

# RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

Volume 12 Number 1

November 1996

## UNCHURCHED SPIRITUALITY GROWS AMONG BLACKS

A new wave of non-institutional spirituality is attracting African-Americans, particularly for its emphasis on gender and self-empowerment, according to *Common Boundary*, (November/December), a magazine on psychology and spirituality. This emphasis on spirituality in the black community is often based outside of the black church in "circles" of women meeting across the country and men attending community programs that draw on the themes of atonement and accountability that first emerged on the national level with last year's Million Man March. The movement is compared to the New Age movement in that it looks beyond the government and conventional church and stresses individualized and internal spiritual guidance. Women's concerns drive much of this movement. The "sister circles" are periodic gatherings that focus on prayer and positive thinking, themes that are also found in a spate of new books for black women, such as "Tapping the Power Within," by Iyanla Vanzant and "Saving Our Sons" by Marita Golden. Forgiveness of parents and mates is often a key element of these circles.

These teachings and techniques are being introduced nationally through "empowerment" conferences known as "African American Women on Tour," reports Bijan C. Bayne. Community activists are also seeking to draw pastors and churches into addressing such "new" spiritual concerns as the value of extended family and the necessity of personal accountability. As with its New Age counterpart, the new black spirituality has a psychotherapeutic component. The concern with providing African-American young people with rites of passage [see March RW] has led to Washington and Baltimore-based Progressive Life Center (PLC) to offer a psychotherapy (called NTU) that draws on principles associated with the celebration of the African-based holiday Kwanza (such as self-determination, cooperative economics, and creativity). This movement toward a non-institutional spirituality has the advantage of uniting blacks from a diversity of religions; "ideological differences are deemphasized for the sake of the common good," writes Bayne. (*Common Boundary*, 5272 River Rd., Suite 650, Bethesda, MD 20816)

## FITNESS FINDS SPIRITUALITY

Gyms and spas are increasingly marketing spirituality and are finding interest among their customers in making such connections between "body and spirit," reports the women's magazine *Allure* (September). "Spirituality-speak" is becoming a regular part of the programs of gyms and spas, "providing a kind of one-stop shopping, where the faithful go

to feed their spiritual hunger..." writes Martha Barnette. It is often difficult to know where the concern for physical fitness and beauty leaves off and spirituality starts in programs that draw exercisers in "search of a higher level of existence." One trainer who teaches "aromafitness" classes in California says, "Sacredness is in coming together and working with each other. Everyone in my classes comes to come into alignment with their finest selves." In beauty spas, clients are told that facials provide care of the soul as well as the skin, according to Barnette.

Even using an aromatic hair gel can be a "spiritual" experience, according to Horst Rechelbacher, CEO of the Aveda Corporation. The pleasure created by the gel's scent puts people in a state of "high bliss," which in turn connects them on a primal level with the oneness of the universe. New York trainer Sharon Kringle says that the spiritual "chatter" in many gyms today is mostly a clever marketing tool that's a lot of "smoke and mirrors"-- as well as a clever way for trainers to add interest to exercise routines that otherwise "might leave clients bored to tears." Barnette adds that the phenomenon may just be "rationalizing the same old self-indulgence with the shiny new language of spirituality. We suspect they spend a lot less time navel gazing than they do studying their cellulite in the mirror, and that the spiritual enlightenment they claim from exercising is actually just a good old rush of endorphins." (Allure, 360 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10017)

**COURT DECISIONS  
CREATING  
RESISTANCE  
MOVEMENT?**

A new debate taking shape among conservative Christians is whether the American judicial system is eclipsing religious freedom and advancing secularism to the degree that resistance and civil disobedience may soon be in order, according to a symposium in the November issue of the neoconservative magazine First Things. Activism and concern about recent decisions of the U.S. Courts, such as on euthanasia and same-sex marriage, has become a focus of the New Christian Right in the last few years, but such critics as Robert Bork and Charles Colson go a step further, questioning the legitimacy of the U.S. political system under the judicial system. The six articles in the symposium (entitled "The End of Democracy?") agree that the religious freedom and democracy is slipping away as the courts decide moral issues and laws that should be left to popular vote. Colson writes that the courts are increasingly excluding religious Americans who seek to apply "transcendent moral values to public life" from political, legal, and cultural debates.

Colson cites the recent Supreme Court decisions of *Romer v. Evans*, which aims to penalize discrimination against homosexuals on moral grounds and *Casey V. Planned Parenthood*, which sought to restrict anti-abortion protests, as well as other decisions on physician-assisted suicide as signs of such exclusion. He adds that even the alliance of the Republican Party and the religious right "offers little solution" to this dilemma. Colson calls for a "kind of convocation of theologically orthodox bodies" to give voice to Christian opposition to the government. If Christians determine that "our present government has violated its God-given mandate...the Church would first have to separate herself and declare her independence" and practice limited civil disobedience; if such efforts failed, even revolution may be justified, he adds. Hadley Arkes of Amherst College argues that litigation against Christians and other religious people may increase, as the Court, especially in such decisions

as *Romer v. Evans*, has fashioned a "powerful new instrument for blocking from the academy and the professions people who are 'overly serious' about their religion--which is to say, people who take seriously the traditional moral teachings of Christianity and Judaism." (First Things, 156 Fifth Ave., Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002)

---

**EVANGELICALS  
TAKE UP  
CORPORATE  
PROTESTS,  
BOYCOTTS**

Evangelicals are increasingly taking on corporate America's internal policies, "charging they are unethical, antifamily, or anti-Christian, according to Christianity Today magazine (October 28). Christian activists are using product boycotts, shareholder campaigns, and "public shaming" to make known their concerns among corporate executives. These protests are similar to efforts by conservative Christians two decades ago in their attempt to get sexually explicit magazines off the shelves of convenience stores. This time, however, the activists are broadening "their emphasis, going beyond such products as books, films, cigarettes, and alcoholic beverages to companies' internal policies and business practices," writes Dale Buss. The most recent and publicized of such efforts was in evangelical churches (such as the Southern Baptists and Assemblies of God) calling for the boycott of the Walt Disney Company for its allegedly antifamily and anti-Christian policies. These forms of corporate protest have also been practiced by liberal Christian groups in the past few years, though such activism focuses on environmental and unfair hiring practices. (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)

---

**CUT  
DECENTRALIZING  
POWER?**

The Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT), a controversial New Age-oriented group, has introduced sweeping changes in its leadership structure that is giving more of a voice to its members, according to the Cult Observer (September/October), an anti-cult digest of the news. The July resignation of Elizabeth Clare Prophet, the leader of the group for 23 years, was intended to "empower its staff and membership so that decisions don't come exclusively from the top, but from throughout the organization," according to Prophet's husband and CUT vice president. Critics claim that Prophet has controlled every aspect of the Montana-headquartered group and that she will still hold ultimate power in CUT, according to articles originally published in the Billings Gazette.

Former member Peter Arnone, who runs an ex-CUT support group, believes that the group's declining membership has forced Prophet to realize that her control of the organization is hurting its growth. He added that the decline has taken place since 1990, when sharp controversy arose over bomb shelters being built by CUT to guard against nuclear attack. Another former member says that CUT is recruiting more abroad than in the U.S. Church official Charles Steinman denies the changes are cosmetic and says the movement continues to be vital, with 200 centers in 40 countries. New Religion specialist J. Gordon Melton says that while Prophet has excelled in building the church, if the shift to a more democratic structure is "really passed down to the members...then it will be a meaningful change." (Cult Observer, Box 2265, Bonita Springs, FL 34133)

---

**SEMINARIES  
FORM NEW  
PARTNERSHIPS,  
ENGAGE IN  
MARKETING**

In a special section on seminary education, Christianity Today (October 7) reports that seminaries are forming new partnerships between schools

and increasingly engaging in "niche" marketing. "Just as corporate America and many organizations of the nonprofit sector are pursuing strategic partnerships and new alliances, so seminaries" are joining together in new study opportunities that are viewed as critical for ministry preparation. Some institutions are merging, such as Western Evangelical Seminary of Portland, Ore., merging with George Fox University. Other seminaries, often from different backgrounds, have joined together to offer cooperative programs. Bethel (Baptist) Theological Seminary and Luther Seminary in St. Paul co-sponsor a graduate school for persons seeking careers in youth ministry. Another example is three Philadelphia seminaries--Eastern, Westminster and Lutheran Theological Seminary--joining together to provide courses for urban pastors of African-American churches.

Seminaries have also forged new relationships with congregations--even the independent and self-contained megachurches. A federation of evangelical seminaries has agreed to grant credit for leadership education programs conducted by Willow Creek Church, the pioneer megachurch. Another trend is the founding of new "niche" seminaries which target their resources to meet specific concerns, ethnic communities or geographic localities. For example, Logos Evangelical Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., focuses on ministry to a single nationality or country: the world's Chinese. Geographic areas with large (usually evangelical) church populations but no seminaries are also being targeted. A decade ago, Charlotte, N.C. had no seminary; today there are four. An example of the "home-grown" quality of these schools is Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte-- a niche school that emphasizes apologetics (defense of the faith)--which is beginning its ministry on the campus of a major church.

#### **CURRENT RESEARCH: Recent Findings On Religious Behavior And Attitudes**

##### ***TEENS WANT MORE RELIGIOUS DISCUSSIONS***

\* Parent-teen discussions about religious topics do not occur as often as most young people would like, according to a recent Gallup Poll. Emerging Trends (October), the Gallup newsletter on religion, reports that teens would like discussions of religion to be second only to the subject of family finances. One teen in three would like to talk to parents more often about religion, and 42 percent are satisfied with the current level of discussion. Roman Catholic young people are among those most often to report that they have struck a "happy medium" on the topic of religious discussion (52 percent). Religion is less likely than other topics (such as friends, dating and music) to generate arguments between parents and teens; only nine percent of teens report such conflicts. (Emerging Trends, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 215, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542).

##### ***MEN'S, WOMEN'S MINISTRY PREFERENCE SHAPE CAREERS?***

\* Women training for the clergy prefer positions with strong interpersonal relations with their parishioners or clients, which may be a significant factor in their greater tendency to find work in "lower - status" or smaller churches and religious organizations than men, according to a recent study in the journal Sociology of Religion (September). The greater percentage of women finding placement in lower-paying, lower profile positions in churches and religious organizations for their position in moving from the seminary has been documented in several studies. In studying seminarians from a Presbyterian seminary, Barbara Finlay of Texas A & M University found that differences in the preferences for ministry among men and women is

the most significant factor in their subsequent placements in congregations and religious organizations.

Men were more favorable toward positions with high status clientele; they were twice as likely as women to view solo pastorates in large and growing suburban churches and campus ministries at large universities as being desirable. In ministries dealing with relatively "low-status" clientele, such as community ministries, hospital chaplaincies and prison ministries, it was women who were more favorable. On the whole, women seem to be open to a wider variety of callings--including the non-traditional parish ministry-- than men. The findings may also be interpreted as meaning that women are simply more realistic about possible discrimination in churches and are therefore more willing to accept a wider variety of ministries. Finlay, however, writes that the women in her study based their views less on possible discrimination than on their concern to gain personal knowledge and close interaction with the membership, even within more traditional pastorates. While the results are based on a small sample (81 responses) at one seminary, Finlay adds that they support similar findings on gender differences in ministry goals. (Sociology of Religion, 401 N. Ridge St., Cambridge, IL 61238-1154)

**FIFTH YEAR  
OF DECLINING  
CHURCH  
ATTENDANCE**

\* The Barna Research Group has regularly issued survey findings reporting on declining church attendance in the U.S. In a recent survey, Barna finds that attendance has declined for the fifth year in a row. The survey found 37 percent of Americans now report going to church on a given Sunday--the lowest level in two decades, according to the United Methodist Reporter (September 13). George Barna says that "Increasingly, we are seeing Christian churches lose entire segments of the population: Men, singles, empty nesters...and people who were raised in mainline Protestant churches." In a sidebar article, sociologist Penny Long Marker finds in her research on the unchurched that church style is important for the 35-and-under group. But somewhat surprisingly, entertainment-oriented worship was not what they wanted. "They were interested in a small church like their grandparents went to, where they can have personal relationships... That kind of surprised us. We thought they would have been interested in entertainment. They've got entertainment. It doesn't help them with their life problems." (United Methodist Reporter, P.O. Box 660275, Dallas, TX 75226-0275)

**RELIGIOUS  
FAITH  
STRONG,  
DIVERSE ON  
INTERNET**

\* Religious faith has a stronger presence on the Internet's Worldwide Web than pornographic "adult" sites, according to a survey conducted by the electronic newsletter Tasty Bits from the Electronic Front. The United Methodist Reporter (October 4) cites the newsletter as finding 63,785 religion sites in contrast with 11,702 "adult sites." Among religion sites, 21,740 contained such words as "church, temple, mosque, archdiocese"; 19,560 sites had words such as "Hindu, Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Muslim, Orthodox, and Protestant;" 12,569 had the word "Christian." The Gallup newsletter Emerging Trends (May) find that Methodists (with 11,800 references) and Baptists (with 11,000 references) have been the most active on the Internet (and are the two largest Protestant denominations). There are 8,100 references to Jews or Judaism; Muslims and Islam are found in 21,700 sites; Buddhism in 6,500, and Hinduism in 6,400.

**CANADIAN  
CATHOLIC  
SEMINARIANS  
MORE  
CONSERVATIVE**

\* Canadian Catholic seminarians, like their counterparts in the U.S., are becoming more conservative than seminarians of ten and thirty years ago,

**CHARISMATICS  
FACING  
RESTRICTIONS  
IN BULGARIA,  
LITHUANIA**

While new religious movements have often been viewed as the main targets for restrictions in religious freedom and harassment in Eastern Europe, the more rapidly expanding charismatic and Pentecostal churches in the region seem to be under the most pressure. Bulgaria and Lithuania represent two recent cases of such crackdowns on religious freedom. Unlike other former Communist countries, Bulgaria was viewed as being more supportive of religious freedom. But that changed in 1993, when a plane carrying passengers from the Word of Life church movement from Sweden was detained by Bulgarian authorities then rerouted to Greece, according to *Charisma* magazine (October). After that, priests from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church started protesting against Word of Life's growth in the country, with one church leader pressing for the expulsion of all evangelicals. Word of Life is a fast-growing Swedish-based charismatic group that has grown throughout Eastern Europe. Despite laws guaranteeing religious freedom, in 1994, the Orthodox church sponsored a bill calling for all denominations to be registered with the government. Since that time, the large Word of Life congregation in Sofia has been the subject of over 300 defamatory newspaper articles which often claim that the group is a mind-controlling cult.

One article alleged that the group's use of cordless microphones (a novelty in Bulgaria) was actually a device to induce a psychological effect on audiences. The church's pastor George Bakalov has been accused of drug smuggling and other crimes and subjected to police raids. The focal point of the controversy about Word of Life (which meets in house churches around Sofia) is the group's independent structure as well as its doctrine based on the "word of faith" school of the charismatic movement (which often involves healing and prosperity teachings). Officials have warned Bakalov that Word of Life must drop its prosperity and healing teachings and join a registered denomination to be considered legal. The November issue of *Charisma* reports that growth in Pentecostal churches in Lithuania has motivated the Baltic state's Catholic-backed government to implement discriminatory policies against non-Catholic churches.

In a situation similar to Bulgaria, there was a period of tolerance of non-Catholic churches following Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. "Today, however, the honeymoon for non-Catholics is over, as Catholic leaders continue to persuade government officials to discriminate against non-Catholic churches and their evangelism efforts." Pentecostal pastor Anatoly Dmitruk says that "Catholics are afraid that a lot of our culture would go down if there are less real Catholics." Catholics in government have stated that Catholicism is the true faith and that other churches are not authentic or may even be traitors, he said. Dmitruk's plans to build a new church in Vilnius have been derailed by government officials who reneged on a 1992 agreement to donate land for the new facilities. At the same time, the city was donating land to a Catholic parish. He adds that "Catholic persecution" is especially strong in the smaller villages. Interestingly, Catholic charismatics, who are growing like the Pentecostals, are also "drawing the ire of mainstream Catholics," according to the article. (*Charisma*, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746)

according to a recent survey. The first national survey of Canada's seminarians, conducted by Martin Rovers of St. Paul University in Ottawa, found that priests in training were more conservative on the "theological attitude scale" than previous generations. The Catholic journal Church (Fall) cites Rovers as writing that "Bi-sexual and heterosexual seminarians were most traditional, as were those who considered their best friend to be Jesus or God, or who indicated a preference for a perpetual promise of celibacy." (Church, 18 Bleeker St., New York, NY 10012-2404)

**BRITISH  
CHRISTIAN TEENS  
LESS LIKELY  
TO TAKE DRUGS?**

\* Earlier this year, there was some commotion in Britain about a survey claiming that young people from Christian families were as likely to take drugs as those from non-Christian families. The survey, which was conducted among 7,000 young Christians at Spring Harvest, a Christian rock festival, has recently been challenged by researchers, according to Quadrant (November), the newsletter of the Christian Research Association. Figures from the University of Exeter show that in 1995 drug use among the general population was nine percent among 12-13 year-olds and 30 percent among 14 to 15 year-olds. More than a third of 15-16 year-olds have taken illegal drugs. This compares with seven percent among the 13 year-olds surveyed at Spring Harvest, 15 percent of the 15 year-olds and just under a quarter of older teens. The newsletter adds that the significant differences in the Christian teen survey came between young people who agreed with statements designed to reveal whether they were committed Christians. The proportion of those who did not agree with these statements were "indeed almost as likely to take drugs as young people in the general public. But those who did agree were much less likely to do so." (Quadrant, Vision Bldg., 4 Footscray Rd., Eltham, London SE9 2TZ UK)

**SANTERIA TAKES  
MORE UNIVERSAL,  
'AMERICAN,'  
APPROACH**

Santeria, a faith blending African-Cuban religions and Catholicism, is attempting to gain a more universal appeal and is even taking on congregational expressions, according to the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion (September). In giving an overview of developments in Santeria in Cuba and the U.S., Harry Lefever of Spelman College writes that as the religion gains more adherents both among Hispanics and non-Hispanics (both black and white), distinctive teachings holding to the special role of Cuba in the faith are fading away. The length of time required for initiation into the often secretive sect has also been shortened from a traditional period of three years to a period as short as three months. Santeria, which has an estimated 500,000 participants in Cuba and the U.S. is moving to a belief system more in line with current psychological knowledge and with the "ethical principles of Christianity."

The move in a more universal direction is most evident in the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye in Miami (which was at the center of the favorable 1993 Supreme Court decision on the freedom to practice Santeria rituals), which is adopting a more "Western-style church organization." At the same time, "there is a growing conservatism within Santeria, as reflected in the importance given to learning African languages and in interpreting the rituals in more traditional Yoruban ways." The religion, especially in the New York area, is also becoming more syncretized with Puerto Rican spiritism. (Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion, 1365 Stone Hall, Sociology Dept., Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1365)

**JAPAN'S JEHOVAH'S  
WITNESSES SHOW  
GROWTH AMIDST  
OBSTACLES**

While Christian and quasi-Christian groups in Japan have generally registered slow growth and small numbers, the Jehovah's Witnesses are showing continual expansion and a high rate of member involvement, according to an in-depth report in the annual Japan Christian Review (1996). Jehovah's Witnesses will in 1996 exceed in membership the largest Protestant group in Japan, being second only to the Roman Catholic Church. The Witnesses have an annual growth rate of about seven to eight percent, compared with growth rates of barely one percent among Catholic and Protestant churches. Japan now has the fifth largest population of Jehovah's Witnesses (after the U.S., Mexico, Brazil and Italy), with nearly 200,000 members. While the Witnesses do have the high numbers of the more recent Buddhist-related new religious movements (although they have more members than the Mormons and Unificationists), they have a high level of involvement and only count those who are among their most active members engaging in proselytizing.

Jack Nelson writes that the Witnesses' strictness and discipline resonates among the Japanese who have received educations stressing conformity and a lack of individualism. The Witnesses, however, face two challenges. The group is increasingly stigmatized in Japanese society as a "cult" due to non-cult activity by Christians, as well as negative publicity over the group's prohibition of blood transfusions (the Witnesses' growth rate has slowed in the wake of such publicity). The other obstacle to growth and success in Japan is the Jehovah's Witnesses' tendency to become isolated from associations with non-member friends and family that can lead to further conversions and membership increases. Such forms of relationship-based proselytizing will become increasingly necessary as the more traditional forms of recruitment, such as door-to-door canvassing, are no longer seen as being very effective in Japan. (Japan Christian Review, Kyo Bun Kwan 4-5-1, Ginza, Chuo-Ku, Tokyo 104 Japan)

---

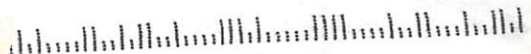
**Religion Watch**

P.O. Box 652  
North Bellmore, N.Y. 11710



**Inside This Issue:**

- *Exercising Spirituality*
- *The Courts And Christian Resistance; Crackdown On Charismatics*





# FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

November/December 1996

## PRESSNOTES

\* Within the volatile world of liberationist theology, several new voices of this thought are emerging in Asia, according to a major article in the September issue of the journal Theological Studies. Peter C. Phan surveys the Asian theological scene and focuses on four theologians as typifying the new Asian theology. The theologians, Aloysius Pieris, Jung Young Lee, Choan-Seng Song, and Chung Hyun Kyung, reject Western Christianity as being essentially the product of capitalist, imperialist, Eurocentric scholars. They seek to find their own indigenous sources for retelling the ministry and teachings of Jesus for fellow Asians. The new generation of theologians draw from such indigenous experiences as massive poverty, the pervasiveness of Asian religiosity, the continuing oppression of women, and the hostility of communist governments. To obtain this issue, write: Theological Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057  
--By Erling Jorstad, RW contributing editor.

\* The International Bulletin of Missionary Research features a concise overview of the new complexion of Protestantism in Latin America in its October issue. The article, written by Clayton Berg and Paul Pretiz, examines the growth of "fifth wave" Protestant churches, which means those churches that have been started independent of any foreign influence. These churches, which now represent over half of all Protestant churches in Latin American countries, often draw heavily on folk spirituality and are increasingly socially active. The writers note that Western churches and missions agencies will need to confront the ways these churches are adopting a "pre-Enlightenment worldview" as a component in their explosive growth. To obtain this issue, write: International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 490 Prospect St., New Haven, CT 06511

\* The Mormon journal Dialogue features an interesting account of the phenomenon surrounding popular spirituality writer Betty Eadie and her relationship with the LDS church. Eadie gained a wide following after writing her 1992 book, "Embraced By The Light," which described her spirituality based on her near-death experience (NDE). Introvigne notes how Eadie's teachings are based on Mormon folk and official teachings and NDE literature. Evangelical critics "suspect a Mormon conspiracy to infiltrate evangelical Christianity behind 'Embraced By The Light,' and some conservative Mormons suspect in turn a New Age conspiracy to take over Mormonism." He adds that any possible disciplinary action against Eadie or her followers (many of whom are Mormon) "could become a catalyst for the birth of a new religious movement." For more information on this article, write: Dialogue, P.O. Box 658, Salt Lake City, UT 84110-0658)

\* A reader of the new book Spirituality And The Secular Quest (Crossroad, \$49.95), edited by Peter Van Ness, might be tempted to conclude that if almost everything is considered a kind of spirituality than nothing really is. Nevertheless, the 562-page book is an interesting

collection of essays that show how formerly secular activities and schools of thought are being "spiritualized" today. These forms of secular spiritualities include: psychotherapy, secular Jewish feminism, twelve-step programs, gay spirituality, social justice, science (embracing "evolutionary spirituality" and ecological spirituality), various art forms, and recreation (such as fly fishing) and games. The introduction attempts to find a common thread in such endeavors, drawing on the "secular spirituality" of such psychotherapeutic-oriented thinkers as M. Scott Peck and Thomas More (author of "Care of the Soul"). The book also includes an informative overview of the New Age movement by Carl Raschke.

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

1) The American Anglican Council represents an attempt by conservative Episcopalians to become more united in their attempt to steer their church back in more orthodox directions. The council, which was founded in 1995 but reorganized last June, seeks to transcend such an issue as the ordination of women, which has long been viewed as a marker dividing conservative from liberal Episcopalians, to focus on the common concern of returning the denomination to the "historic biblical faith." Participants at a recent meeting included women priests and those opposing women's ordination. The group plans to help coordinate the many Episcopalian renewal groups, and supports parishes and dioceses engaging in "conscientious noncooperation" (such as withholding offerings) to protest theological liberalism in the denomination. (Source: The Presbyterian Layman, September/October)

2) Ramtha was a significant force of the New Age movement during the 1980s, bringing the channeling phenomenon to a mass audience. Ramtha, an alleged entity channeled by a Seattle housewife J.Z. Knight, had lost much of "his" following after a barrage of media stories questioning the financial integrity of Knight and criticism that her movement had cultic tendencies. Recently, however, Knight has reemerged with her Ramtha's School of Enlightenment, which takes a more disciplined and esoteric approach to spirituality. The school seeks to create a community of students who follow teachings close to Gnosticism, drawing on such spiritual disciplines as contemplation to recognize one's eternal and "divine origin," according to J. Gordon Melton. Students come to the school for short periods every year, followed by immediate reentry into the everyday world where they have to integrate the teachings and experiences on their own. (Source: Gnosis, Fall)

3) Women of Faith is the female counterpart to the evangelical men's ministry Promise Keepers. As with Promise Keepers, the new organization holds mass gatherings around the U.S. aiming at unity and renewal among women from all denominations. To date, more than 30,000 women have attended conferences in seven major cities, with 13 cities being added in 1997. Zondervan Press, Integrity Music, and Campus Crusade for Christ have recently joined forces to promote the movement. (Source: Zondervan News Release, September 19).