1993 Templeton Contest
1st Place: Gustav Niebuhr

Stories published in 1992
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To the Templeton Award Judges:

Gustav Niebuhr is a staff reporter covering religion on The Washington Post's national desk. In this capacity, he writes stories with a particular eye to how religion intersects with a broad range of subjects, including politics, law, social trends and even economics.

The five enclosed stories, submitted for the John Templeton Reporter of the Year Award, reflect the varied interests he brings to the beat (both at The Post and earlier in 1992 in his previous job as national religion writer at The Wall Street Journal).

Earlier this year, for a story about home some churches -- increasingly influenced by feminist thinking -- are rejecting traditional masculine images for God, Niebuhr visited a Los Angeles area pastor who used feminine imagery in all her references to the deity. Later, to tell the story of an unusual church-state clash, he traveled to coastal South Carolina to profile a group of street preachers and the little city that had enacted an anti-noise law to shut them up.

Other stories enclosed include an analysis of the decline in church giving by Protestants, relative to their rising incomes. And, more recently, in an insightful story of religion and national politics, Niebuhr wrote of how presidential candidate Bill Clinton was attracting some evangelicals who had previously voted Republican through his frequent use of biblical language and imagery. Finally, on a beat that has its share of breaking news, Niebuhr covered the U.S. Catholic bishops' unprecedented decision last November to reject a long-awaited pastoral letter on the role of women in the church.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Marilyn Thompson
Deputy National Editor
BY R. GUSTAV NIESCHUR
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
LONG BEACH, Calif. — The First Congregational Church here looks every inch a bastion of religious tradition. Inside the imposing Italian Renaissance structure, graced with delicate rose windows, are mahogany pews and a grand old pipe organ.

Then the Sunday service starts. “May the God who mothers us all bear us on the breath of dawn, and make us to shine like the sun, and hold us in the palm of Her hand,” intones Mary Ellen Killoy, the pastor.

Unorthodox? Some would say so. But no longer unique.

The ancient Western image of God the Father is coming under assault. Although still relatively unusual in most of America’s 350,000 Christian churches, gospel like this is making inroads among church leaders, who have begun purging hymnals and liturgies of references to God as male, white as pure, black as evil and Heaven as up.

Changing Texts

This year, a new translation of Catholic psalms used in worship that eliminates the word “He” as the pronoun for God will be circulated among Catholics for study.

The United Church of Christ, the liberal Protestant denomination to which First Congregational Church belongs, is revising its hymnal, and will “change some very treasured texts,” says the Rev. James Crawford, pastor of Boston’s Old South Church, who chairs the hymnal committee. Among those due for certain revision: the old Protestant favorite “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind.”

And next week, the staid United Methodist Church will ask delegates to a churchwide conference to approve a new Book of Worship, the text from which ministers design their services, that would allow congregations in certain instances to drop Father in favor of a genderless God. Although the book remains largely traditional, it also includes prayers in which the deity is addressed as “Father and Mother,” “Bakerwoman God” and “Grandfather, Great Spirit.”

For centuries, Christians have worshipped a deity that had explicitly masculine names. The Hebrew Scriptures, which form the Christian Old Testament, call God “He.” In the Gospels, Jesus refers to God as Abba, an Aramaic word best translated as “Daddy.” Culture has reinforced tradition: Medieval artists and hymn writers portrayed God as a wise, older king. Michelangelo painted the deity as a muscular, bearded giant. Hollywood cast actors who could speak basso profundo.

Yet these days, sweeping social shifts—primarily feminism, but also civil rights and environmentalism—have crashed against the ancient Christian picture of the cosmos.

“I don’t think our conception of God will ever stand still again,” says Joseph Hough, dean of Vanderbilt University’s Divinity School in Nashville, Tenn. In his public utterances, Dr. Hough alternately refers to the deity as She, then He. “I don’t think anyone would want to defend the view that God values males more than females, but that’s exactly what [traditional] language does,” he says.

The roots of the debate over what to call God are often traced to a book by Mary Daly called “Beyond God the Father,” a critique of patriarchal religions that bluntly states, “If God is male, then the male is God.” Dr. Hough also cites James Cone’s 1969 book “Black Theology, Black Power,” which argues that the church must so identify with oppressed minorities that it becomes “theologically impossible” not to think of Christ as black.

Such books had an immediate impact on many seminaries, but only recently has their influence been felt in established churches, where church leaders have begun replacing the once-generic word “brethren” with “people.”

The Final Word

For the orthodox, any question about God’s name was settled once and for all more than 1,600 years ago at the Council of Nicaea, where more than 300 bishops from across the Roman Empire convened to resolve a raging theological debate about what, essentially, God is. The group agreed to describe God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three intimately connected “persons” within one “substance.” The doctrine of the Trinity is important because, while it holds Christ to be fully and eternally divine, it also explains that Christians don’t worship two or three separate gods.

These days, however, many pastors are choosing to baptize and marry in the name of a gender-neutral Trinity, the “Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.” And that is causing great concern, especially among some traditional religious experts and academicians, who believe such changes border on heresy.

“Once you deconstruct the Trinity . . . I think you’ve lost the Gospel,” says Carl Braaten, professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. “We’re facing a battle in the

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Yet many people have been protesting the changes. In late January, 77 bishops, pastors and lay people associated with the United Methodist Church gathered in Memphis and issued the so-called Memphis Declaration. The group said inclusion of a new language for God in the proposed Book of Worship would "alter the apostolic faith."

One conservative Methodist group, the Good News Caucus, promises to argue to stop changes in a word-by-word editing at the denomination's committee next week. "It's not for us to decide what God's to be called. He's expressed that in Scripture," says the Rev. James Heidinger II, the group's executive secretary. Tampering with traditional biblical imagery, he adds, "leads to pantheism and goddess-worship."

Over the past year, opponents in the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ have issued their own declarations, branding changes in traditional language about God as anything from a cultural faux pas to outright heresy.

Men as Gods

Some proponents of change say they see in the opposition a backlash by men who fear their own authority is at stake. They may feel the reverberations of the ax being laid to the tree, and they're up in the tree." the Rev. Beryl Ingram-Ward, a Methodist minister in Tacoma, Wash.

Opposition comes from women as well. At the Lakewood, Ohio, Congregational Church, the Rev. Lyman Farrar says for years he's been quietly using the word God instead of male pronouns for the deity in prayers and sermons. But he encountered an "instant negative reaction" when he introduced a gender-neutral version of the doxology, a historic hymn of praise, late in January. As he stood shaking hands with congregants after the service, several women bluntly told him not to do it again.

"I can't understand why so many women are so upset by this," he says. Says Sue Bosworth, a member of the congregation, "I think we're in danger of losing the Trinity" when use of the name Father is diminished.

While this debate is just beginning in the pews, it has already reshaped religious vocabulary at many of the nation's leading seminaries, particularly the Protestant seminaries, where women's enrollment has exploded. As their constituencies have changed, these institutions have found that previously standard terms—mankind, brethren, God the Father—seem antiquated, even politically charged.

Inclusive Language

These days, many seminaries have guidelines recommending proper speech on campus. At Columbia Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian institution in Decatur, Ga., the student handbook says that students, faculty and administrators "are expected to use inclusive language" in the classroom, chapel and written work. Two years ago, faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary, an evangelical institution in Pasadena, Calif., recommended students speak of men and women, rather than man or mankind. (The seminary has retained traditional language for God.)

But attempts to take such messages outside seminary walls have often met with anger and resistance.

In the mid-1980s, the National Council of Churches began publishing its multi-volume Inclusive Language Lectionary—Bible readings for Sunday services—which omitted male pronouns for God and retranslated Jesus's traditional title, "the Son of Man," as "the Human One." As the series went to press, the committee of scholars who put it together received anonymous death threats.

Committee chairman Burton Throckmorton recalls registering under a false name when he went to speak to the council's board at a Hartford, Conn., hotel. Police patrolled the building with bomb-sniffing dogs. "It wasn't funny business," says Dr. Throckmorton, a retired professor of New Testament at Bangor, Maine's Theological Seminary. "There are a lot of lunatics out there."

'Bring Many Names'

Despite the hostility, the lectionary has sold some 80,000 copies, according to one of its publishers, Cleveland-based Pilgrim Press. And other, similar materials are now coming to market, including new hymns that praise a distinctly nontraditional deity.

Brian Wren, an Oxford-educated poet who lives in Rome, Pa., is an author of many such hymns. One of his best-known is "Bring Many Names," whose verses invoke "strong Mother God," "warm Father God," "old, aching God" and "young, growing God."

Dr. Wren travels the country giving seminars in which he encourages people to "brainstorm images of God." At one San Francisco gathering, ministers and church musicians came up with a long list of new names—"Beautiful Movement," "Straight-talking Lover," "Daredevil Gambler"—that he incorporated into a hymn.

"The fact that Jesus called God Father doesn't mean he was teaching us to use that name for time and eternity," Dr. Wren says. "I think that at its best, the biblical tradition is that God cannot be contained in human language."
By Gustav Niebuhr
Washington Post Staff Writer

Republican Jeff Mobley, a 35-year-old Nashville lawyer who voted for George Bush and Dan Quayle four years ago, says he's leaning toward Bill Clinton and Albert Gore Jr. this time around. It's not because of the economy.

"My decision first of all is based on language," said Mobley, who teaches an adult Sunday School class in a Southern Baptist church. "They speak the language I speak," using words like "redemption," "justice," "faith" and "renewal," he said, words that resonate with his evangelical roots.

"By intentionally using that language, they are affirming that [religious] tradition," he said. "They interpret liberal concepts in language that speaks to us Bible Belters."

President Bush still commands the affections of a majority of Southern Baptist voters, religious observers agree, but the Arkansas Democrat is getting a boost from his knowledge of "the language of Zion," the Scripture-laced discourse deeply familiar to the region's evangelicals, both black and white.

The Democratic candidate does not freely talk of being "born-again" and "witnessing" for his faith as Jimmy Carter did, but Clinton "knows the cadence of religious communication," said Robert Parham, director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville and author of a 1991 book on Christian-based environmentalism to which Gore contributed a foreword. Parham cites Clinton's repeated use of the biblical term "covenant" to See BAPTISTS, A14, Col. 5
describe the relationship between citizens and government, his quotations from Scripture, references to hope and community, even the sermonic length and rhythm of his speeches. "He speaks like an educated Baptist minister. There is content, stories, illustrative language and emotion."

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But these days, neither man is considered to be in the mainstream of a religious body that shifted to the political right in the 1980s—the same period in which a staunchly conservative faction wrested control of the denomination from so-called moderates. At their huge annual meetings, Southern Baptists have passed resolutions condemning abortion and, earlier this year, moving to bar membership to congregations seen as "approving homosexual behavior."

By contrast, both Clinton and Gore are on record favoring abortion rights and gay rights—earning an "F" this month for their stand on the latter from Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptists' moral concerns agency, the Christian Life Commission.

Moreover, the Southern Baptists' new, conservative leadership has been widely viewed as sympathetic to conservative Republican figures, welcoming Quayle as a speaker at the annual meeting last June and Bush the year before.

But despite the ideological differences, the Democrats' all-Southern Baptist ticket appears "culturally compatible" to many of their coreligionists, especially among the displaced moderate faction, said James L. Guth, a professor of political science at Furman University in Greenville, S.C.

Guth's post-election surveys of about 1,000 Southern Baptist clergy over the last decade showed about 80 percent supported Ronald Reagan in 1984 and Bush in 1988. Clinton, he predicts, could capture up to 40 percent of that vote, roughly equivalent to what Carter won in 1980. "There's nothing standing in the way as there was with [Michael S.] Dukakis," a Greek Orthodox from Massachusetts, he said. "Clinton will do well among the moderates and moderate-conservatives. He's going to get some of them back."

"They're going to pull a lot of Southern Baptist votes," said James Dunn, director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Public Affairs, a religious liberty watchdog agency in Washington. "There are many strong evangelicals who are ... very vigorously supporting Clinton and Gore. They sat on their hands for Dukakis and [Walter F.] Mondale."

Earlier this month, a survey of 718 voters for VISN, a New York-based ecumenical cable television network, found that people who said they "believe the Bible word for word" were split evenly between Clinton and Bush. Bush held a slight lead among white Protestants, the poll found.

The prospect of evangelical defections to Clinton concerns E.E. "Ed" McAteer, a Memphis businessman who organized the National Affairs Briefing, a gathering of religious conservatives in Dallas two months ago at which Bush (an Episcopalian) criticized the Democrats for leaving "three simple letters—G-O-D" out of their platform.

Many Southern Baptists, McAteer said, "are uninformed" about Clinton's social stands: "Their natural tendency has been to be with their brothers." To counter that, McAteer is making the rounds among Baptist and other church groups, spreading the word that Clinton is out of step with evangelicals.

But others are less worried about Clinton's appeal. Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., and another Bush supporter, said he has found no evidence of a groundswell for Clinton in any of the conservative congregations to which he has spoken recently. "They're just not likely to pull the lever for a candidate who's espousing abortion on demand."
By R. Gustav Niebuhr

As the collection plate makes its way through the aisles of U.S. churches, the people in the pews aren't digging as deeply into their pockets as they once did.

Churches across the country are starting to feel the effects of congregations who are increasingly wary about how they spend — and donate — their dollars. The Presbyterian Church (USA) is working to reduce its annual missions budget about 10%. The Episcopal Church has slashed its national staff one-fifth. Catholic dioceses, particularly in the Northeast, have closed the doors of schools.

Now, in a comprehensive study of donations to U.S. Protestant churches, a research group finds that, although individual contributions are rising, the faithful are giving an ever-smaller percentage of their after-tax income to their houses of worship. That cutback is costing religious organizations about $2 billion a year.

The figures point to a "weakening of the church" in U.S. society, says Sylvia Ronsvalle, executive vice president of Empty Tomb Inc., the nonprofit Christian research organization that conducted the ongoing study, which is being funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. She adds: "The church as an institution has been commanding a smaller and smaller portion of its members' income."

This trend, say some religious observers, stems in part from disagreements with national church bodies. In the case of Roman Catholics, "much of the decline can be accounted for by changing attitudes on sexuality and authority," says the Rev. Andrew M. Greeley, a research associate at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Some church members, he says, have cited their unhappiness with the 1968 papal encyclical against birth control and with a lack of control by lay people over church spending.

Some researchers and educators also cite a rising "consumerist" mentality in U.S. churches. Like shoppers in a mall or grocery store, younger churchgoers want to see some value for their money, says Elmer L. Towns, vice president of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

Mrs. Ronsvalle agrees. "People have changed from stewards into consumers," she says, "and they have brought attitudes to their churches where they are buying specific services — a youth program, a music program."

Churches are also beset by rapidly rising fixed costs, which means that less of the money being dropped in collection plates on weekends is going to governing bodies and to programs outside the church walls. According to the Empty Tomb report, churches' spending on charitable "benevolences" — everything from soup kitchens to missionary work — is shrinking, compared with spending on such in-house items as salaries, building maintenance, utilities and programs for members.

Local church "expenses are up consid-

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erably," says Kenneth Inskeep, director of research and planning for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "You take a look at pension costs, they've gone up dramatically; health costs for clergy, they've gone up dramatically; insurance costs, lights, everything."

The report from Empty Tomb, titled "The State of Church Giving Through 1990," is part of a continuing study of the financial records of about 30 Protestant denominations that together represent more than 30 million people. The findings, to be released today, are based on 22 years of records obtained from the National Council of Churches. The council annually collects information from financial officials in a broad array of Protestant denominations.

Some church financial officials disagree with the study's finding that members— at least in their own denominations— are giving less of their incomes.

"Our research shows that the Presbyterian percentage hasn't decreased for the past 25 years but has remained the same—slightly over 2% of income," says John M. Coffin, director of stewardship and communication at the Presbyterian Church (USA). "We do have fewer members, which means we do have fewer dollars, but it is a decline in membership and not a decline in income giving."

Similarly, Mr. Inskeep says surveys of Lutherans in the late 1970s and again in 1988 showed giving remaining at about 2.3% of family income.

Appearances Are Deceiving

The decline in giving cited in the Empty Tomb study—from about 3.1% of members' after-tax income in 1968 to 2.6% in 1990—appears modest. However, in 1990, members of the denominations studied gave a total of $12.4 billion to their churches. Had they given at the 1988 rate, that figure would have been almost $2.1 billion higher, Mrs. Ronsvalle says.

That trend parallels a pattern among Roman Catholics, as tracked by the National Opinion Research Center. Polling by the center has found that Catholics have been putting less and less in parish collection plates — from about 2.2% of their income 30 years ago to less than 1% currently, according to Father Greeley.

"You could build a lot of new schools, help a lot of old schools, help a lot of missionaries and house a lot of the homeless" with the missing money, Father Greeley says.

J. Thompson Hildreth, assistant treasurer of the 2.4 million-member Episcopal Church, says the church hasn't tried to track members' giving as a proportion of their income; but overall donations, he says, have been rising. Still, he says, local parishes are increasingly retaining larger proportions of the money. "So all that is translated to less funding for diocesan and [national] church structures."

Cutting Staff

The findings from Empty Tomb come at a time of increasing financial stress within the top tiers of America's most historic and influential Protestant churches. Earlier this year, Presbyterian officials warned that a decline in donations by member congregations was producing deficits so severe they threatened to wipe out the church's reserves. Since then, the denomination has pledged to reduce its annual $118 million mission budget by about 10% by 1995, a church spokesman says.

Last fall, the Episcopal Church— which has long claimed some of the most generous donors among Christian churches—made the move to reduce its national staff. Since then, the church has also pledged to cut spending on some of its national programs 35%.

And this spring, the 5.2 million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church eliminated 15 jobs at its Chicago headquarters, a spokeswoman says.

Traditionally, many clergy, particularly in more conservative denominations, have urged members to tithe, or give a tenth of their incomes, to the church. Indeed, the concept of tithing is as old as Genesis, which tells how Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of battle to the priest-king Melchizedek.

But "to a generation that resists any sense of obligation, the tithe is a central symbol they would often choose to ignore," says R. Albert Mohler Jr., editor of the Christian Index, a Baptist newspaper published in Atlanta.

Dr. Towns of Liberty University says he tells pastors that churchgoers born since World War II tend not to give in response to appeals to tradition or to guilt.

"I think we live in a more materialistic society," he says, adding that younger churchgoers are more likely to choose a church based on what benefits they expect from it, such as family-oriented programs or even "a good handball court."

Among Catholic congregations, adds Father Greeley, "people mind much less giving to the parish than they mind giving money that goes downtown," referring to diocesan headquarters or the Vatican.

"They don't trust downtown, whatever 'downtown' might be."
By Gustav Niebuhr
Washington Post Staff Writer

A historic decision, U.S. Roman Catholic bishops voted yesterday to reject a pastoral letter that reaffirmed traditional roles for women in the church, following a two-day debate in which many bishops referred to a subject the Vatican has ruled off limits—women’s ordination as priests.

Afterward, several bishops shook their heads in wonder over the decision, saying they could think of no other instance in U.S. Catholic history when church leaders rejected a pastoral letter, an official teaching document prepared by their fellow American bishops.

Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill., head of the committee that wrote the 28,000-word letter, said after the vote that the vast majority of bishops remain staunchly committed to church teaching that the priesthood cannot be opened to women. But he also said the debate showed “a number of bishops are very uncomfortable with the prohibition” on talking about the issue.

Bishops who voted against the letter, titled “One in Christ Jesus,” cited strong opposition to it from women in their dioceses, who besieged them with mail and phone calls.

A two-thirds majority of all active bishops—190 votes—was necessary for the letter’s approval by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in their semiannual meeting at the Omni Shoreham Hotel here. But despite urgent appeals from conservative bishops who said defeat might be seen as laying the ax to the very roots of their authority, 110 bishops did not support the letter.

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“...We’re going to lose another generation, a generation of very wonderful women,” he said.

But other bishops told their colleagues to stand fast. “There has to be some pain and alienation at times...and it’s the price of teaching the truth,” said Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile, Ala. “I think the truth about ordination is a hard truth that Catholics must face.”

In the works nine years, the letter—which passed through four different drafts—addressed a broad array of issues, discussing family life and sexuality, and striking both liberal and conservative chords. It condemned violence and discrimination against women, while affirming opposition to birth control, abortion and premarital sex.

Sister Maureen Fiedler, coordinator of Catholics Speak Out in Hyattsville, said the 110 bishops who voted to defeat the letter “chose to stand with the people.”

Later in the day, the bishops rallied to keep the document from extinction by voting, on a motion by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, archbishop of Chicago, to send it to the bishops’ standing committees “for further study and dialogue.” Under an amendment, the document can be published, but without the weighty authority of a pastoral letter.

Asked at a news conference after the letter’s defeat whether the “genie was out of the bottle” and lay people would now consider the question of women’s ordination open to discussion, Imesch answered simply, “Yes.” Bishop R. Pierre DuMaine of San Jose, Calif., said that “the debate will proceed...with us or without us.”

Yet some traditionalists saw a silver lining in the day’s events.

Helen Hull Hitchcock, executive director of Women for Faith & Family, noted that a majority of bishops had supported the letter. The debate, she said, would help galvanize conservative bishops to reassert their authority against the influence of “radical feminism.”

“I think they understand the issues a lot better,” she said of the bishops. “It’s odd, but we live in a cultural milieu where a Catholic bishop has to be courageous to teach Catholic teachings.”
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America's earliest evangelical stomping grounds. In the 1730s, the region was host to John Wesley, the English founder of the Methodist movement who conducted revivals among the colonists. A couple of years later, the Rev. George Whitefield—as famous in his time as Billy Graham is today—swept through. Gifted with a voice so powerful contemporaries claimed it could be heard almost a mile off, Whitefield could preach eight hours at a stretch. "His throat would actually be bleeding when he was done," says Mr. Asquith, the evangelist and manager of a home-improvement company, who says he heard this fact while attending Pensacola Bible Institute, in Florida.

These days, however, Beaufort residents view their town in more secular terms, as a place distinguished by its military installations, growing retirement community and tourists. Loud sermonizing introduces a dissonant note into this mix, claim Bay Street merchants.

At the Lipsitz shoe store, Neil Lipsitz says he gets so distressed that "you can't do any work in here." He complains that customers flee out the back door.

Mrs. Rhetz says the preachers give her migraine headaches. Her husband, Bill, once tested the volume of an evangelist on a sound level meter. "It hit 90" decibels. Mr. Rhetz says, the equivalent of "a loud orchestra."

John Pennington calls the preaching "verbal vandalism." He owns a hot dog cart on Bay Street staffed by young women. Some evangelists, he says, "have actually gone up to the girls at the cart and called them sinners and fornicators—that's while they're trying to sell hot dogs."

Though the preaching is not new—Rev. Baker's evangelical school was founded 17 years ago—towndwellers say the relatively recent gentrification of the business district brought the issue to a head. First, store owners and preachers tried a gentlemen's agreement, under which evangelists could preach, but only on the move. It was hoped that they would walk up Bay Street and eventually turn a corner into the town park. That pact was short-lived. Then, last fall, the city passed an ordinance allowing arrests for "loud and unseemly" noises, including the human voice.

City attorney William B. Harvey III, who wrote the ordinance (based on a Maryland law that has withstood legal challenges), says if the preachers would just tone it down, they would be within the law. But the Rev. Mr. Baker insists that a quieter approach would undermine the very nature of street preaching. "You must be loud to reach people," he says.

From the Diaphragm, Please

Indeed, in his evening classes, Mr. Baker teaches his small group of students the art of making a loud noise.

Pick an object about 75 feet away, he says, and aim your voice right at it. To project, speak from the diaphragm not the throat; slow your words down, enunciate, and never turn your head in mid-sentence, or you'll break contact with your audience.

Students learn, too, how to ignore taunts. Mr. Asquith, who occasionally sermonizes outside a Camden, S.C., bar, says he has been doused with beer and sprayed with a garden hose. Stephen Williamson says he has been choked and spat upon.

The actual sermons, however, aren't taught in the classroom; they come instead from divine guidance or on-the-spot inspiration. On one Saturday, Mr. Asquith spotted a tattered American flag hanging from a Bay Street building. He had his sermon. "We're back to reclaim the street for America!" he thundered. "As long as there are red-blooded Americans, we'll be here to preach." He was arrested.

Mr. Rhetz, the gallery owner, predicts the law's strict enforcement, coupled with the prospect of jail, will eventually quiet the preachers. "A little time in the can," he says, "works for most people." So far, most preachers have opted to pay the fine of $234 rather than be jailed. Mr. Baker, however, a repeat offender, is now serving out a short sentence in a state minimum-security prison.

But none of this deters Mr. Asquith. On the contrary, he hopes the town will eventually relent and rescind the noise ordinance. Once that happens, he sees Beaufort becoming a site for an annual convention of street preachers—maybe 300 to 400 at a time. Then the town will sing a different tune, he says: "The motels will be full—and the merchants will do a lot of business."
Republican Jeff Mobley, a 35-year-old Nashville lawyer who voted for George Bush and Dan Quayle four years ago, says he's leaning toward Bill Clinton and Albert Gore Jr. this time around. It's not because of the economy.

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"They're going to pull a lot of Southern Baptist votes," said James Dunn, director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Public Affairs, a religious liberty watchdog agency in Washington. "There are many strong evangelicals who are ... very vigorously supporting Clinton and Gore. They sat on their hands for Dukakis and [Walter F.] Mondale."

Earlier this month, a survey of 718 voters for VISN, a New York-based ecumenical cable television network, found that people who said they "believe the Bible word for word" were split evenly between Clinton and Bush. Bush held a slight lead among white Protestants, the poll found.

The prospect of evangelical defections to Clinton concerns E.E. "Ed" McAteer, a Memphis businessman who organized the National Affairs Briefing, a gathering of religious conservatives in Dallas two months ago at which Bush (an Episcopalian) criticized the Democrats for leaving "three simple letters—G-O-D" out of their platform.

Many Southern Baptists, McAteer said, "are uninformed" about Clinton's social stands. "Their natural tendency has been to be with their brothers." To counter that, McAteer is making the rounds among Baptist and other church groups, spreading the word that Clinton is out of step with evangelicals.

But others are less worried about Clinton's appeal. Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., and another Bush supporter, said he has found no evidence of a groundswell for Clinton in any of the conservative congregations to which he has spoken recently. "They're just not likely to pull the lever for a candidate who's espousing abortion on demand."
By Gustav Niebuhr
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Church of England voted by a narrow margin yesterday to ordain women as priests in one of its most historic decisions since it broke away from Rome five centuries ago.

Passage of the measure—which gained the required two-thirds approval by only two votes in one house of the church's governing General Synod—ends a long disparity in practice between the church and its American counterpart, the Episcopal Church, which is a member of the 70 million-member worldwide Anglican Communion and which began ordaining women in 1977.

The vote followed five hours of often emotional debate by bishops, clergy and laypersons gathered in Church House, next to London's famed Westminster Abbey.

Some clergy voiced concern that the move could hurtle the 450-year-old institution toward schism by prompting an exodus from the church of angry traditionalists who contend the decision violates Biblical injunctions, according to wire reports from London.

In the end, the ordination decision, under discussion for two decades, passed with only two votes to spare in the synod's House of Laity, which had been the most resistant to women's ordination of the three-tiered synod. The vote was 169 to 82, church spokesman Eric Shegog said in a telephone interview. The measure passed the House of Bishops, 39 to 13, and the House of Clergy, 176 to 74.

The measure now moves to Parliament and to Queen Elizabeth II, the church's temporal head, for their approval. Shegog said approval is expected but that the process could take a year.

Shegog said both clerics and laity heard the final tally in silence, bowing to a request by Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion, about 12 of whose 28 self-governing national church bodies already

See ORDAIN, A31, Col. 1
ordain women as priests. "It was received in an almost reverential atmosphere," Shegog said of the voting result.

But outside Church House, a gathering of more than 200 supporters of women's ordination took the news in a considerably more festive spirit, singing hymns, lighting candles and cheering those who had voted for the measure when they emerged from the building, according to persons who were present.

The historic decision will almost certainly complicate the Church of England's relations with the Roman Catholic Church, from which it split in 1534, after King Henry VIII was unable to persuade Pope Clement VII to allow him to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon.

The two churches have been negotiating since 1966 for closer relations, but the Vatican adamantly opposes ordination of women, arguing that Jesus chose only men as his apostles. Rome made it clear in recent years that it would look on any move in that direction by the English church with great disfavor.

A Vatican statement issued after yesterday's vote said the Church of England's decision "constitutes a new and grave obstacle to the entire process of reconciliation."

The vote brought jubilation from many on this side of the Atlantic. The Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, presiding bishop of the 2.4-million-member Episcopal Church, said in a statement he was "thrilled almost beyond words." The Rev. Carol Crumley, canon pastor at Washington's National Cathedral, said in an interview that she was "stunned and speechless—this was something we had hoped for and prayed for for years."

The denomination will consecrate its second female bishop, the Rev. Jane Holmes Dixon, as suffragan bishop of Washington at the cathedral on Nov. 19.

Immediately affected by the Church of England's vote are the more than 1,300 women who serve as deacons, a rank that entitles them to carry out many religious tasks but bars them from the key priestly duties of presiding at the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper; from offering churchgoers absolution for their sins; and from saying a general blessing at church services. These women will be eligible for ordination as priests if the church's decision is approved by Parliament and the queen.

One of the women affected is the Rev. June Osborne, a deacon who serves two East London parishes and who voted for the ordination measure as one of 25 female members of the synod's House of

Clergy. "I feel it's a moment of historic change for the Church of England," Osborne, 39, said in a telephone interview. "It has felt a very long road to this day."

She said supporters of women's ordination were deeply concerned that the measure might be killed by the House of Laity, which had held a separate vote on the issue last July. At that time, 61 percent of the house's members voted in favor—short of the necessary two-thirds majority. "People have very clearly changed their minds in just the last four months," she said.

But Osborne said her own feelings of joy were tempered by an awareness that many church traditionalists who opposed women's ordination were in anguish over the vote. "There's not one of us in the synod who doesn't have friends who are deeply pained by the decision," she said, adding that one bishop had threatened during the debate to resign if women's ordination was approved.

In an attempt to help these men adjust to the change, the authors of the ordination measure wrote in a significant clause that allows traditionalist bishops to abstain from ordaining women as priests in their jurisdictions, or dioceses, if they object to the measure, said Shegog. In addition, traditionalist parishes are provided their own escape clause, being allowed to accept only men as rectors. Severance provisions have also been made for those priests who wish to resign in the aftermath of yesterday's decision.

"The hope is the church will change over time," as resistance by traditionalists dies away, and "as it experiences the ministry of women in the priesthood, [the church] will less and less need those safeguards," Osborne said.
Mr. Coleman is also concerned that tenants' right to privacy is at stake in the case. A victory for the Donahues would create a general situation in which "the landlord presumes the right to ask questions of the tenants' sexual lives," he says. "If you're out looking for an apartment, you'll never know if you're protected" by the laws, Mr. Coleman says. "This could be applied to conduct discovered while you're a tenant."

Further, a ruling for the Donahues might create a precedent that could also be used in the workplace, he says. "Some fundamentalist Christian employer could then use a litmus test on whether you're going to be hired or fired," he says.

Not so, replies Thomas F. Donahue, the Fresno attorney for the landlords, who are also his parents. "It's clear that this case has extremely limited applicability," he says.

Mr. Donahue says a decision for his parents would apply only to landlords who oppose sex outside marriage that they believe they would be "putting themselves in the position of eternal, divine retribution" if they facilitated fornication by renting to an unmarried couple. "There aren't that many people who feel this way," he says.

Mr. Donahue says the state of California itself already allows housing discrimination based on marital status by permitting colleges and universities to reserve campus housing specifically for married students. "Once they allow themselves an exemption, it is very difficult for them to claim that no one else can violate a right," he says. Because such exemptions already exist, he says, a ruling in favor of the Donahues would "not affect any of the other discrimination statutes."

The case has drawn close attention from an ideologically diverse array of religious groups. Organizations representing liberal Protestants, conservative evangelicals and several other groups have signed a friend-of-the-court brief asking the court to apply a "compelling interest" standard — that is, to decide in favor of the tenant only if the court can find that the government has a compelling reason to restrict religious beliefs or practices.

The friend-of-the-court brief doesn't ask the court to necessarily rule in favor of the landlord. But lawyers for the groups say the brief is intended to persuade the court not to follow a broad decision two years ago by the U.S. Supreme Court that governmental bodies need not make special exemptions for religious groups when enforcing general laws.

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enforcing general laws. "Our concern is that state courts not follow the lead of the U.S. Supreme Court and that they continue to provide strict scrutiny and strong protection" for free exercise of religion, says Richard T. Foltin, director of governmental affairs for the American Jewish Committee, which signed the brief.

But some other groups, while also supporting the compelling-interest standard, believe that state officials already met that standard when they originally found against the Donahues. "Discrimination is discrimination, and if you discriminate against one group it has a negative effect on all groups," says Tzivia Schwartz, Western states counsel for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, which filed a friend-of-the-court brief on behalf of Ms. Terry and the housing commission.

In addition, Ms. Schwartz says one reason her organization is so concerned about the case is that it involves rental housing, in which a "long history of discrimination" against various minorities preceded the enactment of fair-housing and civil-rights laws. "We think that when one chooses to participate in commercial activities (such as renting apartments) that one can't impose one's personal religion on . . . governmental restrictions," she says.
By R. Gustav Niebuhr

As the collection plate makes its way through the aisles of U.S. churches, the people in the pews aren't digging as deeply into their pockets as they once did.

Churches across the country are starting to feel the effects of congregations who are increasingly wary about how they spend— and donate— their dollars. The Presbyterian Church (USA) is working to reduce its annual missions budget about 10%. The Episcopal Church has slashed its national staff one-fifth. Catholic dioceses, particularly in the Northeast, have closed the doors of schools.

Now, in a comprehensive study of donations to U.S. Protestant churches, a research group finds that, although individual contributions are rising, the faithful are giving an ever-smaller percentage of their after-tax income to their houses of worship. That cutback is costing religious organizations about $2 billion a year.

The figures point to a “weakening of the church” in U.S. society, says Sylvia Ronsvalle, executive vice president of Empty Tomb Inc., the nonprofit Christian research organization that conducted the ongoing study, which is being funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. She adds: “The church as an institution has been commanding a smaller and smaller portion of its members’ income.”

This trend, say some religious observers, stems in part from disagreements with national church bodies. In the case of Roman Catholics, “much of the decline can be accounted for by changing attitudes on sexuality,” says the Rev. Andrew M. Greeley, a research associate at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Some church members, he says, have cited their unhappiness with the 1968 papal encyclical against birth control and with a lack of control by lay people over church spending.

Some researchers and educators also cite a rising “consumerist” mentality in U.S. churches. Like shoppers in a mall or grocery store, younger churchgoers want to see some value for their money, says Elmer L. Towns, vice president of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

Mrs. Ronsvalle agrees. “People have changed from stewards into consumers,” she says. “They have brought attitudes to their churches where they are buying specific services—a youth program, a music program.”

Churches are also beset by rapidly rising fixed costs, which means that less of the money being dropped in collection plates on weekends is going to governing bodies and to programs outside the church walls. According to the Empty Tomb report, churches’ spending on charitable “benevolences”— everything from soup kitchens to missionary work—is shrinking, compared with spending on such in-house items as salaries, building maintenance, utilities and programs for members.

Local church “expenses are up consid-
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erably,” says Kenneth Inseep, director of research and planning for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. “You take a look at pension costs, they’ve gone up dramatically; health costs for clergy, they’ve gone up dramatically; insurance costs, lights, everything.”

The report from Empty Tomb, titled The State of Church Giving Through 1990,” is part of a continuing study of the financial records of about 30 Protestant denominations that together represent more than 30 million people. The findings, to be released today, are based on 22 years of records obtained from the National Council of Churches. The council annually collects information from financial officials in a broad array of Protestant denominations.

Some church financial officials disagree with the study’s finding that members — at least in their own denominations — are giving less of their incomes.

“Our research shows that the Presbyterian percentage hasn’t decreased for the past 25 years but has remained the same — slightly over 2%” of income, says John M. Coffin, director of stewardship and communication at the Presbyterian Church (USA). “We do have fewer members, which means we do have fewer dollars, but it is a decline in membership and not a decline in income giving.”

Similarly, Mr. Inseep says surveys of Lutherans in the late 1970s and again in 1985 showed giving remaining at about 2.3% of family income.

Appearances Are Deceiving

The decline in giving cited in the Empty Tomb study—from about 3.1% of members’ after-tax income in 1965 to 2.6% in 1990—appears modest. However, in 1990, members of the denominations studied gave a total of $12.4 billion to their churches. Had they given at the 1965 rate, that figure would have been almost $2.1 billion higher. Mrs. Ronswae says.

That trend parallels a pattern among Roman Catholics, as tracked by the National Opinion Research Center. Polling by the center has found that Catholics have been putting less and less in parish collection plates — from about 2.2% of their income 30 years ago to less than 1% currently, according to Father Greeley.

“You could build a lot of new schools, help a lot of old schools, help a lot of missionaries and house a lot of the homeless” with the missing money, Father Greeley says.

J. Thompson Hiller, assistant treasurer of the 2.4 million-member Episcopal Church, says the church hasn’t tried to track members’ giving as a proportion of their income; but overall donations, he says, have been rising. Still, he says, local parishes are increasingly retaining larger proportions of the money. “So all that is translated to less funding for diocesan and in particular church structures.”

Cutting Staff

The findings from Empty Tomb come at a time of increasing financial stress within the top tiers of America’s most historic and influential Protestant churches. Earlier this year, Presbyterian officials warned that a decline in donations by member congregations was producing deficits so severe they threatened to wipe out the church’s reserves. Since then, the denomination has pledged to reduce its annual $115 million mission budget by about 10% by 1996, a church spokesman says.

Last fall, the Episcopal Church—which has long claimed some of the most generous donors among Christian churches—

made the move to reduce its national staff. Since then, the church has also pledged to cut spending on some of its national programs 35%.

And this spring, the 5.2 million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church eliminated 15 jobs at its Chicago headquarters, a spokesman says.

Traditionally, many clergy, particularly in more conservative denominations, have urged members to tithe, or give a tenth of their incomes, to the church. Indeed, the concept of tithe is as old as Genesis, which tells how Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of battle to the priest-king Melchizedek.

But “to a generation that resists any sense of obligation, the tithe is a central symbol they would often choose to ignore,” says R. Albert Mohler Jr., editor of the Christian Index, a Baptist newspaper published in Atlanta.

Dr. Towns of Liberty University says he tells pastors that churchgoers born since World War II tend not to give in response to appeals to tradition or to guilt.

“I think we live in a more materialistic society,” he says, adding that younger churchgoers are more likely to choose a church based on what benefits they expect from it, such as family-oriented programs or even “a good handball court.”

Among Catholic congregations, adds Father Greeley, “people mind much less giving to the parish than they mind giving money that goes downtown,” referring to diocesan headquarters or the Vatican. “They don’t trust downtown, whatever downtown might be.”

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By R. Gustav Niebuhr
Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal

Sister Mary Lucy Astuto recalls fighting the sandman as she drove home alone last June after an all-night prayer vigil.

With two miles to go, the Omaha, Neb., dozed off at the wheel. She came to, says, in front of her house when she felt a gentle nudge. "I know I can't prove this scientifically," says the former schoolteacher, "but I know my angel drove me home."

Lately, Sister Astuto, who has her own evangelistic ministry, has been sharing her story. It always gets a warm reception. "I assure you as I travel all over the country, there is a growing devotion to angels."

Indeed, after a hiatus of maybe 300 years and much skepticism, angels are making a comeback.

Angel books sell. Angel seminars are packed. And, for perhaps the first time since the Middle Ages, the ranks of angelologists are swelling.

Angels in History

In art, images of angels are nearly as old as civilization itself. Western religions put angels stage center. As divine messengers, angels kept Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, told Mary to expect a child and delivered the Koran to the prophet Mohammed.

According to Roman Catholic teachings, angels inhabit no fewer than nine different levels, or choirs, arrayed in rings around the divine throne. Cherubim and Seraphim are closest to God; guardian angels watch over humans. All are incorporeal, sexless, highly intelligent and able to move at the speed of thought.

Many eminence people have claimed angelic contact, among them Joan of Arc, the poet William Blake and Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon Church. But angelic awareness took a tumble during the 18th century Age of Enlightenment, when scientific discoveries and realism cast doubt on things supernatural. In 20th-century times, angels seemed to turn up mostly at Christmas and in movies (see "Angels in the Outfield," "It's a Wonderful Life" and "Heaven Can Wait," among myriad others).

A Vast Constituency

Now angels are back, riding a crest of interest that crosses denominational lines, linking groups as disparate as Catholics and New Agers, the devout and the unchurched.

Angels are an all-purpose antidote.

"All around us, we are besieged by the words of despair — alcoholism, drug addiction, presidential candidates tearing into each other," says Sophy Burnham, a Washington writer who is probably the best-known of the new angel authorities. Angels, unlike the daily news, she says, are full of warmth and joy, "and they say the same thing — 'Don't be afraid.'"

"A Book of Angels," which Ms. Burnham wrote, has gone into its 18th printing since it was published two Easters ago. The illustrated work discusses how various cultures regard angels, and describes experiences people have had with angels lately, including Ms. Burnham's experiences. (An angel dressed in black schussed down an Alpine slope on skis to rescue her from a fall that would have been calamitous, she says.)

Her publisher, Ballantine Books, has

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now brought out a book of letters to Ms. Burnham from readers claiming to have had angelic contact. A host of other angel items are out or in the works at Ballantine: an angel calendar and an angel post-card book, an "angel-a-week" diary and a book on how to talk to angels. This probably wouldn't have worked as well in the 1980s, says Ballantine's president, Susan Petersen.

"Angels are not competitive, they're cooperative," she says. "They don't bring money, they don't bring you status."

Of course, there are naysayers. Fanciful angels "about as nourishing to the spirit as cotton candy is to the body," says the Rev. Forrester Church, pastor of New York's All Souls Unitarian Church. "It leads people away from the social gospel and has them more on a kind of individualistic salvation trip."

Dr. Church is the author of "Entertaining Angels," a book whose title derives from the Biblical story of Abraham laying a feast for three strangers who turn out to be angels. In it, Dr. Church argues that true religious meaning is hidden within ordinary human interaction and that angels should be taken as purely symbolic, not literal beings.

Yet angel devotees say their subject, ethereal though it is, can't be ignored and isn't difficult to master (angeloologists being for the most part a self-taught group).

"You know, angelology is not a hard science like physics," says John Ronner, a former police officer in Murphysboro, Tenn. "But there's a lot of tantalizing evidence around."

Sundry Encounters

A one-time agnostic who got interested in spiritual matters after reading an account of near-death experiences, Mr. Ronner spent 14 months doing research for a book of his own on guardian angels. Now he is a published angelologist, Mr. Ronner says, strangers take him aside at parties or phone him up out of the blue to share stories of strange coincidences, encounters with luminous beings and telepathic voices.

"A real common venue for this voice is traffic," he says. "You could fill a file cabinet full of stories by people who escaped death when they needed disembodied voices saying stop! slow down! pull over!"

Indeed, for many, the most appealing thing about angels is the protective services they offer.

Murray Steinman, spokesman for the Church Universal and Triumphant, a New Age sect, says angelic intervention saved him from muggers in San Francisco. "I made some quick, silent prayers to Archangel Michael, and it just turned things around." The muggers retreated.

Sometimes angels merely reinforce orthodox religious belief among the faithful. Angels, after all, offer "a direct line to Heaven," says the Rev. Karl Chimiak, a Silver Spring, Md., priest who credits angel-awareness with improving his ministry. Each year, Father Chimiak holds a well-attended two-day seminar on the Catholic teachings on angels, a discussion grounded in references to such church authorities as St. Thomas Aquinas and Pope John XXIII, who urged parents to teach their children about guardian angels.

Ms. Burnham, too, finds herself much in demand on the lecture circuit. "People are starvimg, starving for this, and they're not getting it in church or synagogue," she says.

In various parish retreats he holds, the Rev. Stephen Valenta tells people who want to hear from angels that first they've got to step back from the rat race — slow down, relax and be receptive. "If you've got a tense body, forget it, you can't get a communication," says the 65-year-old Franciscan priest in Seaside Park, N.J., who says his guardian angel helped steer him clear of a head-on collision a month back.

It's also necessary to suspend disbelief. Communication with angels "starts if you recognize they're there," says Mr. Steinman of the Church Universal and Triumphant.

"Everyone I know has a working relationship and a living relationship with angels," he says. "It's a constant, daily interaction. It's like you'd have with your wife or your kids."
By R. Gustav Niebuhr
Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal
LONG BEACH, Calif. — The First Congregational Church here looks every inch a bastion of religious tradition. Inside the imposing Italian Renaissance structure, graced with delicate rose windows, are mahogany pews and a grand old pipe organ.

Then the Sunday service starts. "May the God who mothers us all bear us on the breath of dawn, and make us to shine like the sun, and hold us in the palm of Her hand," intones Mary Ellen Kilby, the pastor.

Unorthodox? Some would say so. But no longer unique.

The ancient Western image of God the Father is coming under assault. Although still relatively unusual in most of America's 350,000 Christian churches, gospel like this is making inroads among church leaders, who have begun purging hymnals and liturgies of references to God as male, white as pure, black as evil and Heaven as up.

Changing Texts

This year, a new translation of Catholic psalms used in worship that eliminates the word "He" as the pronoun for God will be circulated among Catholics for study.

The United Church of Christ, the liberal Protestant denomination to which First Congregational Church belongs, is revising its hymnal, and will "change some very treasured texts," says the Rev. James Crawford, pastor of Boston's Old South Church, who chairs the hymnal committee. Among those due for certain revision: the old Protestant favorite "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind."

And next week, the staid United Methodist Church will ask delegates to a churchwide conference to approve a new Book of Worship, the text from which ministers design their services, that would allow congregations in certain instances to drop Father in favor of a genderless God. Although the book remains largely traditional, it also includes prayers in which the deity is addressed as "Father and Mother," "Bakerwoman God," and "Grandfather, Great Spirit."

Yet these days, sweeping social shifts—primarily feminism, but also civil rights and environmentalism—have crashed against the ancient Christian picture of the cosmos.

"I don't think our conception of God will ever stand still again," says Joseph Hough, dean of Vanderbilt University's Divinity School in Nashville, Tenn. In his public utterances, Dr. Hough alternately refers to the deity as She, then He. "I don't think anyone would want to defend the view that God values males more than females, but that's exactly what [traditional] language does," he says.

The roots of the debate over what to call God are often traced to a book by Mary Daly called "Beyond God the Father," a critique of patriarchal religion that bluntly states, "If God is male, then the male is God." Dr. Hough also cites James Cone's 1969 book "Black Theology, Black Power," which argues that the church must so identify with oppressed minorities that it becomes "theologically impossible" not to think of Christ as black.

Such books had an immediate impact on many seminaries, but only recently has their influence been felt in established churches, where church leaders have begun replacing the one-gender word "brethren" with "people."

The Final Word

For the orthodox, any question about God's name was settled once and for all more than 1,600 years ago at the Council of Nicea, where more than 300 bishops from across the Roman Empire convened to resolve a raging theological debate about what, essentially, God is. The group agreed to describe God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three intimately connected "persons" within one "substance." The doctrine of the Trinity is important because, while it holds Christ to be fully and eternally divine, it also explains that Christians don't worship two or three separate gods.

These days, however, many pastors are choosing to baptize and marry in the name of a gender-neutral Trinity, the "Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer." And that is causing great concern, especially among some traditional religious experts and academicians, who believe such changes border on heresy.

"Once you deconstruct the Trinity . . . I think you've lost the Gospel," says Carl Braaten, professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. "We're facing a battle in the
Yet many people have been protesting the changes. In late January, 77 bishops, pastors and lay people associated with the United Methodist Church gathered in Memphis and issued the so-called Memphis Declaration. The group said Inclusion of new language for God in the proposed book of worship would “alter the apostolic faith.”

One conservative Methodist group, the Good News Caucus, promises to argue to stop the changes in a word-by-word editing at the denomination’s conference next week. “It’s not for us to decide what God’s to be called. He’s expressed that in Scripture,” says the Rev. James Heidinger II, the group’s executive secretary. Tampering with traditional biblical imagery, he adds, “leads to pantheism and goddess-worship.”

Over the past year, opponents in the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ have issued their own declarations, branding changes in traditional language about God as anything from a cultural fad to outright heresy.

Men as Gods

Some proponents of change say they see in the opposition a backlash by men who fear their own authority is at stake. “They may feel the reverberations of the ax being laid to the tree, and they’re up in the tree,” says the Rev. Beryl Ingram-Ward, a Methodist minister in Tacoma, Wash.

Opposition comes from women as well. At the Lakewood, Ohio, Congregational Church, the Rev. Lyman Farrar says for years he’s been quietly using the word God instead of male pronouns for the deity in prayers and sermons. But he encountered an “instant negative reaction” when he introduced a gender-neutral version of the doxology, a historic hymn of praise, in late January. As he stood shaking hands with congregants after the service, several women bluntly told him not to do it again.

“1 can’t understand why so many women are so upset by this,” he says. Says Sue Bosworth, a member of the congregation, “I think we’re in danger of losing the Trinity” when use of the name Father is diminished.

While this debate is just beginning...
By R. GUSTAV NIEBUHR  
Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal  
NEW YORK—High up on the 12th floor of the Bible House, home to the venerable African Bible Society and its historic collection of leather-bound Scriptures, a flashy new videotape is playing. It is about an exorcism.

As a female voice narrates the story, vivid images race across the screen: a graveyard, a rusty fire escape, a beach lighted by a bonfire. Through it all, a tormented youth writhe in madness, haunted by a weird, writhing figure. Finally, the youth is touched by a compassionate young man. He is healed: the wraith is vanquished. Background music surges as the narrator concludes a New Testament passage (Mark, Chapter 5) about Jesus casting out a nasty set of demons.

What is this? MTV?

No, it is a new translation of a Scripture, aimed at a young, "post-literate" generation. To hear some religious folk talk, it may be the biggest thing to happen to the Good Book since Johann Gutenberg invented movable type.

The Good Movie Is Begot

"This is really cutting edge," declares Eugene B. Habecker, the energetic new president and chief executive officer of the 175-year-old society, which also has developed interactive software that relates the text to contemporary teen-age issues. "It will revolutionize the way people study the Bible in the 21st century," Dr. Habecker says.

For people eager to spread the Word—or just get it heard—the revolution is coming none too soon. America, many religious leaders say, is becoming a nation of Bible illiterates, its citizens unable to find the time or inclination to read the world's best-selling book.

To be sure, the Bible—in basic black leather, pastel paperback or white cowhide and coffee-table-size—still ranks up impressive sales. But relatively few members of the more than 90% of U.S. households who own a Bible actually get around to cracking it. Barna Research Group, Glendale, Calif., polster, recently found only one in 10 Americans claims to be a daily reader. Among people under 25, it was fewer than one in 30.

As the Good Book gathers dust, even the faithful grow forgetful. About a year ago, polster George Gallup found that while a majority said that yes, they believed the Bible to be God's word, only half could name any of the four gospels. (They are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.) Mr. Gallup noted, too, that many people couldn't recall who preached the Sermon on the Mount. (It was Jesus.)

"America is one generation away from atheism," warns the Rev. Dwight "Ike" Osgood, a Fayetteville, Ga., pastor of a 30-member Baptist church. He blames this trend partly on the fact that the Bible isn't read much in public schools.

The problem is, even churchgoers are daunted by the thought of tackling the Bible's 500,000 words on their own. In a bustling adult Sunday school class at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Shawn Moore, 30, says lack of time keeps him from regular Scripture-reading. "You're probably more than likely to pick up a magazine than the Bible," he says.

Another class member, Paula Fair, says she has tried, but it is tough going. "I don't think I'm stupid," says the 25-year-old. "I just have a difficult time understanding the text."

To remedy such complaints, publishers, pastors, Christian music stars and even entire denominations are heading into the breach in what amounts to a multimedia effort to win back readers.

The tried and true method is simplifying the text—there are now more than 40 English versions available. Thomas Nelson, the country's largest independent Bible publisher, says sales shot way up last year when the company began publishing the New Revised Standard Version.

One Florida publisher still uses the King James New Testament but puts key words and phrases in bold-face, promising this "reduces reading time by two-thirds.

At concerts, Christian rockers Eddie DeGarmo and Dana Key have passed out copies of John's gospel taken from the user-friendly New International Version Student Bible. They performed under banners urging their youthful audiences to "read the Book," says the group's spokesman, Robert Michaels.

But reading the Book—even when it is simplified—is still too heady for some. First United Methodist in Houston has plans for a sort of biblical theater—a 300-seat rotunda with a floor-sized map of the Holy Land, onto which computer-guided lights will trace the path of the Israelites' wanderings in the Wilderness or spotlight the towns where Jesus preached. "People don't want to read anymore," says the church's pastor, the Rev. William Hinson. "They want you to show them."

Hence, the full-length movie "Jesus." It is a literal rendering of Luke's gospel, which its owner, Campus Crusade for Christ, wants to show to everyone in the world by the year 2000. A spokesman says 461 million people have viewed it so far.

For its part, the American Bible Society, which publishes the Scriptures in 68 languages (Arabic to Urdu), has recently introduced the Contemporary English Version, whose plain-vanilla language is scorned by anachronistic words and phrases. So, the King James Version's passage of the birth of Jesus—"And she brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger..."—is now "She gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him in a feed box...

Dr. Habecker, the society's president, says, "If the [biblical] writers were to come back today and give us the message—that's what it would read like." As for the video, he adds, "that's what it would look like.

The organization isn't planning anything as grand as committing the entire Bible to film. Just getting part of the fifth chapter of Mark's gospel on video took almost three years, beginning with the teen-age focus group that selected the exorcism story from a list put together by biblical scholars. Then the challenge was to update the passage. For instance, in the Bible, after the exorcised spirits leave the possessed man, they infest a herd of pigs, who fling themselves into a lake and drown.

But "pigs just don't have the same meaning of 'unclean animals' today," says Dr. Thomas Bomershine, a professor at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, and the project's chief academic consultant. "A lot of people would cry over the destruction of the pigs." The pigs were nixed.

The team also wanted to keep the settings contemporary and urban, avoiding Cecile B. DeMille type treatment that can lend an antiqued feel to the Scriptures. So the Jesus figure is pictured as a cut-young laborer; the possessed youth wears a baseball cap. "In some ways [Hollywood] has made Jesus unreal for some people," says Fern Lee Hagedorn, the project's manager. "We did not want to perpetuate that because then we would have lost the power of Jesus."

Last week, as the tour courted various cities where the video is being test-marketed, Ms. Hagedorn said the finished product seemed to be grabbing eyeballs. "In every instance, none of the teen-agers took their eyes off the screen," she said, after emerging from a session in Boston.

Among those who have seen it recently is Derek Rader, a 16-year-old at Parkersburg, W.Va., high school, who describes himself as "pretty illiterate when it comes to the Bible."

Did he like what he saw? It was "intriguing," he says, enough so to prompt him to look up the biblical chapter on which it is based. "I've started it a couple of times," he says, "but haven't got completely through it yet."
Beaufort, S.C. — On the sidewalk near an art gallery in this lovely antebellum town, a tall man in a brown suit is bounding up and down on the balls of his feet and shouting.

"The flesh of Jesus Christ is the flesh of Eternal God!" booms John Asquith, 38, in a voice that roars down the narrow street and turns the heads of midday shoppers. "Jesus is God become man!"

Two policemen approach Mr. Asquith and ask him to pipe down. When he refuses, they arrest him. As he is hustled to a squad car, he calls out to a passerby: "The Lord loves you. He does, sir."

Other well-dressed men, who have been waiting nearby, step forward one by one. Stephen Williamson, 38, in gray pin stripes, shouts: "We're not down here to glorify ourselves, but to glorify the word of God!" A pair of cops move toward him.

Then up steps Karl Baker. Waving his Bible, he belts out "Glory to God!" and is soon arrested, too.

Within two hours, 21 street preachers have been cut off mid-sermon and hauled off to jail. Call it the Battle of Beaufort.

Praying for Peace and Quiet

This small, elegant coastal town has turned to the law to muffle its street preachers. Bowing to the wishes of Bay Street store owners, who grew sick and tired of the evangelists' noisy sermons, a quiet street preachers recently passed a noise ordinance that would allow arrests and return the three-block commercial district to shopkeepers and the burgeoning tourist trade—or so it was hoped.

Problem is, the local community of leather-lunged evangelists is sizable and since the crackdown began, growing. There is John Howe, a long-haired man who works at the nearby hospital. He shouts out the horrors of hellfire and the glories of salvation.

There is also Tom Talbert occasionally preaching from the bed of a parked pickup truck. Michael Levy, an ex-Marine, passes tracts warning that God's wrath awaits the unrepentant.

Lately, these men of the Word have been joined by sympathetic townsmen, like Mr. Asquith, who here every Saturday from Lexington, in a show of solidarity against the nance.

A Practiced Calling

As a town of 13,000 people and about 20 churches, Beaufort (pronounced fer) hardly lacks spiritual succor. B. C. local church — Calvary Baptist — evening classes in street preaching. Baker, its 43-year-old pastor, assigns young pupils to practice their calling. Saturday shoppers in the Bay Street business district. His graduates, some of whom have worked at the Parris Island Marine Corps base, often show up, too.

...this town should be the object of such high-energy evangelizing seems odd. Halfway between Savannah, Ga., and Charleston, S.C., languid Beaufort is built by upcountry planters eager to trade the interior's humidity for the coast's breezes. Today, their legacy lives in graceful mansions and ancient oaks dripping with Spanish moss. "The whole es-

sence of Beaufort is it's a peaceful, little town," says Nancy Rhett, who with her husband owns the Rhett art gallery, near where the sermons gather.

Yet historically, Beaufort lies amid

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America's earliest evangelical stomping grounds. In the 1730s, the region was host to John Wesley, the English founder of the Methodist movement who conducted revivals among the colonists. A couple of years later, the Rev. George Whitefield— as famous in his time as Billy Graham is today—swept through. Gifted with a voice so powerful and disputing it could be heard almost a mile off, Whitefield could preach eight hours at a stretch.

"His throat would actually be bleeding when he was done," says Mr. Asquith, the evangelist and manager of a home-improvement company, who says he heard this fact while attending Pensacola Bible Institute, in Florida.

These days, however, Beaufort residents view their town in more secular terms, as a place distinguished by its military installations, growing retirement community and tourists. Loud sermonizing introduces a dissonant note into this mix, claim Bay Street merchants.

At the Lipsitz shoe store, Neil Lipsitz says he gets so distracted that "you can't do any work in here." He complains that customers flee out the back door.

Mrs. Rhett says the preachers give her migraine headaches. Her husband, Bill, once tested the volume of an evangelist on a sound level meter. "It hit 80" decibels. Mr. Rhett says, the equivalent of "a loud orchestra."

John Pennington calls the preaching "verbal vandalism." He owns a hot dog cart on Bay Street staffed by young women. Some evangelists, he says, "have actually gone up to the girls at the cart and called them sinners and fornicators— that's while they're trying to sell hot dogs."

Though the preaching is not new, the Rev. Baker's evangelical school was founded 17 years ago — townsfolk say the relatively recent gentrification of the business district brought the issue to a head. First, store owners and preachers tried a gentleman's agreement, under which evangelists could preach only on the move. It was hoped that they would walk up Bay Street and eventually turn a corner into the town park. That pact was short-lived. Then, last fall, the city passed an ordinance allowing arrests for "loud and unseemly" noises, including the human voice.

City attorney William B. Harvey III, who wrote the ordinance (based on a Maryland law that has withstood legal challenges), says if the preachers would just tone it down, they would be within the law. But the Rev. Mr. Baker insists that a quieter approach would undermine the very nature of street preaching. "You must be loud to reach people," he says.

The Diaphragm, Please

Indeed, in his evening classes, Mr. Baker teaches his small group of students the art of making a loud noise.

Pick an object about 75 feet away, he says, and aim your voice right at it. To project, speak from the diaphragm, not the throat; slow your words down, enunciate, and never turn your head in mid-sentence, or you'll break contact with your audience.

Students learn, too, how to ignore taunts. Mr. Asquith, who occasionally sermonizes outside a Camden, S.C., bar, says he has been doused with beer and sprayed with a garden hose. Stephen Williamson says he has been choked and spat upon.

The actual sermons, however, aren't taught in the classroom; they come instead from divine guidance or on-the-spot inspiration. On one Saturday, Mr. Asquith spotted a tattered American flag hanging from a Bay Street building. He had his sermon. "We're back to reclaim the street for America!" he thundered. "As long as there are red-blooded Americans, we'll be here to preach." He was arrested.

Mr. Rhett, the gallery owner, predicts the law's strict enforcement, coupled with the prospect of jail, will eventually quiet the preachers. "A little time in the can," he says, "works for most people." So far, most preachers have opted to pay the fine of $234 rather than be jailed. Mr. Baker, however, a repeat offender, is now serving out a short sentence in a state minimum-security prison.

But none of this deters Mr. Asquith. On the contrary, he hopes the town will eventually relent and resound the noise ordinance. Once that happens, he sees Beaufort becoming a site for an annual convention of street preachers — maybe 300 to 400 at a time. Then the town will sing a different tune, he says: "The hotels will be full — and the merchants will do a lot of business."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 1992
By R. Gustav Niehr
Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal.

Although largely known as a religious broadcaster, Pat Robertson during the past decade has been shrewdly building a mainstream media operation that some now compare with a smaller version of Turner Broadcasting System Inc.

Late Tuesday evening, the 62-year-old Mr. Robertson shocked both the business and religious worlds by agreeing to purchase long-troubled United Press International Inc. out of bankruptcy proceedings at an auction held in Rutland, Vt.

The move gives Mr. Robertson at least the skeleton of a national news organization to complement his existing nationwide broadcast operations. Equally important, the acquisition could provide Mr. Robertson with a higher profile and greater influence in the broader, secular marketplace.

Mr. Robertson wasn't available for an interview yesterday. Earlier, however, he said he planned to maintain the news service and wouldn't impose his religious views on it.

**Conservative Beliefs**

But some who know him well said they were surprised if Mr. Robertson didn't use UPI, a unit of Infotrendary Inc., to further his conservative political beliefs.

Mr. Robertson sees himself as a "political and economic educator for a very wide audience of people who agree with him religiously," said David Harrell, a professor of history at Auburn University and a biographer of Mr. Robertson. A Robertson-owned UPI, he added, would provide "an alternate news source for many people who have an anti-media bias, a feeling that the media is liberal-slated."

Mr. Robertson has certainly proved himself adept in the media world so far. The centerpiece of his broadcast operations is the Family Channel, which offers a 24-hour schedule of news, information, and entertainment programming. The channel reaches 53.2 million households and has become the envy of other broadcasters, who see it as an alternative example of marketing to a broad niche of people seeking entertainment that is free of sexual content and low on violence.

"In a day and age when families are concerned about what's even on the prime-time networks, the Family Channel provides a safe television haven," says Larry Gerbrandt, a senior analyst with Paul Kagan Associates.

The Family Channel has had an admirable showing in terms of both viewership and profitability. It had 1% of all cable viewers in the first quarter ended March 22, according to A.C. Nielsen Co. While that's not as much as its rivals - 3% for Nickelodeon and Turner Broadcasting's TNT network, and 4% for USA Network and Turner's TBS SuperStation - it isn't bad for what was once a narrowly focused religious channel.

And the Family Channel's cash flow and revenue are growing. In 1985, the channel had $31 million in operating cash flow and revenue of $128 million, according to estimates by Paul Kagan Associates. That compares with $111 million in operating cash flow and revenue of $61.9 million in 1988, according to the estimates.

Moreover, analysts say demographic trends bode well for the channel.

Mr. Robertson bought his first UHF television station in 1959. He rechristened the run-down station near Virginia Beach, Va., as WYAH; the call letters stood for "Yahweh," the Hebrew name for God.

The station aired its first broadcasts in October 1961. At about the same time, Mr. Robertson founded Christian Broadcasting Network Inc. and, in 1966, launched the "700 Club," a religious talk show that is now broadcast on the Family Channel and 200 other independent stations.

Like Ted Turner, Mr. Robertson early on saw the potential of cable. To broaden the reach of the "700 Club," Mr. Robertson in 1977 created a cable network, eventually called the CHN Cable Network. The operation, however, still consisted primarily of overtly religiously oriented programming, along with reruns of popular shows like "Wagon Train."

Like Mr. Turner, too, Mr. Robertson showed himself to be adept at niche marketing. In the 1980s, he began breaking away from his heavily religious format, changing his programming to appeal more to young families and nostalgic baby boomers. While Mr. Robertson retained the "700 Club," he replaced religious programming with secular fare.

Mr. Gerbrandt said the move of Robertson throughout the 1980s toward a more secular image for his operations - including changing the name to the Family Channel - was "very purposeful...very calculated."

"All of that was occurring at a time when religious broadcasters were ... imploding," he said. "Pat emerged largely unscathed" from the scandals that afflicted other religious broadcasters.

The Internal Revenue Service helped push the operation further in that direction. Because Mr. Robertson's Family Channel was becoming so commercially successful, federal authorities demanded he separate it from his tax-exempt Christian Broadcasting Network Inc. Accordingly, in 1990, the channel was sold to International Family Entertainment Inc., a partnership 18%-owned by Denver cable giant Tele-Communications Inc. and the rest owned by the Robertson family and employees. The partnership, valued at $400 million to $500 million, made an initial public offering April 25.

In the process, Mr. Robertson garnered about $100 million for his Christian Broadcasting Network, which sold stock that it received from the buy-out.

Since being sold, the Family Channel has become more ambitious in its programming, shifting to more original fare. Joining with firms in Europe, Australia and Canada, the company has been co-producing movies and dramatic and comedy series as a way of raising its profile as a serious entertainment venture.

"We can hook up with two foreign production companies and come up with a high-priced movie, and split the cost three ways," said Earl Weich, a spokesman for International Family Entertainment. "And we'll have the exclusive rights in our country."

**New Channel**

At a cable trade show in Dallas two weeks ago, Timothy Robertson, president of International Family Entertainment and Pat's son, said that company would widen its horizons by offering a new channel in January 1993. To be called the Game Channel, it will be a 24-hour interactive basic cable network featuring original and established game shows and will use 1-900 interactive telephone technology to attract viewers as contestants.

Prof. Harrell at Auburn sees both the development of the Family Channel and the UPI purchase as Mr. Robertson's efforts to show he is the businessman he has always claimed to be. During his unsuccessful run for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988, Mr. Robertson frequently tried to correct reporters who referred to him as a "televangelist."

Among fellow conservative religiousists, many of them viewers of his channel, Mr. Robertson had never been lumped together with other TV preachers, Prof. Harrell said. "He's viewed within that community as an entrepreneur."

"Laurie M. Grossman contributed to this article."
By Gustav Niebuhr
Washington Post Staff Writer

In a historic decision, U.S. Roman Catholic bishops voted yesterday to reject a pastoral letter that reaffirmed traditional roles for women in the church, following a two-day debate in which many bishops referred to a subject the Vatican has ruled off limits—women's ordination as priests.

Afterward, several bishops shook their heads in wonder over the decision, saying they could think of no other instance in U.S. Catholic history when church leaders rejected a pastoral letter, an official teaching document prepared by their fellow American bishops.

Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill., head of the committee that wrote the 28,000-word letter, said after the vote that the vast majority of bishops remain staunchly committed to church teaching that the priesthood cannot be opened to women. But he also said the debate showed "a number of bishops are very uncomfortable with the prohibition" on talking about the issue.

Bishops who voted against the letter, titled "One in Christ Jesus," cited strong opposition to it from women in their dioceses, who bestowed them with mail and phone calls. A two-thirds majority of all active bishops—190 votes—was necessary for the letter's approval by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in their semianual meeting at the Omni Shoreham Hotel here. But despite urgent appeals from conservative bishops who said defeat might be seen as laying the ax to the very roots of their authority, 110 bishops voted "no".

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ops cast ballots against the letter, while 137 voted in its favor.

By stark contrast, two pastoral letters in the 1980s, one on nuclear war and peacemaking, the other on the economy and social justice, passed with just nine dissenting votes each. Pastoral letters are written by ad hoc committees of the bishops' conference to offer guidance to Catholics in dealing with major social issues.

During the debate, Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee, a leading liberal among the bishops, said anger among churchwomen was such that the letter's approval would trigger "a tremendous crisis in the church."

"We're going to lose another generation, a generation of very wonderful women," he said.

But other bishops told their colleagues to stand fast. "There has to be some pain and alienation at times, and it's the price of teaching the truth," said Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile, Ala. "I think the truth about ordination is a hard truth that Catholics must face."

In the works nine years, the letter—which passed through four different drafts—addressed a broad array of issues, discussing family life and sexuality, and striking both liberal and conservative chords. It condemned violence and discrimination against women, while affirming opposition to birth control, abortion and premarital sex.

Sister Maureen Fiedler, coordinator of Catholics Speak Out in Hyattsville, said the 110 bishops who voted to defeat the letter "chose to stand with the people."

Later in the day, the bishops rallied to keep the document from extinction by voting, on a motion by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, archbishop of Chicago, to send it to the bishops' standing committees "for further study and dialog." Under an amendment, the document can be published, but without the weighty authority of a pastoral letter.

Asked at a news conference after the letter's defeat whether the "genie was out of the bottle" and lay people would now consider the question of women's ordination open to discussion, Imesch answered simply, "Yes." Bishop R. Pierre DuMaine of San Jose, Calif., said that "the debate will proceed . . . with us or without us."

Yet some traditionalists saw a silver lining in the day's events. Helen Hull Hitchcock, executive director of Women for Faith & Family, noted that a majority of bishops had supported the letter. The debate, she said, would help galvanize conservative bishops to reassert their authority against the influence of "radical feminism."

"I think they understand the issues a lot better," she said of the bishops. "It's odd, but we live in a cultural milieu where a Catholic bishop has to be courageous to teach Catholic teachings."