

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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WELFARE REFORM GENERATING NEW CHURCH-STATE CONFLICTS

The Republican push for welfare reform which includes returning many social services to private charities is likely to generate new church-state conflicts in the upcoming years, according to recent reports. These conflicts could be previewed in Senate Majority leader Robert Dole's recent welfare-over-haul bill which would allow states to funnel some of their welfare funds directly to religious groups, including churches, to provide social services and cash to the poor. The Wall Street Journal (September 7) reports that such provisions, which were "buried deep inside" the bill, set off a firestorm of opposition by strict church-state separation groups, such as the Baptist Joint Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the American Civil Liberties Union. Many on the right are viewing the battle over the provisions for religious groups as a test of presidential contender Dole's seriousness on conservative issues. The language in the bill "would give practical effect to a growing belief among some conservative Republicans that government welfare should be replaced with a system of private charity." This movement, which "stems from the ideas of writers such as Marvin Olasky," a conservative Christian thinker [see May/June supplement for more on Olasky], points out that the provisions safeguard discriminating against welfare recipients. If a recipient objected to getting benefits at a given religious site, the state would have to provide an alternative location.

Even if these provisions and others like them are legislated and become a part of welfare policy, it appears likely that there will be significant conflict between religion-based and secular state-based welfare programs. Already, this new breed of church-state battle is taking shape around the U.S. The conservative Christian weekly World (July-29/August 5) reports that the Christian drug rehabilitation ministry Teen Challenge is engaged in conflicts with state agencies and officials who are questioning the legitimacy and standards of such "faith-based" programs. The Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse recently suspended the license of Teen Challenge, citing the ministry's lack of licensed drug counselors. Teen Challenge officials have responded by protesting that the ministry does not take government grants and cannot afford to hire chemical dependency counselors. They also claim that Teen Challenge uses a "Christ-based" approach viewing addiction as a symptom of alienation from God and has had a success rate of 70-86 percent compared to the single digit rates seen by secular programs.

There are similar struggles in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Oregon, involving Teen Challenge as well as other religious anti-drug ministries. What is unique about Texas is that Teen Challenge has formed an alliance with other anti-drug ministries, such as Victory Fellowship in

San Antonio, to fight such restrictions on their work, report Roy Maynard and Marvin Olasky. Bob Woodson, head of the conservative Washington, D.C.-based Center for Neighborhood Enterprise who took part in the protests, says that the opposition from state agencies to such faith-based programs is part of a backlash to the anti-government policies and ideas put into motion by such Republican leaders as Newt Gingrich. Such welfare reform has stirred up a "hornet's nest within the poverty industry," which aims to target "unwanted competition from effective grassroots initiatives," he says. But even Freddie Garcia, pastor of Victory Fellowship, expresses concern about the Christian groups that have not focused on quality-control and high standards among their workers. Woodson adds that such conflicts may eventually lead to an alternative mode of certification, since secular programs don't understand and therefore cannot regulate faith-based approaches to welfare reform and substance abuse. Such certification would "give Christian organizations autonomy," he says, pointing to Christian childcare agencies in Florida that are certified separately from their secular counterparts. (World, P.O. Box 2330, Asheville, NC 28805)

AMERICAN BUDDHISTS LIVING IN DIFFERENT WORLDS

American Buddhists are divided to such an extent that the various segments of the faith have little if any knowledge of or contact with each other, writes Jan Nattier in *Tricycle* (Fall), a Buddhist quarterly. Many observers and scholars have written that there are two Buddhisms in America; one that is made up largely of converts who emphasize meditation and spirituality and the other faith whose members are mostly ethnic and stress traditional rituals [see the July-August 1994 RW for more on this split]. But Nattier writes that American Buddhists actually fall into three major groupings that often revolve around social class. 1) "Elite Buddhists" are well above average in terms of income, education and status and are converts usually to Tibetan, Vipassana and Zen Buddhism. These are the Buddhists who stress meditation and spiritual enlightenment and are often featured the most in the media. They often tend to de-emphasize traditional Buddhist ethical precepts (although recent scandals in these communities have caused some changes here) and their faiths bear the least resemblance to Buddhism as practiced in any Asian country, according to Nattier. 2) "Evangelical Buddhists" are the result of Buddhist groups' missionary activity in the U.S. Such a fast-growing group as Soka Gakkai, which stresses chanting as a means of success and happiness, belongs in this group.

Evangelical Buddhists draw members from a broad social spectrum. Unlike the mostly Caucasian elite Buddhists, Soka Gakkai has a substantial percentage of African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American members. Soka Gakkai Buddhism has a strong appeal to those with material needs, as the group teaches that one can change one's social conditions through spiritual practice. While elite Buddhists seek to remove material concerns from their lives in their search for spiritual enlightenment, Soka Gakkai Buddhists see no sharp break between the material and the spiritual, according to Nattier. 3) "Ethnic Buddhists" are immigrants or the descendents of Asian immigrants. Their Buddhism emphasizes the "role of language, traditional festivals, and even food" more than enlightenment. Often the different ethnic Buddhist groups have little to do with each other. The three sub-groups of Buddhists often write off the other groups or are unaware of their presence, posing serious obstacles to Buddhist "ecumenicity." For instance, evangelical Buddhists such as

Soka Gakkai have been traditionally taught that other Buddhists are not legitimate, although this stance is slowly changing. "Only a few American Buddhists--most ethnic Buddhists, in my experience--have yet attained" a spirit of tolerance of the wide differences found in American Buddhism, Nattier concludes. (Tricycle, 92 Vandam St., New York, NY 10013)

**ESOTERIC
CHRISTIANITY COMES
OUT OF CLOSET**

Esoteric Christianity, stressing mystical and unorthodox Christian teachings and practices, a reinterpretation of Christian beginnings, and feminine spirituality, has gained a steady following in the last decade, according to *Gnosis* magazine (fall), a magazine of occult and esoteric spirituality. For its tenth anniversary, the magazine asked leaders of various mystical and esoteric groups to forecast trends and directions they spot in their respective movements. Many of such trends have been covered in *RW*: the growth of Jewish and Islamic mysticism; the burgeoning readerships for books on mystical and non-institutional faiths; and the popularity of Neopagan teachings and practices (even if such groups have not shown significant institutional growth). More noteworthy is the appeal of mystical and unorthodox forms of Christianity among such spiritual seekers. Christopher Bamford writes that such interest has been sparked by new revisionist views of early Christianity, as found in popular books such as John Dominic Crossan's "Who Killed Jesus?" Such views questioning orthodox Christian precepts "allow us to separate what is historically contingent from what is essential in the mystery of Christianity-- that is, what is to be understood imaginally and supersensibly," he writes.

These revisions of early, and medieval, Christianity have included a renewed appreciation for Gnosticism, Rosicrucianism, and other groups viewed as heretical by orthodox Christianity. There has also been a "rediscovery of the psychological, cosmological, and theological secrets of liturgy...the past years have seen the Greek and Russian Orthodox traditions revealed in many new and different lights; witness the new interest in Mt. Athos and 'Orthodox psychotherapy.'" The recent interest in the Celtic Christian tradition, with its emphasis on ecology and asceticism, has also fed into the esoteric Christian upsurge. Bamford adds that "many of these trends can be subsumed under the rubric of the recovery of Sophia, Divine Wisdom..." The name Sophia has recently been used by liberal Christian feminists to describe the feminine attributes of God, but Bamford sees the Sophia revival as embracing those who view such divinity as representing either "Goddess Earth," the Holy Spirit, or the "archtype of human nature." While much of the above interest in esoteric Christianity is individualistic, Bamford adds that in the last decade there has also been a growth of groups across the U.S. who have sought to put into practice many of these teachings. (*Gnosis*, P.O. Box 14217, San Francisco, CA 94114-0217)

**BOOKS ON
RELIGION AND
THE ARTS FINDING
READERSHIP**

A recent, long-term interest in the religious arts among American young adults has turned into a windfall of sales in books on such subjects, according to *Publisher's Weekly* (September 11). Books on music, poetry, the visual arts and inner spirituality are finding as large a readership as previous books on angels and medieval music (such as the popular "Chant" CDs). In accounting for this upsurge, observers cite a 1993 poll conducted by the evangelical InterVarsity Christian Fellowship where

respondents identified five characteristics they wanted in their religion: authenticity, community, an abandoning of dogmatism, a focus on the arts, and diversity. The article also notes the growth of publications linking the arts and spirituality (see April RW). Whatever else can be said, it is clear that the baby boomers' generation of children, now young adults, are continuing to eschew theology and doctrine and continue to pursue experience-based religious interests.--
By Erling Jorstad, RW Contributing Editor.

CATHOLIC USE OF ENNEAGRAMS GROWING, QUESTIONED

While enneagrams have often been associated with the New Age movement, the use of this esoteric personality typing system is also finding a large following among American Catholics, according to Common Boundary (September/October), a magazine on spirituality and psychotherapy. The enneagram was developed by mystical scholar Oscar Ichazo as a way of classifying core personality motivations or "sins." The system was introduced among Catholics by Jesuits who had studied the technique in the 1970s and today "Catholics are attending workshops...in droves as well as devouring books and tapes on the subject," writes Tori Deangelis. There is some debate as to why Catholics are drawn to enneagrams. The system provides Catholics with "an easy recognition...and translation of the language" of their religion, with a stress on virtues and sins, says Clarence Thomson, a former Catholic priest who edits the "Enneagram Educator" newsletter. For liberal Catholics and those influenced by New Age currents, the enneagram encourages a less strict view of sin, viewing spirituality as a journey out of unconscious destructive life patterns. Enneagram founder Ichazo, however, criticizes Jesuits and others who have "lifted randomly from his work and in the process ended up touting a theory that, as conceived, is not very Catholic at all." He says that Catholics tend to underplay the system's emphasis on sexuality and humanity's potential for divinity. (Common Boundary, 5272 River Rd., Suite 650, Bethesda, MD 20816)

URANTIA FRAGMENTING OVER CHANNELLERS

Urantia, a movement blending esoteric scientific and quasi-Christian teachings is becoming increasingly divided and fragmented over the many new revelations followers are claiming to have received that challenge the final authority of the group's bible, the Urantia Book, writes Martin Gardner in his recent book Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery (Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY 14228. \$25.95). Urantia is based around revealed messages from "celestial" beings dictated to William Sadler in the 1950s. The Urantia Book claims to provide new insights on the life of Jesus and teaches a complex cosmology that includes polytheism and the existence of life forms on other planets. The movement, which has drawn many scientists and scholars, does not have any churches and is comprised of study groups and societies of a "few thousand" followers who meet to discuss the teachings from the the Urantia Book.

Gardner's book is largely a critical attempt to debunk Urantia's use of science, but he also reports that there is an "awesome epidemic of channelling" taking place in the movement, as hundreds of members claim that they are in contact with "supermortals" or "Teaching Messengers" who are heralding a new age where many Urantia prophecies will be fulfilled. The Urantia Foundation, which is the publisher of the Urantia Book, strongly rejects the new messengers, calling the phenomenon an outburst

of New Age "channelling." Gardner adds that the phenomenon is "splintering Urantia study groups into two bitterly warring camps..." One factor in the growth of personal revelations in the movement may be that New Age-oriented seekers have recently discovered the Urantia Book.

CURRENT RESEARCH: *Recent Findings on Religious Attitudes and Behavior*

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IMPACTS ON GENEROSITY TOWARD POOR

* Denominational affiliation has a strong relationship with levels of generosity toward the poor, according to a recent study cited in the journal Sociology of Religion (Fall). The study, conducted by professors Jeffry A. Will and John K. Cochran, measured the attitudes of General Social Survey respondents to "vignettes" of poor families of various marital, educational, and financial situations. The study asked respondents how much these families should get from charity and public assistance. All faith groups were found to respond with increased generosity for larger welfare families. Conservative Protestants were unique in the emphasis they placed on the mother's situation in the vignettes as compared to the father's. They were punitive toward some unemployed mothers, but "appeared to disregard the employment status of the father. In addition, highly religious conservative Protestants were less generous toward the poor. The same is true of highly religious liberal Protestants. Personal religiosity is irrelevant in regards to generosity levels awarded by moderate Protestants [such as Methodists and Lutherans], and highly religious Catholics were significantly more generous," according to Will and Cochran. (Sociology of Religion, Marist Hall, Rm. 108, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 20064)

MORE DOUBT ON EVANGELICAL- REPUBLICAN VOTING BLOC

* Last month's RW cover story on the Christian right overlooked another study questioning the claim that evangelical or born again Christians represent a solid conservative Republican voting bloc. A survey by the Barna Research Group (August 1) found that while born again Christians are more likely to be conservative than to be liberal on political and social views, they are also more likely to be middle-of-the-road in their views than to hold conservative views. 48 percent of those defining themselves as born again agreed that they were somewhere in-between conservative and liberal; 44 percent say they are conservative; and just four percent called themselves liberal. In contrast, among those who do not fit the born again criteria, 61 percent said they were moderates; 24 percent defined themselves as mostly conservative, and 12 percent claim to be mostly liberal. Only four out of ten born again adults claim registration with the Republican Party, the rest registering with Democrats or independents. Barna finds the born again population divided: 25 percent are conservative Republican; 20 percent are moderate Republicans; 13 percent are conservative Democrats; 17 percent are moderate Democrats; 11 percent are moderate independents; 8 percent are conservative independents; and the remaining 6 percent are liberals of any party affiliation.

STAGNANT GIVING RATE AMONG CHURCH MEMBERS

* Giving rates by U.S. church members are stagnant, according to a recent study by the research group Empty Tomb, Inc. In 1993 yearly per capita giving was \$367.39 or 2.52 percent of after-tax income, which is about the same as in 1992. Local churches used \$304.84 of that money to pay internal expenses and sent \$62.55 to support church work at the regional, national and international levels, where contributions are eroding, according to the report, entitled "The State of Church Giving Through 1993." The study examined the finances of 29 Protestant denominations.

**EUROPEAN
DISSENTING
MOVEMENT GROWS
AMONG LAITY,
THEOLOGIANS**

A dissenting movement is growing in European Catholicism that was ignited by Austrian Catholics demanding liberalization in the church, according to the Washington Post (September 13). Although there have long been groups dissenting from official Catholic teachings, the dissenting movement gained momentum in Austria last spring following a scandal over allegations that Cardinal Hans Hermann Groer, archbishop of Vienna, was involved in pedophilia at a Catholic school 20 years ago. Groer subsequently resigned, but not before a movement called the People of the Church was formed by a few priests and high school religion teachers. The movement--which is based in the ski resort of Innsbruck--circulated a petition throughout Austria calling for such reforms as women's ordination, local elections of bishops, and optional celibacy for priests. By the end of June, the drive had collected 505,154 signatures--five times the hoped-for number. In a country of 8 million where only 17 percent regularly attend Mass, this turnout was seen as an affirmation of the new movement's agenda, reports John Pomfret.

The People of the Church movement is now spreading to Germany, Slovenia and Switzerland. Although observers doubt that the movement will have much chance of changing church teachings, Austrian church leaders are paying attention to the protests. Nearly all of the Austrian bishops have agreed to engage in dialogue with the People of the Church movement. One holdout, Bishop Andrea Laun of Salzburg--one of the youngest Catholic bishops in the country-- said that those who cannot follow Catholic teachings should be purged from the church. The issue in the controversy in Austria is about money and international influence as much as theology. Catholics in Austria pay about \$400 million yearly in taxes to the church. One reason why the new dissenting movement is spreading in German speaking and German influenced countries is because "Our way of thinking is that we want to make things clear. Catholics in Italy and France have the same problems, but there people nod and wink and get on with things. Here we want the rules and our lives to be the same," says one Austrian journalist.

European Catholic theology is also feeling the winds of dissent and unrest, according to a report in the Jesuit magazine America. (September 30). There is a "pervasive sense of darkness hovering over European theology at the present moment, reflective perhaps of the discouragement following the collapse of Communism and the outbreak of war in Bosnia," writes Paul G. Crowley who attended the recent congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology held in Germany. Crowley finds that much of the pessimism among European Catholic theologians is due to the "long shadow of Rome," as the Vatican continues to attempt to uproot theological dissent and promote orthodoxy. Many such liberal Catholic theologians feel a "resentment toward current Roman rule," especially fueled by the Austrian Catholic protests and the "suppression of several theologians" by the Vatican. Crowley adds that the European Catholic theologians at the congress showed little interest and understanding about North American theological trends and its major figures. "This is especially true in the area of feminist theology. While Western Europe has produced its own crop of feminist theology, there seems to be little acquaintance with the massive body of feminist theology that has emerged in the United States in recent years." (America, 106, W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019)

**CHRISTIAN
ZIONISM SEEKS
BROADER SUPPORT
..MIDST CRITICISM**

Christian Zionism, a movement consisting mainly of American-based evangelicals supporting and promoting Israel, is making increasing political and religious overtures to the Jewish community, but signs of tension between the two groups have not abated, according to a report in Moment magazine (October). Evangelicals make up the predominant segment of Christian Zionists, especially those conservative Protestants who believe that Israel will have a significant role in biblical prophecy and that it is part of God's plan that Jews to believe in Jesus as messiah. But there appears to be a growing sentiment among Christian Zionist groups that the focus should be taken off evangelism and proselytism in their work. Several of the key players in Christian Zionism, such as Bridges for Peace, and the Faith Bible Chapel of Arvada, Colorado, are adamantly "non-evangelistic." Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein of the Chicago-based International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, says that while many Christian Zionists believe that Jews are not "saved...they often fulfill what they call their 'great commission' by blessing the Jewish people. That's different than the messianic outreach" of groups such as Jews for Jesus who press for conversion. Christian Zionists have been prominent in recent social projects in Israel, such as providing transportation and material help for Russian immigrants. Christian Zionist groups also fuel the enormous evangelical tourist trade in Israel.

Critics in the Jewish community still fear "hidden agendas" (such as evangelism) among many of these evangelicals. Another reason for the wariness among many Jews over the Christian Zionist advocacy for Israel is that they remain "unconvinced that [Christian Zionists] will do the grassroots work--calling and writing congressmen, canvassing neighbors. Sure they love Israel in a broad biblical sense, but I haven't seen them rolling up their sleeves and getting practically involved," says one activist. More liberal Jews are disconcerted to find that Christian Zionists are increasingly forming alliances with the Jewish right in Israel in the wake of the peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians. Many Christian Zionists interpret scripture to say that Israel retains the right to the entire West Bank, often bear strongly anti-Muslim sentiments and have ties to the American Christian right (such as the Christian Coalition). An example of the influence of the Jewish right in some Christian Zionist circles was at last spring's "National Unity Conference" in Jerusalem, where the guests "were a who's-who of critics of the Rabin government's handling of the peace process," according to the article. (Moment, 4710 41st St., NW., Washington, DC 20016)

**DALAI LAMA
ADOPTING
CHURCH-STATE
SEPARATION**

The Dalai Lama and his Tibetan Buddhist exile government have gained a new appreciation for church-state separation that is likely to have major implications in the shaping of a future autonomous Tibet, according to Common Boundary magazine (September/October). The Tibetan government in exile was formed after Chinese authorities took over the country and banned the Dalai Lama, 14th in a line of Tibetan Buddhist leaders believed to be reincarnations of the Buddha. Last spring, the famous monk brought delegates from his government to the U.S to study the American tradition of church-state separation "with a view of leaving him out of governing a future autonomous Tibet," writes Tony Semerad. Among other places, the delegation visited Salt Lake City, Utah, where Mormonism

dominates the religious and political scene yet accepts church-state separation. Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama were the political bulwarks both in the former Tibet and the government in exile. Recent writings as well as a new draft constitution drawn up by the monks call for the Dalai Lama to be replaced by an elected interim head of state and the elimination of favoritism for ordained Buddhist monks and nuns (although the country would still be based on principles of the "Buddhist Path of Enlightenment"). It has been conjectured that Beijing will loosen its grip on Tibet after the death of senior Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, who is 90 and ailing.

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Religion Watch

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- *Buddhist (Non)Ecumenism; Catholic Dissent Grows in Europe*



FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

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PRESSNOTES

* Developments taking place within the field of new religious movements is the focus of the June issue of Social Compass, an international journal on the sociology of religion. The issue (published in French and English) covers such subjects as new religions and the law, the changes within the anti-cult movement, as well as featuring articles on the growth of such movements in Switzerland and Japan. Especially noteworthy is Eileen Barker's overview of changes in the new religious movements (focusing on, among others, the Unification Church, the Boston Church of Christ, the Family [formerly the Children of God] and the Hare Krishnas), discussing challenges posed by the emergence of a second generation of members; new compromises with society; and resulting changes in attitudes by the public toward such groups. For information on this issue, write: Social Compass, Sage Publications, 6 Bonhill St., London EC2A 4PU, UK)

* The spring issue of the Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture is recommended to readers looking for further analyses and accounts of the case of Aum Shinrikyo and its terrorist actions beyond the RW cover story in the last issue. The issue reprints and excerpts articles from a wide range of sources (popular newspaper articles, as well as Buddhist and Catholic critiques) and explores the doctrinal views of Aum, as well as examining the responses to the controversy by religious groups, and the role of religion scholars in the affair. For information on obtaining this issue, write: Nanzan Institute, Nanzan University, 18 Yamazato-cho, Show-ku, Nagoya, Japan 466.

RW's article on Aum by Ian Reader drew some criticism from readers for its treatment of religion scholars, such as J. Gordon Melton, and their role in the controversy. In publishing this article, RW did not consider this material to be a personal attack on such scholars, but rather an examination of the public role these specialists played in the affair and how many in Japan interpreted and responded to such positions. In presenting another perspective on this matter, an article in the Japan Times Weekly (May 13) reports that Melton and the team of religious freedom specialists he headed in Japan found several abuses of civil liberties in the wake of the Aum controversy. The article reports that the Japanese police used repressive tactics against Aum members after the attacks, such as taking custody of their children and assigning them to foster homes. For more information on this article, write: Japan Times Weekly, 445 S. Figueroa, #2900, Los Angeles, CA 90071

* Internet for Christians Newsletter is a new, online source of information on the wide range of religious (mainly Christian) subjects and issues that are now found via the computer. The editor is Quentin Schultze, a longtime leader in Christian communication studies. The first issue gives brief descriptions and online addresses of no-charge sources ranging from Calvinist theology to Cursillo, to "Christian Computing Magazine" to the Monk Page, among others. Schultze also includes resources available on religious subjects from Compuserve and America Online. For more information, send e-mail to: ifc-request@gospelcom.net.
--By Erling Jorstad.

* Phyllis Tickle, religion editor of Publisher's Weekly, has specialized in monitoring trends in religious publishing and her new book, Re-Discovering The Sacred (Crossroad, \$19.95), makes many intriguing connections between currents in the book world and developments in contemporary religion. Tickle makes the point that since people "are especially slow to express aloud religious beliefs or visibly to pursue religious patterns that are too divergent from those of our community," such private beliefs and feelings can often be detected through the kinds of books being read. Tickle uncovers four major patterns in religious reading: the renewed interest in traditional religious beliefs and practices (citing American Indian spirituality books as well as the best-selling Catholic Catechism), self-help spirituality, supernatural phenomenon (books on angels), and the new genre of religious fiction and storytelling (Frank Peretti's evangelical "thriller" books). The book intersperses such trend-spotting with Tickle's personal reflections on spirituality, which seems to be a blend of teachings from the New Age and world religions and Christianity.

* Several months ago Findings & Footnotes mentioned that there has been little unbiased research on Opus Dei, a conservative Catholic lay order exerting considerable influence in the church. But the recent publication of Saints & Schemers: Opus Dei And Its Paradoxes (Oxford University Press, \$30) by Joan Estruch, corrects that situation. The book attempts to get past the standard portrayals of Opus Dei as it examines, often in dizzying detail, the complex history of the organization. Estruch finds that, contrary to the view of Opus supporters and officials, the group has changed with the times, such as in adapting to capitalism and other features of the modern world, while emphasizing continuity with its past. The Spanish sociologist, however, also dismisses the view (often propagated by some anti-cult organizations) that Opus Dei is a mind-controlling cult.

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

1) The University of Rochester in upstate New York has developed a unique work/study program in religious and Judaic studies. Students in the religious studies program can sign up for an internship program where they volunteer at Jewish institutions in order to "understand what it takes to make a living Jewish community work," says Prof. William Green, director of the two-year-old program. Green describes the program as a "missing link" between the academic study of Jewish texts and values, and learning about how a community puts these values into action. Students get involved in charities, synagogues and fundraising. The program is open to students of all denominations and academic majors. (Source: Moment, August)

2) New Beginnings Community Church in Phoenix, Arizona, is one of the first "seeker-sensitive" congregations to reach out to Hispanics. The congregation is similar to such prominent megachurches as Willow Creek Community Church as it seeks to reach out to unchurched people using contemporary music and teaching on practical issues, such as handling stress and improving marriages. The 200-member congregation pastored by Rev. Eli Marez targets second and third generation Hispanics who have been disenchanted with Spanish-speaking traditional churches [see July-August RW for more on this issue]. (Source: HABBM News Service, July 12)