

# RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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## AMERICAN MUSLIM ACTIVISM ON MORAL ISSUES TAKING SHAPE

Although Islam is now the largest U.S. religion outside of Christianity and Judaism, American Muslims have so far taken a low profile in addressing social and moral issues outside of their religious communities. But a recent issue of The Minaret (Jan./Feb.), an American Islamic magazine, suggests that this reticence may be giving way to a new kind of activism among U.S. Muslims that places them in proximity to the camp of conservative Christians and other religionists battling for a return to "traditional values" in society. In a cover story entitled "The Moral Agenda For the '90s," the magazine provides an overview of the issues starting to occupy American Muslim attention: euthanasia, abortion, AIDS and sex education in the schools, drugs and homelessness. Many of such concerns were expressed at an inter-religious conference on sex and morality sponsored by the Islamic Center of Southern California, the group which publishes The Minaret. The conference gained media attention for drawing Christian (such as Cardinal Roger Mahony of the archdiocese of Los Angeles), Jewish and Muslim leaders, as well as because of the sharp criticism it issued against "safe sex" education programs in the schools, such as condom distribution. This inter-religious conference was among the first to be sponsored by an American mosque.

The Los Angeles-based Islamic Center is planning similar conferences for the future, with an upcoming one focusing on euthanasia. The center is also planning to form a coalition with other religious groups and community groups to target various moral issues, such as the upcoming California euthanasia bill and crime. Throughout the issue of The Minaret there is an emphasis on going public on moral issues among Muslims, as well as building stronger ties with co-religionists (an article on sex education cites the writings of New Right evangelicals Tim LaHaye and James Dobson). Maher Hathout, chairman of the Islamic Center, says that such a call for activism is rare for American Muslims. "...Muslims have preferred to be introverted. They have shown little interest in the country's problems." Hathout speaks of Muslim concern on such issues more in the manner of a New Christian Rightist than a member of a religious minority: "Immorality has taken over and the silent majority has to speak." In an interview with RELIGION WATCH, Hathout says that one of the factors in the new Muslim outspokenness is that broader social and moral issues are now hitting home among them. "We had the sense that we were immune from many problems. But now some Muslim youth are doing what their peers are doing." He adds that Muslims "don't want to impose their morality on others. But we don't want others to impose their immorality on us either." (Continued)

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Hathout favors a strategy of "selective constructive engagement" with other religious groups in addressing social issues. He says most Muslims would favor a moment of silence instead of prayer in the schools. While against abortion, he criticizes pro-life Christian groups for not being as strongly against pornography and for other measures that would strengthen family life. How much does Hathout's and the Islamic Center's activism and views reflect American Islam? "We are a bit ahead of other Muslims in our outspokenness," he admits. But he adds that there is a new interest among Muslims in such activism and that it will be the "wave of the future." Some Muslims, however, will continue to pull back from such involvement, "saying that we should keep to one another and fortify our own way rather than jumping into the middle of the ocean where God knows what could happen," Hathout says. Much of the new concern for public issues and coalition-building has come to Arab American Muslims from their black counterparts. "African American Muslims have been more ready to cooperate, especially with black churches, than Arab-American Muslims, who are newer to the country," he adds. A.M. Khattab, leader of the Islamic Center of Toledo, Ohio, agrees with Hathout that a trend toward greater involvement in moral issues is growing among Muslims as they become more Americanized and realize that "this is our home." But such activism will take less outspoken forms in places like Toledo where he says there is less "corruption" than in California. (The Minaret, 434 South Vermont, Los Angeles, CA 90020)

## SACRED SITES ACTIVISM REINVIGORATING, CHANGING AMERICAN INDIAN RELIGION

The prolonged battle between American Indians and the legal system over the preservation of sacred sites throughout America is showing the difficulties American Indian religion has in proving its claims in court, as well as bringing new conflicts to the religion itself, according to Mother Jones magazine (March-April). Dan Baum writes that while disputes between American Indians and the government over land ownership and rights have a long history, Indian activists are now patching up traditional tribal animosities and banding together with environmentalists to stake their claim on such sites. There are now about 60-70 sacred site cases in dispute. So far, Indians have never won a sacred lands case on First Amendment grounds, and have won few of such cases at all. U.S. law stipulates that there should be proof that sites are used for ceremonies. But the whole idea of monuments and other such markers is "anathema" for Indians, who believe in leaving no mark on the land they use for rituals, according to Baum. Says one former forest official about such cases, "We get information [from Indians] that isn't substantive. They say 'We like the mountains.' How do you document that?"

Another clash in world views between the legal system and American Indian religion concerns the government's frequent insistence that Indians write down their songs and stories to prove a place is sacred. Indians claim such record-keeping of ceremonies would be revealing sacred secrets. In the new coalition with environmentalists to save such sites, some Indians are now agreeing to share such ceremonial information with the public, but the issue, as well as that of cooperation with non-Indians, is proving divisive. "Other Native Americans recoil from diluting religious issues with environmental rhetoric. Still others, whom non-Indian reporters hear about but don't get to interview, steadfastly hold their religion entirely separate from the world of headlines and environmental-impact statements, and make their own peace with the threat of losing their places." Indian activism on sacred land issues has brought a new emphasis on the significance of special sites to the religion. Indians have long held that all the earth is sacred-- a claim that might



complicate their case in court. "Therefore, activists have decided to try to convince mainstream America to help save a little Indian real estate..." writes Baum. The growing Indian activism and involvement in traditional religion has also had a "cleansing, chastening effect on young Indian society," discouraging such wide-spread practices as drug and alcohol abuse. (Mother Jones, 1663 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94103)

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES RECEIVE NEW ACCEPTANCE, INFLUENCE IN ACADEME

The formal study of religion, especially in the social sciences, has taken on a new respectability and influence in American universities, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education (April 1). For decades religion was considered too sectarian or riddled with superstition to deserve careful academic study. But in the last few years this attitude has been replaced by a new interest in religion, especially in psychology, sociology, political science and the humanities. Considerable evidence of this trend exists: More scholarly articles on religion are appearing in scholarly journals; more books centering on religion and personality, religion and society, and religion and government are appearing in non-church related presses; more jobs in religious studies at public colleges and universities are opening. The new interest is not aimed at winning converts nor at debunking some of organized religion's well known excesses. Rather, scholars are seeing religion, public and private, more fully as an essential element in understanding human behavior in all its dimensions.

One factor in this development is that the new multiculturalism on campus has increased scholarly interest in how other subcultures have been shaped and reflect behavior outside of traditional, white middle class American life. Resistance to the the new attention being paid to religion still flourishes, however, especially in the general field of psychology which has maintained its suspicion of issues which it cannot quantify or analyze by existing accepted theories. But clearly, the movement for far greater acceptance has taken deep root. What this general pattern has meant in the past and may well mean again is that the popular, mass media will soon pick up on these new investigations in religion and in turn will bring the erudite scholarship of the ivory tower to the general public. That could in turn help shape perceptions many non-participants have about organized religion, a segment of the population which at best estimate would include about 65 percent of the population. --By Erling Jorstad, an RW contributing editor and professor of History at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.

## RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT AGAINST 'OBJECTIONAL' PROGRAMMING LOSING MOMENTUM

The Christian Rightist crusade to eliminate what it considers objectional television and movie programming appears to be losing momentum and suffering from a lack of unity. The April issue of the activist Donald Wildmon's American Family Association (AFA) Newsletter says the organization faces a major financial crisis. Wildmon says that the AFA will have to seriously curtail its programs unless it receives large amounts of revenue quickly. He hints that the AFA treasury is at an all-time low. The Wildmon crusade had been showing results: Last fall it claimed major victories in convincing the major television networks not to produce or air certain new sit-coms and childrens' programs. The



current difficulties come at a time when other post-1988 New Christian Right organizations are also taking up the crusade against 'objectional' programming and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Christian Action Network out of Forest, Virginia, Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, and John W. Whitehead's Rutherford Institute are all appealing to the same potential donors for funds. Some of the conservative Washington-based think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, are also calling for stronger grassroots support and White House leadership in turning back what they consider as objectional and obscene writings, movies, and visual art. [It may well be that without much help from the Oval Office, the Wildmon campaign and other similar groups are finding that they have overextended their programs, none of which are coordinated with one another. The same potential donors are being repeatedly asked for support-- a situation which may lead to the apparent decline in support for each of them.] (American Family Association, Newsletter, P.O. Drawer 2440, 107 Parkgate, Tupelo, MS 38803) -- By Erling Jorstad

## PRAISE MARCHES GIVING PUBLIC EXPRESSION TO EVANGELICAL FAITH

Evangelical Christians are increasingly taking to the streets in "Marches for Jesus" around the world in order to give a public expression to their faith, according to Charisma & Christian Life magazine (May). "Praise marches" of Christians holding aloft banners and singing hymns through the streets of major cities in Europe, Africa, Japan and the U.S. have been gaining momentum since the late 1980s. The March for Jesus movement started in England, when Christian songwriter Graham Kendrick helped lead a march of 55,000 Christians through the streets of London in 1987. These marches try to steer clear of political protests or messages and instead focus on exalting Christ and bringing together Christians. The marches serve as rallying points for churches, giving them a new sense of outreach and cooperation in their communities, reports Randy Robison and John Archer. In Belfast, Northern Ireland, for instance, Catholics and Protestants joined together for the march. March for Jesus organizers says the marches are an opportunity for Christians to "take down the walls of the church and celebrate Jesus in the public square," according to Robison and Archer.

In a recent book on the movement, Kendrick says that "The once-powerful, visible church has become virtually invisible. I have a vision for the church becoming visible again-- the 'bride on display,' if you will." The marches have also served to put evangelical churches on the front pages. "Even the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which typically disregards religious events, has had to take note of what the church is doing," Kendrick adds. The response to these marches have been mixed, with some being converted on the spot, while others jeer at the marchers. The American organizers of the movement come from the evangelical-charismatic orbit, such as Bill Bright of Campus Crusade and John Wimber of Vineyard Ministries. On May 23, March for Jesus events will take place in more than 120 U.S. cities, and every capital city in Europe will also have praise marches. (Charisma & Christian Life, 600 Rhinehart Road, Lake Mary, FL 32746)



## NEW IMMIGRATION BILL HELPING TO BRING WORLD RELIGIONS TO U.S.

A new infusion of religious leaders and workers into America from the world's non-Christian religions will be the likely result of a recently-passed U.S. immigration bill, according to Hinduism Today newspaper (April). The bill, passed last fall by Congress, liberalized the "religious worker" qualifications for immigration to include a new "lay religious worker" category. "Previously the religious worker type of visa was more or less for priests or, with greater difficulty, for monks. Now, spectacularly, there's an almost endless spectrum of possibilities-- religion teachers, instructors, counselors, librarians, temple craftsmen, pundits, missionaries, even temple musicians, dancers and temple cooks and seamstresses-- not excluding anyone seeking on-the-job training in these areas," the newspaper reports. While the actual wording of the bill claims that the applicant has to be a member of a U.S. denomination, suggesting an advantage for Christians, immigration officials emphasize that any American religious group can sponsor religious workers in obtaining visas.

The new bill will end the bureaucratic technicalities that have taken place between non-Judeo-Christian religions and immigration officials. In the case of Hindus, for years, U.S. temples had to explain why their equivalent of an ordained minister "didn't have a college degree or doctorate in theology...[and] that they don't do marriage counseling or organize Sunday church picnics." The newspaper adds that the "U.S. immigration office is emphasizing they want the Asian religious community to use this new visa...With the influx of over a million Buddhists in the last decade (many from Vietnam), an Indian population growing towards the one million mark--and Muslims approaching the 10 million mark-- America has had to face the fact of its religious plurality and make visa rules work for everybody." Hindus have greeted the bill with "emphatic delight." With the help of New York Hindu lawyer Sidney Elfman, over 50 U.S. and Canadian Hindu temple societies have been contacted regarding the visa's potential of bringing in a new range of religious help. Over a dozen groups have already responded, "seeking Elfman's Hindu-tailored legal expertise, including the grandfather of U.S. temples, the Hindu Temple of Flushing, N.Y..." (Hinduism Today, 1819 Second St., Concord, CA 94519)

## CATHOLIC PRIESTS MOVING TO EPISCOPALIAN PRIESTHOOD DOWNPLAYED?

There has been a steady yet unpublicized stream of former Catholic priests moving into the priesthood of the Episcopal Church, according to the National Catholic Reporter (April 3). At least 345 former Catholic priests been accepted into the ministry of the Episcopal Church since 1970, while 90 former Episcopal priests who have gone the other way since 1981, the year the practice was approved by the Vatican. While considerable attention has focused on these former Episcopalians moving into the Catholic priesthood, the other trend has "been all but ignored in Catholic quarters and largely played down by Episcopal leaders," according to the Religious News Service-based article. One Catholic-turned-Episcopal priest says that the "Roman Catholic Church wishes [the phenomenon of Catholic priests joining the Episcopal priesthood] would go away. Episcopal Church leaders don't want to call attention to it because they don't want to disturb relations with Rome." While critics say that



the former Catholics who are now Episcopal priests made the move because they wanted to marry, most interviewed claim that wider concerns, such as papal authority and such church positions as divorce and birth control, prompted them to change denominations. (National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 419281, Kansas City, MO 64141)

## CANADIAN SEMINARY ENROLLMENTS REBOUNDED

Canadian Protestant theological schools are reporting an upswing in candidates for the ministry and an increased interest in the extra courses offered in theology on a part-time or correspondence basis, according to the United Church Observer (April), the magazine of the United Church of Canada. This development represents a departure from twenty years of steady decline in enrollment, withering resources and lack of commitment in Canadian seminaries, writes Roy Bonisteel. One official from Queen's Theological College, Kingston, Ontario, says that the student increase means the past decade of austerity that the liberal United Church of Canada has suffered through may be over. The college has had to launch a \$500,000 campaign to help finance not only the ministerial studies, but a demand for correspondence courses in theology and, also, scholarships for Third World students. A number of factors are cited for the increased interest in church careers: The resulting lack of jobs from the recession may make the ministry seem like a more secure field, or a new concern for "humanitarian" service in the face of growing technology and violence. The Canadian student increase appears to follow the U.S. pattern in that most of the seminarians are older and entering the ministry as a second career rather than young people just out of college. (United Church Observer, 84 Pleasant Blvd., Toronto, Ont., M4T 2Z8 Canada)

## CLERGY-LAITY SPLIT IN SUPPORT FOR LE PEN'S FAR RIGHT MOVEMENT

While religious leaders played a large part in denouncing the upsurge of support for the right wing leader Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front during the recent elections in France, there is a fairly large segment of practicing Catholics who support the politician, according to The Tablet (March 28), a British Catholic magazine. Le Pen's National Front has emerged as the largest and most powerful extreme-right party in Western Europe since World War II-- a fact driven home to voters in the March French regional and local elections. Support for the National Front reached as high as 30 percent in the south of France and 16 percent in the Paris region, beating the socialists. The local elections are "traditionally used to deliver warning shots over the bows of the governing party. The crunch will come next year with the parliamentary elections," writes reporter Alain Woodrow. He adds that "For once it was the religious leaders who took the lead in denouncing the extreme right, in no uncertain terms." Archbishop of Lyons Cardinal Albert Decourtray told Catholics not to abstain from voting but to extend their influence for a democratic society," yet warning that "Hitler was brought to power by democratic elections."

Bishops in the southern Provence-Méditerranée region published a statement on the electoral campaign in which they defended the right of the immigrant worker-- alluding to the National Front's anti-immigrant policy. Even France's chief rabbi, rarely given to political statements publicly called Le Pen "dangerous." But Le Pen continues to have a hold



over a noteworthy segment of France's Catholics. The Catholic magazine La Vie published an opinion poll which showed that 13 percent of practicing Catholics consider Le Pen's political program as "very close or close to Christian values." Only 50 percent of practicing Catholics feel that the church should condemn his ideas, and 17 percent of them feel "very close or close to his ideas." Only 67 percent said they would never vote for Le Pen "under any circumstances." One finding may cheer religious leaders: 74 percent of practicing Catholics do not believe that Le Pen and his party are "sincere in their reference to Christian values, but simply use them for their political ends." (The Tablet, 48 Great Peter St., London SW1P 2HB ENGLAND)

## GREENING OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND ACTIVISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

A new breed of activist priest in the Philippines is forging a "green" version of liberation theology that blends ecology with social justice, according to the Far Eastern Economic Review (April 23). While activist priests are nothing new in the Philippines--some have taken part in the communist guerilla movement-- "these days a growing number of priests are talking about religion and nature. They say it is the role of the church to be on the front line of the environmental battle that is raging in the Philippine countryside. Priests are preaching ecology, logging bans and, in some provinces, heading to the hills to stop loggers." One priest preaching for a moratorium on logging in the Sierra Madre mountains brought together liberationist and ecological concerns, explaining, "We are anti-logging not only for ecological reasons but also because logging supports the status quo. We want to change present conditions." On the southern island of Mindanao, all of the province of Bukidnon's 44 priests have been deputized by the government as "forest officers" to enforce a ban against logging. The government chose to give priests this position because of their "credibility and strong influence" in these communities.

The environmental concern among the priests and other church activists started in 1988 when the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines issued a pastoral letter read across the country warning against exploitation of the forests and the seas. The bishops stated that the official church was slow to respond to the "ecological crisis," and asked parishioners and church offices to organize and advocate ecological causes. But meanwhile, the church finds itself in conflict with critics in the government who claim that its position against birth control is causing the population growth that brings environmental decline. The church's Episcopal Commission on Family Life, on the other hand, maintains that the view that rapid population growth depletes resources is outdated, citing countries which enjoy economic growth despite fast population growth rates. (Far Eastern Economic Review, 181-185 Gloucester Rd., Centre Point, Hong Kong)

## ISLAMIC UPDATE

\* "Many African Muslims are looking to a non-Arab Muslim state for support: Iran," according to the Catholic World Report magazine (March). The March RW cited a report on the Islamic fundamentalist upsurge in Algeria which forecasted that Algerian and North African Muslims are not likely to adopt an Iran-style Islam. But it appears that the Iranian



appeal is stronger in parts of black Africa (as opposed to Arabic Africa in the north). Islam scholar Donal Cruise O'Brien writes that "Black Africa's Islamic militants have an ambivalent attitude toward the Arab world...there is a common perception, among black African Muslims, of racial arrogance on the part of present-day Arabs." This ambivalence stems from historic memories of Arab involvement in the slave trade and such recent events as the incursion of Colonel Qaddafi's forces in Chad, and the ongoing civil war in the Sudan between Arab Muslim northerners and black Christian or animist southerners.

While Islamic militancy had been associated with the Arabs in the 1970s, the Iranian revolution of 1979 proved to be a liberating example for black African Muslims. "Here has been an alternative model of Islamic government and society, which is at the same time not Arab," O'Brien writes. He concludes that the leaders of Islamic militancy, "from Qibla in the Republic of South Africa to Ibadou Rahmane in Senegal or Said Musa's center in Tanzania, are often those with an Iranian linkup: a minority phenomenon, but a highly significant minority, and continent-wide." (Catholic World Report, 2515 McAllister St., San Francisco, CA 94118)

\* Among Muslim countries, Saudi Arabia and Sudan are the most intolerant of other religions, according to a recent study by the Zwemer Institute, a Pasadena, Calif.-based evangelical organization that studies Islam. The National & International Religion Report (April 6) notes that the study compared religious freedom in 33 Muslim nations according to such criteria as human rights abuses, incidents of violence, the status of women and constitutional laws. It was found that countries in the "very-intolerant" range--Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan--had instituted Sharia, or Islamic law. Sudan received the highest intolerance rating for its "holy war" against non-Muslims in the country's southern region. The west African states of Mali, Senegal, and Niger, along with Jordan and Lebanon, were deemed the most tolerant during 1991. The study also noted that Muslim minorities in Myanmar, India, Israel, and Yugoslavia are defending themselves "against an aroused Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and Christian Serb-Croat nationalism." (National & International Religion Report, P.O. Box 21433, Roanoke, VA 24018)

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## Religion Watch

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- Academic Revival of Religion; Le Pen and the Catholic Vote



# FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

## PRESS NOTES

May/June 1992

\* Crosswinds: The Reformation Digest made its debut in March at the National Religious Broadcasters' convention. The result of several years of planning by evangelical activist Jay Grimstead of the Coalition on Revival, the omnibus journal aims at bringing together the most theologically and politically minded conservative Protestants into a loose confederation, while consciously avoiding the most controversial and divisive programs of the Reconstructionist movement. Reconstructionists have gained attention for their teachings that society should be ruled by the Old Testament, which would mean capital punishment for adultery, schools being run by churches and similar laws. The masthead of Crosswinds includes 110 names, a virtual who's-who of right wing conservatives, including Reconstructionist leaders R.J. Rushdoony and Gary North, but also many of their critics.

In its 140 pages, Crosswinds offers articles on foreign affairs, the New Age movement, prayer, family policy, and science, as well as book reviews and editorial comments. It hints at organizing local political blocs to sway elections on matters such as school board elections and controls over pornography. The journal's significance lies not only in its steering away from the Reconstructionists but in its attempt to offer a forum where an enormously diverse variety of issues can be printed and critiqued. Crosswinds indicates that the extreme right has found it expedient no longer to fire salvos at each other, as in classic fundamentalism, but to reach out for consensus. There is, literally, something for everyone here, and that in itself is news from this group. For more information, write: Crosswinds, 789 El Camino Real, Sunnyvale, CA 94087. -- By Erling Jorstad

\* The fledgling newsletter American Orthodoxy represents a unique attempt to relate Eastern Orthodoxy to American culture and world affairs. That the quarterly newsletter is being published by the neoconservative Ethics and Public Policy Center suggests that Orthodoxy is now being viewed as a significant player on the religio-political scene, especially with the reemergence of Orthodox influence in the former Soviet Union and parts of Eastern Europe. The premier (Winter) issue features articles stressing traditional theology, while addressing political concerns: a commentary on Catholic-Orthodox tensions in Yugoslavia; a call for tolerance toward immigrants and support for immigration from former communist countries; Orthodox involvement in the pro-life movement; criticism of feminist influence in Orthodoxy; and an examination of just war philosophy in the Eastern tradition, especially as it relates to the gulf war. A subscription to American Orthodoxy can be obtained with a \$25 contribution. Write to: Orthodox Studies Project, Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1015 Fifteenth St., NW, #900, Washington, DC 20005)

\* Most periodicals dealing with new religious movements (NRM) or "cults" have usually come from an anti-cultist or evangelical position, but the recent publication of the journal Syzygy provides an exception to that rule. The quarterly journal, sponsored by NRM specialist Gordon Melton's Institute for the Study of American Religion and Italy's Center for



Studies on New Religions, focuses on the "traditional" new religious movements, such as the Unification Church, as well as communal groups, such movements as the New Age, occultism, and UFO and Identity (white supremacist) groups. The first issue (Winter) features an article by Gordon Melton on the greater receptivity toward NRM's in Europe than in the U.S.; the utopian vision of the Danish commune, Christiania; and the UFO contactee phenomenon. A subscription costs \$30 and is available from: Center for Academic Publication, Stanford University Branch, Box 5097, Stanford, CA 94309-5097.

\* For those wanting more in-depth treatment of the Euthanasia debate in the religious community than found in the January RW article, we recommend the special report entitled, Active Euthanasia, Religion and the Public Debate published by the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Faith, Health and Medicine. The book-length report examines euthanasia in historical perspective, and then looks at how a wide diversity of American and world religions view the issue, as well as how such views relate to current public policy. A thorough bibliography is also provided in the back pages. The report costs \$10 and is available from the Park Ridge Center, 676 N. St. Clair, St., Suite 450, Chicago, IL 60611.

## ON/FILE: A Survey of Groups, Movements and People Impacting Religion

1) Brian Wren is in the forefront of efforts to rewrite Christian liturgy and hymns to include feminine and other non-traditional references to God. Liturgy and hymn books that include such "gender inclusiveness" in references to God are increasingly coming to the market and are being met with protest and some praise from Catholic and mainline Protestant church members. Wren, an Oxford-educated poet now based in Rome, Pa., is the author of many of these hymns. One of his best-known is "Bring Many Names," which invokes "strong Mother God," "warm Father God," "old, aching God," and "young growing God." Wren travels the country giving seminars in which he encourages people to "brainstorm images of God." At a recent San Francisco gathering, ministers and church musicians came up with a lengthy list of new names-- "Beautiful Movement," "Straight-talking Lover," "Daredevil Gambler"-- that he incorporated into a hymn. Says Wren: "The fact that Jesus called God Father doesn't mean he was teaching us to use that name for time and eternity...the biblical tradition is that God cannot be contained in human language." (Source: Wall Street Journal, April 27)

2) The growth of "megachurches" (large, multi-purpose congregations) around the U.S. has led to the formation of a new alliance of these congregations called Churches United in Global Mission (CUGM). The organization was launched by televangelist Robert Schuller and already has a membership of 80 megachurches (which are large, multi-purpose congregations) which set out to "share positively" the Christian message...and [to address] the needs of humanity and our environment." Schuller says that mainline denominations are a "spent resource" and that the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals have "failed" in their ecumenical missions. "The most creative and effective things [in ministry] are happening on the local level through inspired leaders," Schuller adds. CUGM members agree to avoid public debate on theological and political leaders. The organization is open to all Protestants, Catholics and Eastern Orthodox churches, although no Catholic or Orthodox parishes have joined yet. Schuller's television program, "Hour of Power," encourages new Christians to attend a church that is affiliated with the new network. (Source: Twin Cities Christian, April 2)