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COMMUNITY
CHANGES BRING
ADAPTATION,
RESISTANCE
AMONG
CONGREGATIONS

American congregations are just as often adapt and thrive than fail in the midst of racial and cultural shifts, urban decline, and suburbanization. This is the fairly upbeat conclusion of sociologist Nancy Ammerman's new book Congregation & Community (Rutgers University Press, \$24), an in-depth study of how churches relate to their changing social environments. The book is the result of research on 20 congregations in nine communities around the U.S. and a broader survey of 449 congregations in these areas. The communities were diverse as Long Beach. Calif., a city in urban renewal with a growing gay population, and Brighton and Allston, sections of Boston experiencing a transition from a white population to a diversity of immigrants from Asia and Latin America. The congregations studied by Ammerman and a team of researchers included Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, United Church of Christ, Quaker, United Methodist, non-denomiational, Church of God, Wesleyan, Disciples of Christ, and various Baptist churches.

The 434-page study found that "more than 20 percent of all the congregations we located in these communities had been created since 1980. While at least that many are likely to die within the next ten years, the overall population of congregations is at least stable, if not growing." As might be expected, congregations in areas experiencing economic booms and population growth were most likely to adapt and flourish, while those in areas of economic decline presented far more challenges to growth. But in all the areas surveyed, congregations responded to changes in a myriad of ways: maintaining the status quo, relocation, and making internal changes in finance, decision-making and leadership. However, 59 percent of the congregations whose communities have undergone population and economic shifts, "appear to have chosen to maintain their existing identities. About half of them are already in decline, while many of the remainder will likely begin to decline in the years ahead," Ammerman writes.

It was found that among those experiencing serious declines in membership and resources, "all have either actively resisted change or have continued with existing patterns, apparently unable to envision how things might be different." Such non-adaptation can even take place in burgeoning communities. A Wesleyan church in Indiana that has maintained its Holiness-"camp-meeting" style now finds itself alienated from the transient suburbanites moving into the community. If a congregation sees it as important to retain their identity in such situations, it might be necessary to relocate or become a "niche" or magnet parish drawing those from outside the community. The sociologist writes that "Cultural"

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immigrants, rather than the geographic kind, are more easily absorbed into existing structures. Race and ethnicity, however, remain major barriers that sexual orientation and exurban migration are not." But even racial differences did not prevent congregations from adapting to changes when there was a common ground of similar education levels uniting members. Other findings in Ammerman's study include:

- * Even those congregations with few financial resources can survive and adapt if they have leadership and volunteer resources, especially members with high levels of education.
- * Pastoral leadership was one of the most important factors in adaptation-- more important than high attendance and high giving rates among members. In fact, such commitment--creating a small band of survivors with little interest in reaching out to the community--may be an impediment to adapting to changing realities.
- * Denominations were found to be "either a hinderance, irrelevent, or--at best--supporting players" when it comes to helping congregations meet the challenges of community change.
- * Attempting significant change to make congregations adapt will generate conflict between members and between the congregation and the pastor. Ammerman writes that "congregations unwilling to engage in conflict will not change."
- * In predicting responses to community change for congregations, those with a "predominantly conservative view of Scripture differed little from congregations with a predominantly liberal view." While congregational adaption is not adequately explained by theological and ideological factors, each of the adapting congregations "had to discover elements in their own theological heritage that could be turned to the task of explaining and encouraging change."

BLACK
PENTECOSTAL
WOMEN GAIN
LEADERSHIP
ROLES

Black women in Pentecostal churches are slowly but surely moving into positions of pastoral leadership, according to Charisma magazine (February). Opportunities for black women ministers have been scarce, even in denominations that officially approve of the ordination of women. "But a shift from antiquated beliefs has begun to crack the glass ceiling, observers say, particularly in nondenominational settings. Some women are opting for pastoring independent churches; others seek positions in denominations that accept female ministers, such as Mount Sinai [Holy Church of America] or...the Mount Calvary Holy Church of America," writes Valerie Lowe. Prominent African American women ministers, such as gospel singer Shirley Caesar and Barbara Amos of Faith Deliverance Christian Center, Norfolk, Va., are making the practice more acceptable to churchgoers. Lowe adds that these women don't consider themselves feminists in the secular sense of the term and, as one might expect, are more conservative on moral and theological issues than their counterparts in mainline churches. (Charisma, 600 Rinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746)

EVANGELICAL
WOMEN
BROADCASTERS
FIND VOICE

Women broadcasters are making slow but steady progress in leadership

positions in Christian ministries, according to Christianity Today (March 3). At the annual meeting of the National Religious Broadcasters in January, it was reported that women have been placed in five of the top twenty radio programs lasting five minutes or less a day. In the lead is evangelical preacher Mary Whelchel of the Christian Working Woman, with 450 stations subscribing to her daily program. This places her eighth behind such stalwarts as Charles Stanley, James Dobson, and Charles Swindoll. The first biblical expositor in radio, Kay Arthur, has found a growing market with her daily 15 minute show on 115 stations, and 300 stations airing her daily one minute show on biblical themes. Finally, Jane Parshall, long identified with the evangelical Concerned Women of America, how hosts a 3 hour a day variety program with 50 outlets. In contrast to a decade ago, these broadcasters are reaching new listeners. Yet their major audience is women who are often working during their time of broadcasting, making further increases in women broadcaster numbers difficult to achieve. (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)--By Erling Jorstad, RW Contributing Editor

FUTURE-CHURCH--LAY-BASED, LARGE, AND CONSERVATIVE?

Churches will be larger, more conservative, lay-based, and yet more diversified by the year 2017, writes veteran church growth specialist Lyle Schaller in The Clergy Journal (January). He forecasts that the generations born after 1955 will be found disproportionately in churches with the following characteristics: They will have two or three high quality "entry points" designed in response to the needs of individuals and families, such as child care, marriage enrichment or volunteer programs for singles and other young adults; these churches will also be larger, with an average attendance that will exceed 350. These congregations will have a wide-open door policy for anyone wishing to worship with them, while having a "high threshold for membership;" such churches will affirm the "historicity of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; they will offer such choices as traditional and non-traditional worship. Schaller adds that at least one-third of these larger congregations will offer a Christian day school from nursery classes through at least grade five.

By 2017, the ministry of the laity will be the norm, rather than the exception, Schaller writes. The more significant trend is to let the paid staff "run the church" while lay volunteers are engaged in a wide range of ministries. This would bring a number of changes to church structures. The role of the clergy and program staff will shift from conducting and micro-managing ministry to "challenging, enlisting, training, placing, nurturing, and supporting volunteers who do the ministry." For example, while the old model called for clergy to make most hospital visits, the new model calls for "97 percent of all hospital calls to made by trained volunteers..." Counseling of married couples would shift from being mainly the province of the pastor to that of a trained volunteer couple. Such a couple may have contemplated divorce but found a way of rescuing their marriage and can more effectively counsel a couple in similar straits. Schaller adds that the "old model called for the pastor to lead worship; the new model calls for a team of eight to twenty trained volunteers, with the aid of one or more paid staff members, to lead worship." (Clergy Journal, P.O. Box 240, South St. Paul, MN 55075)

SPIRITUAL BASIS FOR STAR WARS REVIVAL The astounding success of the new versions of the "Star Wars" trilogy at the box office is being attributed by some observers to its supernatural message of good triumphing over evil, according to an article from Scripps Howard News Service in the Scottsdale Tribune (February 1). Leading all other movies by huge margins at box office sales, the films portrays not only dazzling special effects and celebrity icons for its leading actors, but also depicts myths and stories appropriate to the late twentieth century young adult audiences. Terry Mattingly writes that the plot contains both good and evil, something Generation Xers want but don't find in other movies. They also resonate strongly to the presence of "The Force defined as an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us." Some Christians are supporting "Star Wars" as evidence of cultural search for moral absolutes, without iudgmentalism. On the Internet's World Wide Web, many fans of the movies hail them as teaching Asian philosophy in a way attractive to Americans.--By Erling Jorstad, who has written widely on American religion and popular culture.

THE KABBALAH--HOW GOOD FOR JEWISH COMMUNITY?

The Kabbalah, the tradition of Jewish mysticism, is finding a wide following, especially among younger Jews who have little connections to organized Judaism, reports Moment magazine (February). The Kabbalah has evolved from an arcane discipline with an underground following to mainstream phenomenon that fills the shelves of bookstores and the classes of Jewish adult education. An international network of Kabbalah Learning Centres "has made a 'pop' version of Kabbalah attractive to a broad audience, including such Hollywood celebrities as Roseanne and comedienne Sandra Bernhard. Of the 55 titles published by six-year-old Jewish Lights Publishing...fully 20 deal with Jewish mysticism and spirituality. The newest frontier in Jewish mysticism in America is an attempt to enhance the purely intellectual study of Kabbalah with mystical experience," writes Robert Eisen. Kabbalah refers to several schools of mysticism and theology dating back to medieval Europe which stress contact with God through spiritual practices such as meditation as well as through deep study of God's attributes, known as "sefirot." found in Kabbalistic writings such as the Zohar.

The Kabbalistic view that God can be known through such attributes as wisdom and and understanding provides this form of Jewish spirituality with a "mythic" character that makes the faith accessible to seekers, according to Eisen. There is a growing tendency in recent books to explore the commonalities between Jewish mysticism and Eastern mysticism as found in Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as with recent findings in physics. While some Jewish leaders see the interest in the Kabbalah as keeping Jewish young adults in the fold and away from joining other religions, others are worried about the tenuous commitment of these seekers to Jewish faith and observance. Some critics say that some Kabbalistic concepts can encourage the view that God's feminine attributes "are often associated with evil and the realm of the demonic. So are non-Jews," writes Eisen. (Moment, 4710 41st St., N.W., Washington, DC 20016)

THE WAY--CLOSING RANKS AMIDST ATTACKS

The Way International is toning down its evangelism programs and tightening up its membership ranks in the wake of criticism and growing

FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

- A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch -

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PRESSNOTES

- * It is difficult to pick up a magazine nowadays without reading of the beneficial effects of faith on physical and mental health. For those who want to keep track of this fast-changing field more closely, the Faith & Medicine Connection newsletter is recommended. The new quarterly publication, published by the National Institute of Healthcare Research, digests current research and provides other news on the relationship of religious faith and health. A recent issue looked at teen drug abuse and how medical students approach religious faith in their treatment of patients. A subscription is \$20 and is available from: NIHR, 6110 Executive Blvd., Suite 320 A, Rockville, MD 20852
- * A new electronic newsletter and discussion group for connecting
 "spiritual people from all kinds of religious and philosophic traditions"
 has recently come on-line. Based in England and Santa Barbara, Calif.,
 the Global Spirituality Report seeks to find ways to connect the many
 bodies of spiritual seekers—from New Age to Zoroastrians, Buddhists,
 Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Baha'is—in a virtual reality community for
 support and an exchange of ideas. The weekly report sees the Internet as
 a way of expanding a "global consciousness" that draws on the worlds'
 religions. The report, sponsored by the Isbourne Foundation in England,
 also provides links with related projects, such as a 914-page text of
 "World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts," with some
 4,000 scriptural passages arranged in terms of 165 themes common to all
 religions. Its web site is: http://www.rain.org/~origin/ws.html.
 Subscriptions to the report are free and available via e-mail at:
 MAJORDOM@epinet.co.uk—By Erling Jorstad.
- * Some readers have criticized RW's citation of the New Republic article on the conflict within neoconservatism in the January issue. The NR article has been faulted for its inaccuracies and anti-Catholic sentiments. While the NR article got a lot wrong (such as claiming that the conflict is between Jews and Christians and that neoconservatives favor a Christian America), it did pick up on the division between conservative religionists (including, however, Jews and Christians) and more moderate and secular conservatives, especially on the strategies for resolving and addressing the abortion and other "culture war" issues. The February issue of Commentary looks at this division and other conflicts in conservatism in a symposium. The respondents, who include Peter Berger, Michael Novak and Francis Fukuyama, view the division between economic and social conservatives as one of the most serious for the conservative movement. Fukuyama asks whether a "conservative social agenda [can] be formulated that will remain respectful of religious practice, while not seeming to be driven by primarily religious forces or concerns?" For more information on this issue, write: Commentary, 165 E. 56th St., New York, NY 10022
- * The new book <u>Toward 2015: A Church Odyssey</u> (Cowley Publications, 28 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111; (800) 225-1534) is a creative attempt to chart the future of the Episcopal Church, as well as American churches in

general. Authors Richard Kew and Roger White, who have co-written previous books on Episcopal trends, forecast a future that blends tradition (such as a revival of Anglican monasticism) with contemporary and consumer-oriented forms of ministry to reach seekers. Kew and White criticize the centralized, corporate-minded structure of the denomination and the Episcopal bishops and write that the "village parish model" has to give way to decentralized networks and congregations that emphasize evangelism and missions to an increasingly unchurched society. The beginning and concluding chapters provide interesting fictional accounts of how future ministry may be carried out.

* The new book by RW's editor, <u>Against The Stream: The Adoption of Traditional Christian Faiths Among Young Adults</u> was finally mailed out at the end of February and the beginning of March. If readers who have ordered a copy have still not received it by the middle of March, please let us know.

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

- 1) The recent conversion of black activist <u>Benjamin Chavis</u> from Christianity to the Nation of Islam is likely to have significant repercussions on the latter movement. Chavis is the former director of the NAACP and has been a prominent United Church of Christ clergyman involved in religious left activism. It has been widely reported that Chavis' move will put him in position to eventually succeed Nation of Islam head Louis Farrakhan, who is fighting prostate cancer. Chavis, who says he still believes in Jesus Christ, plans to bring a more ecumenical thrust to the NOI. He said he wants to repair relations between the NOI and American Jews and engage in a "trialogue" between Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The Nation of Islam is reported to be faltering after Farrakhan visited governments considered by the U.S. to be sympathetic to terrorism last year. (Source: Wall Street Journal, February 24)
- 2) The <u>Alpha Course</u> has become a highly popular and successful means of initiating new Christians into churches in England. The course was developed at the charismatic Holy Trinity (Anglican) Parish in London (which has also become a center for the Toronto Blessing phenomenon in Britain), and now there are more than 3,000 courses in place in the U.K. The course consists of 15 sessions of practicial introduction to the Christian faith. There is an emphasis on the Holy Spirit and small group discussion in most Alpha courses. Because so many lapsed Catholics have been taking the courses in Anglican churches, the Catholic Church has recently adapted the course to its own needs. (Source: The Tablet, January 4)
- 3) Haviva Ner-David is the first woman to be ordained as an orthodox rabbi. Ner-David, an American who now lives in Israel, admits that the ordination may be more symbolic than actual, since she will not likely be accepted by orthodox synagogues as an actual rabbi. But other orthodox Jews of a feminist bent as well as respected Rabbi Aryeh Strikovsky of Jerusalem who plans to ordain her, think Ner-David may be in the vanguard of orthodox women rabbis in the future. Ner-David says that once she is ordained, she will forego some of her feminist ideals to be accepted among the orthodox; she won't read the Torah or lead prayers in a mixed crowd. (Source: Jerusalem Report, February 20)

influence by splinter groups, according to the anti-cult digest Cult Observer (January/February). The Way, a quasi-Christian group often criticized for its authoritarian leadership, has suspended its primary outreach WOW (Word Over the World), which consisted of relatively new members proselytizing, because 10 percent of such "Ambassadors" proved to be homosexuals, according to the leaders of the movement. The WOWs will be replaced by more advanced class graduates. Some speculate that the concern about homosexuality is related to allegations of adultery and promiscuity among members. The group's basic "Power for Abundant Living" classes have also been closed to newcomers partly because opponents have attended them and use such material against the organization. Other changes, including financial reforms, may make the group smaller but more effective, and are said to be the response to the damaging influence of splinter groups. By using basic Way teachings, they have drawn off many Way followers by accusing the main "International" body of "authoritarianism, misuse of power, adultery, misuse of funds, and spiritual corruption." (Cult Observer, P.O. Box 2265, Bonita Springs, FL 34133)

CURRENT RESEARCH: Recent Findings On Religious Attitudes And Behavior

COMMERCIALS' SECULAR MESSAGE * A study of TV commercials has found little spiritual or religious content, according to a recent study. Brendan Maguire of Western Illinois Univeristy and Georgie Ann Weatherby of Gonzaga Univeristy found that only sixteen of 797 commercials studied had any spiritual content, according to a report in Christian News (February 17). The study examined commercials from four broadcast and four cable networks, inclding CNN, early last year. The researchers found that fewer than 2 percent had any spiritual or religious content. They add that findings do not necessarily mean that religion is becoming less significant, but rather that religious activity is less dramatic than other activities portrayed, such as sports. (Christian News, 3277 Boeuf Lutheran Rd., New Haven, MO 63068-9568)

PEACEMAKING MEETS PRESBYTERIAN CLERGY-LAY DIVISIONS * Presbyterians, like other mainline Protestant groups, have been divided on war and peace issues—divisions that have remained and perhaps even grown since the end of the Cold War, according to a recent denominational study. Presbyterian Panel Report (November), an ongoing survey of members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reports that only one in ten members believe that the church "definitely" has a part to play in peacemaking efforts in Bosnia, the Middle East, and Northern Ireland, among other conflicted areas. Significantly more pastors and other clergy—about four in ten—strongly support such a role for the church. The survey found that focusing on issues of racism and violence in the U.S. may cause fewer problems among Presbyterians. The response patterns of laity and clergy are much closer to each other on these issues than they are on international peacemaking. (Presbyterian Panel Report, Congregational Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202)

VOLUNTEERS WANTED IN MAINLINE, CATHOLIC CHURCHES * A recent study shows that mainline Protestant and Catholic volunteer activity falls below that of evangelicals. The study, conducted by Charles Zech, Patrick McNamara and Dean Hoge and featured in America magazine (February 8), found that these churches' rate of vounteerism is similar to the patterns of monetary giving among members: Catholics volunteered only half as many hours per month as did evangelical

Protestants, and only 60 percent as much as mainline Protestants. More highly educated members volunteer more than those with a high school education or less, and as people's incomes increased, they volunteered more. For Catholics, volunteer time peaked at the middle of the income range (\$40,000 to \$60,000) and then declined as incomes increased further. By correlating the value of volunteers' time by what it would it would cost a church to hire someone to perform the same task, the study found that the small amount of Catholic volunteer time costs the church an additional \$515 to \$651 million per year. These figures are based on the difference in the number of hours that Catholics volunteer in their church compared to the Protestants in the sample. (America, 104 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019)

CHRISTIANITY NOT KEEPING PACE WITH WORLD POPULATION

* The expansion of Christianity throughout the world is not keeping pace with population increases-- a pattern that will continue into the next century, reports Quadrant (March), the newsletter of the London-based Christian Research Association. World Christendom as a percentage of the population has decreased from 30 percent in 1960 to 28 percent in 1995, and is projected to decline to 27 percent by 2010, according to statistics in the newly published World Churches Handbook (1997). The figures show that the number of Christians is actually growing, although the world population is growing at a faster rate (although in the 1980s, the rapid expansion of churches was virtually at the same percentage rate as world population). The newsletter notes some of the areas where growth in the 1990s is taking place according to denomination: Increasing proportions of Anglicans in Africa (although declining in Europe); Baptist growth in Asia, Methodists in Africa and other churches in Asia. (Quadrant, Vision Bldg., 4 Footscray Rd., Eltham, London SE9 2TZ)

ORTHODOX JEWISH STUDENTS EXCEL AT MATH SKILLS * A new study reported in Science News (January 25) suggests that the students in ultra-orthodox Jewish high schools in Israel are better prepared in solving difficult math problems than those in public schools. In a test of 240 teenagers, researchers found that the orthodox students trained in rigorous problem-solving procedures, independent learning and strict work habits, clearly outscore more secular trained aspiring students. "Most striking," the article concludes, is how the ultra-orthodox students performed better on all geometric reasoning tasks than their mainstream peers. The researcher of the study, Robert Siegler of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, says that the results signify that the ultraorthodox successful approach to learning comes from its "more reflective and analytical style of thought." (Science News, 1719 N St., Washington, DC 20036)--By Erling Jorstad

MESSIANIC GROUPS FIND FERTILE GROUND IN RUSSIA

Messianic Christianity continues to spread throughout the former Soviet Union, helped along by fewer of the traditional Jewish strictures against belief in Jesus than are found in the rest of world Jewry, according to Moment magazine (February). There are an estimated 30,000 Jews in the former Soviet Union who have joined the various messianic Jewish groups that have emerged since the collapse of communism, such as the U.S.-based Jews for Jesus and Chosen People Ministries. Figures from a 1994 study by the Russian Academy of Sciences found that just a third of the people in Russia today who are Jewish by nationality consider themselves Jewish by faith. Another 13 percent say they lean toward Christianity. Since

Judaism was repressed for so many years in Russia, many Jews have begun a spiritual search with a clean slate; the familiarity with Christianity and the absence of traditional Jewish taboos against considering Jesus' teachings has led to a steady stream of converts in messianic congregations.

Writer Rachel Katz notes that such converts value the high level of community at messianic congregations as opposed to the more individualistic orientation of traditional synagogues. These groups often invite ethnic Jews to learn more about their heritage, featuring a blend of Hebrew songs and greetings, Israeli folk dances and stirring preaching. Other Christian churches have had little of the success in drawing Jewish converts as the messianic groups, especially Orthodox parishes that show strong nationalist sentiments. Jewish groups with less financial resources than the evangelistic groups have attempted to counteract their competitors but have not had much success. Their literature, with its dire warnings against Christian beliefs, strikes Russian Jews, who are tired of being told what to do, as pedantic and preachy.

UKRAINE--MODEL OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM?

The conflict-ridden state of Ukraine, with Orthodox churches battling each other, is preventing the emergence of religious nationalism in the nation and may even help the republic serve as a model of pluralism in the region, according to two reports. First Things magazine (March) reports that the conflict between three separate Orthodox bodies competing for leadership of Ukraine's estimated 35 million Orthodox believers shows no signs of letting up, especially in the wake of a 1995 violent disturbance. During this incident, church leaders attempted to bury the Patriarch of Kiev on church grounds of St. Sofia Cathedral, but were turned away by authorities who feared that such an action could lead to greater conflict among the competing Orthodox groups. When some mourners, helped along by militiamen, went ahead and dug a grave, a riot erupted among the different Orthodox believers and police, leading to killings and injuries.

The three battling Orthodox bodies are: the Russian Orthodox Church (with about 6,500 parishes), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (claiming 1,300 parishes), which broke with Moscow and established its own Patriarchate, and the Autocephalous Church (1,200 parishes), which has been kept alive by expatriates overseas. Writer Joseph Gregory adds that in recent months, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church appears to be gaining ground, picking up many former Autocephalous parishes in western Ukraine. He writes that "Although antipathy among the three [Orthodox] leaders remains virulent, the split may ultimately benefit Ukraine. After all, it has undercut efforts to establish a state religion that would play into the hands of the country's hard-line nationalists." Unity will be difficult since the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, the seat of Orthdox authority, will not recognize the legitimacy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church until Moscow grants it freedom, something the Moscow Patriarchate is unwilling to do.

At the conference of the Association of the Sociology of Religion RW attended last summer, Josè Casanova presented a paper suggesting that the divisions among the Orthodox, the revival of religious groups with historical roots in Ukraine (such as the Roman Catholics, certain

Protestants, and Jews), as well as the rapid growth of new religious movements, makes for conditions similar to those in the U.S. after independence. Thus, Ukraine's independence and "sudden institutionalization of religious freedom have created the conditions for the most pluralistic and competitive denominational market in all of Eastern Europe"--factors that could lead to the establishment of democratic states and the resolution of ethnic-religious and nationalist conflicts, according to Casanova. (First Things, 156 Fifth Ave., Suite 400, New York, NY 10010)

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