

# RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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## NEW INNER-CITY MINISTRIES STRESS DEVELOPMENT, RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Since the riots last year in Los Angeles there has been a renewed concern and involvement among religious groups on the social and spiritual problems of American inner-cities. Such activity is especially evident among evangelical churches which, unlike Catholic and mainline Protestant groups, have had less of a presence in urban areas. The new involvement ranges from congregations custom made for blighted urban areas to efforts in community development and racial reconciliation. Below are some snapshots of these emerging ministries that appear to be making an impact on the inner-cities.

"AIDS and L.A. riots have shaken up the evangelicals in a good way," says Rodolpho Carrasco, an editor of *Urban Family*, an evangelical magazine on urban affairs based in Pasadena, Calif. He told RELIGION WATCH that the unrest of a year ago has moved evangelicals "to finally get on board with holistic, economic-based community service." Evangelical efforts in the inner-city have largely been concerned with evangelism, or "harvesting" ministries, but now such activity is being joined with community development. Such development work can mean starting a resource center for ex-prisoners, drug rehabilitation, investing in neighborhood companies and new enterprises, and forming programs to strengthen marriages. While this trend is evident across the U.S., Carrasco sees its strongest impact in blighted South Central L.A. For example, Victory Outreach in South Central has started a job-training program as part of its philosophy that conversion needs to be followed up by programs that help people to be "pillars of the community." Many evangelical ministries have moved into the area, and "within five years you are likely to see significant community development work there," Carrasco says.

The mounting toll of deaths and suffering from the AIDS crisis has also propelled evangelicals to turn their attention to those afflicted with the disease, according to Carrasco. He confirms a report last year from *Pacific News Service* (June 1-5) which says that there have been a growing number of AIDS ministries being run by conservative congregations in urban areas-- from evangelical to Mormon. According to the AIDS Interfaith Network in Washington, approximately one-quarter of the 850 congregation-based AIDS ministries are conservative Christian. A national network on AIDS issues has been established by Mormons after congregations, or wards, were affected by the disease in San Francisco. Such involvement has even led to changes in Mormon theology on homosexuality-- marriage is no longer viewed as a cure for homosexuality,

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and homosexuality is off the "must excommunicate" list, reports Barbara Kelley. Such involvement by conservative groups has also led to more sympathetic attitudes toward homosexuals, though not acceptance of their lifestyles.

Meanwhile, a growing concern among evangelicals for racial reconciliation and unity may be a result of, as well as a factor in, their involvement in the inner-cities. Carrasco notes that most of the major evangelical magazines have run or are planning stories on this theme. Charisma magazine (April) reports that independent charismatic congregations have become the most active in denouncing racism and tearing down racial barriers, largely because they are unencumbered by denominational "bureaucratic baggage." Several surveys have shown that Sunday morning has remained the most segregated time of the week for most American Christians, but it appears that congregations with a common Pentecostal background are an exception to the rule; they often find inspiration from the mixed race, black-led Azusa Street revival in 1906 in Los Angeles which started the Pentecostal movement. "Anyone seeking evidence of a trend toward racially blended, charismatic/Pentecostal fellowships need look no further than some of the nation's largest charismatic churches," such as the Jubilee Christian Center in San Jose, California; Orlando Christian Center, Orlando, Florida; and the Covenant Church of Pittsburgh. Each of these churches has a racially blended pastoral staff and are in areas that are interracial in flavor. The magazine adds that recent March for Jesus USA rallies held in many cities have also served to bring white and black evangelicals closer together.

The "harvesting" or evangelistic ministries mentioned by Carrasco earlier have become increasingly non-traditional as they have sought to deal with the escalating problems of the inner-city. One of the most controversial is the Set Free Fellowship that started in California and is now growing in cities across the country. The Australian journal Zadok Perspectives (December) reports in its "America Watch" column that the fellowships are drawing large crowds that include gang members, drug addicts, and bikers to their non-traditional, "street-tough" services. One congregation in Anaheim, Calif., has 5000 people regularly attending. The fellowships use secular rap, reggae, and rock songs substituting Christ-centered words-- "just like Luther and Wesley did with bar room songs of their day...During the last nine months they have planted 30 churches in the toughest of neighborhoods-- places from which other churches are keen to leave...An amazing 70 percent or more of their growth is conversion growth," writes Bruce Lindley. He adds that Set Free has been the center of a controversy because of its strict drug rehabilitation program. A more preventive-based ministry that is having an impact among inner-city children are sidewalk Sunday schools, according to Charisma (February). The Metro Assembly in Brooklyn, N.Y., started the trend as it sent out trucks with open stages to New York neighborhoods where children are taught Bible lessons with such visual aids as videos. There are now sidewalk Sunday schools in Miami, Detroit, Los Angeles, Grand Rapids, Seattle, Dallas, Washington, and other U.S. and foreign cities.

Coming out of Brooklyn is another ministry that is becoming a trend-setter, this time among black churches. St. Paul Community Baptist Church, the recent subject of the acclaimed book Upon This Rock (Harper-Collins) by Samuel Freedman, started with a handful of poor and disadvantaged members, and through the leadership of its pastor Johnny

Ray Youngblood, the congregation has soared to a membership of over 5,000. Freedman's book shows how Youngblood confronted the long-standing inertia over effective means of inner-city ministry with fresh programs targeted at drug addicts, unwed mothers, and poor people. The ministry outreach centers largely on community involvement along with keeping spiritual life vibrant. Youngblood and the book's author agree that St. Paul's most effective innovation has been its ministry to African-American men, a group long neglected by other congregations. Youngblood has tapped into these men's need for a place to learn and reaffirm congregational and family responsibility. Already, other churches across the country are reported to be looking to St. Paul's for help in putting to use such innovations, reports the Washington Post (March 13). (Charisma, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746; Zadok Perspectives, Locked Bag 23, Kew PO, Vic 3101, Australia)--Erling Jorstad, RW contributing editor and professor of History at St. Olaf College, contributed to this report.

## BABY BOOMER MINISTRY INCREASINGLY DIVIDING FUNDAMENTALISTS

A sharp split is emerging among American fundamentalists over the use of new forms of ministry to attract baby boomers. For several years Protestant fundamentalism in the U.S. has been in a period of turmoil and division over such issues as whether or not to cooperate with non-fundamentalist churches in political activism and sexual and leadership scandals among prominent pastors [see June 89 RW]. Now more fuel has been added to the fire as the January-March issue of the strict or "militant" fundamentalist magazine Church Bus News [the publication's name stems from its emphasis on busing children to Sunday school] attacks fundamentalist congregations that have adopted "seeker-oriented" models of church growth that eschew such traditional evangelistic methods as "hell-fire" preaching, revival meetings, Sunday schools, and instantaneous conversion to embrace contemporary music, non-confrontational teaching-based sermons, and conversion as a gradual process.

The new seeker model, pioneered by Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, is said to be "a dangerous" heresy, as it "plunders confrontational soulwinning ministries and pushes any church who practices it into an exclusivist, religious, ego trip...This is not Bible-believing fundamentalism. This is one short step from Modernism!" [The alarmist tone on this subject is increasingly found in other militant fundamentalist publications. It appears that fundamentalist churches, such as Jerry Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church, that have adapted the seeker model are showing signs of growth, while more traditional fundamentalist congregations have been stalled in growth since the 1980s.] (Church Bus News, 166 Swan Lake Dr., Stockbridge, GA 30281)

## INCREASING CLAMP-DOWN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The Internal Revenue Service's recent action against Jerry Falwell's Old Time Gospel Hour program for engaging in political activism appears to be the latest sign of increasing government restriction of religious groups involved in such activity, according to the Washington Post (April 10). Falwell is being fined \$50,000 for using TV ministry funds for such



prohibited purposes as helping candidates seek elective office during his "I Love America" Committee program. The fine was levied after negotiations between the IRS and Falwell's agents reached an agreement. The Committee was disbanded, and the tax-exempt status for the Old Time Gospel Hour, now rid of politicking, was restored. This levy follows an IRS policy established in 1991 when it fined Jimmy Swaggart Ministries 171,000 for similar political activity in the mid-1980s. Observers of the Christian Right, such as Arthur Kropp of People for the American Way and leaders of the Baptist Joint Committee for Public Affairs interpret the recent IRS action as evidence that the IRS is stepping up its enforcement of laws prohibiting political use of funds designated for religious ministries.-- By Erling Jorstad.

## NEW AGE, SELF-HELP SPIRITUALITY GETTING COLD SHOULDER FROM AIDS PATIENTS

The growth of New Age-based self-healing spirituality among people suffering with AIDS appears to be on the wane as the disease's fatalities have discredited some of the movement's too-easy concepts about the relationship between mind and body, according to Common Boundary (May/June), a magazine on spirituality and psychotherapy. During the 1980s, various New Age-oriented groups emerged that taught that AIDS patients could tap into their spiritual potential to survive longer and even be healed. Foremost among these groups was Louise Hay's Science of the Mind, which formed AIDS healing circles across the country, using such techniques as visualization to bring about spiritual and physical healing. Marianne Williamson, popular leader of the New Age-oriented Course on Miracles also established a Center on Living for AIDS patients, espousing the belief that are responsible for their illnesses. Through such teachings and techniques, AIDS patients, who were often critical of institutional religions, thought "they wer keeping AIDS away with affirmations, but actually it was just what we now refer to as the honeymoon period," writes Mark Matousek.

When such people did finally get sick, they blamed themselves for doing something wrong. "Thus many infected and dying individuals, alienated by both the religious and new age contingents, found themselves in a spiritual no man's land, compelled to create an approach to healing and spirituality forged from their own experience meeting their own particular needs, incorporating their own unique gifts, and drawing from the best of mainstream and alternative sources." Matousek writes that many are finding a general (and sometimes non-theistic) spirituality from the sense of community created through the hundreds of AIDS groups started. He adds that the "experience of deepened spirituality seems to be nearly universal among those touched by AIDS," citing Buddhism and various forms of meditation as popular forms of spirituality. (Common Boundary, 4304 East-West Highway, Bethesda, MD 20814)

## CATHOLIC FEMINISM TOO INCLUSIVE TO KEEP IDENTITY?

Catholic feminists are emphasizing diversity to such an extent that some leaders of the movement think the Catholic component has being obscured, according to the National Catholic Reporter (April 16). The question of whether religious identity is being diluted among Catholic feminists has become a hot topic of debate and controversy, especially among those connected with Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of 40 Catholic-based



# FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

## PRESS NOTES

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\* Progress In Theology is an unusual new quarterly newsletter that seeks to challenge established science with theological ideas and challenge theology with scientific research and data. The newsletter is published by the Center for Humility Theology, a new group started by financial advisor and philanthropist John Templeton (who annually awards his million dollar Templeton Prize to innovators in religion). The eight-page inter-faith newsletter (which has an advisory board that includes neurophysicist Sir John Eccles and sociologist Peter Berger) reports on research in the physical and social sciences that could shed light on the "purpose of the Creator," and on the progress and benefits of religion. The editor says that "Our culture has become contentious, self-serving...and that attitude has affected scientists and theologians and other thinking people in a way which makes honest exploration and open inquiry about God very difficult." For a free subscription write: Progress in Theology, P.O. Box 429, Topsfield, MA 01983-0629.

\* While the American liberal religious press has been in the doldrums for at least the past decade (the mainline Christianity & Crisis magazine just published its last issue last month), the religious feminist press is thriving. The following periodicals represent a brief sampling of Christian and Jewish feminist journalism that may also serve as a guide to some of the directions religious feminism is currently taking. [Findings & Footnotes was unable to review feminist periodicals from an alternative religious perspective at presstime; stay tuned for such a review in a future issue].

Daughters of Sarah (380 N. Keeler, Chicago, IL 60641. Quarterly. \$18 per year) has emerged as the leading ecumenical feminist publication. The magazine has an interesting history: It was founded by evangelicals in the 1970s, but gradually found a wider readership among mainline Protestants and Catholics, with the latter predominating today. The magazine could be said to represent a school of liberal or reformist feminism among the churches; the Christian tradition is accepted while most of the articles call for more room to be made for inclusive language in speaking of God, a pro-choice position on abortion, and gay rights. The magazine mainly features first-person stories and does not shy away from controversy, with one recent issue dealing candidly with prostitution. The speculation that Catholic women make up a formidable presence in Christian feminism is confirmed by the growing number of Catholic-based feminist publications [see an article on this trend in the January 15 National Catholic Reporter]. Often these publications occupy the more radical or liberationist end of the spectrum [see related article on Catholic feminism in this month's issue of RW]. WATERwheel (8035 13th St., Silver Spring, MD 20910. Quarterly. Subscription by donation) reports on the alternative spirituality movement that has burgeoned among Catholic women. The newsletter, with a circulation of 10,000, views much of Christianity as too patriarchal to be reformed, and focuses on alternative rituals and liturgy (often involving the Goddess movement), as well as pro-choice and other women's issues.



The Center for Women and Religion in Berkeley, Calif., issues a monthly newsletter and the annual Journal of Women and Religion (GTU, 2400 Ridge Rd., Berkeley, CA 94709. Write for membership fee). The newsletter serves as a clearinghouse of news and announcements of events for mainly Jewish and Christian feminists. The journal publishes theological articles, poetry, and first-hand biographical accounts of women's issues both from radical and reformist perspectives. Priscilla Papers (380 Lafayette Freeway #122, St. Paul, MN 55107-1216. Quarterly. \$20 membership fee) represents the growing evangelical feminist movement. The magazine is published by Christians for Biblical Equality, a group that broke away several years ago from the feminists based around Daughters of Sarah because of the latter's support for homosexual lifestyles. Priscilla Papers, which carries theological and more practical feature articles, is more moderate than the above publications, especially on matters of sexuality and abortion, while supporting women's ordination, equality in marriage, and, more surprisingly, a degree of inclusive language in referring to God.

\* Wade Clark Roof's A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation (HarperSanFrancisco, \$20) is likely to become this year's most discussed book on religion by scholars, clergy, church growth specialists, and baby boomers themselves. Through both surveys and case studies, Roof and a team of researchers document the religious "cultures" of the baby boomer generation that have been the subject of so many reports lately (often covered in RW). The sociologist finds that whether baby boomers are liberal or conservative, Protestant, Catholic or Jewish, they are more alike than different in their emphasis on choice, tolerance of different lifestyles (to one degree or another), and blending of faith and psychology (closely identifying the "self" with the spiritual). The reason Roof's work is likely to be controversial is that it is far from an objective, disinterested study of the religious habits of baby boomers; he sees the baby boomer style of religious consumerism and individualism (which he calls a "transformed narcissism") that accepts the role of faith communities as the wave of the American religious future.

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

1) Benjamin Chavis Jr. is becoming a name to watch in the changing world of religion and U.S. politics. Chavis, a United Church of Christ minister and activist, was recently named executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as being a member of President Bill Clinton's transition team. While selected a minister to head the NAACP is not unique (his predecessor, Benjamin Hooks, was also a minister), Chavis comes more from the white-based mainline Protestant-liberationist orbit than from the black church. But Chavis, formerly the director of the UCC's Commission for Racial Justice, has been a long-time activist on black causes. He was the leader of the "Wilmington 10," a group of desegregation activists imprisoned (and later exonerated) for conspiracy and arson. Unlike earlier leaders, Chavis' activism has earned him stature amid the gang cultures of the inner-city. With his current focus on "environmental racism" and making systemic changes in the economic system, Chavis is likely to be a lightning rod of controversy in the religion-politics debate. (Source: The New Republic, May 10; Christian Century, April 28)



feminist groups. While Catholic feminists have been experimenting with non-Catholic theologies and rituals (such as those associated with the goddess movement) for several years, it appears that many fear that such spiritual currents are now gaining an ascendancy over Catholic concerns. The latest controversy was triggered when Sister Jeannine Gramick wrote in the newsletter of the National Coalition of American Nuns (which is a member of Women-Church Convergence) that the planning and publicity for the April conference hardly mentioned its Catholic identity; for instance, the word "liturgy" was changed to "sacred events" in the Women-Church brochure.

Even if some leaders deny that they are jettisoning their Catholic identity, they do admit that they are diversifying these groups. A recent emphasis on ethnic diversity in Women-Church is also leading to "spiritual diversity," says Mary Hunt of the Silver Springs, Md.-based Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual. There are now rituals performed by American Indians, Buddhists, Quakers and Jewish leaders, while also having a feminist Eucharist, according to Hunt. Another Women-Church leader says that the convergence may be heading toward a "hugely broad coalition-- the Goddess people, Methodist ministers, etc., with a Roman Catholic caucus." Dominican Sister Donna Quinn says that many women involved with Women-Church have given up on reforming the Catholic institution. She estimates that about half of convergence participants define church as what happens outside the official structures and that the other half equate church with the structures that they believe should be reformed. (National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 419281, Kansas City, MO 64141)

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

\* Non-white minorities are increasingly making their presence known at American Protestant seminaries--both mainline and evangelical. In accounting for the rise in seminary enrollment over the last year (5.1 percent), the evangelical magazine World (April 10) reports that much of the increase could be attributed to the increasing number of women and minorities in the schools. Female students make up 31 percent of the entire enrollment, increasing by 10 percent over last year. Growing even more over the last 20 years was the number of African-American seminarians (up 18.9 percent). Hispanic enrollment increased by 2.8 percent over this period [which is not much considering the Hispanic movement to evangelical congregations]. Forty percent of the student body at evangelical Fuller Theological Seminary is now non-white. Liberal Union Theological Seminary is now one-third non-white. The changing complexion of the student body is now impacting the curriculum at Fuller; students are now required to take a course in ethnicity called "Multiculturalism Today," which focuses on African-American, Hispanic-American and Asian-American experiences and their relation to theology. (World, Box 2330, Asheville, NC 28802)

\* There continues to be a "slow but steady increase since 1987 in the number of people who consider religion very important in their lives," reports Emerging Trends (April), the Gallup newsletter on religion. The most recent Gallup poll shows that religion is now considered very important in their own lives by 58 percent of the population. In 1987 the measurement of religion's importance had reached a low point of 53

percent. "There is still a long way to go, however, to match the record high of 75 percent in 1952," the newsletter adds. It was found that over three non-whites in four (78 percent) consider religion important, in comparison to just 55 percent of whites. The newsletter also reports that the findings on religion's importance are matched by figures showing a rise in church membership. The recent poll on membership shows that 70 percent of adults now claim membership of a church or synagogue-- the highest level recorded since 1985. (Emerging Trends, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 215, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542)

\* Canada remains overwhelmingly Christian in belief, with a larger number of evangelicals than previously thought, according to a recent poll. Canada's Maclean's Magazine (April 12) says the findings from the Religion Poll, conducted by the Angus Reid Group and Queen's University historian George Rawlyk, is the most extensive study yet of the religious faith of the country, surveying 4,510 adults. Although fewer than a quarter of Canadian adults attend religious services weekly, the poll finds that eight out of 10 affirm their belief in God, and two-thirds of all adults subscribe to the basic tenet of Christianity-- the death and resurrection of Jesus. Close to one-third of the adult population claims to pray daily and more than half to read the Bible or other religious literature at least occasionally. Seventy eight percent of Canadians still define themselves as Christians; almost two in 10 Canadians say that they have no religion at all.

At least 15 percent claim to have had a born again experience-- more than Rawlyk expected. Although evangelicalism has traditionally been associated with Protestantism, Rawlyk was surprised to find that a third of all evangelicals say they are Roman Catholic (whom he calls "Catho-evangelicals.") Other findings are close to those found in the U.S.: A large majority of Catholics (which included practicing and non-practicing Catholics) are dissenting from church teachings on birth control, premarital sex and abortion; evangelical churches are drawing higher attendance rates; and there is closer agreement among evangelical laity on their denominations' stands on sexual issues. Unlike their U.S. counterparts, there is little hint that Canadians vote along religious lines; although the populist Reform party was viewed as having strong conservative evangelical appeal, the poll finds that Reform had as much support among atheists as it did among evangelicals. The magazine concludes that "What the poll does not answer is why, given what it reveals about an overwhelmingly Christian populace, there is a near-total absence of religious discourse in Canadian politics, the media and advertising." Adds director of the poll, Andrew Grenville, "Christianity is flourishing outside the elites, and without attention from elites." (Maclean's, Maclean Hunter Bldg., 777 Bay St., Toronto MSW 1A7 Canada)

\* Recent surveys of religious belief and practice in Australia show a high degree of nominal Christianity, as well as a good deal of informal ecumenism taking place. The Australian Christian quarterly Zadok Perspectives (December) cites the recent study "Faith Without the Church: Nominalism in Australian Christianity," by the Christian Research Association, which shows that four out of five people identify with one of the mainline denominations, but only about one in every five Australians actually attend church or rarely do so. Anglicans lead the field with 85 percent of their members being rare- (less than once a month) or non-attenders, followed by the Uniting Church, Methodists,



Presbyterians and Catholics. The strangest finding is that 40 percent of those who identify themselves as Pentecostals say they never attend church-- the highest rate of non-attenders (Lutherans have the lowest rate). The researchers wonder whether Pentecostal churches, which often draw in a high number of newcomers, are now suffering from dropouts. Baptists have the highest rate of regular attendance (60 percent).

Another study from Church Life Survey shows a more vital side to Australian religious life. The survey, taken of 6,500 congregations, shows the churches generating a strong "sense of belonging"-- 62 percent say they feel a growing sense of belonging, and 86 percent say they are satisfied with their level of belonging. The churches are also drawing the educated: Seventeen percent of church members have a university degree compared with six percent in the general population. Women strongly outnumber men in the churches: 62 percent against 38 percent. The church members have also been moving very easily between denominations. Nearly one-third of all attenders have previously attended a different denomination, and about 12 percent had changed denominations within the last five years. The journal adds that "This has major implications. In one sense, ecumenism has happened at the popular level. One wonders whether it will be appropriate to talk about denominational affiliation in the future. Only 24 percent of the attenders...saw lifelong loyalty to denomination as important."

## FREE MARKET RELIGION PROSPERS IN ESTONIA

Last month's report on the new religions in Europe by Timothy Miller noted that the interest in such movements in Eastern Europe has little to do with the repudiation of material wealth that drove the spiritual seekers in the West a quarter century ago-- the reason being that Easterners have little wealth to repudiate. A report on the arrival of new religious movements in Estonia in the British quarterly Religion Today (Spring) suggests that the economic factor may have a more direct influence as to which groups succeed or fail in this region. Toomas Paul reports that "the most successful groups have been the proclaimers of Success, those who promise their recruits health, happiness and success in business...we have a 'Wild West' situation where only the brave win and speculators make the biggest profits. Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People," and Rev. N. Peale's "The Power of Positive Thinking" have already been published here. 'Make God Your Partner' means that God should be a partner in business, both earthly and heavenly. Faith and prayer are just ways of increasing success."

Paul adds that primarily Lutheran Estonia is inundated with books and booklets by Kenneth Hagin, the founder of the U.S.-based charismatic "faith movement," which teaches that Christians can claim prosperity and healing as part of Christ's redemption. Transcendental Meditation has made the biggest impact in the country, recruiting 20,000 in 1990 through a large-scale advertising campaign. Paul writes that the situation goes beyond the post-communist bewilderment about religious pluralism and economic freedom; with high inflation and little value to Estonian currency, there is hardly a way to compete with such movements. "In the present situation, American Presbyterians, paying in [American dollars], can buy time every Sunday morning on Estonian TV for Ben Haden's 'Awakening Sermon.' The Lutheran Church can only afford to transmit two

festive occasions a year." Paul sees Estonian society divided, with one segment moving to the Lutheran Church "as the public church, apparently valuing it for its traditional stability in this madly changing world. Others try to be on top of the wave and to be part of the most modern of religions. Like the rest of the world, the consumer value of religion appears to be more important than its meaning." (Religion Today, Kings College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS England)

## POPULAR CHURCH SERVICE DRAWING BACK DISSAFFECTED IN SECULAR FINLAND

While church attendance has been steadily dropping in Finland in the last 20 years, particularly in urban centers such as Helsinki, the popularity of a new kind of worship service suggests that such decline is not irreversible. Lutheran World Information (February 11) reports that the service, called the St. Thomas Mass, usually fills the state Lutheran churches where it is celebrated. The mass has been described as a "eucharistic celebration," as communion is the high point of the liturgy. About 1,300 people attend the service every Sunday evening in Helsinki, while in Tampere, the country's second largest city, it attracts about 1,000 people. The mass also takes place regularly in several other major Finnish towns. In comparison with traditional services, the St. Thomas Mass places a strong emphasis on prayer and music. Every celebration includes an opportunity for confession and anointing with oil. As the masses are prepared by participants, each is one is different. The participants, half of whom have distanced themselves from parish life, include a wide range of ages and social groups. Surveys of the participants have found that they value the masses' free style-- laity have a greater role in leadership, there is a variety of music styles, and the prayer section includes a period where there is freedom to move from one "prayer altar" to the next. (Lutheran World Information, P.O. Box 2100, Route De Ferney 150, CH-1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland)

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