

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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TWIN TOWER BOMBING, WACO, AND THE POPE IN DENVER-- BEYOND THE HEADLINES

In 1993 news of a religious nature often made the headlines-- the destruction of the Branch Davidians at Waco; the radical Muslim terrorist bombing at the World Trade Center; the Papal visit to Denver; the peace accord between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel; and the resulting recognition of Israel by the Vatican. These news events and others either carried religious trends that have been taking shape for several years or signaled developments that are just beginning to unfold. As in previous years, this review of religion in 1993 and preview of upcoming trends will cite issues of RELIGION WATCH where these developments. This year, however, we will also cite other publications and sources of information.

1) The visit of Pope John Paul II to Denver stood out from other papal visits mostly because of the size and enthusiasm of his young audience-- the same generation often reported to be disenchanted with Catholic teachings, and especially with the authority of the pope. While the crowds at Denver may not be representative of the views of the majority of "baby buster" Catholics, the event did show the stirrings of a sizable Christian youth movement. At roughly the same time, there were reports of evangelical youths protesting against banning prayers at public school graduations and organizing prayer meetings and Bible clubs in schools. Groups of evangelical and Catholic youth have since joined together in taking pledges of sexual abstinence until marriage [see January 1 New York Times]. Often this uncoordinated movement--especially in its evangelical expression--views itself as a new type of "Jesus movement," this time taking on an "establishment" (usually older baby boomers) they see as promoting secularism and the wrong kinds of sex education. (See November RW)

2) Last year's court cases on church-state separation and religious freedom suggest a changing legal landscape on such issues. Strict church-state separationists criticized two important Supreme Court rulings that permitted religious groups to use public school facilities after school hours and allowed public funds to be used to hire a tutor for a deaf student in a Catholic school. Church-state watchers are closely monitoring a case due before the Court that centers on creating a public school for a Hasidic Jewish students. But most religious freedom advocates hailed a decision ruling that an Afro-Cuban religious group practicing animal sacrifices could not be prohibited from doing so; the ruling was said to allow minority religions greater freedom. The passing of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act by Congress was also applauded

by a uniquely diverse coalition of religious and civil rights activists for giving greater government support to religious freedom. (September RW)

3) Both the destruction of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas and the bombing of the World Trade Center by terrorists associated with a radical brand of Islam brought American attention to the relation of religion and violence. Rather than becoming clearer, most of the factors behind the attacks and apparent mass suicides in Waco have become increasingly shrouded in mystery. Whatever the actual circumstances, the incident has highlighted the difficulties the government and public have in dealing with little-known religious groups-- and many are now asking if the government should be in the business of dealing with them at all. In the wake of the World Trade Center bombing, it was reported that "radical" Islamic groups have become the leaders in terrorist activity. For this reason the FBI is focusing its anti-terrorist investigations on such groups-- another issue likely to become enmeshed with religious freedom concerns. (April, October RW)

4) The New Christian Right bounced back in 1993. The election results from last November showed that Christian Right-based candidates are electable and their strong moral positions are not detrimental to the Republican Party. This was seen in the near-win of Michael Farris, who ran as the GOP candidate for Lieutenant Governor of Virginia. Farris received 46 percent of the total vote, and his platform included conservative positions on abortion, anti-gay legislation, and vouchers for private schools. The Christian Coalition, the conservative activist group founded by Pat Robertson, broadened its agenda last year to include such issues as crime, education and taxes, as well as reach out to non-evangelicals and minorities. This has clearly divided the Christian Right, as some of the more hardline activists have charged the Christian Coalition (and Pat Robertson) with watering down its agenda. Nevertheless, a recent gathering of journalists, activists and scholars at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington discussed the future of the religious right and concluded that the movement is gaining organizational and promotional savvy, and will continue to make impressive strides within GOP circles by maintaining its loyalty to its social agenda, such as pro-life and anti-gay legislation concerns. (September RW)

5) Last year also showed that the concern for moral issues and family values was not concentrated in the Republican/religious right orbit. Hillary Clinton's emphasis on a "politics of meaning" found resonance in moderate and liberal religious circles. The First Lady placed an emphasis on personal responsibility and voluntary action that removed much of her message from a traditional secular liberal mindset. The broad appeal of Yale Law School professor Stephen Carter's book, "The Culture of Disbelief"--publicly recommended by Bill Clinton-- which decried the effort to strip politics from moral and religious values, along with a recent greater emphasis on family values by President Clinton suggests that the battle lines in the much talked about "culture war" are not always clearly drawn. (June RW)

6) The peace accord between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel and its impact on religion can be interpreted from various angles. Several observers of American Judaism have forecasted that major changes may be ahead for Jewish communities outside of Israel. In Commonweal magazine (November 19) Norman Cantor writes that the agreement

represent the end of Zionism, a major component of identity for many Jews. With the threat of the Arabs removed from Israel, the moral and fiscal support provided by Diaspora (especially American) Jews will no longer be needed. Thus, with Jewish identity no longer driven by Zionism, Diaspora Jews will "move to recreate a Jewish consciousness based now on religious and cultural thrusts from within their own communities." Cantor predicts that in the future there will be greater Jewish involvement with other Christians. The Vatican recognition of Israel in late December also suggests that Catholic-Jewish cooperation will intensify in the future.

Meanwhile, the prospect of peace between Arabs and Jews in Israel has made the Christian "prophecy experts" [who have taught that a major war is pending between Israel and the Arab nations] more cautious, according to the Christian-based Inside Israel newsletter (Volume 13 No. 11). "It seems that the events of the past two to three years have taught them something. Many books that three years ago were best sellers, have been dumped for obvious reasons...Others are declaring that this is the beginning of the seven year period with the first three and one half years being one of peace and then comes the great tribulation." --Erling Jorstad contributed to this review. Jorstad, professor of History at St. Olaf College, participated in the Washington conference on the future of the religious right.

BLACK CHURCHES TAKING UP ENTREPRENEURIAL ROLE

Economic development has become a topic of concern among many religious groups and movements, but nowhere is such activity more evident than in black churches. Community development has been the subject of social statements, recommendations and sociological forecasts, but only recently have such plans been translated into workable models. The December issue of Black Enterprise magazine reports on the growth of church-led community development projects in both rural and urban black churches across the country. The Hartford Memorial Baptist Church transformed an abandoned plot in Detroit into a complex that will include a restaurant, supermarket, auto care center and a multimillion dollar housing project. Rev. Charles Adams, Hartford Memorial's pastor, says the "issue is jobs. People being laid off through all this corporate downsizing is affecting every black community in this country. The church finds itself in a situation where it recognizes the power of ownership and entrepreneurship. And they realize that, given their collective money and expertise, they are in a unique position to jump-start their communities."

Lloyd Gate reports that there are also a growing number of rural churches involved in such work, such as the Greater Christ Temple Church in Meridian, Miss. The congregation has lately received a good deal of media attention for its REACH program where church members own a number of restaurants, stores, and a farm. Not all of these churches are large or wealthy, but they "share a belief that the salvation of their communities depends on basic business and economic development. Behind them are pastors and church leaders who view the church's role as not just social or spiritual, but entrepreneurial as well, and can rely on congregations who are willing to pool their resources to create a strong business arm for the church." Gate adds that major corporations, cities, foundations and private individuals are offering grants to churches to help fund redevelopment projects. (Black Enterprise, 130 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10011)

THE CHURCHES AND CHRISTMAS SERVING AS A MELTING POT FOR IMMIGRANTS?

In their recent book One Nation Under God (see review in supplement), Barry Kosmin and Seymour Lachman make the intriguing observation that "religious identification and belief tend to crosscut racial and ethnic divisions among Americans and to provide a largely unappreciated level of social cohesion and consensus on core values. In fact, for many new immigrants the church rather than the public school is the new melting pot aiding their acculturation into their new society." (Pg. 116). This assertion is based on research conducted by Kosmin and Lachman where they found that Arab- and Asian-Americans were more likely to identify themselves with Christian churches than with their ancestral faiths, such as Islam and Buddhism. [While it is true that many of the Asians and Middle Easterners emigrating to the U.S. were originally Christians, the authors note that a significant number (especially the Asians) have converted to Christianity since arriving]. A sign of how the religious factor may help new immigrants move into the American mainstream can be seen in these newcomers' acceptance and adoption of the Christmas holiday. The New York Times (December 26) reports that many non-Christian immigrants in the New York City borough of Queens (considered one of the most ethnically diverse areas of New York and thus a laboratory of ethnic pluralism for the rest of the country) are now celebrating Christmas.

"Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Sikhs plugged in strings of lights, exchanged gifts, and held candles at carol services next to Christian friends and relatives." Many of the immigrants interviewed "echoed the idea that they were [celebrating Christmas] out of a newly acquired sense of national obligation, much as they prepared turkeys last month on Thanksgiving and watched fireworks on Independence Day...Those who have looked beyond the lights and the wrapping paper are often attracted to the spiritual side of Christmas, impressed by a non-specific message of serenity and good will that appeals to many with Eastern sensibilities." Muslim groups have sought to prevent their adherents from taking part in Christian holidays, but the Eastern religions have been more accepting of such participation-- although Eastern religious leaders are also disturbed by the development. There is the fear that the expansiveness of Hinduism and Buddhism toward the surrounding Christian culture may dissolve their own traditions. A former Buddhist told the newspaper: "The Buddhists say you can believe in almost everything, and it is too confusing in a place like America."

MAINLINE'S SILENT CENTER INCREASINGLY SPEAKING OUT, ORGANIZING

The conflicts in mainline Protestant bodies have often been depicted as involving two parties: conservatives and liberals. But increasingly, the "two-party system" of American Protestantism is being challenged by once silent "centrists," writes theologian Gabriel Fackre in his occasional Theology and Culture Newsletter (Number 33, Advent). Fackre writes that such groups are forming more over central concerns of Christian orthodoxy--such as preserving the doctrine of the Trinity-- rather than political or social issues. "Presbyterians are doing self-critical work in their seven volume self-study...Lutheran self-examination proceeds apace with two grassroots 'Call to Faithfulness' assemblies involving over a thousand Evangelical Lutheran Church in America pastors and teachers. A group of Episcopal priests have formulated a 'Baltimore

Declaration'...soul-searching abounds in mainline churches, coming not from the predictable critics on the right, but from the heretofore silent center of the church," Fackre writes. This trend of denominational centrists speaking out and organizing can be seen most clearly in Fackre's own United Church of Christ.

Long considered the most liberal of mainline bodies in doctrine and ethics, the UCC has seen several renewal bodies form recently. During November and December, a new group called "Confessing Christ" held several regional meetings explaining its agenda to inquirers, reports the Christian Century magazine (December 1). Among its priorities are resistance to those UCC leaders pushing to remove the word "Lord" from a new hymnal, and remove the male language in the traditional baptismal formula, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All of the centrist groups are fighting the latter action, interestingly enough, often for ecumenical reasons. Fackre writes in his newsletter that the self-chosen baptismal formulas often used by UCC liberals (such as "Creator, Christ and Spirit") "no longer have universal status, not only in Roman Catholic circles but in most of the rest of the church ecumenical. The choice by these UCC folk to break ecumenical bonds is painful indeed in a denomination that has prided itself on being a 'Church united and uniting.'" The UCC centrists are largely supportive of the denomination's work in "justice and peace" issues, but are "nevertheless profoundly troubled by the loss of theological substance and the corresponding growth of ideology." (Theology and Culture Newsletter, Andover Newton Theological School, 210 Herrick Rd., Newton Centre, MA 02159; Christian Century, 407 S. Dearborn, Chicago, IL 60605)-- Erling Jorstad contributed to this report.

NEW GENERATION OF EVANGELICAL LEFT EMERGING

One of the oldest and most influential of American evangelical interest groups, Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), recently underwent a major overhaul of its objectives and commitments, and in the process showed some of the changes taking place in the evangelical left. Meeting for a 20th anniversary conference in November, the members, who had long been on the cutting edge of moderate to radical social justice efforts within the evangelical world, redesigned their long range objectives. The National and International Religion Report (November 29) reports that younger evangelicals in the group are pushing for more direct confrontation with such issues as racism, xenophobia, the religious right, sexism, family values, and environmentalism. The 'older' generation (who were known as the "young evangelicals" 20 years ago), led by Ron Sider, Jim Wallis (of Sojourners) and John Perkins, had originally proposed a manifesto focusing largely on such long-standing issues as poverty, world peace and economic justice. Observers and participants alike agreed the new look for the ESA reflects the bold new confidence younger evangelicals have shown in working for their particular agendas. Something of a changing of the guard occurred at the Chicago meeting, a change hailed by both old and young alike. (International and National Religion Report, P.O. Box 21433, Roanoke, VA 24018) -- By Erling Jorstad

CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY IN U.S. INCREASINGLY DE-EUROPEANIZED

American Catholics interested in spirituality today are far more likely to seek sustenance from U.S.-based and popular writers than from the

weighty European theologians that they preferred 25 years ago, according to America magazine (November 27). Robert Hamma compares the best-seller lists from 1968 and 1993 from the Spiritual Book Associates, a book club focusing on spirituality. Back in 1968, the bestseller list was made up of authors who were men and priests, including such books as "Hymn of the Universe," by French theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and "Watch and Pray With Me," by German theologian Karl Rahner. In 1993 the most popular book ("May I Have This Dance") was by a women, Sister Joyce Rupp. Not too far down on the list is another book ("Lessons of the Heart") by a laywoman, Patricia Livingston.

The 1993 list does not include any major theologians (although their inclusion in the 1968 list may be partly because of the greater need for theological interpretation of the Second Vatican Council). The book club today is also made up of 30 percent laypeople, whereas in 1968 it consisted mainly of priests. Hamma writes that the biggest change has been the "Americanization of contemporary spirituality. Five of the ten books on the 1968 list were translations. Two more were written in English in the U.S., but by Dutch-born psychologist Adrian van Kaam. As was the case in theology, spirituality was heavily influenced by Europe. By contrast, all of today's best sellers were written in English, seven by Americans. Two of the three books not written in the U.S. are by the Jesuit from India, [the late] Anthony de Mello. (America, 106 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019)

STAGE BEING SET FOR ORDINATION OF JEWISH ORTHODOX WOMEN?

How close are Orthodox Jews to ordaining women as Rabbis? According to Orthodox Jewish scholar Blu Greenberg, the stage is being set in Orthodox Judaism for such a development. Writing in the Jewish monthly Moment (December), Greenberg writes that the growing movement of Orthodox women learning the Torah and Talmud in new institutes, study groups and university programs, as well as the high numbers of noteworthy female teachers of religious texts, provides a large pool of potential rabbi candidates. There is also a growing awareness among Orthodox women of the reality of women rabbis in the other Jewish branches. There has even been interchange between these two groups, such as a Reform woman rabbi teaching a class of Orthodox women.

Greenberg adds that while these trends can serve as a "powerful agent of change," her forecast that the ordination of Orthodox women is close at hand is largely "sociological conjecture," since Jewish law forbids women's participation in various religious ceremonies. Yet she notes that interpretation of Jewish law (halachah) has changed in other respects (such as lifting the ban on teaching women the Talmud 100 years ago) and that women will likely achieve partial recognition while other issues of Jewish law are being worked out. She adds that "some highly respected Yeshiva University-ordained modern Orthodox rabbis" see no barriers to women ordination in the law. "These minority views carry great significance, as this is a community where religious authority is decentralized." (Moment, 3000 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20008-2509)

CURRENT RESEARCH New Findings On Religious Behavior And Attitudes

* Postal customers are increasingly choosing secular themes rather than religious designs when they purchase stamps for sending greeting cards

during the Christmas holidays. While the results of this year's selections are not yet available, in 1992 secular designs outsold religious theme stamps by a margin of 59 percent to 41 percent, according to Emerging Trends (December), the Gallup newsletter on religion. Historically, secular themes have been more popular by a margin of 56 percent to 44 percent. Religious themes on Christmas stamps were most popular from 1970 to 1972. But since then (with the exceptions of 1978 and 1985), stamps featuring secular designs of the holiday season have won over those with religious themes in sales. (Emerging Trends, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 215, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542)

* About half of the 50 wars waged every year throughout the world have a religious background, reports a recent survey by the Development and Peace Foundation in Bonn, Germany. Lutheran World Information (December 9) reports that the survey shows that most religiously motivated conflicts began in the 1990s. The longest lasting are the religiously motivated conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Ireland. During the past year, wars based on religion broke out in Afghanistan, Tadzhikistan and India. Religions in the Asian successor states (such as Tadzhikistan) of the former Soviet Union are particularly "ethno-nationalist" in character. The researchers state that religious tensions are often related to the "existential conflicts" leading to war. "The meaning of life seems to be threatened, and thus religiously motivated wars are often fought in a more obdurate, unrelenting and brutal way than others." (Lutheran World Information, 150 route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland)

* A recent survey on religious belief in Russia verifies reports claiming that a major religious revival is taking place in the nation. The survey, said to be the first comprehensive study of Russian religious beliefs, found that twenty-two percent of the nearly 3,000 respondents, including nearly a third of Russians under 25, said they were once atheists but now believe in God. The survey, released by the National Opinion Research Center and part of the International Social Survey Program, also found a quarter of those between the ages of 25 and 34 reported being converted from atheism and that half of all respondents said they believe there is a God who is concerned with every human being personally. The "church" [presumably meaning the Russian Orthodox Church] receives widespread support, with 75 percent of Russians expressing a great deal of confidence in the institution. In a report on the findings, sociologist Andrew Greeley asks whether "Since the mass conversions of the Middle Ages has there ever been such a widespread and rapid change in religion?"

TRANSLATION OF BAHÁ'Í SCRIPTURES POSING CHALLENGES TO UNIVERSAL FAITH?

The recent translation of Baha'i scriptures into English is likely to become a challenge and turning point for this religion in the West due to the text's theocratic and Muslim-influenced teachings, according to Gnosis magazine (Winter), a quarterly on mysticism and the occult. Paul Johnson writes that there has been a "120-year delay" in issuing a full English version of the "Kitab-i-Aqdas" (or "Most Holy Book"), written by Baha'i founder Baha'u'llah, due to, among other factors, the unreadiness of Western Baha'is for the contents of the book. Johnson speculates that one ulterior motive of the delay may be the fear that "the book might alienate members and threaten the expansion of the faith," which has five

million members worldwide. The Baha'is believe that Baha'ullah was a manifestation of God, as were Jesus, Muhammad and Moses, and that they are to lead the way to a world of peace and political and religious unity.

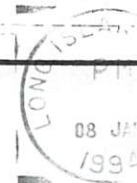
Johnson writes that the "Aqdas provides an elaborate code of laws for a future Baha'i theocratic world government, comparable to the Islamic shariah [law] though differing from it in most details...While some of its tenets, like worldwide compulsory education, are widely accepted, few Western readers could make it through the book without flinching at more draconian prescriptions, such as measures prescribing that arsonists should be burned alive." Yet there are also impressive prophecies made in the book, such as Baha'ullah's predictions of the defeat of Germany in World War I. Johnson concludes that the publication of the text "marks a turning point for Baha'is, who must reconcile the universal scope of Baha'u'llah's prophetic inspiration with the Islamic cultural constraints of his predictions for the future. Translation of the Aqdas into other languages is under way, so the book will presumably soon take a central place in the Baha'i movement worldwide." (Gnosis, P.O. Box 14217, San Francisco, CA 94110)

NEW CATECHISM PROVIDES GLUE FOR HINDUISM'S TOGETHERNESS

A newly issued universal Hindu catechism is another sign of Hinduism's growing unity. The catechism, entitled Dancing With Siva (Himalayan Academy Publications, 1819 Second St., Concord, CA 94519), serves as a primer on the faith as well as an encyclopedia of the diverse history and streams of Hinduism. A review in Publisher's Weekly (September 13) notes that the Hindu diaspora played a big part in the publication of the catechism, as they often were at a loss for "tools to explain their beliefs to their non-Indian compatriots." While Hinduism has been seen by scholars as not so much a unified religion as a collection of diverse religious traditions from India, such a view is changing. Harvard University scholar Diana Eck writes in the Harvard Divinity Bulletin (Vol. 22, No. 4) that the religion "is becoming much more of a 'thing,' an 'ism'...There is considerable evidence of a growing worldwide transformation of a tradition that has never previously been organized into a tradition with an order, a set of 'beliefs' and above all an agenda." (Harvard Divinity Bulletin, 45 Francis Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138)

Religion Watch

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FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

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PRESSNOTES

* The Christian Activist has been edited by Christian writer and speaker Frank Schaeffer for several years. What is new and worth mentioning about the quarterly newspaper is that it has become the mouthpiece for a unique brand of Eastern Orthodox activism emerging in the U.S. The newspaper changed from a conservative evangelical to an Orthodox perspective after Schaeffer shocked many of his evangelical counterparts (he is the son of evangelical philosopher Francis Schaeffer) by converting to Greek Orthodoxy. The newspaper reflects the fervor of a new convert, frequently charging that evangelicalism is bankrupt because it has cut itself off from traditional Christianity and therefore does not have the resources to win the "cultural war" in America. Schaeffer also criticizes Orthodox churches for acting like "Greek, Russian, or Arab social clubs." The newspaper covers pro-life and other issues from a socially conservative (Orthodox and non-Orthodox) position. Schaeffer is convinced that Orthodox church should not be politicized but rather countercultural, "like St. John the Baptist, obnoxious in her defense of the timeless, as she reminds the world of the difference between good and evil. This may soon result in active persecution by our ever-expanding, aggressively secularized state..." A free subscription is available from: The Christian Activist, P.O. Box 740, Mt. Hermon, CA 95041

* American Indian Religions is a new journal covering the wide spectrum of religious traditions of American Indians. The quarterly examines both past and present sacred Indian traditions for scholars, Indian activists, journalists, lawyers and politicians. The premiere issue (Winter, 1994) carries commentaries by Indians on a wide range of concerns, poetry and more scholarly articles and book reviews. Given the recent attention to American Indian religion and the law (such as the disputes over the use of peyote in ceremonies and sacred land sites), it is not surprising that much of the journal focuses on legal matters. One article provides an interesting overview of the misunderstandings and conflicts that emerge when non-Indians seek to apply First Amendment measures to Indian religious practices. The article calls for a new Federal law to protect the right of worship for "native people." A subscription is \$30 and can be obtained from: Center for Academic Publication, Stanford University Branch, Box 5097, Stanford, CA 94309-5097.

* Readers sometimes inquire about books that can provide them with an overview of history, trends and commentary on American religion. The new book One Nation Under God (Harmony Books, \$25), by Barry Kosmin and Seymour Lachman, fulfills such a purpose, while also giving the reader new and provocative information and perspectives on contemporary religion. The book is an outgrowth of Kosmin's and Lachman's National Survey of Religious Identification. The City University of New York-sponsored study surveyed 113,000 Americans--the most extensive poll of its kind--on questions of religious identity and found patterns of faith and practice that one is not likely to find in denominational yearbooks or encyclopedias (the study found far more Unitarians than are actually on church rolls, and yet found far fewer Muslims and members of the

United Church of Christ than officially claimed.) The book fleshes out the study's statistics with a detailed account of how religion is changing and being changed by American society (footnotes would have been helpful here). Also noteworthy are the sections on the persistence of the regional factor in religious identification; the tension between ethnicity and religious beliefs; and how the findings relate to the "culture war" in American society. It should be noted that RW's editor helped with research for the book and that RW is cited in the bibliography.

* The new book Exit Interviews (Moody Press, \$17.99) by William Hendricks, looks at an area of the evangelical world that is rarely explored-- the high number of people who have dropped out of these congregations. Hendricks conducts 16 in-depth case studies of dropouts and finds common themes of discontent emerging. Almost all of the case studies have a high regard for church involvement and still have retained their faith, but they often felt bored with church services, experienced a lack of community and spirituality, or struggled with glitzy packaging of the faith and discrimination against women. While the book is written from an evangelical perspective, the stories Hendricks recounts are applicable to other religious traditions.

* Readers may notice that this issue of RW looks different from previous issues. We are working with a new computer system and printer and are just beginning to learn the various functions and enhancements such technology offers; we're not even at the headline stage yet. Next issue we expect to use a better typeface and will eventually go to a two-column format for the newsletter (a feature many readers have long requested). Stay tuned for these changes.

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

1) Project Joseph is a new ministry started by African American evangelical Christians that seeks to counteract the work of new religious movements seeking black recruits. The project seeks to "rescue those African Americans who find themselves being seduced by the false teaching of cults, and at the same time preserve and strengthen the African American community by providing information and education on the cults which have targeted its people." Among the groups that Project Joseph is targeting through training materials and workshops are the Black Jews, the Spiritualists, Islam and the Black Muslims (the project holds special "Muslim Awareness Seminars"), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormonism. The project is among the first black "anti-cultist" efforts, and could be a sign of growing interest in the new religions in the black community. Project Joseph's address is: P.O. Box 40486, Pasadena, CA 91114. (Source: Urban Family magazine, Fall)

2) Maggie Gobran has been called the Mother Teresa of Egypt for her indigenous ecumenical work with the poor in the shantytowns of Cairo. Gobran is the founder of Stephen Ministry-- a holistic approach by Egyptian Christians to meet the short- and long-term needs of the many destitute Egyptian children and their families. The ministry's workers identify the most needy families and visit them on a weekly basis. After meeting short-term survival needs, Stephen Ministry seek to encourage self-reliance by training one child in each family to take on moral and practical leadership roles. The ministry is also unique for bringing together Coptic Orthodox Christians (the predominant Christian group in the country) with Catholics and Protestants. (Source: Charisma, January)