

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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BABY BOOMERS REMAKING AMERICAN CHURCHES?

There appears to be growing concern among church growth experts on how to reach the baby boomers, especially since there have been forecasts of a significant culture clash between this influential generation and religious institutions. At a recent Long Island conference on baby boomers that RW attended, for instance, church growth specialist Elmer Towns was convinced that evangelical churches are going to have to reshape their ministries if they are going to impact the baby boomer culture. The concern among church growth specialists and clergy is not misplaced; recent findings have shown that many baby boomers do not follow the traditional pattern of having a "church home," but rather attend different churches on an "as-needed" basis [see October RW for more on this subject].

Towns added his own findings to the list: Baby boomers tend to value experience and right behavior, such as not being a hypocrite, over correct doctrine and denominational teaching; they want a relationship-oriented church where they can also have a part in its decision-making; they view the sermon as a vehicle for teaching rather than preaching; baby boomers will tithe only if they see a "value return" to such giving; unlike earlier generations, baby boomers "cannot be motivated by guilt." Towns sees certain churches prospering during the coming baby boomer era while others will be "hibernating." He says that "If ever a movement was destined to draw in baby boomers, it is the charismatics." The charismatic movement's emphasis on experience rather than doctrine, participatory worship, small group meetings and flexibility is appealing to baby boomers. Towns, who became known for his sympathetic studies of the fast growing fundamentalist churches in the 1970s and is currently affiliated with Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, now says that fundamentalist churches will be "hibernating" during the baby boomer era.

"Fundamentalists will have a sphere of influence among their members, but will have no impact upon the boomer culture...fundamentalism as a movement is dead, although individual fundamentalist churches may grow," he said in an interview. The practices which made fundamentalist [mainly independent Baptist] churches prosper earlier, such as busing children to Sunday school, vacation Bible schools, revival meetings and the one-man leadership style of pastors, are not relevant to the baby boomers. He added that Southern Baptist churches may have similar problem adapting to the new generation, especially those that resist any charismatic influence in their ranks. Towns notes that there are "boomer

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churches" around the U.S. that have created a new style of ministry. They usually don't have Sunday schools, have a band rather than an organ or piano, sing contemporary praise choruses rather than traditional hymns and often divide their congregation into small cell groups for many functions. Such congregations would include the fast-growing Willow Creek Church in Chicago and Perimeter Presbyterian Church in Atlanta.

MEDITATION MOVING INTO MEDICAL MAINSTREAM

Meditation techniques are increasingly gaining a hearing in the medical establishment as new studies claim to show their effectiveness, according to recent reports. The National & International Religion Report (February 26) notes that a recent Harvard University study found that meditation can prolong life. The findings, first reported in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, showed that meditation worked better than two other techniques for lowering blood pressure and improving several aspects of mental function as well as extending lifespan. The study involved 73 volunteers, whose average age was 81. Twenty of the subjects were taught Transcendental Meditation and still survive. Others practiced another technique called, "mindfulness" training (which is aimed at stimulating new ideas and outlooks on life), simple relaxation programs, or no techniques at all, and their survival rates were 88 percent, 65 percent and 77 percent respectively. The study's co-author, Charles Alexander, says that instructors for each of the techniques downplayed philosophical considerations, with only one TM student saying that he perceived meditation in spiritual terms. Some experts said that motivation rather than TM may have accounted for the outcome, with one doctor adding that any relaxation technique combined with religious undercurrents might have done as well.

Nevertheless, meditation is "fast becoming an arm of medicine as doctors recommend it to treat stress-related disorders," writes Paul R. Fulton in Common Boundary (March/April), a New Age-oriented magazine on psychotherapy and spirituality [see supplement for review]. But Fulton adds that "In seeking to don the cloak of scientific respectability, [meditation instructors] often apologize for-- and even excise-- meditation's spiritual dimension. They portray meditation as little more than another healthy tonic akin to jogging, or a self-regulation technique like biofeedback, hypnosis and progressive relaxation." One notable exception to this tendency is the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program (SR&RP) of the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester. The instructors are all experienced meditators who include the "spiritual element of meditation." SR&RP is run by founder Jon Kabat-Zinn, who has been strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism. The program, using mainly "mindfulness meditation," puts to use various Zen-oriented concepts, such as the "dissolution of the self," and has been embraced by more than 500 doctors who refer their patients to its services. SR&RP has strengthened its reputation through many studies documenting the program's effectiveness in alleviating stress and pain, Fulton adds. (National & International Religion Report, P.O. Box 21433, Roanoke, VA 24018; Common Boundary, 7005 Florida St., Chevy Chase, MD 20815)

"many pastors are trying to put their parishes on solid financial ground through sacrificial giving programs," and tithing (which means giving ten percent of ones' income). DeTurris adds that "Where [tithing and sacrificial giving] is in place, dramatic increases in giving can be tracked, and parishioners not only seem to accept the practice but most also attribute spiritual growth to it." One parish in suburban New York involved in tithing increased the contributions by over 50 percent. "That's the kind of increase most parishes with tithing programs frequently see," DeTurris writes. She notes that tithing programs have gained entry into parishes because of the emphasis on the practice's scriptural roots in the Old Testament. (National Catholic Register, 12700 Ventura Blvd., Suite 200, Studio City, CA 91604)

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES MEETING INCREASING RESISTANCE IN ITALY

[The following report on the Jehovah's Witnesses in Italy was written for RW by Stefania Falasca, a writer for the Rome-based Catholic magazine, 30 Days.]

In the past few months the Jehovah's Witnesses in Italy have come into hard times as they have been met with a growing number of complaints from ex-members, criminal charges and a proposed government crackdown on their activity. There are currently more than 600 alternative religions in Italy, but with more than 170,000 members, the Jehovah's Witnesses are the largest, following only the Catholics in size. Italy has the highest number of Witnesses in Europe, with West Germany, England and France closely following. According to ISPES, an Italian social and political research institute, the Witnesses are concentrated in the north of Italy and are distributed in every social class and age group. Recent months have seen increasing reports of harassment by Witnesses against members who have left the sect. In February, five Witnesses were charged with a number of crimes, which included attempted murder. After years of silence, many ex-members are now speaking out about their experiences with the Witnesses. There are cases of people forced to leave the sect because they had driven an ambulance of a Catholic voluntary association or voted, or had dinner with an old friend..

These charges against the Witnesses have alarmed the Italian government, which is now drawing up a law to control the proliferation of new religions. Meanwhile, at a recent conference, Cardinal Silvio Oddi, upset by the latest events, publicly accused the Witnesses of being emissaries of the devil. The Catholic Church has long been engaged in efforts to help Catholics involved in the sect and to prevent their joining. But now Catholic organizations researching sects have banded together to help prevent more Catholics from joining the sect. Lay Catholic associations have also joined in the hail of criticisms and complaints against the sect. But, according to their Italian leaders, nothing will stop the Witnesses' main aim, consisting in the conquest of Rome, the historical native country of Catholicism. It is for this reason that the Witnesses have concentrated their efforts, above all, in Italy.

NICARAGUAN RELIGIOUS LEFT AND RIGHT SWITCH PLACES AFTER SANDINISTA LOSS

The recent election of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro as president of Nicaragua has recast the polarized Christian situation in this country, shifting the influence from Christians supporting the Sandinista government to conservative Catholics who were critical of the regime, according to the Catholic New Times (April 15), a Canadian liberal

Catholic newspaper. "While progressive Catholics grieve and reorganize, Nicaragua's conservative Catholic hierarchy is elated" about Chamorro's presidency, writes Paul Jeffrey. "The election of a devout Catholic aristocrat as the nation's first president assures [the hierarchy's] return to what its members view as rightful prominence in public life." Chamorro's campaign has hinted at this new role for the bishops in her promise to deliver a new cathedral to replace the Managua structure still in ruins since the 1972 earthquake. "Right-wing Catholic groups are expected to thrive here in the wake of Chamorro's victory," according to Jeffrey. Chamorro's religious advisor, Carlos Mantica, is head of the Nicaraguan chapter of the Sword of the Spirit, a Catholic charismatic movement based in the U.S. Several family members and business associates of Chamorro are reported to be members of this group, which has been accused of authoritarian tendencies by liberal critics and anti-cultists.

And what will happen to radical (or progressive) Catholics and Protestants who saw the Sandinista revolution as the visible expression of liberation theology? Jeffrey writes that the election has "created a crisis for Christians here who have participated in the Sandinista revolution." One activist called Chamorro's victory a "Good Friday" for us. CEPAD Report (January/February), the newsletter of the pro-Sandinista Protestant coalition, CEPAD, reports that while leftist Christians are meeting together to discern their future, they still have hope for the Sandinista revolution. A group of Christians have written a pastoral letter which states that Nicaragua is experiencing a "moment of temptation and testing, but also of grace. The Sandinista revolutionary process is passing through its test of fire." Base community activists are organizing "pastoral brigades" to reach out to their neighbors who supported Chamorro, while continuing to work with the Sandinistas. One activist says that Chamorro supporters "will repent soon enough when they see what type of president we're going to have."

Meanwhile, "Chamorro's victory has left many evangelicals worried about a return to the days of discrimination against non-Catholics," Jeffrey writes. An Assemblies of God pastor who runs the country's evangelical radio station says he expects a "religious war" to break out. The papal nuncio Paulo Giglio rejected an impending discrimination of non-Catholics, but added that "Evangelicals who don't get involved in politics won't have any problems with the new government." While Jeffrey cites evangelicals who have been largely supportive of the Sandinistas and CEPAD, the more conservative evangelical group of pastors known as CNPEN are more optimistic, according to Christianity Today magazine (April 9). CNPEN leaders have come away from dialogues with Chamorro's advisors satisfied that there will be freedom of worship for all Protestants. [Chamorro's associates' involvement with the Sword of the Spirit and other charismatic Catholic activity may also serve to prevent government discrimination against evangelical Protestants. The Sword of the Spirit is associated with the charismatic Word of God community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a group which has sought to build a coalition between conservative Catholics and Protestants] (Catholic New Times, 80 Sackville St., Toronto, Ont., M5A 3E5, Canada; CEPAD Report, 32867 SE Highway 211, Eagle Creek, OR 97022; Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187)

CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT TENSIONS EMERGING IN EASTERN EUROPE

The Swiss-based Ecumenical Press Service (April 1-5) reports that "As a measure of freedom returns to religious life in much of Eastern Europe,

NATION OF ISLAM FINDING GROWING SUPPORT IN BLACK COMMUNITY

The Nation of Islam, led by Louis Farrakhan, is moving from the fringes of American society toward the mainstream, as it has won growing respect among blacks for its emphasis on discipline and fighting crime, according to Time magazine (April 16). While considered off-limits for many blacks in the past, today the Nation of Islam has quietly established itself as a welcome presence in black neighborhoods. The Muslims have "cleaned up a drug-infested Washington apartment complex and run a model drug treatment program on its premises. They have earned the respect and cooperation of gang members in Los Angeles and run effective anticrime patrols in New York City, Chicago, Detroit and Atlanta...The well-disciplined Muslims are becoming role models for a generation of black youth [mostly males]," the article adds.

Howard University political scientist Ronald Walters adds that Farrakhan is respected in the black community for his "audacity...Supporting Farrakhan has become a way of hitting back at the system and expressing black public opinion." Blacks and their organizations are now also more willing to join Nation of Islam followers in their protests against discrimination, as could be seen in a January incident where black organizations came to the support of the Muslims after a clash with the Los Angeles Police. This incident also led the Los Angeles police and country sheriffs to develop training films to educate officers on the Nation of Islam. In black popular culture, filmmaker Spike Lee has spotlighted Farrakhan in his two last films, and rap groups such as Public Enemy, Big Daddy Kane and others are now wearing the Islamic star and crescent. [The Nation of Islam is also finding more mainstream Muslim support as the long-time rift between the group and the Sunni Black Muslims is being mended; see May '89 RW]

STUDY FINDS MAINLINE PROTESTANTS' FAITH IMMATURE

A recent study of mainline Protestant churches found that "most of their members do not have a mature faith, that they are little interested in working for social change and that many of their youth are involved in 'at risk' behaviors such as chemical use and thoughts of suicide," according to the National Catholic Reporter (April 13). The study, conducted by Search Institute in Minneapolis, also make the "shocking discovery" among the largest Lutheran body, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), that only 40 percent of its members believe in salvation by faith alone independent of good works, a key Lutheran belief. Among the 11,000 church members surveyed from five mainline denominations-- the ELCA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Presbyterian Church (USA), United Methodist Church and United Church of Christ-- and the Southern Baptist Convention, most said that their churches did not challenge their thinking or encourage questions.

Only a third of those surveyed were found to have a mature faith, "that is, one marked by both a deep, personal relationship to a loving God and a consistent devotion to serving others." Fifty-two percent of mainline adults and 45 percent of Southern Baptist adults said they "never donated time to helping the poor, hungry, sick or those unable to help themselves." Seventy-eight percent of mainline adults and 83 percent of Southern Baptists said they "never spent time promoting social justice."

The one encouraging finding was that Christian education "does matter," in strengthening Christian commitment and is the key to renewing congregational life and "therefore to reversing the decline of mainline Protestantism," writes Willmar Thorkelson. (National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 419281, Kansas City, MO 64141)

SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION LOSING MOMENTUM

The Southern Baptist Convention is showing increasing membership losses and financial cutbacks-- a situation that many are attributing to the continuing battle between fundamentalists and moderates in the denomination, reports the Wall Street Journal (April 25). Since the late 1970s the fundamentalist faction of the SBC has been taking increasing control of America's largest Protestant denominations, although not without a fight from moderates and others in the convention. "But rather than gaining strength, the Southern Baptist juggernaut has stalled, and many members blame what they say is the overzealous leadership," of the fundamentalist leaders who led the takeover of the denomination. The convention is now "losing more members than its adding, and fewer and fewer missionaries and seminary students are signing up to spread its word...Enrollment at the six Southern Baptist seminaries has fallen 14 percent since 1985...Some churches have been withholding contributions to the convention's coffers, forcing some Baptist agencies to cut their staffs and postpone salary increases," according to the article. Writer Gustav Niebuhr notes that demographics (such as the drop in church attendance among the baby boom generation) may also account for some of the losses in the convention.

Fundamentalist leaders such as Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler play down the troubles in the denomination, noting that the SBC raised a record \$137 million last year, and that contributions have continued to rise every year under their tenure-- although by a much smaller amount than in the past. These leaders do acknowledge that the movement has lost its momentum, but they vow to right that soon. Says Pressler, "When the fire is recovered in the pulpits...we'll see great things accomplished...This is going to mean more baptisms, more contributions, more evangelistic zeal." Niebuhr writes that "perhaps more important than the shortage of money is the public-relations problem the denomination's squabbling is causing throughout the South. When one SBC member took an informal poll of diners at a Raleigh, N.C. cafeteria last year on what they thought of the denomination, he received mostly negative comments referring to the convention's infighting-- even from non-Southern Baptists. Another article in the Journal notes that while official SBC statistics claim that the denomination has 14.9 million members, such figures are overstated. Baptist statisticians and some convention officials acknowledge that many churches overstate their memberships and that half the total membership number "no longer set foot in a Southern Baptist church."

TITHING FINDING A PLACE IN CATHOLIC PARISHES

"Tithing, once associated only with Protestant denominations, is rapidly making its way into Catholic churches and homes," writes Mary DeTurris in the National Catholic Register (April 8). As American Catholic parishes struggle with heavy debts due to a stagnation of contributions,

old tensions between evangelicals and Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox have arisen again, Baptist leaders say." Evangelicals are a minority in Eastern Europe and are sometimes considered to be "cults" by the dominant religious establishments of various countries. In the Soviet Union, some Eastern Orthodox sources have distributed letters criticizing Martin Luther and the 16th-century church Reformation. "That move has created a backlash of ill will against the Russian Orthodox Church, especially among Baptist young people," says one leader (although the Orthodox leaders say the negative material was not authorized by them). Baptists and other evangelicals also report tensions between themselves and Eastern Orthodox leaders in Romania, as priests have criticized Baptists for stealing their flocks. Protestant suspicions have not been alleviated by government minister of religion Nicolae Stoicescu's opposition to church-state separation because of his view that the Orthodox church has a "major role to play in rehabilitating the Romanian spirit."

Romanian Baptists have formed an evangelical alliance including Baptists, Pentecostals, Brethren and others to "counterbalance" the Orthodox Church [recent reports note that the the ministry of religious affairs has refused to register the alliance]. Meanwhile, in Catholic-dominated Poland, Baptists are worrying about increasingly close ties between the new government and the Catholic Church, although relations between evangelical pastors and some Catholic leaders continue to be good, according to one Baptist pastor. Similar concerns have been expressed in Hungary, where the Catholic Church is growing in influence; in one instance, a priest refused to let a Pentecostal pastor lead devotions in a Budapest hospital. [If evangelical growth takes place in the new Eastern and Central Europe-- as seems to be the case among the Pentecostals in Romania-- the situation may take on some similarities to Latin America, where a long-standing conflict continues between Catholic--or traditional religious-- leaders and the insurgent evangelical churches] (Ecumenical Press Service, Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland)

RELIGIOUS DISSENT GROWING IN ALBANIA

"Religiously and politically motivated revolts are stirring in Albania," reports the West German news service, idea (April 20). There have been reports of demonstrations in the north and south of the Balkan nation, which is one of the last hardline communist countries, tolerating no religious expression or dissent. Tourists in Albania said they saw demonstrations for democracy and religious freedom in the northern city of Shkoder. Of the approximately 1000 protestors, 400 were taken into custody. "Refugees report that citizens in the settlements of the Greek ethnic minority in the Southern part of the country gather regularly in former churches. There they pray together for the freedom of religion until they are either driven apart or arrested by the police. In February the state of emergency is said to have been declared in the cities of Gjirokastra and Voskopoja for that very reason. The number of [Greek Orthodox] in this region is estimated to be around 100,000."

Meanwhile, there is a growing interest in religion among Albanians, according to Ecumenical Press Service (April 26-30). U.S. Albanian Orthodox leader Arthur Liolin recently visited the country and found a "number of signs that indicate a kind of reawakening to spiritual life."

One...is the restoration of churches, particularly those of historic value, in terms of art and architecture...In contrast, the atheist museum in Shkoder was closed last year...Another sign is that the national choir is planning a concert of the works of St. John of Durres, an Eastern Orthodox who is considered the second most heralded Albanian hymnographer." Liolin adds that "Whereas wearing a cross or possessing a Bible may have been punishable by all types of oppression in the past, people now will request a cross from you, and toleration of scripture seems to be accepted now...With the collapse of Marxist philosophy and atheism...the rekindling of interest in religion is not only among the elderly, but among the young as well." Liolin does not see a major rebellion happening in Albania, but rather, a "gradual evolution from its existing forms..." (idea, Postfach 1820, D-6330, Wetzlar, West Germany)

EVANGELICAL GROWTH NOW TAKING POLITICAL EXPRESSION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Evangelical Protestantism continues to make inroads in the Philippines and is now becoming a serious political factor in the country, according to Britain's The Economist magazine (April 21). The largest of the evangelical churches in the Philippines is Iglesia ni Cristo, founded in 1914 by Felix Manalo, who claimed he was God's last messenger before the second coming. With 4000 congregations (whose buildings "show a considerable architectural debt to Disneyland."), Iglesia ni Cristo has "immense political influence. The church is said to deliver four million votes in elections, and one of its members serves on the Supreme Court. It tends to use its power to back right-wing candidates. Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, a defense chief under Marcos and now on bail after being charged with involvement in last December's attempted coup, is said to be courting Iglesia ni Cristo's support in the 1992 presidential election...The two front-runners to win that election--Mr. Fidel Ramos, the present defense secretary, and Mr. Jovito Salonga, the president of the Senate-- are both good Protestants. Perhaps the possibility of a non-Catholic taking over will give the devout [President Cory] Aquino cause to change her mind and stand again in 1992." (The Economist, 10 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020)

Religion Watch

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TIME-DATED MATERIAL — PLEASE RUSH

FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

MAY/JUNE 1990

PRESS NOTES

* The Lilly Endowment has recently issued a 24-page special report in their publication Progressions on current trends in American mainline Protestantism. Written by a team of journalists who have covered religion for the country's leading daily newspapers and religious publications, the report focuses on such findings and trends as the baby boomer phenomenon and the churches, changing styles of church leadership, the regional differences in religious belief throughout the U.S., and changing women's roles. An in-depth case study is also presented on the Presbyterian Church (USA) and how its changes, divisions and declines have mirrored mainline Protestantism as a whole. Readers may also want to inquire about past issues of Progressions, which have focused on other sectors of American religion, such as Catholicism. For a copy of Progressions and other information, write to: Lilly Endowment Inc., P.O. Box 88068, Indianapolis, IN 46208

* Two recently-published magazines demonstrate a growing interest in the interaction of religion and psychology. Common Boundary (7005 Florida St., Chevy Chase, MD 20815. Bimonthly. \$19) was started in 1981 as a newsletter for psychotherapists and others in the helping professions interested in the relation of their work to religion and spirituality, and recently evolved into a glossy four-color magazine with over 10,000 subscribers. The magazine covers a wide spectrum of movements with mystical and New Age themes, suggesting that the psychological interest in religion is not likely to be found in traditional Christianity or Judaism. Past issues have included a positive evaluation of "A Course in Miracles," popular books of esoteric Christian teachings, from a psychiatry professor, (which set off criticisms from readers), an appreciation of Matthew Fox's creation spirituality, and a report on the difficulties that psychotherapists with religious and other alternative orientations have in being licensed by the American Psychological Association. The magazine also provides interesting abstracts of research findings on religion and psychology.

The new British journal, International Minds (19 Hugh St., London SW1V 1QJ, England. Quarterly. USA-Airmail rate- \$60) provides an analysis of world affairs from a psychological perspective and, in the process, focuses frequently on religious factors in international understanding and world peace. The current issue (February-April) examines the role of religion in the Eastern European revolutions and environmental ethics based on ideas from the Green movement.

* A noteworthy addition to F&F's May/June '89 survey of American Islamic publications is the magazine The Minaret (434 South Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90020. Quarterly. \$12). The magazine is published by the Islamic Center of Southern California (representing a Sunni Muslim perspective), but has a national and international focus. The Minaret pays special attention to the social and political dimensions of Islam, and is often critical of American foreign policy, such as the invasion of Panama. The Winter 1990 issue celebrates Nelson Mandela's

release from prison, looks at the state of Soviet Muslims, and charges that U.S. textbooks distort Islam.

* Postmodern spirituality has meant different things to different people and movements, but the prospect has probably received the greatest attention from the State University of New York Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought. So far, there have been six books dealing with postmodern spirituality and theology and their impact in society in the series, the latest being Sacred Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art, (\$12.95), edited by David Ray Griffin. The series, which is published under the auspices of Center for a Postmodern World and the Center for Process of Studies in California, is the most serious attempt yet to provide a theology for such currents as the Green movement, radical feminism and Eastern and Western mysticism and New Age thought. What is noteworthy is that the series often connects these concerns to Christian left themes, such as liberation theology and process theology (which closely identifies God with human experience), and that many of its contributors teach at Christian theological seminaries. For more information on the series and its sponsors write to: SUNY Press, State University Plaza, Albany, NY 12246

* Many of the developments digested in Religion Watch, as well as other facets of American religion are examined in the new book, In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism (Transaction Publishers, Rutgers- The State University, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903 \$16.95), edited by Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony. The 544-page volume is an extensive revision of an earlier text, with new articles on such topics as the New Age movement, Christian schools, goddess worship, rural religion on the right and left, the prosperity gospel, AIDS and new religions and power and religion. While a few of the articles might appeal only to an academic readership, the introduction by the editors summarizes topics throughout the book, providing a succinct and understandable overview of contemporary religion in the U.S.

ON/FILE: A Survey of Current Movements and People Impacting Religion

1) The Christian Coalition is a new political group organized by Pat Robertson to combat anti-Christian bias through the political system, focusing especially on the state and local levels. The coalition, which will recruit both conservative Catholics and Protestants, comes at a time of growing sentiment by conservative Christians leaders that Christianity is being discriminated against in society (especially in the media and entertainment worlds). The Virginia Beach-based organization will draw upon Pat Robertson's following from his 1988 attempt for the U.S. presidency, such as his three-million-signature petition drive. The Christian Coalition is also concerned with educating Christians on political issues and grooming political activists on the "grass-roots" rather than the national level-- another sign that the religious right is moving to the local level after a period of declining national influence. [see April '89 RW]. (Source: Christianity Today, April 23)

While Religion Watch tries to keep track of religious trends in all the press, finding articles in out-of-state newspapers is proving difficult. If readers come across articles in their daily or weekly newspapers (or regional monthlies) reporting on religious developments, RW would appreciate receiving such material. Subscriptions will be extended for two issues for readers whose clippings are used.