

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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NEWS EVENTS OF 1990 GIVING SHAPE TO THE RELIGIOUS FUTURE

While the closing of old decades and the beginning of new ones may not always be a factor in shaping trends, it does appear that 1990 was a year that will have long-range significance for a number of religious issues. As often happens in the world of religion, many of the events and developments of last year carrying such impact did not have much to do with organized religion, at least on first appearance. It should be noted that the following trends are not listed in order of importance. When applicable, the issues of RELIGION WATCH that have reported such developments are cited after each entry.

1) Such 1990 events as the Gulf crisis, the continuing changes in Eastern Europe and the USSR, and the reunification of Germany and eventually Europe have revived prophetic fervor among evangelicals and other conservative Christians. The renewed interest can be seen in such mainstream evangelical leaders as Billy Graham--who in a recent Long Island crusade RW attended linked the rise of Saddam Hussein with the biblical prophecies of the revival of ancient Babylonia-- as well as in the reissuing of prophetic literature-- from Hal Lindsey to Nostradamus-- predicting the end times. The prophetic concern is likely to intensify with the approach of the third millenium, possibly eclipsing the social involvement of some fundamentalists and evangelicals, especially those of premillennial leanings. (see January, December 1990 issues of RW)

2) Last year's news also signalled a new and uncertain climate for the social activism of the religious left. Such items on the religious left agenda as anti-apartheid activism, nuclear disarmament, the support for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the adoption of Marxism in various kinds of liberation theology, lost much of their currency as burning issues during the year's rapid changes. The call for peace in the Gulf conflict and ecology appear to be two issues that will increasingly find religious left support. But such involvement may spark less of the sharp conflicts between religious left and right that occurred during the 1980s. (November, December)

3) While it was difficult to hazard forecasts of the religious situation in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union a year ago, the picture that emerged at 1990's end is clearer, if no less predictable. Centuries-old religious issues that communism put into a deep freeze appear to be reviving in the region: Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic-Protestant

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competition and conflict; religious influence used to bolster nationalism and, in some cases, anti-Semitism; conflicts between those wanting strict separation of church and state and others pressing for a stronger religious presence in public life. One new issue emerging is the growing Western religious influence in Eastern Europe and the USSR--through both Western evangelical organizations and new religious movements (see page 6)-- and whether the faiths native to the region can maintain a following (many of whom are reported to be religiously illiterate) with such competition. (February, May, July-August, September, October)

4) Last year RW forecasted that a schism in the Southern Baptist Convention will not take place anytime soon, but that may have to be revised for 1991. That the battle between moderates and conservatives in the SBC has been won by the latter camp has been obvious for the past few years. But last year also saw moderates set up a funding program to enable congregations to send money directly to missionary work and other ministries, bypassing conservative-dominated denominational structures-- a large step toward actual schism, according to both moderate and conservative observers. A strategy meeting of moderates this spring in Atlanta will provide the strongest indication of whether an official split will take place in the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

5) A new and potentially divisive wing of the New Age movement came into prominence last year that stressed a blending of mysticism with technology. Through such new technology as virtual reality, which enables computer users to create their own imaginary worlds, various kinds of brain machines, and new forms of psycho-pharmaceuticals (often derived from natural plants), this phenomenon has been called the psychedelic movement of the 1990s. While this development can be viewed as just another component of the multi-faceted New Age, such movement veterans as William Irwin Thompson has sharply criticized the new "techno-mysticism" as a deviation that would take New Agers away from their original "earth-based" concerns, such as ecology and global harmony. (July-August)

6) The general discontent with Israel among U.S. Jews has shown up in the polls for the last five years, but such 1990 events as the ultra-Orthodox leadership gains in the new Israeli administration and revived Israeli-Palestinian violence helped bring that sense of alienation into sectors of the Jewish leadership. This development has resulted in revisions of Israel's central place in American Jewish life and calls for a Judaism that emphasizes spirituality. [but it should be noted that the escalation of the Gulf crisis may bring a renewal of concern for Israel's survival]. (November)

AMERICAN SEMINARIES OFFERING MORE, ATTRACTING LESS QUALIFIED?

American seminaries across the theological spectrum are recovering spirituality and introducing new cross-cultural programs, while drawing students of less caliber than in previous generations. Those were a few of the findings of a 20-page cover story on U.S. seminaries in the Atlantic Monthly (December). Writer Paul Wilkes visited 15 seminaries of Jewish, Catholic, and mainline and evangelical Protestant orientations and found most of the schools struggling with common concerns. Seminaries today are "considerably less demanding of applicants than they were in the past...Dean after dean admits that seminaries are getting precious

few of those ranked in the top reaches of their undergraduate classes," Wilkes writes. He adds that one researcher found that many seminary students are not self-starters; "the energy level is shockingly low," he says. The influx of women to many seminaries has increased the prestige of schools. One recent study showed that women aged 20-24 entering seminaries in all denominations scored twenty points higher in the quantitative section of the Graduate Record Exam than men in the same age group. In contrast, women in professions other than the ministry score on the average eighty points lower than men on this portion of the GRE. Wilkes also reports a de-emphasis on theology in the seminaries and an emphasis on specialized and practical programs on a wide range of subjects.

"Christian seminarians today are far more conversant with Hindu and Muslim beliefs than their counterparts were in the past; cross-culturalism is definitely in," he writes. At the Interdenominational Training Center in Atlanta, which trains nearly one in five black church clerics, Wilkes found a concern for scholarship, while the "rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s [of black revolution-based theology] has been relegated to the basement of memory, a hammer that felt good to wield but didn't pound enough nails." He notes that the most divisive and explosive issue at the seminaries is homosexuality-- and not only on the issue of the ordination of homosexuals. "Of those theological schools that have been most open to gays, many have found that gay faculty and students have in turn attempted to influence curriculum, faculty appointments, and other matters. Given all the other difficulties that seminaries face, the possibility of a 'gay veto' is not an issue that most schools are eager to take on." Wilkes sees a growing interest in spirituality among seminarians and a widening generation gap resulting between these spiritual "seekers" and their more radical politically-oriented professors who came of age during the late 60s and 70s. But he concludes that the "beliefs and practices of seminary teachers are increasingly important in theological education now that it is becoming clear that a brilliant faculty of agnostics may produce some interesting...scholarship but will do little to shape men and women for careers in the ministry." (Atlantic Monthly, 8 Arlington St., Boston, MA 02116)

DECODING THE HUMAN GEONOME PROJECT'S IMPACT ON RELIGION

The Human Geonome project is fast becoming one of the most widely hailed scientific endeavors in recent years-- a fact that the religious community is recognizing as it prepares for the challenges and questions involved in the controversial research program. The Human Geonome Project, now government-sponsored through the National Institute of Health and the Department of Energy, attempts to "map" the 50,000 to 100,000 genes that make up the genetic endowment of humans, with such a listing eventually providing a guide to improving faulty genes (such as restoring the genes causing cystic fibrosis). In the Christian Century magazine (October 3), Ann Lammers and Ted Peters write that the Human Geonome Project will raise important theological questions. The possibility that people can reorder their genetic codes will challenge believers on such issues as the relationship between divine and human creation and whether humans can be considered "co-creators" with God. The challenges will also be coming from sociobiology (a field of science that holds that behavior and belief are influenced by biology), which has recently attempted to account for the rise of human

culture and religious values, such as altruism, through genetic influence.

In his newsletter Context (December 1), Martin E. Marty, a historian and interpreter of American religion, notes that more specific issues raised by the Human Genome Project for the religious community would include the concern about the spectre of eugenics-- which, in the mold of Nazi Germany, would attempt to eradicate "inferior" genes and create "perfect individuals." Marty adds that the project will become a "justice" issue for churches and synagogues, as they "step up activities after the Human Genome Project issues more and more of its map and more people are screened and tested." He sees new underclasses being formed because of possible "genetic discrimination," such as when people are passed over for jobs because of inferior genes. The controversies over abortion in the religious community "can only grow" after the Genome Project, Marty writes. "Those who oppose abortion will be under tremendous new pressure from other taxpayers and from health-care providers not to bring to term a fetus that will issue in a person who suffers a lifetime of illness. Meanwhile the anti-abortion people have good reason to fear a great increase in the numbers of abortions chosen by parents who want 'perfect' children.'" (*Christian Century*, 207 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, IL 60605; *Context*, 205 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60606)

CHRISTIAN SCIENTIST MEDIA PROJECTS FALTERING

The turmoil and division that Christian Scientists have undergone in recent years over the church's large investment in the mass media may be intensifying as these media projects face sharp financial decline. The February '89 RW noted that Christian Scientists were increasingly divided over the denomination's establishment of the World Monitor magazine and television show, with some dissenters claiming that this media ignores and even contradicts Christian Science's healing mission while stressing public relations. The independent quarterly Christian Scientist newsletter, The Banner (October), reports that the church's media operations lost \$57 million last year with revenues of just \$30 million. Losses this year are expected to be \$50 million. Citing a report originally in Forbes magazine, the newsletter notes that the new color version of the Christian Science Monitor, which now carries less hard news, has fallen from 167,000 subscribers in January 1989 to just 115,000 today. The church's television ventures last year lost \$20 million and will lose \$30 million more this year. The Forbes article concludes by asking, "How long can a non-profit institution with a public service philosophy afford to ignore the unforgiving laws of the marketplace?" But Christian Science board chairman Harvey Wood says he is not "beleaguered" but rather challenged by the financial losses, adding that numbers are no indication of the church's vitality. (*The Banner*, 2040 Hazel Ave., Zanesville, OH 43701)

CURRENT RESEARCH: RECENT FINDINGS ON RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR AND BELIEFS

* Five of the top ten organizations rated as the most trustworthy to receive charitable contributions are religiously-connected, according to Money magazine (December). The magazine rated 100 organizations based on the percentage of funds raised in 1989 that "actually went toward good works." The top three on the list are Christian: Interchurch Medical

Assistance of New Windsor, Md., MAP international of Brunswick, Ga., and Lutheran World Relief. In sixth place was Catholic Relief Services, and in tenth was United Jewish Appeal. The magazine noted that numbers aren't the only guide to a charity's performance, since some organizations may have legitimate reasons for spending what may appear to be small percentages of their income. (Money, Time & Life Bldg, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020)

* "Charitable giving and volunteerism are on the rise in the [U.S.], thanks largely to the generous character of religious people," according to Christianity Today magazine (November 19). The magazine cites a joint survey by the Independent Sector and the Gallup Organization, which found that 75 percent of American households are contributing an average of \$734 annually to charitable causes. That dollar figure represents a 20 percent increase (after inflation) from two years ago. The number of Americans volunteering for charitable work is at 98 million, up 23 percent from 1987. It was found that 80 percent of those affiliated with religious organizations reported household giving to charity and nearly 60 percent volunteered. People who regularly attended religious services were far more likely to give to charity, and it was found that 43 percent of all givers said such "behavior met their religious beliefs or commitment." Those listing such motives were also significantly above the national giving average." (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187)

* Interest in the traditional Latin Mass appears to be growing among American Catholics, according to a recent Gallup poll reported in The Remnant (November 30), a traditionalist Catholic newspaper. The poll showed that 76 percent of U.S. Catholics would attend a traditional Latin Mass at least part of the time if it were celebrated on all Sundays and holy days in or near their parish. In comparing these findings with a 1984 poll on the same subject conducted by the Gallup Organization, it was found that 53 percent would attend such traditional Masses if they were available. Among the respondents who indicated that they would attend the Latin Mass in the recent poll, eight percent said they would attend it exclusively, 17 percent said frequently and 51 percent would go to such services occasionally. Although Latin Masses are now permitted in the U.S., 71 percent of respondents did not know they had the right to petition their local bishop for such services. (The Remnant, 2539 Morrisison Ave., St. Paul, MN 55117)

* "Only about 60 percent of the members of the new Congress are traditional Protestants, broadly defined, compared to 77 percent in 1960," reports the National & International Religion Report (December 3). The congressional religious affiliation figures and trends often reflect the changing religious landscape of the nation, according to veteran election analyst Albert J. Menendez, who conducted the survey. There are now 30 unspecified Protestant members of both houses, which represents an increasing number who are Protestant but who do not identify with a particular denomination. Menendez also notes that the 41-member Jewish contingent is at a record high. (National & International Religion Report, P.O. Box 21433, Roanoke, VA 24018)

* Many of the traditions abandoned by Reform Judaism, the most liberal of the Jewish denominations, "are coming back into vogue," according to the New York Times (December 1). In a survey of 425 Reform Jewish congregations it was found that yarmulkes are provided at 59 percent of

them, and virtually all report that they light Sabbath candles before Friday night service. Rabbi Sanford Seltzer, director of the study, which was conducted by the Union of Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, said the responses "would appear to confirm anecdotal reports" of a return to tradition in many Reform congregations. But he added that this trend does not mark a "return to Orthodoxy," but rather a quest for "new dimensions of spirituality."

NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS INCREASINGLY IMPORTED TO EASTERN EUROPE, USSR

Last year's revolutions and political changes in Eastern Europe and the USSR have encouraged a growth of new religious movements in the region. The Christian Research Newsletter (October/November), a publication of the anti-cultist Christian Research Institute, surveys the region and finds: Scientology groups active in Hungary, East Germany (now united Germany), Poland and Bulgaria; the head of the fast-growing and controversial Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist organization, known in the West as Soka Gakkai, met for the first time with Mikhail Gorbachev last summer for a "humanistic dialogue." At the same time Soka Gakkai leaders fanned out to confer with a variety of Soviet educational and cultural leaders. Raisa Gorbachev plans to visit the group's college for women when traveling in Japan this spring. Meanwhile, Werner Erhard, father of est and its latest incarnation, The Forum, has been hired by Soviet officials to host a series of management seminars dubbed a "perestroika [restructuring] of our brains." Erhard is said to have become an "intellectual hero" to dozens of Soviet officials earlier this year when he spoke in Moscow to businessmen, economists and philosophers.

In Soviet Armenia, over 12,000 people are now practicing Transcendental Meditation since it was introduced in the region four months ago. Such groups as the Mormons and the Hare Krishnas have gained religious freedom in the Soviet Union, with the latter group establishing a branch in Leningrad after three years of efforts to obtain legal recognition. Mormonism is especially attracting recent Soviet attention, if not adherents yet. The current issue of the Independent Mormon magazine, Sunstone (August), reports that a Soviet filmmaker was recently in Salt Lake City preparing a story on Mormonism because of an interest in the church's growth and popularity in the USSR. But he added that Soviets might be slow to accept a religion like Mormonism because of the limits it puts on one's freedom. "I am 39 years old and all my life I have felt limited in freedom inside. I feel Christian principles are important, but I do not want to go to church because it is too limiting in freedom," he said. The filmmaker added that this attitude, which is shared by many Soviets, may change over time as people are exposed to different religious lifestyles. (Christian Research Newsletter, P.O. Box 500, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92693; Sunstone, 331 South Rio Grande St., Suite 30, Salt Lake City, UT 84101-1136)

CONSERVATIVE CALVINIST MOVEMENT GROWING IN NETHERLANDS

There is a growing conservative movement in Holland's largest Calvinist church body, the Hervormde Kerk, according to the Religion & Society Report (December), a newsletter of the conservative Rockford Institute's Center on Religion & Society. About 400 of the denomination's 2,500 congregations have "joined something called the Reformierte Bund, a kind of church within a church, committed to accepting without reservation the

classic documents of the Reformed faith, such as the Heidelberg Catechism." The newsletter adds, "in contrast to France, Switzerland, and West Germany, which are extremely secularized with only a small percentage of the population in any sense actively Christian, people in the Netherlands are divided into two camps, one strongly Christian, the other 'liberal' to the point of being energetically anti-Christian." On a visit to one small town church involved in the Reformierte Bund, an editor of a Swiss Christian newspaper found most of its members were under 35 and attendance was up to 1,000-- "a figure virtually without parallel in any big-city church in Europe." He adds that most of these churches tend toward a "certain Calvinistic pietism...The result is that the churches more or less ignore the fundamental anti-Christian changes that are taking place in society." But this silence "is not likely to last long" in the face of increasing secularism in Dutch society. (Religion & Society Report, 934 N. Main St., Rockford, IL 61103)

CULTURAL DIVIDE STILL EXISTING FOR GERMANY'S CHURCHES

While East and West Germany may have reunified, the churches there are still experiencing substantial differences, according to The Lutheran magazine (November 28), the publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in the East is becoming more critical of reunification as it has realized that its strong self-identity may be diluted in this process, writes Bill Yoder. The EKD was a galvanizing force for dissent in the country, but it also saw itself as a church that operated on a "small-but-beautiful" philosophy that was critical of Western capitalism and consumerism. "East German believers have regarded themselves as 'poor but purer' than their West German colleagues...East Germans cherished their special contacts to churches in developing socialist countries, such as Cuba and Nicaragua. A missions executive in East Berlin fears that his mission's relationship to the German-founded Tanzanian church will change dramatically [under the reunification]," Yoder writes. Especially at issue now is that the EKD in East Germany will be expected to follow the Western churches and "drop its resistance to state-collected church taxes, above average salaries for clergy and military service by Christians. The East regards its much-treasured credibility to be at stake."

In view of these beliefs, East German Christian-Democratic politician and EKD minister, the Rev. Christine Lieberknecht, has caused controversy among her theological colleagues when she recently stated that "In the future, the Eastern churches will have no other choice but to accept, step by step, the laws and bylaws of the [West German] EKD." Meanwhile, in an interview in the journal First Things (November), West German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg is skeptical about the authenticity the East German theological experience. "For the most part, theology there has been shaped by the influence of West German theologians. I do not think you can say that there is a really independent theological development in East Germany. Even much of the church's stance of opposition to the former regime was informed by a style of 'prophetic engagement' that came from the West," he says. But Pannenberg does see a new development in the many pastors from the East who are now holding public office. He adds that "it will be interesting to see whether this

is only temporary or whether there will develop ideas about the church's ongoing responsibility for the political order." (The Lutheran, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631; First Things, 156 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010)

WORLD NOTES

* Buddhism in Mongolia is making a comeback fifty years after its temples were closed and an estimated 30,000 monks were killed by the communists, according to the evangelical missionary newsletter Pulse (November 23). Today 40 of the 740 monasteries closed have been or are being revived. Hundreds of monks are conducting services, and more are being trained. One official of a newly legal religious political party adds that "For hundreds of years, state and religion were unified. Our goal is to bring the two closer together." (Pulse, Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60184)

* The warming of relations between the government and the Catholic Church in Uruguay has also brought a new role for Opus Dei, a conservative Catholic lay group, in the country's politics, according to Latinamerica Press (December 6), a left-of-center newsletter on Latin American affairs. Uruguay had long been considered a capital of secularism, outlawing any religious presence in public. But last March new president Luis Alberto Lacalle started closer relations with the Catholic Church when he included a religious ceremony in his inauguration. More recently, members of Opus Dei, a group that has drawn controversy for its strict discipline and its activism in applying Catholicism to all levels of society, have been appointed key positions in the government and the military. The group has also held meetings bringing together influential members of Uruguay's political and economic community. The newsletter adds that "participation of Opus Dei in the government is viewed as an attempt to end one of Uruguay's most entrenched traditions since independence: the influence of Freemasonry on the government." (Latinamerica Press, Apartado 5594, Lima 100, Peru)

Religion Watch

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TIME-DATED MATERIAL — PLEASE RUSH

FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

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PRESS NOTES

* For those wanting a more comprehensive guide to New Age publications than found in last issue's survey, the Catalyst directory is recommended. Catalyst--which was formerly a New Age newsletter-- provides brief reviews of hundreds of newsletters, journals, newspapers and organizations, according to the specific field of the New Age they cover. The categories include: metaphysic-psyhic, astrology, channeling, UFO's, occult, spiritual communities, health, and ecology and earth-related concerns. The 12-page directory costs \$7.95. Send to: P.C. Catalyst, P.O. Box 670022, Marietta, GA 30066.

* The Church & Community Forum is a new newsletter addressing congregations and their interaction with their surrounding communities. Published quarterly by the Center for Church and Community Ministries in Chicago, the newsletter, which comes from a mainline-ecumenical perspective, provides research and an open forum for ideas on church and community relations. The first issue (November) presents research challenging current theories that conservative churches are less socially involved while liberal or mainline churches are the most involved; the newsletter found that a congregation's social involvement cannot be predicted by its theological posture alone. Send to: Church & Community Forum, 5600 S. Woodlawn, 4th Fl., Chicago, IL 60637

* A combined issue of A Friendly Letter (October/November), an independent Quaker newsletter, reports on a new kind of church conflict that may become more common in the future. The story goes like this: The New York Yearly Meeting of Friends (a regional organization of Quaker meetings) had recently featured a workshop on the Quaker experience of the Goddess (or "Wicca") at a conference. While it wasn't the first time the New York Quakers had been involved with Goddess spirituality, a meeting (or church) in upstate, N.Y. learned of the event and promptly issued a statement condemning Wicca and calling fellow members of the New York Yearly Meeting to do likewise. What followed was increasing division and bitterness over the issue and a "total disintegration" of the Quaker process of deliberation and consensus. Editor Chuck Fager writes that the controversy is more than a theological disagreement; the two groups of fighting Quakers "inhabit strikingly different cultures...without a common language," as they create negative myths of the other camp. The conflict is likely to grow in Quakerism, especially since the Friends General Conference--the major organization of liberal-oriented Friends--invited a witch to speak at its next gathering. For more information, write to: A Friendly Letter, P.O. Box 1361, Baileys Crossroads, VA 22041.

* Observers have noted that the various kinds of liberation theology have toned down their Marxist component and embraced other concerns, such as feminism. That observation is borne out in Latinamerica Press, a liberationist-oriented newsletter that devotes its November 29 issue to the rising influence of feminism among Catholic and Protestant church women in Latin America. One article reports on the growing number of women clergy, nuns and laywomen formulating their own theological concerns, in the view that both liberation theology and traditional

theology have excluded women in the past. Other features include reports on Argentina's base communities as a catalyst for feminism and the strong leadership of women in the Catholic Church in Peru. For more info write: Latinamerica Press, Apartado 5594, Lima 100, Peru.

* Religion Watch has often cited the ongoing research of C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya on trends in the American Black Church. Such findings and much more information are found in Lincoln and Mamiya's new book, The Black Church in the African American Experience (Duke University Press, 6697 College Sta., Durham, NC 27708 \$18.95). The 519-page book provides a historical overview of black churches and denominations, as well as the authors' own extensive survey research on such topics as the decline of rural black churches and the rise of urban congregations, the black consciousness and theology movements and their failure to find a large hearing in the black churches, the political and economic dimensions of the black church, the changes in gospel music, and the increase of unchurched black young people. Worth noting is the last chapter where Lincoln and Mamiya survey the challenges to the black church, and then make "policy recommendations" to help strengthen these churches.

* The Presbyterian Church (USA) is becoming a laboratory for understanding American mainline Protestantism's declining memberships and cultural influence during the last few decades. Westminster/John Knox Press is issuing a series of seven books that provide in-depth examination of mainline Presbyterianism. The first book, The Presbyterian Predicament (\$12.95) provides an overview of the denomination's decline as well as possible solutions by writers from various disciplines. The latest book in the series, The Mainstream Protestant 'Decline': The Presbyterian Pattern (\$14.95), continues the analyses of Presbyterianism, this time probing more deeply into the causes of congregational growth and decline through congregational surveys, individual interviews and case studies. For more information: Westminster/John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396.

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

1) The Noachide Movement is a small but growing phenomenon of ex-Christians who are observing Old Testament laws and ethical monotheism without converting to Judaism. More than 250 members of the group who practice the Laws of Noah as taught in the first five books of Moses, recently gathered at a former Baptist church in Athens, Tenn., for their fifth annual conference. According to a leader of the group James D. Tabor, professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, says that Noachides "tend to be, by and large, disenfranchized former Christians. They do not denounce belief in Jesus, but they're not in any way Christians. The most they would say is that he (Jesus) was a great teacher." Noachides, many of whom have come from evangelical and fundamentalist backgrounds, draw their inspiration from the a group of Gentiles who followed Jewish law during the Greco-Roman period. One area of disagreement among Noachides is how much contact the group should have with organized Judaism. Several respected Orthodox scholars and rabbis have been working with some Noachides to get the movement official recognition from the Chief Rabbinate in Israel. Others favor keeping the movement independent. At their recent meeting the Noachides decided to start a publishing company and a periodical called The Gap. The U.S. movement is in close touch with a growing number of like-minded international groups and individuals, so far located in England, Belgium, Nigeria and Italy. (Source: Ecumenical Press Service, December 21-31; Christian News, Dec. 10)