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- Owen Gleiberman, ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY



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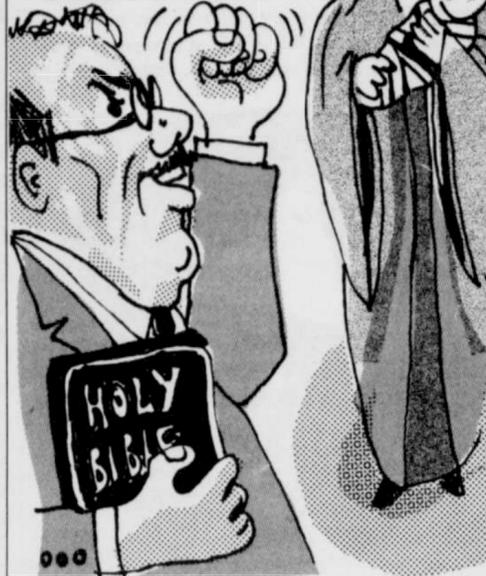
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SPIRITUALITY

Conference riles conservatives



Recent alerts from conservative wings within at least three denominational bodies—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and the United Methodist Church—call for disciplinary action, including possible dismissal, of national staff persons who attended "Re-Imagining," an event of the World Council of Churches' Decade in Solidarity with Women, held last November in Minneapolis, Minn. The conference drew over 2,000 women, including many lesbians. At the conference one speaker, concerned with the lack of direct discussion about lesbians in the church, invited "lesbian, bisexual and transsexual women" to join her on stage. The audience applauded as some 100 women came forward.

Critics say that the women at the conference discussed "destroying traditional Christian faith, adopting ancient pagan beliefs, rejecting Jesus' divinity, and creating a goddess in their own image," according to the conservative *Presbyterian Layman*. The Presbyterian Church U.S.A., which helped fund the conference and sent 20 national staff members, has already lost more than \$2.5 million in contributions because of the post-conference backlash, reported *The New York Times*. James V. Heidinger II, a conservative Methodist writing an editorial in *Good News Magazine*, said of the conference, "without question...this event was the most theologically aberrant I have ever read about." Another conservative, United Methodist Bishop Earl G. Hunt said of certain aspects of the conference, "No comparable heresy has appeared in the church in the last 15 centuries. Conservative concerns focus on the presence of openly lesbian women in the conference, the exploration of Sophia imagery, and the use of nontraditional liturgical forms within the context of the conference."

Episcopals say no, again

At the national policy-making meeting of the Episcopal church, delegates voted to reduce the status of a document on sexuality from a "pastoral teaching" to a "study document," according to the New York Times News Service. Also, a statement was added calling for chastity outside marriage and stating the church cannot condone same-sex orientation. The document, entitled "Continuing the Dialogue," affirms marriage as the standard for sexual relationships, but acknowledges that a significant minority of people are gay or lesbian and that the church must "respond pastorally" to people whose sexual behavior falls outside traditional norms.

A group of 45 bishops protested the changes made to the document, which had urged church members to welcome and recognize same-sex relationships. "Our lives and our experience as bishops have convinced us that a wholesome example to the flock of Christ does not exclude a

person of homosexual orientation," said the Rev. John Spong, bishop of Newark, N.J. The original draft supported same-sex relationships but discouraged ordination of lesbians and gay men in the church.

About 10,000 Episcopalians from the United States, Mexico and Central America attended the convention.

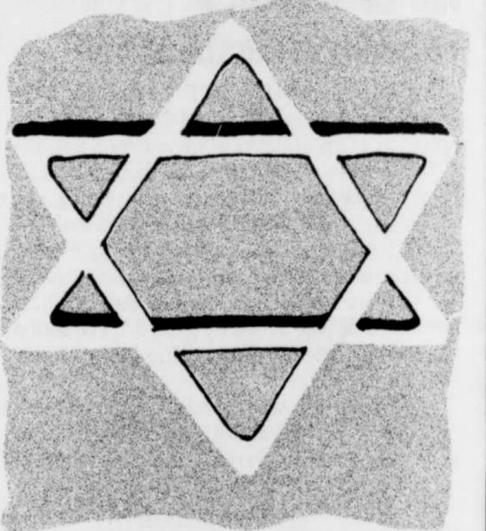
Presbyterians ban same-sex unions

The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. has forbidden its ministers to bless same-sex unions in an action taken by its highest governing body, the General Assembly, according to the interfaith quarterly *Open Hands*. As an amendment to the church's constitution, the action will take effect in a year if a majority of the regional bodies (presbyteries) approve it.

"This action was surprising," said Bob Patenaude, co-moderator of Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, "because last year's assembly took milder action." Another proposal would have amended the constitution to prohibit ministers and ordained laity from holding office if they were not "faithful in marriage or celibate." By the narrowest of margins this language was removed and less-restrictive language substituted.

What had promised to be the most controversial issue of this assembly—response to the "Re-Imagining" conference—was diffused. The committee in charge of reviewing it produced a report, nearly unanimously approved, calling for reconciliation.

OJA focus on opposing OCA



The Oregon Jewish Agenda will host a pre-election discussion on the strategies and tactics of effective political opposition to the Oregon Citizens Alliance from a Jewish perspective at 2 pm Sunday, Oct. 23, at 5204 NE Wisteria St., in Portland. In a recent survey the OJA found its membership most concerned about being a progressive voice in the Jewish community, being a Jewish voice in the progressive community, and opposing the OCA.

New pastor at MCC

The Rev. Roy A. Cole has been elected senior pastor of Metropolitan Community Church of Portland. An installation service will be held at 10 am Sunday, Oct. 30.

Cole is a graduate of Warner Pacific College in Portland and received a graduate diploma in Old Testament theology from the American Institute in Jerusalem, Israel. Most recently, he served for five years as pastor of MCC of the Sierras in Reno, Nev.

Compiled by the Rev. Matthew Nelson, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.