

# RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

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## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS:

### KOREAN, CHINESE, AND RASTAFARIAN RELIGION ADAPTS TO AMERICAN RELIGIOUS PATTERNS

The changing nature of immigrant religion in the U.S. and the role of interfaith dialogue in new religious movements came under scrutiny at two scholarly conferences RELIGION WATCH attended this summer. Research presented by the New Ethnic and Immigrant Congregations Project (NEICP) at a New York conference demonstrated how new religious transplants from other countries are taking on American characteristics while still maintaining their identities. The NEIP, based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, presented its findings at the conference of the Association of the Sociology of Religion, August 15-17.

The second generation of Korean-American Christians are increasingly using seeker-based church models and viewing their churches more as spiritual rather than social and ethnic centers, according to research conducted by Karen Chai of Harvard University. Chai noted that the second generation opts for English rather than Korean services and favors a born-again, evangelical identity stressing informal worship as compared to the formal, mainline church style of their parents. She added that these new congregations and services (which sometimes clash with traditional Korean churches) are marked by a sense of ownership by these younger Koreans and a more multi-ethnic flavor (with even the clergy sometimes being non-Asian). An article in *Christianity Today* (August 12) supports Chai's findings, adding that many young believers who have grown up in traditional Asian congregations "are now choosing to leave not only their home churches, but possibly their Christian faith as well." The article cites a study suggesting that Korean-American young people at the college level tend to feel uncomfortable in both Korean and Caucasian churches, signaling slower growth among once burgeoning Korean-American churches.

Chinese-American churches are experiencing similar tensions between first and second-generation members, according to the same article. The refusal to have English language services is even stronger among Chinese Christians, since it is feared that such a change could weaken the church's cultural role as a haven for new immigrants. In a paper presented at the NEIP sessions, Fenggang Yang of Catholic University in America said that Chinese Protestant churches play a unique role in cementing the unity of Chinese-Americans. Rather than splitting over issues of doctrine and practice, many Chinese churches emphasize unity, often accepting different styles and political, doctrinal, and cultural differences, including dialects (such as Taiwanese and Cantonese) which are often incomprehensible among Chinese speakers from different regions. These churches consist of subgroups, such as small group fellowships,

where these differences are expressed without breaking the bonds of the church, according to Yang. He added that there is no other Chinese ethnic organization that has achieved such a level of unity.

Sociologist R. Stephen Warner, director of NEICP, has said that new immigrant religious groups embrace a "defacto congregationalism" in their adaption to American society, even if their respective traditions had no historical place for congregations. This observation was borne out in the research conducted by Randal Hepner of New York University on the Afro-Caribbean Rastafarian faith. The Rastafarians have had little concern for institution-building since their emergence in Jamaica in the 1930s, basing most of their worship in communal festivals and small decentralized gatherings. More recently, however, Rastafarians in the U.S. are turning to local congregational structures in order to pass on the faith to the next generation. Standardized forms of worship, Sunday services, children's programs, even baptisms, weddings and funerals--ceremonies traditional Rastafarians have eschewed--are among the innovations being introduced. Evangelism is even taking place, with the "mother" church of New York establishing missions in New Jersey and Florida, as well as a prison ministry. While the traditional Rastafarians placed little emphasis on female roles, women are gaining greater prominence in the group today. Hepner also sees a "Rasta-fundamentalism" developing, as a more sectarian and theocratic tendencies emerge in the American movement.

**NEW RELIGIONS  
SEEK  
INTERFAITH  
ACCEPTANCE**

The 10th annual Congress on New Religious Movements meeting in Montreal from August 13-16 showed itself to be different than many other academic gatherings. Members of such new religious groups as the Hare Krishnas, the Family (formerly the Children of God), and Scientology participated in the proceedings alongside academics who take a more objective approach to such matters. In all, over a dozen different unconventional religious systems were represented by devotees who were given the opportunity to respond to papers given at the conference. The sponsor of the conference was CESNUR, the Center for the Study of New Religions, an international professional association of academics based in Turin, Italy. One of the undercurrents which typically follow these diverse gatherings involves the challenge to foster effective dialogue among new religious groups. Interfaith leaders have observed that the typical instability of new religious movements (NRMs) often hinders effective dialogue. But NRM leaders express frustration that participation for such dialogue is limited by interfaith organizations only to those groups which have been in existence for at least 150 years.

Perhaps the most controversial workshop centered on Scientology. It appears that a consensus is growing among those who study new religious movements (NRM's) concerning Scientology's reputation for taking its critics to court. Such scholars seem to be in agreement that the controversial group will need to restrain or reverse its litigious tendencies in order to gain the acceptance it has been seeking from interfaith dialog. In holding the conference in Quebec, there was a desire by some of its organizers to respond to the sense of fear and confusion the province has experienced in the wake of a new and turbulent culture of religious pluralism. Quebec was rocked when five members of the secretive Order of the Solar Temple (OST) were found dead in the Canadian province as part of a mysterious murder-suicide occurrence that was synchronized with similar deaths in Switzerland in 1994. It was an additional shock to the general public when a formal investigation of the

tragedy revealed that well-placed Quebec citizens were numbered among the dead members. The fact that about 85 percent of the conference participants were Quebec citizens could well show such concern. Jean-Francois Mayer of the Swiss Central Office of Defense said the now-defunct OST remains obscure and without significant ties to the other new religious groups currently under the microscope.-- *Rich Poll, a research associate with the International School of Theology, San Bernardino, Calif., reported on the CESNUR conference in Montreal for RW.*

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**JEWISH CONVERTS  
SERIOUS ABOUT  
FAITH**

While many American Jews view converts warily, seeing them as adopting Judaism more out of convenience when intermarrying rather than conviction, many have deeper motivations for adopting the faith, according to an article in *Moment* magazine (August). There are no national records kept of the number of conversion, but estimates say that converts account for about one of every 30 American Jews. In interviewing Jewish leaders and converts, writer Ellen Jaffe McClain found that "contemporary converts appear to have two things in common: a profound alienation from the religious doctrines in which they grew up and a spiritual thirst that only Judaism can quench. They wrote off their Christianity years before they decided to become Jewish. Most reported that they felt they were "coming home" when they converted to Judaism. "Converts often report having admired Jews they met as youngsters, being impressed by Jewish history and Judaism's intellectual tradition, and seeking out Jews as dating partners. More than a few discover that they had a Jewish grandparent or great-grand parent."

McClain adds that it is also a myth that conversion takes place only in the context of betrothal or marriage. Rabbi Neal Weinberg, who directs the introduction to Judaism program at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, has said that the number of single gentiles coming through his classes had more than quadrupled during the last few years. Many rabbis do say that having a Jewish partner often makes conversion easier to pursue and maintain. But where once as many as 40 percent of gentiles marrying Jews became Jewish before their weddings, today fewer than 10 percent do so. That these conversions happen after marriage may be a sign that they are sincere, since they are not viewed as conditional for marriage. McClain argues that it is time to separate the issue of conversion from intermarriage. The latter may dilute Jewish identity, but conversions only serve to strengthen the faith. She concludes that while it is still a minority position in American Jewry, there are a number of Jewish thinkers and leaders calling for a more assertive role in drawing converts to the faith. (*Moment*, 4710 41st St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016)

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**AMERICAN  
MUSLIMS  
DISAFFECTED  
FROM BOTH  
PARTIES**

Muslim voters in 1996 find that despite their rapidly growing strength as an interest bloc, they are unable to support either President Clinton or Senator Bob Dole in their bids for the presidency. Recognized with their more than 4 million members as one of the fastest growing religious bodies in the U.S., Muslim leaders want the American government to provide more social programs for their people living in the inner cities, reports the *Los Angeles Times* (August 10). According to one specialist, Salam Al-Marayati, director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council of Los Angeles, neither major party candidate appeals strongly to Muslims

because of what they see as inner-party contradictions.

Republicans are attractive to Muslim voters for their stand on family values and abortion, but their reliance on the Christian Coalition is seen as a negative. Democrats attract African-American Muslims because of their stronger stand on social welfare programs, but their endorsement of Israeli foreign policy finds no support among the general Muslim population, according to Sulayman Nyang of Howard University. These specialists agree that the three to six million Muslims in America are in no way an organized voting bloc. Another concern of Muslims is that they also want to be accepted as a major American faith, just as the Jewish people have been accepted. To date, the American Muslim populace remains, as one leader stated, "the new kid on the block," waiting to find its role in American politics.--By *RW contributing editor Erling Jorstad.*

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**CLERGY-LABOR  
ALLIANCE  
REVIVED**

Clergy are becoming active in labor issues after a long period of non-involvement, reports the New York Times (August 18). Recent clergy support of unions has taken such forms as preaching, pastoral letters, protest marches, meetings with management and Congressional testimony. Such aid "has come from many quarters, from black ministers who labored in the civil rights movement, from priests whose siblings are union members, and from rabbis whose grandparents were union stalwarts as apparel workers on Manhattan's Lower East Side," writes Alison Mitchell. The new support for unions among clergy has grown because of the concern that working conditions have been declining since the 1980s. The end of the cold war, where many liberal clerics were critical of the anti-socialist positions of unions, such as the A.F.L.-C.I.O. There was also the view among many that unions, such as the Teamsters, were corrupt.

Labor-clergy coalitions have sprouted in New York City, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, Boston, Detroit and Chicago, and a steering committee made up of 40 clerics is forming the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. "These days, 100 or so members of the clergy and of unions attend meetings of a New York City coalition [between the two groups] when less than a dozen might have shown up two years ago," writes Mitchell. Business executives are reported not to be happy with the new alliance between labor and the clergy, claiming that the clergy do not understand how unions can hurt a corporation.

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**BOOK TRENDS  
SHOW ANGEL  
AND DEVIL  
INTEREST  
DECLINING**

The annual summary of religious trends in America as suggested by recent book purchases indicates both continuity and decline, according to Publishers Weekly (August 12). Gone is the once huge interest in angels; books linking religion and domestic violence are also in abeyance. One a major staple, books on Satan are no longer in demand. Once the other hand, new titles on inner-spirituality, including its expression in Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist and New Age circles, continue to flourish on the book shelves. Readers are also buying a large number of studies in Medieval mysticism, Catholic saints and male-based prayers. The decline of interest in angels may be due to the saturation that has been achieved by the enormous volume of available titles. Sales of books on Satan depend on how critical world crises are at any given moment, especially Arab-Israeli conflicts at the geographical point in which the Battle of

# Against The Stream:

The Adoption of Traditional Christian  
Faiths by Young Adults

by Richard P. Cimino, Editor and Publisher of *Religion Watch*

*Against The Stream* explores the trend of young adults converting and returning to tradition-based Christian faiths.

Surveys of baby boomers and busters have found that many young adults are not strongly connected to religious institutions and often practice consumeristic or "pick-and-choose" forms of religious faith. There is, however, a countertrend emerging of young adults adhering to comprehensive religious traditions.

*Against The Stream* examines this "young traditionalist" phenomenon in Roman Catholic, Reformed (or Calvinist), and Eastern Orthodox churches. The study, which is based on in-depth interviews with 30 young adults from these churches, examines how these young traditionalists adopt and then adapt these faiths to provide them with personal and social benefits. The book concludes with a comparison of these different journeys to traditional faiths and an examination of the role of choice among these young adults even as they disassociate themselves from the religious consumerism of their generation.

Copublished by Religion Watch and University Press of America. 146 pages (with bibliography and endnotes), paperback. *Against The Stream* will be available in December, 1996. Order now for a 22% pre-publication discount.

Please send me [       ] copies of *Against The Stream* at the discount of \$20.28 per copy. Make check payable to University Press of America. Add \$3.75 for postage and handling; \$.75 postage and handling for each additional copy.

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Send with payment to: Religion Watch, P.O. Box 652, North Bellmore, NY 11710

Armageddon is prophesized to take place.--By Erling Jorstad.

**CURRENT RESEARCH: *Recent Findings In Religious Attitudes And Behavior***

**CHRISTIAN  
RIGHT  
SUPPORTERS  
LOOK TO  
GOVERNMENT  
SUPPORT?**

\* Those who identify themselves with the religious or Christian right show some sympathy for the belief that America's political troubles can be alleviated by giving stronger government support to Christianity, according to a recent Gallup survey. The survey, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, found that of those who aligned themselves with the religious right, 48 percent said a constitutional amendment should be adopted "declaring that the United States is a Christian nation (compared to 21 percent of other Americans). Forty four percent of those who identified with the religious right agreed that "on most political issues there is one correct Christian point of view." While those aligned with the religious right differ little from other Americans in their attitudes toward Asians, Blacks, Catholics, and Hispanics, they are much more negative in their attitudes toward gay rights groups, atheists and, to a lesser extent, Muslims. While religious right respondents had positive attitudes towards Jews and Israel (more supportive of the latter than other Americans), they were twice as likely to raise objections "to Jews on religious grounds," believing they should believe in Christ. But still, 93 percent of religious right respondents deem it "essential" or "very important" to "promote racial, religious, and ethnic understanding and tolerance in the U.S."

**AMERICANS  
FIND CHURCH  
DONATIONS  
WELL-SPENT**

\* Americans are satisfied that their donations are put to good use by churches, according to a recent poll by the Barna Research Group. They study found some 47 percent of donors interviewed said donations to churches are used more productively than money given to other nonprofit organizations, and an additional 38 percent said the money is used with equal effectiveness. National & International Religion Report (July 22) notes the survey found that in a typical month, 45 percent of Americans give money to a church or other place of worship, 41 percent to a nonprofit organization other than a church, and 23 percent to both. But most Americans (three-quarters) gave less than \$500 yearly to nonprofit groups.

**CATHOLIC  
VOCATION  
DECLINE DUE  
TO LACK  
OF PARENTAL  
SUPPORT?**

\* Parents' lack of concern to foster religious vocations among their children may be a decisive factor in the continuing decline of young people entering religious life in the Catholic Church, according to a recent survey. The survey, conducted by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, found that while three in every 10 adolescents thought about pursuing a religious vocation, only a fifth of the youths said their parents encouraged them in making such plans. The New York Times (August 31) reports that parental support differed by gender. Twenty six percent of teen boys said they received encouragement in considering the priesthood, while 15 percent of girls had received similar support in considering becoming a nun. The survey, which polled 6,010 Catholic teens, found that the respondents reported attending Mass more often than their friends and even their own parents. By an overwhelming majority, the youths said they were proud to be Catholic and nearly half said prayer was "very important" to them.

**ADVENTISTS  
SUFFERING  
FROM OWN  
SUCCESS IN  
DEVELOPING  
WORLD?**

\* The practice of reducing tension between Seventh Day Adventists and their surrounding environments in developing countries has brought growth to the church, but it is also sapping Adventist strength, according to a

recent study by Ronald Lawson of Queens College. Lawson traces this development to the U.S. church policy of pursuing reduced tension between Adventist missions and governments, such as in cases where the church negotiated to win such privileges as building schools and hospitals in exchange for compliance with restrictive government laws. This has resulted in situations where adults in the developing world are increasingly attracted to Adventism because of "perceived opportunities for upward mobility. They frequently compromise key church standards, and leave the church in higher percentages [particularly in Africa] than in the United States," writes Lawson in the independent Adventist journal Spectrum (June).

"Adventists in many of these countries [especially in the South Pacific region] have risen to political prominence. When tensions with the state arise, prominent members ease them with considerable success." Lawson adds that "Adventism's rapid growth among the poor all over the world is spreading its resources, which are drawn primarily from the U.S., very thin. Total tithe and offerings per capita in the world church, measured in 1950 U.S. dollars, had fallen by 1994 to only 37.2 percent of what it was in 1950." As a result, Adventist schools and hospitals are failing as they "have no hope of accommodating the numbers of potential students from among the vast array of young converts..." Lawson asks whether the convert rate will drop off once it is realized that Adventism no longer offers the same opportunities for upward mobility, and whether the church will "be able to continue to avoid a major schism" in such countries. (Spectrum, 5330, Takoma Park, MD 20912)

**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CANADA  
FAILING  
TO REACH  
ADULTS**

\* The United Church of Canada continues to decline in membership, with recent statistics pointing to a serious failure to reach adults, according to figures in the church's 1996 Yearbook. The United Church Observer (July/August) cites the yearbook as showing a steep 14.9 percent decline of baptisms for those 12 years and older. "Combine this with the fact that members over 18 received by [making a] profession of faith has declined an alarming 10.5 percent. All this suggests that United Church congregations are not connecting adults with the transforming power of God... These same adults are the primary target of other faith groups in Canada today." The church also showed a 2.2 membership decline to a total of 728, 134. The membership decline is not surprising, says evangelism official Tom Bandy. He believes it could be much steeper in coming years, noting that sociologist Reginald Bibby is predicting the United Church and other mainline denominations will experience a major decline within five to six years. (United Church Observer, 478 Huron St., Toronto, Ontario M5R 2R3 Canada)

**BUDDHISM  
YOUNG AND  
GROWING IN  
AUSTRALIA**

\* Buddhism has grown dramatically in Australia in recent years, according to a report from the nation's Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research. Between 1981 and 1991, the number of Buddhists jumped from just over 35,000 to almost 140,000, making Buddhism the fastest growing religion in Australia during this period. Most of the increase was due to immigration from Viet Nam, Malaysia and Cambodia; there are only 10,000 Buddhists of Anglo-Celtic background. The Buddhists are younger than other religious groups; 83 percent were less than 45 years old in 1991, compared with 70 percent of the overall population. The Australian Christian magazine On Being (July) cites the report as suggesting that Buddhists may face prejudice in the workplace. In a survey, 41 percent of the Australian population said they would not wish to have Buddhists as workmates. (On Being, 2 Denham St., Hawthorn, 3122,

Australia).

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**UNIFICATION  
CHURCH SUPPORT  
SHIFTING FROM  
JAPAN TO  
LATIN AMERICA**

The Unification Church's strong financial base in Japan is reported to be weakening due to protests and criticism by former members and the public, according to the Washington Post (August 4). Japan has long been the "financial engine driving the church's global machine," with Unificationist doctrine assigning Japan (known as "Eve's country") the role of supporting the church. Analysts say the fund-raising machine in Japan has faltered. It has slipped largely because of intense scrutiny from the media and civic watchdogs (especially in the wake of Aum Shinro Kyo gas attack). Recently, 300 Japanese citizens have filed law suits against the church and its members, "an unusually high number in a society where it is unusual to resort to civil lawsuits to settle disputes," writes Keven Sullivan and Mary Jordan. Those suing the church are claiming they were brainwashed or taken advantage of financially. Critics say the church is now raising about half of the money it did in the 1980s and is now overinflating its contribution rate. Journalist Yoshifu Arita says the church is focusing on older people, particularly women, rather than young people.

Church spokesman Masuo Oe counters that Japanese Unification operations are as strong as ever, as members are still raising \$400 million in donations, surpassing the amount raised during Japan's booming economy in the mid-1980s. The article adds that "many of those watching the church here say Moon appears to be shifting his focus to Latin America and elsewhere for fund-raising. Church officials said Moon has been spending much of his time recently in Latin America." The turn to Latin America is the result of a policy change in the Unification Church after the fall of communism, which called for members to go home and develop their own countries, according to an article in the Danish journal Spirituality In East and West (No. 2). "Now the Rev. Moon sees the providential period of Protestant America being over, and as a result he is moving into Catholic Latin America. The church in Brazil has developed a major ecological project and is calling for volunteers from around the world." More important is the UC's move to Paraguay, where it has been granted major tracts of land, especially since the Korean government is no longer as friendly to Moon. "Perhaps what we see here is the reduction of the ideal of bringing the Kingdom of God on earth to a Unification Church colony to carry on the work of the Messiah," writes Mike Garde. (Spirituality In East And West, Dialog Center, 46, Katrinebjergvej, DK 8200 Arhus N, Denmark)

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**MAYAN RELIGION  
FINDING  
PUBLIC  
FACE IN  
GUATEMALA**

Mayan religion and political expression is on the rise in Guatemala, reports the New York Times (August 12). In the aftermath of Guatemala's civil war, the country's Mayan majority is asserting itself, making public native religious ceremonies after centuries of repression. In July, the Vice President of Guatemala swore in 21 Mayan priests as members of a new government-sponsored Council of Elders. An estimated two-thirds of Guatemala's 10.5 million people are of Indian descent. For the first time in memory, ceremonies invoking Mayan gods, long condemned by the Roman Catholic Church, "were not only celebrated publicly, but also covered extensively by Guatemalan newspapers and television stations." Along with the demand for greater political autonomy of native



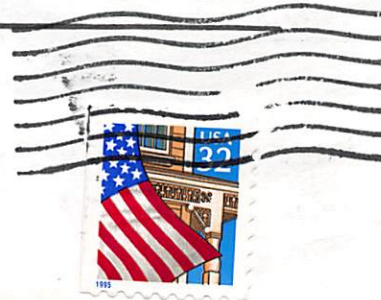
Mayan culture, there are also plans "to incorporate Maya healers, and spiritual advisors analogous to psychiatrists, into the country's health care system and to establish bicultural public schools," reports Larry Rohter. Some fear that Guatemala may be heading down the road to separatism, becoming another Bosnia.

**SPIRITUAL  
INTEREST  
GROWS AMONG  
ISRAEL'S  
SOLDIERS,  
SPORT STARS**

The election of B.B. Netanyahu signaled the strength of the religious parties and Orthodox influence in Israel, but there also appears to be growing spiritual interest among Israelis, especially in the military and the sports/entertainment sectors. The evangelical newsletter Inside Israel (Volume 16 No. 8). A recent report from the Israel Defense Forces states that the "motivation of religious soldiers far exceeds that of their colleagues," and that an increasing percentage of officers and those serving in the elite combat units are religious. This was evident in the large number of kippot (yarmulkas) on the heads of those in the Israel Aircraft control room during the recent launch of Israel's Amos satellite. Several of Israel's leading entertainers were reported to be among the first public figures to declare their return to observant Judaism. "Now several of the top sports stars of the country are studying in yeshivas and seeking to move sporting events from the Sabbath to other days of the week." The newsletter adds that the religious renewal can also be seen in the large rallies being held monthly from the northern border to the Negrev. The meetings resemble Billy Graham crusades as they are held in large stadiums and auditoriums to overflow crowds. (Inside Israel, P.O. Box 22029, San Diego, CA 92192-2029)

**CORRECTION:** It has been called to RW's attention by a reader that the March issue contained a confusing error. The beginning of the second sentence on page 8 in the article on the revival of Islamic politics in Turkey should read: "Even if such ideals are not realized, observers say that including Refah in the once strongly secular government is better than repressing such popular movements...."

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**Inside This Issue:**

- *New Immigrant Religion And New Religious Movements--Two Reports*
- *A Closer Look At Jewish Converts; Unification Church Goes West For Funds?*

# FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

September/October 1996

## PRESSNOTES

\* A cover story in the August Atlantic Monthly magazine provides an interesting and thorough account of the megachurch and the seeker-sensitive service movement. Writer Charles Trueheart profiles several megachurches and uncovers the social dynamics that make these congregations so effective, such as their appeal to consumerism, their decentralized nature, professionalization, and concern with intimacy through the formation of small groups. The 16-page article shows how mainline churches are borrowing megachurch features, from giving greater attention to children ministries to the use of alternative services.

\* "What Do American Jews Believe?" is the subject of a symposium published in the August issue of Commentary magazine. The editors asked 48 Jewish leaders and thinkers from a wide range of perspectives to reflect on such issues as the distinctive role of Judaism today; the state of Israel; serious societal challenges to Judaism; internal divisions within Judaism; and the possibility of a large scale Jewish revival. Most respondents--whether Orthodox, Reform, Conservative or Reconstructionist--see growing divisions and polarizations between Jews and the growth of secular challenges, such as intermarriage, preventing a strong Jewish revival. The editors, who note that the same survey was taken back in 1966, find that conservative sentiments (at least in belief and practice) are much stronger than liberal views among respondents. While this may be due to the coincidence of who responded to the questions, the editors add that such a conservative tendency may show that "among affiliated Jews in general, religion is back, and it is fueled by traditionalism." The issue costs \$3.75 and is available from Commentary, 165 E. 56th St., New York, NY 10022)

\* The July 6 issue of the Jesuit magazine America is devoted to the topic of the "new feminism." The term, which has recently been used by Pope John Paul II, is meant to describe a more irenic form of feminism that harmonizes with the goals of the general female population, according to the lead article by Harvard Law professor Mary Ann Glendon. She writes that younger college-educated women no longer identify with the feminism of the 1970s finding it too single issue-oriented, too strident in rejecting homemaker roles, and unnecessarily hostile towards cooperation with men. Drawing on Catholic social teaching, Glendon calls for a more inclusive feminism that recognizes the dignity of all kinds of work. In a responding article, Margaret Steinfelds questions whether the Catholic Church should be the leading sponsor of the new feminism and calls on Catholics to invite other people of faith into the movement. For more information on this issue, write: America, 106 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019--By Erling Jorstad

\* Seeking assimilation into the evangelical community, the controversial Local Church movement has launched its first periodical Affirmation & Critique, a magazine on Christian apologetics (or defense of the faith) for the general public. The Local Church and its 92-year-old leader Witness Lee have been criticized for alleged authoritarian and non-Christian practices, such as using Eastern meditation techniques. Local Church dissident Jim Moran observes that the new publication is unique in

that it is published by the church's publishing arm, Living Stream, apart from Lee and may be taken as a sign of the founder's decreasing role within the movement. The most recent issues include articles, in contrast to earlier publications, with not one citation of Lee's writings in the endnotes. In line with its assimilation efforts, Living Stream has also become a member of the Christian Booksellers Association and runs ads for Affirmation & Critique in evangelical publications, such as "Books & Culture," published by Christianity Today, Inc. For more information on the magazine write: Affirmation & Critique, P.O. Box 2032, Anaheim, CA 92814-0121-- By Rich Poll

**ON/FILE: A Continuing Survey of People, Groups, Events, and Movements Influencing Today's Religious Scene.**

1) Michael Behe and Michael Denton are challenging Darwinian evolutionary theory in their assertion that "intelligent design" is built into human biology and are finding growing interest among theologians. Behe is a Lehigh University scientist and author of the recent book, "Darwin's Black Box," and Denton is a New Zealand researcher who wrote the new book, "Biology: the Anthropropic Perspective." Behe contends that recent discoveries on the complexity of human biochemical systems (such as blood-clotting) suggest "intentional intelligent design" and could not have obtained their functions in the gradual way required by evolutionary theory. Denton goes further in arguing that the harder sciences of physics and chemistry support the view that the laws of nature are uniquely fashioned for humans. Such scientific theories could help rehabilitate the belief of most world religions-- that human beings are the center of meaning and focus in the cosmos and that the world was "prefabricated" for humanity. (Source: Ethics And Public Policy Center Newsletter, Summer)

2) The Catholic Common Ground Project is similar to the Common Ground initiatives on the issue of abortion in that this new group seeks to bring parties in conflict into dialogue. The new project, led by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago, seeks to promote discussion and a sense of shared purpose among liberal, conservative, and other groups in the Catholic Church in the U.S. The project has a committee of 23 prominent Catholics, including such conservatives as Michael Novak and Mary Ann Glendon, and plans to sponsor a series of conferences at which issues affecting the church can be discussed. Shortly after Bernardin announced the formation of the project, other leading Catholic prelates, such as Bernard Cardinal Law of Boston, expressed concern that his statement announcing the initiative did not place sufficient importance on church teachings and authority. (Source: New York Times, September 1)

3) The formation of the Singer Foundation by anti-cult scholar Margaret Singer follows in the wake of the bankruptcy and possible folding of the anti-cultist Cult Awareness Network due to the many lawsuits against the group by the Scientologists. The foundation plans to make court records, case histories, and documentation on "cults" and other forms of what Singer calls, "psychological and social manipulation" available over the Internet. Singer writes that "Armed with balanced information about propoganda and thought reform, people should be free to make their own choices free of intrusive, outside domination of governments, cults, gangs, or abusive family members." The foundation's e-mail address is: singer@singer.org (Source: Press Release)