

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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THEOLOGIANS AND SCIENTISTS GEARING UP FOR GENETIC WARS?

Will the revolution currently taking place in genetics become the next major conflict between religion and science? While many scientists and theologians might answer that question affirmatively, it may be more accurate to say that genetic breakthroughs and research are creating new divisions and tensions within both the religious and scientific communities. Such a divide among religious believers regarding genetic research is most evident on the issue of patenting human and animal genes. In a recent issue of the interfaith journal *First Things* (May), Southern Baptist ethicists Richard Land and C. Ben Mitchell write that the patenting of human beings and their genetic parts "attempts to wrest ownership from God and commodifies human biological materials and, potentially, human beings themselves." Land was one of the participants in a broad coalition of religious leaders and animal rights activists last year organized by writer Jeremy Rifkin that called for a moratorium on patenting genes [see July-August '95 RW]. It should be noted that such major pro-life force as the Catholic Church did not join the coalition and has not condemned gene patenting.

In another article, Lutheran theologian Ted Peters writes that the philosophy behind the condemnation of gene patenting "artificially separates divine creation from human creativity. It inadvertently cedes the natural world to functional naturalists such as Jeremy Rifkin....[who] takes as his mission the 'resacralization of nature.'" Peters adds that religious leaders should focus their energies on more substantive issues surrounding genetics, such as discrimination based on new genetic information available to the public and new findings showing genetic influences on behavior and how this may relate to personal responsibility.

In the social science journal *Society* (May/June), Dorothy Nelkin writes that new genetic-religion conflicts are growing among pro-life groups as they turn their attention to science, especially as such issues as fetal research and human embryo research find their way into the political arena. She adds that opposition to science is increasingly framed in moral and religious terms, such as the view that tampering with genes is violating the sacredness of life, and that such opposition is "driven by the growing power of religious interests in the United States." But Nelkin, a New York University sociologist, notes that religious opposition to genetics is often encouraged by the language employed by many scientists in the genetics field. In examining scientific descriptions of the genome project (the attempt to map human genes) and

other research involving DNA, Nelkin finds that "scientists seem to endow biological structure called DNA with a nearly spiritual importance as a powerful and sacred object..." Scientists have encouraged a popular view of genetics that often crosses over to religious themes. A biotechnology firm called Third Millennium Research advertises offers to preserve a person's gene set as "the closest chance at immortality people have at the moment." Well-known biologist Kary Mullis, who was instrumental in developing DNA identification techniques, has founded a company that produces cards and jewelry containing DNA cloned from famous rock stars, athletes, and other "secular saints... The DNA cards are, in effect, molecular relics. They can be understood as a form of contagious magic, the mystical construct that underlay the distribution of pieces of the True Cross and other Christian relics during the fourth and fifth centuries. Indeed, Mullis himself directly compares his cards to Christian relics... Such spiritual imagery gives mystical powers to molecular structure, and DNA has assumed an iconic meaning as a sacred entity. It is a way to explore the most fundamental questions about human life, to define the very essence of human existence, and to imagine immortality."

Nelkin concludes that in many scientists' efforts to convince the public of the centrality and power of genes, "they are encouraging the very image of DNA--its image as a sacred entity--that has attracted so much religious opposition. It is, ironically, scientists themselves who are providing weapons in a war between science and religion." (First Things, 156 Fifth Ave., Suite 400, New York, NY 10010; Society, Rutgers--The State University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903)

**CHURCHES
TARGETING
NO FAULT DIVORCE**

There is a growing movement among churches and other conservative groups to press state legislatures to place more restrictions on the existing no fault divorce laws, according to *New Republic* magazine (May 6). Introduced first in Iowa and Michigan, by April the movement had placed proposals in at least 18 state legislatures. In response to the talk in the early 1990s about "family values," proponents of such measures argue that the dilemmas of family life can be reversed once husbands and wives are required to work harder at saving their marriages rather than obtain a no fault separation. Once marriages are strengthened, the spouses will work harder at being faithful parents, which in turn will revitalize traditional morality in American society.

The role of the churches is described as pivotal to the success of ending no fault divorce. Christian columnist Michael McMannus, called the "Johnny Appleseed" of the crusade, is leading churches to implement "community marriage policies" that provide counseling to those considering divorce by those who have been to the brink but stayed with their marriages. At least 42 such programs have appeared in the last year. The movement is still in embryonic form, varying in influence from state to state. Yet, the article suggests that the seed for major reform of no fault divorce has been planted. Continued national attention in the political realm to morality and family values can only enhance the popularity of the crusade. --By Erling Jorstad, *RW* contributing editor.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES
MAJOR
REJUVINATED
AND REINVENTED**

Religious studies is becoming an increasingly popular major for American

college students, according to the Christian Century magazine (April 24). In the 1994-95 academic year, more than 44,000 freshmen at 427 U.S. colleges and universities declared religion or theology as their major, reports a study conducted by the American Council on Education and the University of California Higher Education Research Institute. A 1985 study by the Association of Chairs of the Departments of Religion also found a 36 percent increase in enrollment of undergraduate religion majors over the preceding five years. The curricula of these courses and programs often focuses on world religions and address personal questions on the meaning and priorities of life and the relationship of the individuals to the community.

There is also an interest in the interaction of religion with different fields, such as courses on religion and the law, religion and medicine and religion and film. Lonnie Kliever of Southern Methodist University says that for today's religious studies student, "Religion and politics no longer exists in separate, logic-type departments. In order to understand far-reaching political and economic phenomenon, students are going to have to understand what religion means." The growth in religion majors in some cases is also the result of students, such as Asians or Jews, wanting to learn more of their cultural heritage that was not taught to them by parents or the public schools. (Christian Century, 407 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, IL 60637)

NEW PAPAL ELECTION RULES REINFORCING CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP TREND?

A recent change in electing popes by the Vatican will have a long-range effect on Catholicism, most likely intensifying the conservative trend in the church's leadership, according to the Jesuit magazine America (April 13). Pope John Paul II's recent decision to change the traditional rule of electing popes by a two-thirds majority to one that allows an absolute majority (more than half the electors) to elect a pope represents a "radical change" in this election process, writes Thomas J. Reese, a specialist on the Catholic hierarchy. The 800-year tradition of a two-third majority vote encouraged compromise and consensus in the selection of popes, as the majority had to compromise with the minority in order to find a candidate acceptable to two-thirds of the cardinals. Reese adds that the "practical consequence of the change in the election rules is significant. If a conservative majority controls the college of cardinals [as it now does], it is now much more likely that they will elect a hard-line, authoritarian conservative rather than a pastoral conservative...Liberal Catholics who hoped for a change in the next papacy are probably going to be disappointed. The change in election rules means that liberal Catholics may find John Paul's successor even less to their liking than John Paul himself." (America, 106 West 56th St., New York, NY 10019)

CURRENT RESEARCH: *New Findings On Religious Attitudes And Behavior*

HOW DISTRESSFUL ARE 'CULTS'?

* During the past two decades anti-cultists have claimed that "cults" or new religious movements are psychologically dangerous, while defenders of these groups and many scholars studying them have attempted to refute such charges, especially those involving brainwashing. CAN News (March), the newsletter of the Cult Awareness Network, an anti-cultist organization, now reports that "For the first time, researchers have demonstrated an empirical relationship between cult involvement and a

person's post-cult distress..." The newsletter cites Nadine Winocur of Pepperdine University who says that research involving 104 people who had been involved with cults and others who had never been in a cult showed that former cult members typically have more psychological distress. Winocur says that this study could provide a factual foundation that would challenge many mental health professionals' view that prior psychological problems may account for a person's involvement in a cult and their problems after leaving one. At Ohio University's Cultic Studies Laboratory, co-founder Peter Malinoski and his colleagues found in a study that former members of the Boston Church of Christ, a group criticized by anti-cultists for its authoritarian leadership, had more psychological problems, such as anxiety and depression, than former Catholics and Inter-Varsity (an evangelical campus ministry) members.

Michael Langone says that beginning in the 1970s, some clinicians began developing theories to explain the psychological problems they encountered among former cultists, but they tended to overgeneralize. Additional research is still needed to prove that cults cause psychological distress, Langone adds. Many scholars and other observers of new religious movements, however, are likely to criticize this preliminary research. Bruce Robinson, director of the Ontario Centre for Religious Tolerance, says that anyone involved in religious movements that require strong commitment are likely to experience distress upon leaving such groups. Thus, it is not unusual that former members of a high intensity religion such as the Boston Church of Christ would experience more distress upon leaving their group than those leaving more sedate groups such as Inter-Varsity and the Catholic Church. Other scholars claim that the exit counseling programs used by many anti-cult groups to convince members to leave new religious movements may themselves cause psychological distress among former members. (CAN News, 2421 W. Pratt Blvd., Suite 1173, Chicago, IL 60645)

*PRAYER FOUND
TO HAVE NEGATIVE
EFFECT IN
ALCOHOLIC STUDY*

* While many studies have found prayer to have a beneficial effect on health, a new study suggests that praying for patients can actually have a negative effect on people. The study found that among 42 alcoholics entering a treatment center, those who were prayed for showed no appreciable difference in "drinking outcomes" than those who were not prayed for. More surprisingly, patients who reported that someone had been praying for them before they entered the program drank more heavily during follow-up than those who did not, regardless of which study group they had been in, according to the Washington Post (April 27). The New Mexico study, conducted by psychiatrist Scott Walker, was similar to a well-known 1988 study where coronary patients who were prayed for showed significant improvement as compared to patients who were not prayed for. While Walker said no firm scientific conclusions can be drawn from this "small pilot study," he speculated that the negative results of the pre-treatment prayers may be due to the fact that it was family members who were doing the praying for patients. The alcoholic may resent a family member trying to control his or her life through prayer, or may feel unworthy of such prayers. Either emotion could have "blocked" the positive power of prayer, Walker says.

*HARASSMENT OF
MUSLIMS
INTENSIFIES AFTER
OKLAHOMA CITY*

* There have been nearly 300 incidents of American Muslims being harassed in connection with last year's Oklahoma City bombing, according to a recent report. Most of these cases of harassment (216 of them) came in days following the bombing in the form of speculation that Middle Eastern terrorists had been behind the attack, writes Mohamed Nimer in the

FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

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PRESSNOTES

* An article by Thomas W. Flynn in the spring issue of the secular humanist magazine Free Inquiry has unleashed a debate among church-state separation advocates and fellow secular humanists. Flynn calls for a "militantly secularist long-range agenda on the separation of church and state, especially in public schools." He advocates the complete removal of religious language, symbols, and subject matter from public life" (even ruling out objective examination of religion in public schools). Flynn acknowledges that this position (which he calls "affirmative secularism") is not the accepted church-state stance of many secular humanists, but he adds that a more moderate stance has been tried and found wanting in the midst of growing religious pluralism and renewed Christian political influence. In response to the article, Rob Boston of Americans for Separation of Church and State writes that Flynn's views are promoting a "brand of extremism that runs counter to the spirit of the First Amendment," and hopes other secular humanists will refute his views. For a copy of this issue, send \$6.95 to: Free Inquiry, P.O. Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226-0664

* A comprehensive overview of contemporary religion in Canada is featured in the spring issue of Social Compass, an international journal of the sociology of religion. The 15-page article by Roger O'Toole examines the past and present of Canadian religion and writes that mainline Protestantism (namely Anglicanism and the United Church of Canada) and Catholicism are marked by internal crisis. Catholicism in Quebec is experiencing the "paradox of empty pews and crowded classrooms," as parochial schools offer some "institutional focus for an otherwise nebulous sense of Catholic identity." Evangelical churches, in contrast, show continuing growth, although their smaller numbers are unlikely to carry the cultural influence as seen in the U.S. O'Toole concludes with an examination of the new influence of non-Christian religions and religious individualism in Canada. For information on obtaining this article, write: Social Compass, 6 Bonhill St., London EC2A 4PU, UK.

* Last issue we neglected to mention sociologist David Martin's important article, "Wesley's World Revolution" in National Review magazine (December 31). Martin's article examines the growth of evangelical Christianity around the world--From Latin America to Eastern Europe and Asia--and how the adoption of this faith leads to upward mobility and the formation of new cultures. Martin writes that the sense of self-worth and validation that is received from an evangelical faith "literally and psychically turns people around." Among Latin American evangelicals, Martin finds an "extending ladder of cultural competence...Reading the Bible leads on to literature in general, sermonizing leads on to argumentation, popular Christian music to Johann Sebastian Bach."

* A lively sketch of where the women's movement is headed during the next millennium appears in the May-June issue of the Futurist magazine. Christopher Jones of Eastern Oregon State College writes that radical

feminist activism and spirituality will be the most important catalyst in the fruition of the women's movement. Rejecting such modalities as patriarchy, total separation of the sexes or partnership, today's spirituality minded feminists are seeking to recreate the world in their own mold, leading to a new politics, a new set of social institutions, and a new spirituality of sensuality. For those skeptical of such prognostications, Jones points to the historical record showing that the achievements of the women's movement of the last century were pioneered by the radicals. For more information on this issue, write: The Futurist, 7910 Woodmont Ave., Suite 450, Bethesda, MD 20814.--By Erling Jorstad

* The new book Congregations in Conflict: The Battle Over Homosexuality (Rutgers University Press, \$24.95) by Keith Hartman, focuses on Southern Baptist, Catholic, Quaker, Presbyterian, Methodist and Metropolitan Community Church (a denomination ministering to homosexuals) congregations in the Research Triangle region of North Carolina and how they handle this volatile issue. Hartman shows how the different politics and structures of each church affect the way the issues were resolved. Regardless of whether a church is hierarchical- or congregational-based, the issue of homosexuality--especially the ordination and marriage of gays--generates considerable conflict, even in more liberal church bodies. Aside from the Quaker chapters, Hartman, a gay journalist, focuses mainly on the homosexuals involved in these conflicts and those in sympathy with their concerns rather than those opposed to such measures. Hartman suggests several strategies to avoid congregational conflicts, such as framing the deliberations in terms of a "search for God's will," rather than as a debate. But it doesn't seem likely that his concluding suggestion that church members need to "agree to disagree" on the issue in order to maintain church unity will be agreeable to either party in the current battles.

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

1) The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals is a new organization among mainly conservative Reformed and Lutheran leaders who are critical of the influence of modern philosophies and other currents in the evangelical world. The alliance, which recently held its first conference in Cambridge, Mass., especially targets the consumeristic influence in the church growth movement and the role of such "modern idols" as psychology, psychotherapy and sociology in evangelical churches and calls for a return to theology based on the confessional writings of the Protestant Reformation. The call for reform is aimed at the alliance members' own churches as well as at the wider evangelical world; such conservative Reformed and Lutheran bodies as the Presbyterian Church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have experienced divisions over the growth of "seeker-based" church growth practices among its members. (Source: Christian News, March 25; National & International Religion Report, April 29).

2) The Teaching Christian Network applies the principles of mentoring, long prominent in the business world, to churches. The program, launched in 1994 by the evangelical Wooddale Church in Minnesota, connects "teaching churches" that share their knowledge on church growth with "developing" churches. The network now numbers 18 teaching churches and 40 developing churches. Participating congregations may be urban or suburban, large or small, mainline, evangelical, or independent. (Current Thoughts & Trends, May)

Council on American-Islamic Relations-based report. The study found that even after it became clear that the bombing suspects were of Christian background, Muslims continued to experience discrimination as members of a religious minority, according to the Washington Post (April 20). The report, which does not claim to be a comprehensive survey of bias crimes against Muslims, cited Muslims being fired for refusing to take off their head scarves and for requesting breaks from work to say their prayers as examples of such discrimination.

**MAINLINE'S
MEMBERSHIPS
DECLINE WHILE
CONTRIBUTIONS
INCREASE**

* The largest decline in mainline Protestant membership last year was in the Presbyterian Church (USA), according to the 1996 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches. The church lost 98,630 members, a 2.6 percent decline. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), lost 20,373 members (2.13 percent), while the United Church of Christ lost 28,868 members (1.89 percent). The Assemblies of God grew by 2.3 percent, the Southern Baptist Convention was up 1.4 percent, the Mormons, up 2.1 percent; and the Jehovah's Witnesses grew by 2.1 percent. But even denominations with declining members showed a growth in contributions. The Presbyterians had a 4.8 percent increase, to a total of \$2.1 billion, while the Disciples of Christ showed a 3.3 percent rise, to \$385.5 million. (Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches, National Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10115-0050)

**POLITICAL
GAP GROWS
BETWEEN
PROTESTANT
CLERGY**

* America's Protestant clergy are increasingly divided in politics and theology, according to a recent survey. The survey, conducted by James Guth of Furman University, Corwin Smidt of Calvin College, Lyman Kellstedt of Wheaton College, and John Green of the University of Akron, polled nearly 8,000 pastors in eight denominations, according to Christianity Today (April 8). The researchers found that "the theological divide among Protestant clergy is probably widening, as those in the conservative denominations remain relatively stable in beliefs and identification, while mainline Protestant clergy seem to be drifting in an even more liberal theological direction. There is also a growing connection between conservative politics and conservative theology. Two-thirds of the most conservative believer say it is difficult to be both a political liberal and a true Christian. (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)

**SBC CONSERVATIVE
CLERGY TAKE UP
POLITICS WHILE
MODERATES
WITHDRAW**

* While it is well known that many conservative Southern Baptists have become strongly active in politics the past two decades from being formerly apolitical, there has also been a decline of political involvement among the more liberal "moderate" camp in the SBC, according to Baptists Today newspaper (April 4). At a recent conference sponsored by the Nashville-based Baptist Center for Ethics, journalist Marv Knox presented research by political scientist James Guth showing that the "old relationship between liberal theology and political involvement has been reversed, at least among Southern Baptists." Guth found that the willingness of Baptist pastors to cooperate politically with non-Baptist clergy grew from 54 percent in 1984 to 63 percent in 1992. By 1992, three-fourths of Southern Baptist pastors claimed more than a "mild interest" in politics. Conversely, membership in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate group that was formed in response to the conservative take-over in the denomination during the 1980s, was termed by Guth "a powerful negative influence on activism." Knox adds, "When it comes to politics, moderates are just too moderate--neither hot nor cold, right nor left, angry nor happy. Lukewarm." (Baptists Today, 403 West Ponce de Leon Ave., Suite 119, Decatur, GA 30030)

**INDEX OF
RELIGIOUS
COMMITMENT
REACHES
10-YEAR HIGH**

* The level of religious commitment of the American public has hit a ten-year high, according to the annual religion index issued by the Gallup-based Princeton Religion Research Center. The religion index measures eight key religious beliefs and practices of Americans, including church membership, confidence in churches and the clergy, and belief in God. The index rose to 665-- a significant jump from last year's score of 658 and from 1993 when it hit the all time low of 649 (a perfect score would be 1000, which is unattainable since it would mean that every American would be totally committed to God and church), according to the center's newsletter Emerging Trends (March). The current score is the highest recorded since 1985. Much of the current increase can be attributed to renewed confidence by the public in both organized religion and in the clergy. (Emerging Trends, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 215, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542)

**IMMIGRATION
CUSHIONING
GERMAN CHURCH
DECLINE**

* Although German church membership continues to decline, an influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe into Germany is alleviating some of these losses, according to the German evangelical news service Idea (April 23). According to recent church statistics, the number of membership cancellations (most Germans are baptised into membership as infants but from age 14 they can renounce their memberships) in Protestant and Catholic churches increased to 445,000 in 1994. Immigrants to Germany from Eastern Europe made up for some of the losses the losses--especially for the Protestants--increasing membership rolls by almost 70,000, which was about the same figure for the previous year. (Idea, Postfach 18 20, D-35528 Wetzlar, Germany)

**HIGH RATE
OF YOUNG
ATHEISTS
IN AUSTRIA**

* Every third young Austrian is an atheist, according to a poll by the Gallup Institute for the Vienna-based church magazine, "Kirche Intern." The poll, cited in Idea (April 9) found that 35 percent of the interviewees under 30 do not believe in a higher being. Twenty two percent of Austria's total population call themselves atheists. The poll found that merely three percent of the younger generation attend church every Sunday in the predominantly Catholic nation.

**MORMON WORLD
EXPANSION KEEPS
AMERICAN ACCENT?**

The expansion of Mormonism into a world religion is changing aspects of the faith in different cultures but it is likely to retain its American identity along with a conservative, managerial model of leadership in the future. Those were some of the conclusions reached by scholars writing in a special issue of the independent Mormon journal Dialogue (Spring) devoted to the subject of Mormonism's prospects in the 21st century. Mormonism's rapid growth throughout the world means that the religion will be largely based in the Third World, especially Latin America (by 2020 a majority of all church members will reside in Latin America with less than one-fourth in North America.). In an overview of the church in Latin America, sociologist David Clark Knowlton writes that there will emerge "various national Mormonisms," especially as Mormons are now becoming more socially and politically active in the region. Another article sees Guatemala as a harbinger of how Mormonism in the next century will be marked by diverse understandings of what it means to be Mormon. Guatemalan Mormons see themselves as descending from a chosen people (native American people are considered the lost tribe of Israel in the Book of Mormon) and blend nationalistic and pre-Christian concepts with their faith, writes Thomas Murphy.

"Guatemalan converts to Mormonism have conflated the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, a local god revived by Guatemalan nationalists, with the internationally recognized Jesus Christ, whose ancient visit to the Americas is proposed in the Book of Mormon," Murphy adds. Meanwhile, European Mormons are calling for more decentralization and tolerance on such lifestyle issues as divorce (and less overall American influence), and Japanese Mormons are pressing for greater church understanding of their ancestral customs. But for all these calls for greater inculturation of the faith, sociologist Armand Mauss writes that Mormonism still "seems to do best wherever American influence is felt," the Philippines being one current example. Sociologists Gary and Gordon Shepherd put the matter more strongly: "for the foreseeable future, insistence of doctrinal orthodoxy and the centralized, corporate managerial approach (which has worked well thus far in mobilizing church resources and member support for missionary expansion) will continue to be the Mormon norm worldwide." They add, however, that the church may experience some cases of "nationalistic schisms" in reaction to this centralized approach. (Dialogue, P.O. Box 658, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110-0658)

**UNIVERSAL CHURCH
GROWS AT HOME
AND ABROAD
DESPITE
CONTROVERSY**

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a large fast-growing syncretistic Christian movement in Brazil, is exporting its teachings to the U.S. even as it gains political influence and courts controversy in its birthplace, according to the *Christian Century* magazine (April 10). The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UC) has three million members in Brazil and a vast economic empire (particularly in broadcasting) worth as much as \$1 billion a year. The UC, under the charismatic leadership of Edir Macedo, is increasingly involved in politics, although government officials in Brazil and other Latin American countries are seeking to prosecute Macedo and his group for alleged corruption and swindling. The church (as with other Pentecostal groups in Latin America) also puts an emphasis on prosperity as a sign of God's blessing.

Writer Ken Serbin notes that "lumping the UC success in the category of 'Protestant growth,' as so many reports have done," downplays how the group, as one scholar puts it, "is the first product of syncretism to emerge among Brazilian evangelicals. It is a Christian version of macumba (an Afro-Brazilian spiritualist religion)." As in macumba and other Afro-Brazilian faiths (which is officially condemned by the UC), exorcism occupies a central place in the UC and tithing is stressed as a payment in exchange for favors from God. The UC "temples" in the Spanish-speaking communities in major U.S. cities tend to take a less confrontational stance toward Catholicism than in Brazil (where the UC has attacked the veneration of the Virgin Mary and is engaged in a pitched battle with the Catholic Church), even referring to communion as receiving the body and blood of Christ. The flexible nature of the UC as well as its emphasis on healing and prosperity for the poor may provide ripe opportunity for the group's growth in the U.S., concludes Serbin.

**'THIRD WAVE'
EVANGELICALS
TAKING MIDDLE
GROUND IN
CHINA CONFLICT**

Although Christian churches in China are often viewed as either being pro-government ("official") or underground (often known as "house churches"), there is now a "third wave" movement of churches that have the approval of local government officials but are not part of the

official Three Self Patriotic Movement, according to the National & International Religion Report (March 4). There is a growing crackdown against unofficial house churches, which often receive support from outside the country [see February RW for more on the Chinese-Christian conflict]. The approximately 4,200 third wave congregations (with about 1.2 million believers) are not political and do not receive money or materials from outside the country. By avoiding the conflicts between the Three Self and house churches, the third wave pastors can develop relationships with local Communist Party officials. Third wave pastors are trying to show that the officials' view of Christian evangelizing as meaning "one more Christian, less Chinese," might better be thought of as "one more Christian, one better Chinese," says David Wang of the Asian Outreach ministry. (National & International Religion Report, P.O. Box 21505, Roanoke, VA 24018-0560)

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