

RELIGION WATCH

A Newsletter Monitoring Trends In Contemporary Religion

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 5

MARCH 1990

NEW ISSUES AHEAD FOR RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE

The situation in Eastern Europe is still too fluid to know what shape religion will take with the disintegration of communism. But recent events suggest that new developments are unfolding that will not only change the church-state relations in Eastern European countries but also the churches themselves. The following reports highlight these changes and how they may affect the future of Eastern European religion.

While many churches played an important role in overturning communism, providing the social space for political dissent, the rise of democracy in several Eastern European countries may be weakening the social and spiritual role of churches. Inside The American Religious Scene (February 5), a newsletter providing news from Religious News Service, reports that seminarians in East Germany are leaving the once-filled seminaries for other disciplines, attendance at church services has dropped and enrollment in adult and child education classes have fallen. The reason for this, according to one church official, is that "Many young people studied theology because it was an island of freedom from the restrictive Marxist surroundings. Now they are saying, 'The whole world is open to us. Why study theology?'" One pastor noting the enrollment drop in his adult education courses, says they "are experiencing West German conditions."

Similar reports of the churches losing their function as a social forum have been reported in Poland and Lithuania (see February '89 RW). But as the social role of churches diminishes, there is a growing role for Christians as voting citizens and politicians (because many Christians were not members of communist parties they were barred them from political participation). The new government in Czechoslovakia has "reserved major posts for Christians," reports the National Catholic Register (February 4). The new leaders include Catholic activist Jan Carnogorsky, one of the two deputy prime ministers in the cabinet of Prime Minister Marian Calfa and Josef Hromadka, a theologian of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and now in charge of education, culture and religious affairs. Czech minister of the interior Richard Sacher says Christians in government will be a "stabilizing factor." Romania is seeing the formation of a National Christian Peasants Party, an ecumenical party appealing to voters in rural areas. Several Christians have also been asked to serve on the ruling National Salvation Front, according to Christianity Today magazine (February 5).

As religious freedom grows in Eastern Europe, there may be a shifting of

Religion Watch is published monthly except once during July and August. Richard P. Cimino; Editor/Publisher.
A subscription in the U.S. is \$17.50 per year. \$19 for libraries and Canadian subscribers. Write for foreign rates.
The mailing address is P.O. Box 652, North Bellmore, NY 11710 (ISSN 0886-2141).

religious allegiance, a process that will hurt those churches and groups that supported communist governments and Marxism. In Romania, for instance, the Orthodox Church was closely allied with Ceausescu up to his death-- close enough for many of its priests to have informed on their own parishioners. The National Catholic Register (February 11) reports that to many Romanians the Orthodox Church (to which 80 percent of the population nominally belong) has been discredited and previously repressed churches now look appealing, such as the newly-legalized Catholic Church. Jonathan Luxmoore writes that partly because of the church's long-time opposition to Ceausescu, "many Romanians are looking to Catholicism as a more progressive, modernizing force."

Meanwhile, In Czechoslovakia the Christian Peace Conference, a prominent Christian-Marxist organization in Eastern Europe, is in a state of confusion and financial distress as the dogmatic "socialist vision upon which many of its leaders depended," is being increasingly questioned, according to the Christian Century (January 3-10). The article adds that while it may be premature to bury Marxism and socialism, both ideologies "will be so changed [throughout Eastern Europe] that it may take an entirely different leadership for the CPC to sail in these unknown waters." (Inside the American Religious Scene, 1425 W. Maple St., P.O. Box 2625, North Canton, OH 44720; National Catholic Register, 12700 Ventura Blvd., Suite 200, Studio City, CA 91604; Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187; Christian Century, 407 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, IL 60625)

THE NEXT STAGE OF THE NEW AGE

Last month's survey of forecasts of religion in the 1990s reported that the New Age movement may be declining in influence due to a drop in bookstore sales, a disenchantment with the term "New Age" and a decline in such practices as channeling and crystals. But in the newspaper In These Times (January 31-February 6) Murray Bob writes that while the New Age name may be retired, many features of the movement may still be around in the 1990s. The New Age movement of the next decade "has to be broad enough to encompass such old chestnuts as alchemy, astrology, cabala, I Ching, Tarot, black magic, white magic, witchery, Earth religions and Tibetan and Tantric Buddhism. More important, it must include recent tendencies, which will give the next stage of the New Age its distinctive flavor and probably its new name." Bob, a skeptic of the New Age, says that such new currents would include: Holistic health and healing; mythology, with subsets for goddess and Native American religions; 12-step recovery programs; visualization or imaging

The solid interest in alternative healing can be seen in such practices as therapeutic touch and psychic healing. Bob adds that healing has the "inestimable advantage of being marketable not only through traditional bookstore channels but also in the thousands of health-food stores..." The growing appeal of mythology could be seen in the best-selling videocassettes of Joseph Campbell's "The Power of Myth" series. Meanwhile, the goddess religions now occupy the "spiritual penumbra of feminism," just as Native American religion interest is growing out of the current ecological concern. As one Green Party member in Germany says, "In Germany, ecology is the basis of a political movement; in America it seems to be the basis of a religion." Twelve-step recovery programs are now addressing everything from sexual addiction to co-dependency; public confession and "sinning and saving are back in style," Bob writes. Visualization or imaging concepts are evident in current popular books ranging in subject from how to image white blood

cells to fight cancer to how "visioning" can bring success-- a popular concept in big business circles. (In These Times, 1300 W. Belmont, Chicago, IL 60657)

DISSENTING CATHOLICS BUILDING NEW COALITION

Dissenting Catholic groups are increasingly linking together in a new coalition, writes Mary E. Hunt in the liberal National Catholic Reporter (February 16). While organizations opposing official church teachings are nothing new in American Catholicism, "what is new in the 1990s is that we are building bridges" between such groups, writes Hunt, who is co-director of the radical feminist Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER). She cites four dissenting movements in the new coalition: 1) Feminist groups such as the Women's Ordination Conference, Conference for Catholic Lesbians, WATER, and Catholics for a Free Choice. These and other groups belong to the Women-Church Convergence, a coalition calling for women to form their own communities and spirituality outside of church control. 2) Single issue groups such as the gay Dignity, Corpus, for resigned priests, and the Quixote Center, which focuses on peace and justice issues in Central America.

3) The creation-spirituality movement, led by Matthew Fox, is gaining a hearing at church conference centers and renewal programs for its linking of mysticism and ecology (see November '88 RW). 4) A movement of "people on the edge of the pew," best exemplified by the Chicago-based Call to Action group. These Catholics stay in full communion with the church while they "do their best to get around" its rules. While the combined numbers of these groups and movements represent a minority of American Catholics, they [especially the feminists] have created their own ceremonies and other activities which often function as an alternative church. Although these groups differ in their degree of dissent and independence from the official church, Hunt adds that even pro-choice and pro-life divisions are not as strong as they once were for these Catholics. [Hunt's article may be another sign that dissenting groups are giving up hope of influencing the institutional church in the face of an increasingly conservative leadership. The emphasis now appears to be on building and unifying a coalition--and subculture--existing on the margins of the church] (National Catholic Reporter, P.O. Box 419281, Kansas City, MO 64141)

AMERICAN YOUTHS' APPROACH TO MORAL ISSUES DIVIDED

A recent poll of 5,000 young people shows the next generation of Americans to be "morally divided," by virtue of a number of social factors, but especially because of their "underlying ethical assumptions," and religious beliefs, according to World magazine (February 17). The survey, commissioned by the Girl Scouts of America whose researchers included pollster Louis Harris and child psychologist Robert Coles, found that few of those surveyed base their difficult decisions on guidance from traditional authorities, such as religious figures. The poll showed that 70 percent of junior and senior high school respondents believe that a girl should have final say over whether to get an abortion. Sixty five percent of high school students would cheat on an examination if given the opportunity. Analysts of the survey said the respondents used five distinct kinds of "moral compasses" to determine their actions: The "theists" make moral judgements in accord with religious beliefs and authorities (16 percent were in that category).

"Civic humanists" make judgements according to what is regarded as serving the common good (representing 25 percent of respondents). In the third grouping are the "conventionalists," who do what is accepted as given in a community (20 percent). "Expressivists," act according to feelings and psychological needs (18 percent). "Utilitarians," base their moral judgements on what will get them ahead (10 percent). The theists were found to stand out in their responses to many questions. Asked if they would put aside their own plans to help an injured classmate, 49 percent of theists said yes, as did 40 percent of conventionalists, 22 percent of utilitarians and 30 percent of expressivists. It was found that black and poor children are more likely to make their decisions from a theistic perspective (29 percent) than are other children. The poll also found that 34 percent of all respondents said they had a "religious experience that has changed the direction" of their lives. (World, Box 2330, Asheville, NC 28802)

A TREND TOWARDS 'NEW MODEL' EVANGELICALISM?

Are many evangelicals shifting over to a "new model" of the faith that is different from the older form of evangelicalism? That is the contention of Robert Brow writing in the February 19 Christianity Today (his article is headlined, "Evangelical Megashift"). While not identifying people or institutions with his "new model" evangelicalism (although British writer C.S. Lewis seems to be a big influence), Brow writes that many evangelicals are increasingly viewing their faith in terms of a freely chosen family relationship with God rather than in the traditional legal terms. According to Brow, under the influence of St. Augustine and the early Latin translations of the Bible the older evangelical faith emphasized doctrinal concepts in legal terms such as judgement and punishment and viewed Christ's work as primarily paying the penalty for sins. The new model stresses God's love rather than judgement and wrath, sees the church as an agency of forgiveness and views God in "dynamic" rather than more static terms.

The responses to Brow's article-- printed in the same issue-- range from puzzlement and criticism to enthusiasm. Theologian David Wells writes that Brow is merely describing the growing evangelical accomodation to modernity that sociologists have already documented: Evangelicals are stressing self and therapeutic values more than God and biblical faith. He adds that "historical Protestant faith" is being reduced to a "mass of diverse, conflicting models...That a sundering of the [evangelical] movement is coming seems utterly certain to me..." Theologian Clark Pinnock affirms the new model's position that "God not only acts but reacts; not only influences events but is influenced by them." He adds that the new model's free-will approach (Arminianism) is challenging the more Augustinian and Calvinistic-oriented evangelical leadership. "... the real issue is one of control: Will the Augustinian old guard that dominates the structure of official evangelicalism gracefully surrender some of its power to a resurgent wave of Arminian thinking? Or will it fight to retain control?" (Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60187)

EVANGELICALS REACHING FREE-MARKET CONSENSUS

While evangelicals may be experiencing increasing differences in their theology, they appear to be moving together in support for free-market capitalism. The British newspaper Christian Week (January 26), reports a "historic consensus," recently reached at a conference in Oxford where evangelical theologians and economists from the left "affirmed free

market strategies and conservative market economists demanded a special focus on justice for the poor." Leaders of the evangelical left who have in the past favored redistribution of wealth and socialism over capitalism, such as Ronald Sider of Evangelicals for Social Action and Latin American theologian Rene Padilla, appear to have rethought their positions as the "Oxford Declaration" explicitly rejects central planning and heavy state involvement in the economy. The conservative evangelical World magazine (January 27) says that conservative ideas "dominated discussion at the conference. Gone were the 'radical' calls for global redistribution of wealth that marked similar conferences in the past."

The Oxford Declaration also endorsed a study of credit-based income projects for the poor. This example of putting free-market theories into action is becoming increasingly evident in evangelical development work, according to an article by Amy Sherman in First Things (March), a new neoconservative magazine (see review in supplement). Sherman writes that evangelical relief and development organizations, such as World Vision, Food for the Hungry, World Relief and Transformation International, are showing a "willingness to learn from the revisionist studies of recent years," which criticize the dependency theory. This theory teaches that the primary factor in Third World poverty is the economic policies of the First World, and that redistribution of wealth is necessary. The shift in evangelical thinking is evident in the above organizations' stress on wealth creation, and was first seen in the 1987 "Villars Statement," where evangelical relief leaders criticized development work based on redistribution. (Christian Week, 11 Carteret St., London, England SW1H 9DJ; First Things, 156 Fifth Ave., Suite 400, New York, NY 10010)

NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT SHOWING STRENGTH IN AUSTRALIA

Australia is seeing a growing movement of conservative Christians whose political activism may impact the national elections later this month, according to the Australian evangelical magazine, On Being (February). Much of this activism was observed in the elections in the state of Queensland last December, where there was "a remarkable level of Christian involvement in the fierce debate before voters decisively rejected the National Party government," writes Terry Craig. Conservative Christians organized around the National Party with an agenda stressing support for pro-life concerns, capital punishment and anti-gay rights. While the National Party lost--mostly due to corruption charges-- the well-financed Christian campaign through the media was a "phenomenon by Australian standards." It was not uncommon to see Christian National Party parliamentarians speaking in local churches in the city of Brisbane. But Craig questions how much influence the Christian right can have outside of Queensland.

Queensland has one of the few Bible belts in Australia (located around Brisbane) and there is less resistance to conservative Christian politics in the state. Additionally, Craig writes that there is not likely to be "such an expensive media push in the Federal political sphere by conservative Christians, unless they get an unprecedented flood of funding." The Christian right's bypassing of social justice issues and tendency to attack the "sinner as well as the sin," keeps "otherwise emphatic" Christians from supporting it, he adds. But since the independents or small parties could well end up holding the balance of power after the upcoming election (which is said to be a "watershed in Australian history") a more broadly based Christian right "may have

an electoral impact at a significant time," Craig adds. A key player in the Queensland elections was the Logos Foundation. Logos has transformed itself from an apolitical charismatic orientation to a "neo-Calvinist," reconstructionist group calling for a Christian Australia-- a process of growing political involvement that other Australian evangelicals have been undergoing, writes Charles Ringma in another article. (On Being, P.O. Box 434, Hawthorn, Vic., Australia 3122)

GROWING IMPACT OF ENGLAND'S NEW GENERATION OF EVANGELICALS

The evangelical situation in England is rapidly changing and flourishing with the emergence of a younger generation of Christians influenced by the charismatic movement, according to Christianity Today magazine (February 5). The 12-page report notes that evangelicals are growing in both the Church of England and in "non-conformist" churches: the percentage of those being ordained from evangelical theological schools in the Church of England has grown from 31 percent in 1969 to 51 percent in 1986; After a period of decline, the Baptists are also growing. But such evangelical growth is "less and less like that promoted" during the blooming of the movement in the postwar era, represented by such leaders as John Stott and J.I. Packer. Where the older movement had a Calvinist element and stressed scholarship and expository preaching, the new British evangelicals are often charismatic (it is estimated that 50 percent of English evangelicals are charismatic), and have shifted from liturgical to informal worship, partly through a strong American influence [bearing some similarities to the "new model" evangelicalism described on page 4.)

David Neff and George Brushaber write that the new evangelicals "do not feel particularly bonded to others by virtue of a historic set of beliefs that would define them as Baptist, Methodist or Brethren so much as by special events and transdenominational movements," (such as the Spring Harvest conference, which is expected to draw 100,000 people next year). Traditional evangelicals are criticizing the new generation for its lack of rigorous theology and emphasis on emotions and fellowship; only one percent of the hymns in major charismatic songbooks contain references to the cross. Another major characteristic of the new generation is its "populist" spirit. While the Church of England has failed to attract those in the urban housing projects, the house churches (a movement of independent churches attempting to return to New Testament Christianity) are growing rapidly in such areas. The authors conclude that the new evangelicalism "tends to have a strong social-concern component, with activity on behalf of the poor and unemployed viewed as an essential part of the Christian life."

BRITISH HINDUS BECOMING ESTABLISHED AND TARGETED

England's one million Hindus are becoming more visible in society, while also suffering increasing ostracism and violence, according to Hinduism Today (February). There is a growing number of Hindu temples recently being established, usually through buying and converting old Christian churches, bringing the total number of temples to 52. Local and national governmental bodies are also making substantial grants to Hindu religious and cultural organizations. Most Hindu temples continue to teach regional Indian languages and there is the "unchallenged assumption that such linguistic knowledge will help the children maintain traditional Indian culture." The temples have appeared to be successful at "incorporating the youth in their fold, creating special

sports programs to draw them in and inviting non-Hindus in for cross-cultural programs.

But "all Hindu activity in Britain is under the shadow of the volatile racial situation...The well-publicized 'Dot-Buster' attacks against Hindus in the eastern USA are isolated incidents by comparison. Britain's temples are regular targets of vandalism. Hindus are harassed on the street and often brutally attacked for no reason. All Asians are lumped together in the white Britisher's mind, so that anger at the Muslims over the Salman Rushdie affair, for example, can just as well be taken out on a Hindu Indian as a real Muslim. Arson has been a particular problem....To avert attacks, temples often have little to identify them on the outside." (Hinduism Today, 1819 Second St., Concord, CA 94519)

'ELECTRONIC MOSQUE' PRE-EMPTING MUSLIM DIVERSITY

Because of the growing influence of the media in Islamic countries, the "Muslim world is shrinking, and so is the space that shelters unique understandings of Islam," writes Martin Kramer in the Wilson Quarterly (Winter). In responding to an earlier article in the quarterly reporting on Islamic diversity around the world, Kramer writes that such "diversity is under a relentless assault by the Muslims themselves." He adds that there "are 'electronic mosques' of widely popular sermonizers, whose preaching has avid viewers and listeners in many countries. Muslim politicians, intellectuals and activists ply the skies between conferences and seminars-- on Muslim minorities, Islamic banking, Islamic medicine..."

Kramer adds that, "Missionary organizations based in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya and Egypt support a bewildering array of Muslim associations across national frontiers. The new activists, utilizing modern technologies of communication spread definitions of truth from aspiring new centers. The sheer reach of these techniques became evident in the aftermath of the Saudi-Iranian pilgrimage clash in 1987, when both countries mobilized vast transnational networks in support of their rival interpretations of the pilgrimage. The varieties of Islam carried by the air lanes and airwaves hardly touch the lives of all Muslims. But in the wired capitals of Islam, local forms are retreating before the advance of a limited set of transnational forms. The diversity of the many soon may yield to the hegemony of the few." (Wilson Quarterly, 370 L'Enfant Promenade SW, Suite 704, Washington, DC 20024)

ISLAMIC BROTHERHOODS VIEWED AS THREAT BY GORBACHEV

While officially Islam may be finding growing tolerance in the Soviet Union under glasnost, the more unofficial Islamic "brotherhoods" scattered throughout the USSR are worrying the government about their possible militancy, reports the Catholic newsmagazine 30 Days (February). In the July/August RW, it was reported that the Soviet government has recently been permitting Muslims to build mosques and print literature. But another side to Islam in the USSR is the Sufi brotherhoods-- a movement of Islamic mysticism that propagates the faith through an "underground" strategy. The brotherhoods have historically been vast popular movements defending Islamic culture against military and

cultural invaders. Massimo Introvigne writes that the brotherhoods are being portrayed by Mikhail Gorbachev (with approval by some Muslim leaders) as deviant sects from mainstream Islam (which they are not, according to traditional Islam). It should be noted that not all brotherhoods are equally anti-communist, nor are officially-tolerated Muslims all equally submissive toward the regime.

Introvigne adds that "...the sole real aim of the campaign [against the brotherhoods] is to persuade westerners...that the repression of the brotherhoods and the destruction of their underground worship centers would not be anti-religious or anti-Islamic, but only the Soviet equivalent of the West's battle against 'dangerous sects.'" While the brotherhoods represent a minority of Soviet Muslims, their numbers are large enough: Soviet Muslim publications estimate brotherhood members at 300,000, while Western specialists put the number as high as several million. The brotherhoods are said not to hold Gorbachev or his concessions to Islam in high esteem. Some observers "detect in the recent disturbances in the USSR's Muslim areas the possibility--even if it is still a remote one-- that what is occurring is a type of preparation for a future 'holy war.'" This has a precedent: the brotherhoods of the Caucasus and Central Asia demonstrated in the last century that they were able to call upon their faithful to rise up in rebellion against the czarist colonial power without any warning whatsoever." (30 Days, 2515 McAllister St., San Francisco, CA 94118)

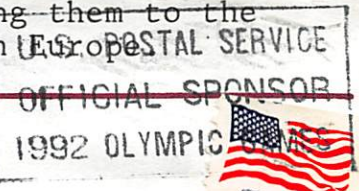
SOVIET MEDIA TREATMENT OF RELIGION GETS HIGH RATINGS

The National Catholic Register (February 18) reports that despite a strong Stalinist presence, "Soviet media pay considerable attention to religion these days and treat the subject fairly." The paper cites an interview with Soviet dissident Tatiana Goritsjeva where she says that, unlike its counterparts in West Germany or France, Soviet TV broaches the subject of religion almost daily, and in a "positive and honest manner." One example is the USSR's most popular TV news show, "The Fifth Wheel," even though it is under direction of an atheist. The Ministry of Culture recently suggested a daily broadcast of the Orthodox liturgy for those who can't attend services. Soviet TV may be in for more religion if U.S. televangelists have their way, reports Long Island's Newsday (February 16). Robert Schuller has already made broadcasts into the USSR and Pat Robertson is producing a children's Bible program for Soviet viewers. Michael D'Antonio writes that the televangelist's declining American viewership is drawing them to the newly opened television markets of the USSR and Eastern Europe.

Religion Watch

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FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

— A Bi-Monthly Supplement of Religion Watch —

MARCH/APRIL 1990

PRESS NOTES

* The premier (March) issue of First Things, a magazine published by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, has recently come off the press. The magazine and its founding reveals the growing independence and influence of the neoconservative movement. First Things continues in the tradition of the journal "This World" and the newsletter "Religion & Society Report" edited by Lutheran neoconservative leader Richard John Neuhaus. But last year Neuhaus was dismissed by the publications' sponsor, the traditionalist conservative Rockford Institute for ideological and financial differences (see October Religion Watch), thereby creating a rift between neoconservatives and traditionalists (or "paleoconservatives").

The first issue of First Things, which is edited by Neuhaus, carries articles by such neoconservative leaders as Michael Novak and Paul Johnson, and a newsletter format in the back pages for Neuhaus' distinctive commentary on religion and social issues. The neoconservative emphasis on democracy and capitalism (recent events have taken anti-communism off the agenda), as well as the role of religion in shaping cultural values, is evident in the first issue. With its editorial board carrying such mainstream names as the National Council of Churches president Leonid Kishkovsky, and Neuhaus' strong criticisms of his former traditionalist allies, First Things appears to be making a bid for a place at the center of today's religious/political debate. A subscription is \$24 per year. First Things, 156 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010)

* Findings & Footnotes has long been interested in the non-official denominational press-- those publications that often provide informative coverage of their denominations from an independent editorial and operating base. One recent addition to the collection of independent publications is The Banner, "a newsletter for Christian Scientists." The quarterly newsletter, edited and published by Andrew W. Hartsook, approaches issues that do not get a hearing in official Christian Scientist publications, such as the declining number of churches and Christian Science practitioners. The Banner often criticizes the church for losing its religious integrity because of its involvement in secular media projects (such as its television program, the World Monitor). There is no cost for a subscription, although some donation might be appreciated for postage. Send to: The Banner, Andrew Hartsook, 2040 Hazel Ave., Zanesville, OH 43701)

* In the review of the alternative Christian press last issue we asked if any readers might know of any other such publications. Reader Phelps Gates of Chapel Hill, N.C., responded by sending in a multitude of such publications-- otherwise known as "fanzines" or "zines." A brief look at these zines might include such publications as Radical Times (C/O P.F.J., Box 310, Everett, WA 98206), which focuses on the Christian rock scene but also carries items on Christian living and such issues as abortion. The Look (RT. 1, Box 612, Chesapeake, OH 45619. \$5 for six issues) focuses on Christian "heavy metal" music-- a movement often rejected by churches. These and other zines-- which are often distributed at

Christian rock concerts-- show a Christian youth subculture that is often critical of churches, although quite conservative itself; many zines espouse anti-abortion themes. Readers wishing to correspond with Mr. Gates regarding his collection of Christian zines can write to him at: 160 Windsor Circle, Chapel Hill, NC 27516-1207)

* Readers interested in more forecasts and analyses of religion for the 1990s than found in last month's Religion Watch, might want to consult recent books on the subject. The Peoples' Religion: American Faith in the 90's (Macmillan. \$19.95) by George Gallup Jr. and Jim Castelli brings together Gallup polls conducted on religious belief and behavior during the past 50 years. From these statistics, the authors make forecasts on the shifting membership and attendance figures of evangelical and mainline churches as well as other development. Megatrends 2000: Ten Directions for the 1990s (William Morrow and Co., \$21.95) by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, adds a strong religious thrust to Naisbitt's earlier best-seller, "Megatrends." The authors view the continued growth of evangelicalism and new age groups with "great hope," citing such developments as a "turning away from the religion of technology." Naisbitt and Aburdene make a strong connection between such a "revival" and the approach of the third millenium.

* A new genre of writing on American religion may be developing-- a kind of religious geography. In varying degrees, three recent books combine travel with observation to show the ways that religion is often interconnected with the American land and its different regions. In The Divine Supermarket: Shopping for God in America (William Morrow, \$18.95) by Malise Ruthven, provides an in-depth exploration of the varied religious landscape of America-- from an upbeat, ecumenical New England Congregationalism to New Age California. In his trailer, Ruthven, a British agnostic, retraces the "Mormon trail" made by Brigham Young last century, making side trips to talk with black Baptists in Alabama, white supremecists in the Northwest, Native Americans in the Southwest and many other religious groups, frequently noting the connection between geography and faith.

Randall Balmer's Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America (Oxford Univ. Press, \$19.95) carries more emphasis on faith than geography. But Balmer's journey into evangelical America shows that the diversity of the movement often interacts with the various American regions more often than one might think from watching televangelists. Although there is less travel in Belden C. Lane's Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality (Paulist Press, 997 Macarthur Blvd., Mahwah, NJ 07430, \$9.95), the book provides good background for thinking about the ties between American geography and religion. Among Lane's case studies are the Shakers, the writings of Edward Abbey on the American West and the Catholic Worker in New York.

ON/FILE: A SURVEY OF NEW AND INFLUENTIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PEOPLE ON THE RELIGIOUS SCENE

1) Virtual Reality has recently been portrayed in the alternative and mainstream press as the new computer frontier. In short, Virtual reality is a computer system allowing its operators to create and experience other forms of "reality" through sensory equipment and the imagination (for instance, a participant in this technology can "experience" walking on the Moon) . Less known is virtual reality "guru" Jaron Lanier's view that the technology (to be available to the public in a few years) will "bring back into western experience...a shared mystical altered sense of reality that is so important in basically every other civilization prior to big patriarchal power." (Source: Whole Earth Review, Fall; Utne Reader, March/April)