangelicals in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, reports that "non-liturgical churches are beginning to take another look at the observances abandoned by their founding reformers." Such observances of the liturgical church calendar as Advent (a time of preparation before Christmas) are increasingly being followed by Assemblies of God churches, according to theologian David Nichols. "I wouldn't say they do it in a wholesale liturgical way, but just the use of the word is a big step. Being from an Assemblies background, we would say, 'Advent? That's what the Lutherans talk about,'" he says. Another observer adds that there has been a reoccurrence of Lenten observation among different groups of Christians; popular evangelical radio broadcaster David Mains has "kind of introduced Lent among Evangelicals without calling it Lent." A Baptist pastor says, "I really feel that the '90s will see a move of the church toward more traditional-style services. The baby boomer generation is coming back to church, and they will be attracted to some of the formalism."

The move toward liturgy extends beyond Minnesota [where the Lutheran-influenced culture could partly account for this development]. U.S. News & World Report (January 15) notes that while most mainstream evangelicals still prefer informal worship, there are a "growing numbers of traditionally nonliturgical churches where clergy are incorporating ecclesiastical rituals into their Sunday services." A Nazarene church in Kansas attended by high church officials is incorporating elements of Anglican liturgy into its services; "several churches in the North American Baptist Conference have undergone a similar transformation," with one congregation using Anglican chants, writes Jeffery Sheler. One influence behind this movement is Robert E. Webber, a Wheaton College theologian and Anglican convert who now conducts seminars on the subject for interested clerics. Church historian Martin E. Marty says that the largely ahistorical nature of American evangelicalism is drawing some churches to liturgy to "feel a connectedness to the past."

More liturgy and tradition in evangelical churches may also cause

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divisions in their respective denominations. A case in point is the Reformed Episcopal Church, a small "low church" evangelical denomination which broke from the mainline Episcopal Church in the 19th century over its emphasis on the sacraments and "high church" liturgy. The December issue of the denomination's journal, Episcopal Recorder reported that a "time of unrest" is developing in the church as new practices, such as weekly communion and the introduction of clerical garb, are finding their way into worship services. In an interview with RW, Louis Traycik, an associate pastor in a Philadelphia R.E. church, says that this development is taking place among newer members, especially seminarians, who "want to be an authentic part of Anglicanism."

There is also more contact taking place between Reformed Episcopalians and continuing (or traditionalist) Anglican bodies, which are often "high church." While a church committee is investigating the new liturgical involvement, Traycik says those who actively oppose the movement are a small minority. He doesn't expect an open conflict in the church unless the movement challenges R.E. theology, such as its doctrine that baptism is only symbolic. Interestingly enough, much of the interest in liturgy has come from the influence of Reconstructionism (which holds that Old Testament law should run the church and society) in the church. Such Reconstructionist leaders as James Jordan and Ray Sutton are Reformed Episcopalians and are part of the movement's "high church" wing led by Gary North in Tyler, Texas. (Twin Cities Christian, 1619 Portland Ave., S., Minneapolis, MN 55404; Episcopal Recorder, 4417 Tyson Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19135)

## BLACK CHURCH REVIVING THROUGH SELF-HELP PROGRAMS

Black churches are being revitalized throughout the U.S. as they increase their emphasis on self-help social programs, according to Portland, Oregon's Sunday Oregonian newspaper (February 18). This trend can be seen in Portland, where its more than 50 black churches are reporting a recent upturn in membership and attendance. Concern over crime and drugs in the black community has brought people back to the church, where they are finding a new emphasis on programs fighting social problems-- "something that hasn't happened to this degree since the civil rights movement," says one Pentecostal minister. Duke University sociologist C. Eric Lincoln says there has been a nationwide "resurgence in the black church. The past decade has been hard on black people...So the church is once again having to do the things for black people that society is not willing to do." [In an interview with RW in June, 1987, Lincoln spotted the move of black churches toward self-help programs, although then it was taking place "slowly and spasmodically."]

Lincoln adds that such social concern "means housing for the indigent, day care and drug rehabilitation. It's not just symbolic. Many of the larger black churches in Houston, Los Angeles and New York have begun comprehensive programs." Lincoln, who recently finished a 12-year study of the nation's black churches to be released this summer, says that he expects black churches to play an increasingly powerful national role, as they have gained more unity through such pan-denominational groups as National Congress of Black Churches. "There will be a trend toward mobilization of black energies under the aegis of the church. The inability of black denominations to work together is legendary...But I think we will see the black church in the 1990s work together in a more unified way," he adds. The growing social ministry of black churches, at least in Portland, is also partly due to influence of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition. The coalition "made us realize that power comes by putting the forces together," says one church official.

## NEW HOTLINE DEEPENING AMERICAN CATHOLIC DIVISIONS?

The rapid growth of a new telephone hotline is galvanizing conservative Catholics on national and local issues and possibly intensifying divisions between American Catholics, according to the National Catholic Register (April 1). Voice Network International, which is based in Chicago but available on both the West and East coasts, offers conservative news and views as well as urging callers to "exert public pressure" on public officials regarding various issues. The hotline received 92 callers the day it opened last November; by March, the "number of call-ins had jumped to nearly ten times that number," reports Bob Olmstead. Among the first to help the network with fundraising was California Republican Congressman Robert Dornan, who called the new technology vital to breaking the control of the "dominant media culture," where the "religious views of conservatives are anathema to news reporters," the article says. The hotline's polemical style and "rapid growth, along with a parallel spurt in membership of the Chicago-based Call to Action, an activist group on the left, may suggest an increasing polarization among Catholics, both locally and throughout the United States."

Call to Action is best known for its sponsorship of a full page ad in the February 28 New York Times. The ad, signed by over 4,500 Catholic laity and clergy [including one bishop], called for dialogue and reform on such issues as greater participation in forming church teaching and academic freedom for theologians. The National Catholic Reporter (March 23) notes that since the ad ran, the organization has received an additional 200 signatures a day, amounting to 10,000 by mid-March. [Call to Action's strength may seem to contradict RW's comment last month that Catholic dissenting groups are "giving up hope of influencing the institutional church." While Call to Action may represent a more moderate kind of dissent, other groups mentioned last month, such as Matthew Fox's Creation Spirituality, the various feminist organizations tied to Woman-Church and the gay Catholic group, Dignity, no longer emphasize reform of church structures but rather propose new church models] (National Catholic Register, 12700 Ventura Blvd., Suite 200, Studio City, CA 91604)

## HOMESCHOOLING GROWING AND INCLUDING CATHOLICS

Since RW reported on the growth of homeschooling among conservative Protestants in the U.S. a few years ago (see September '85 and May '86 issues), the movement has continued its momentum, finding a following among conservative Catholics and even some "secular humanists," according to the National Catholic Reporter (March 16). The newspaper reports that there has been a twenty percent increase of homeschoolers since 1985, with approximately 300,000 students receiving instruction in their homes (some homeschooling advocates put the number up to one million students). Most parents who teach their children at home do so for religious reasons; "they do not approve 'secular humanist' values promulgated in the public schools," writes Joe Feuerherd.

The homeschooling movement is extending beyond its fundamentalist and evangelical base, as a "growing number of Catholics...peace activists and even self-proclaimed 'secular humanists'...are so disillusioned by conventional schooling that they make the commitment to teach at home." A popular homeschooling curriculum for Catholics is the Front Royal, Virginia-based Seton Home Study School [the best way to find the variety of philosophies in the homeschooling movement is through its many



networks and curriculum programs], providing programs to more than 2,000 parents. "There is a politically conservative and religiously orthodox--even old-fashioned--bent to the Seton material. The Baltimore Catechism is an integral part of the religion curriculum. And the monthly newsletter recently included quotes from Whittaker Chambers, author of the anti-communist manifesto *Witness*," Feuerherd writes. One secular humanist interviewed says that she favors homeschooling because learning is "compartmentalized" in public schools. (National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 419281, Kansas City, MO 64141)

## ANABAPTIST INFLUENCE GROWING AMONG THEOLOGICIANS

Anabaptist thought is gaining influence among American theologians, although much of it is coming from non-traditional sources, writes Charles Scriven in *Christianity Today* (March 5). Anabaptist theology holds that churches should act as a counterculture or a model of non-violence and community rather than aiming to transform secular society. The Mennonites and such groups as the Amish and the Hutterites have been the traditional standard bearers of the Anabaptist tradition in America. While Anabaptist thought was formerly written off by theologians as irrelevant and socially passive, Mennonite theologians such as John Howard Yoder have helped bring such ideas into the mainstream of American theological debate. But the current movement defies denominational boundaries. Among the theologians reinterpreting the Anabaptist vision today are Duke University's Stanley Hauerwas, a Methodist, and Southern Baptist James William McClendon of Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union.

Scriven writes that Anabaptist ideas are gaining a hearing because of the growing concern for peace and the horror of nuclear war and the growing "dechristianization" of modern society. "To some degree, the entire community of believers has begun to feel itself a minority. Anabaptists have had this experience from the start. In the new context it is likelier than before that they should be taken seriously." The emergence of "postmodern" theology, which questions such values of modern thought as universal reason and individualism and emphasizes tradition and rooted communities [see March '87 RW], has also provided a favorable climate for Anabaptist ideas to flourish, Scriven adds. (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187)

## AMERICAN INDIANS RELEARNING RELIGION IN FIGHTING ADDICTION

Traditional American Indian culture and religion combined with 12-step programs has become the "key to recovery for many Indian alcoholics" and drug abusers, writes Robert Allen Warrior in *Christianity and Crisis* magazine (March 19). American Indians have long had a problem with alcoholism; in some communities the majority of the Indian population have had alcohol problems. But now such alcohol and drug recovery centers as Project Phoenix in Kyle, South Dakota use traditional tribal practices and rituals of the Lakota tribe, such as the purification ceremonies of the sweatlodge, along with the 12-step programs of Alcoholics Anonymous in their treatment.

One Lakota leader says he finds the 12-step philosophy close to his own tradition. "The AA model is the Indian model. You help each other, visit each other...If the god you choose to use keeps you sober, it's the right god. There's not a lot of dogma to it." One Indian community in Canada ravaged by alcoholism developed a program utilizing the AA program, traditional culture and economic development and is now 98

percent sober. Warrior adds that many Indian young people are learning "the specifics of traditional culture and religion in drug and alcohol treatment." (Christianity and Crisis, 537 W. 121st St., New York, NY 10027)

#### CURRENT RESEARCH: RECENT FINDINGS ON RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES

\* According to National & International Religion Report (March 26), two-thirds of American adults believe television programs that ridicule religion should be censored, regardless of their popularity. The survey, featured in Parents magazine and conducted through random telephone interviews with 1,004 people, found that 72 percent of respondents favored a ban on ridiculing or making fun of religion. Fifty four percent say they don't want "objective discussions of Satanism, and 55 percent say scenes suggesting, but not actually showing, homosexual activity should be cut. (National & International Religion Report, P.O. Box 21433, Roanoke, VA 24018)

\* While some have said that Southern gospel music is dying out, a recent study shows that the music is finding a new audience among baby-boomers and country music fans, according to Christian Retailing magazine (March 15). The survey found that six out of 10 Southern gospel fans say the music is more important to them now than it was 10 years ago. A related article says that Christian country music "soared" last year as such singers as Ricky Skaggs and the Forrester Sisters showed that "it was acceptable for country artists to sing about their faith." (Christian Retailing, 600 Rinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746)

\* A recent informal survey of farmers in Canada shows that their spirituality often differs from the faith preached in the churches, according to the Catholic New Times (March 18). Eighty two percent of the farmers surveyed across Canada said they found something "spiritual" in farming. But when asked if their Christian teachings influenced their farming practices, 43 percent of the farmers said no or were uncertain. One Presbyterian farmer said, "You'll find more lovers of nature among farmers than lovers of Christ." Most of those surveyed based their spiritualities on their sense of dependence on nature and "feeling a part of something greater." But Christianity was reported to "have a nebulous relationship with this spirituality." The 58 percent who agreed that church teachings influenced their lives generally said, "It teaches me not to cheat my neighbor," or "We don't work on Sunday." About one half said it teaches environmental stewardship. Many of the farmers surveyed criticized the churches' slowness in addressing environmental issues and helping farmers in need. (Catholic New Times, 80 Sackville St., Toronto, Ont., M5A 3E5 Canada)

\* Barely one-third of New Zealanders believe in a personal God, according to the Christian Challenge magazine (March). This finding was taken from the recent book, "The Religious Factor in New Zealand Society," written by researchers Alan Webster and Paul Parry. The study reports that the other two-thirds are evenly split between belief in some form of "life-force" and outright agnostics and unbelievers. Fewer than 30 percent believe in the concept of sin and 25 percent believe in the devil. The New Zealanders' disaffection from the faith was described by the researchers as "extreme" according to Western standards. A related story noted by the Christian Challenge reports that total church attendance in Auckland on a typical Sunday is four to five percent of

the population. (1215 Independence Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20003)

## CHILE'S ACTIVIST CHURCH CHARTING DIFFERENT FUTURE

With the recent transition to democracy in Chile, the Catholic Church is also changing its strategy from one of activism to evangelization, according to the Jesuit America magazine (March 17). The church in Chile was one of the few bases of human rights advocacy during the Pinochet regime. In an interview, Renato Poblete, head of the church's largest social action organization, Hogar de Cristo, says that the "church will have to continue its social programs, but in the future emphasize evangelism more and more..." Interviewer Thomas H. Stahel adds that "Mensaje," the Jesuit magazine known for its solitary voice in covering human rights during the censorship of the Pinochet years "has to find a new role now that there are other journals covering political and economic subjects."

Poblete adds that the task of evangelism is especially pressing in the face of Protestant (mainly Pentecostal) church growth in Chile. But unlike critics who view the Protestant phenomenon as a political and economic "invasion" from the U.S., such as the Latin American Catholic bishops, Poblete says, "I think that the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses really have brought a tremendous amount of money in from the states. But the Pentecostal groups, at least as far as I can see in Chile--and I have studied this question in Chile--don't receive one cent from the United States, or from the government of the U.S. People say so, but I have seen no proof...I have seen how much the Pentecostals tithe, and even among poor people. They give a lot of money to support their own churches." (America, 106 West 56th St., New York, NY 10019)

## BUDDHISM BEING REFURBISHED IN SOVIET UNION

After a long period of persecution and neglect, Buddhism in the Soviet Union is being rehabilitated, according to the Buddhist Peace Fellowship Newsletter (Winter). Most Buddhists in the USSR are found in the Buryat Autonomous Republic, making up about half of the republic's population of 900,000. During the 1930s most Buddhist monasteries were closed by the government and many monks (or lamas) were arrested and sent to labor camps. Under glasnost and perestroika, Buddhist monasteries and temples are reopening, and there are plans to publish Buddhist literature, according to the article. Recently a lama was allowed to speak on television on the environment. While there is no longer official opposition to Buddhist activity, major restoration and funding is needed to refurbish deteriorated temples and monasteries. One Buddhist leader says that the "major challenge is to overcome the problem of training lamas. The future development of Buddhism here is linked to this...We hope that in the future we will have a center for training lamas within the Soviet Union [most Buryat monks are trained in Mongolia]." (Buddhist Peace Fellowship Newsletter, P.O. Box 4650, Berkeley, CA 94704)

## PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT GROWING AMONG EASTERN EUROPE'S CHRISTIANS

There appears to be growing anti-abortion involvement on the part of churches in Eastern Europe, according to reports. The West German newsletter idea (March 2) reports that a national anti-abortion movement has recently formed for the first time in East Germany. The

interdenominational organization, known as KALEB, will act as an umbrella organization for Christian groups "which fight for the sanctity of life." According to KALEB, 1.6 million babies have been aborted since abortion was legalized in the GDR in 1972. The movement aims to "consult and help women who are in distress because of becoming pregnant...[to] inform people about 'responsible methods of practicing family planning' and to explain the physical and psychological consequences of an abortion," the newsletter adds.

Until recently, the concept of "pro-life" was little known in Eastern Europe, according to Christianity Today magazine (February 19). But there is organized pro-life group activity in Poland and in certain areas of Yugoslavia, with individual activism in Hungary and Czechoslovakia through such organizations as the International Right to Life Federation. Meanwhile, sociologist Jerry Pankhurst says that the fact that abortion is widespread in the Soviet Union may prove "fertile ground for a pro-life movement...As the church becomes a greater voice in Soviet society, this might become a major issue." (idea, Postfach 1820, D-6330 Wetzlar, West Germany)

## EUROPE'S CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS MOVING TOWARD SECULAR IDENTITY ?

Europe's Christian Democrat may be moving away from their Christian orientation during current shifts in European politics, according to Britain's The Economist magazine (March 17). The Christian Democratic parties throughout Europe started under Christian inspiration (heavily influenced by Catholic social teachings steering a middle-way between socialism and free market capitalism), but recent years have found the movement divided on its religious identity. Christian Democrats have been divided between "idealists," who want to preserve the movement's Christian base to distinguish it from secular liberalism and conservatism [see February '87 RW for more on this segment], and "pragmatists," who downplay religious values and want a closer alliance with parties on the right. The Christian Democratic parties still have a strong religious component. In last year's Dutch elections, for instance, 85 percent of Christian Democratic voters describe themselves as religious, as compared to 55 percent of the Socialists, 40 percent of Liberals and 25 percent of the Democrats '66 party.

But the "continuing trend toward a more secular society" favors the pragmatists, as represented by the West German Christian Democrats. "The triumph of free-market economics makes it hard for Christian Democrats to maintain an economic policy distinct from that of the conservatives. And the shift of Europe's left-wing parties towards the center encourages some Christian Democrats to take a more right-of-center line; they have to appear different." But the article adds that "The more Christian of Christian Democrats insist that religious inspiration could once again drive their movement. They rest their hopes on Eastern Europe, where 50 years of persecution have made the new or revived Christian political groups unashamedly forthright." (The Economist, 10 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020)

## JAPAN'S ULTRA-RIGHTISTS' ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS DRIVE INTENSIFYING

"Japan's ultrarightists have stepped up a violent campaign to restore the country's 'spiritual and ethnic purity,'" according to the evangelical newsletter Pulse (March 9). Pulse says that "Many political



figures and other leaders who espouse a more open Japan, and question the country's Shinto heritage and the role of the emperor, have been targets of violence and intimidation this past year. Foreigners and foreign ideas are polluting Japan, the far right groups say." The National police agency estimates that there are some 840 ultrarightist groups in Japan, with a combined membership of 125,000. Masaaki Nakajima, the head of Japan's largest Protestant denomination, the United Church of Christ, [which has been a leader in the movement of mainline churches opposing the revival of Shintoism in the country] was threatened because his church worked on behalf of a growing number of Third World minorities living in Japan. The threat came in the form of trucks surrounding Nakajima's home with loud speakers. (Pulse, P.O. Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60187)

## NEPAL INCREASINGLY VIOLATING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

"With improvements in Eastern Europe, Nepal is fast becoming one of the world's worst tyrants in the area of religion," says The First Freedom (January/February), the newsletter of the Puebla Institute, a religious freedom organization. Since the 1970s, the world's only Hindu kingdom has increasingly restricted freedom of religion, making conversion from Hinduism to another religion punishable to up to six years in prison. The newsletter reports that the cases of Christians being prosecuted for violating the conversion ban have grown from one or two incidents in 1970 to "about 180 individuals prosecuted for religious reasons in 1989."

Such an increase may be due to the Protestants' growing evangelistic efforts, as well as the Nepali government's "perception that Christianity corrupts the country's traditional culture and socio-political order by rejecting the claims to deification of the king and other leaders." [The Nepali king is held to be the reincarnation of Vishnu, the Hindu god of good order and harmony] There are reports of government-led church closings and job discrimination against Christians. While Christians (especially Protestants) have suffered the most persecution in Nepal, Tibetan Buddhists have also experienced repression. But in the face of the government's repressive tactics, Christians "continue to worship, even to transmit their religion to others." The newsletter concludes that "Partly due to its isolation in the world, and partly due to deliberate attempts by the government to mask its repression of Christians and political dissidents, Nepal has largely succeeded in avoiding international scrutiny." (The First Freedom, 1030 Fifteenth St., NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005)

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### Religion Watch

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