

The Small Magazine Review

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The Small Magazine At The Forefront of Religious Change

It's a new direction in spiritual consciousness! And what is the primary vehicle of its emergence? The small magazine - newsletters, journals, tabloids - all sorts and sundry formats that lend to the expression of New Age and other alternative religious perspectives.

To begin to understand the dynamics of the scene, we need to consider three factors. One is obvious to SMR readers: with the affordability of computers, publishing as a way of promulgating religious views is a live option for almost any individual or group so inclined.

Two, ours is a culture largely frustrated with the prevailing religious establishment. Contrary to the rise of secular consciousness predicted by most sociologists of religion earlier this century, masses are seeking alternative ways of viewing spirituality, ways that might speak to our times. But the renewal of fascination with the spiritual is not finding its voice through traditional outlets, the churches. And so, the religiously disenfranchised are, so to speak, "taking it to the streets."(1)

Three, vying to better oneself at the expense of the whole is recognized, by growing numbers, as an abysmal way to interact in an ever-shrinking, endangered world. With the urgency of cooperation large on our minds, New Age and other alternatives are eager to forefront cooperative models. Once one begins to delve into religious alternatives, one discovers a viable, flourishing chain of periodicals, each link exchanging with the next for advertising space or, in other ways, cooperating to support each other's efforts.

While mass-marketed alternative magazines, like *Body/Mind/Spirit* and *New Age Journal*, express the spit-and-polish of this new consciousness, the guts of religious change is happening at the grass-roots level. Thousands of small periodicals, each with its own flavor and focus show the trends of alternative cosmologies in their very gestation. And how does one discover those periodicals that speak to one's own interests? Follow the links of the chain! If one prefers a wiccan, or astrological, or alternative Chris-

tian spirituality, just by sampling the likely mags advertised in the various periodicals, one soon discovers the niche of periodicals that best address one's own tastes. Let's overview the variety of formats peppering the scene.

Regionals

Almost every area of the country has a tabloid devoted to local events, organizations, and businesses that nurture new spiritual paradigms. These papers are usually distributed, free of charge, at New Age bookstores, fairs, and health food stores. Regionals are almost always financed by their advertising revenues, which enables this free distribution. You'll find that each regional, which typically offers articles and news items, a calendar of local events, and a directory advertising nearby businesses, has its own personality which reflects the spiritual flavor of the locale. Fine examples of regionals are *Transformation Times* of Portland(2) and *The New Times*(3) of Seattle.

Promotional Periodicals

Often dual-purpose mags that promote the activities of a spokesperson or group - or serve as an extension of other commercial endeavors, such as *New Worlds*(4), published by Llewellyn Publications, a sizable metaphysical book publisher - they also often feature articles compatible with the particular slant of the enterprise. These periodicals, offered either for free or by

subscription, bolster related sales of products or services, while generating sideline revenue.

Organizational Periodicals

Ranging from magazines published under the auspices of a special interest group to church newsletters, these voice a certain religious or topical stance consistent with the beliefs of the main body. That some church newsletters may foster fresh religious viewpoints can startle many an estranged churchgoer more accustomed to the typical church fare. True, church newsletters, meant to share info among the members, are replete with the goings-on of the congregation. Still, many Unity Churches, for example, publish newsletters that voice a worldview far afield of the mainstream denominations.

And some church newsletters, while not abandoning the familiar chat, are outstanding alternative voices, specializing in a slant of religious expression one finds nowhere else. A prime example is *The Epistle*(5), the newsletter of the First Baptist Church of Montclair, NJ. For historical-critical and deconstructionist insights on the relevance of the Bible to contemporary events, *The Epistle* is unparalleled. This type of newsletter is usually free for the asking, although a small donation to cover postage may be required of nonmembers.

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Magazines Reviewed

Age(18) Alaska Quarterly Review(16) American Literary Review(19) American Writing(19) Anterior Poetry Monthly(17) Art Papers(8) Artpaper(5) Calyx(18) Case(6) Crosshairs(18) Elephant(14) Gila Queen's Guide to the Markets(14) Haigh Ashbury Literary Journal(16) Horizon Alice(8) Index on Censorship(5) The Laurel Review(10) Nona(12) Pacific Coast Journal(4) The People's Poetry(18) The Pullerfield Portfolio(17) The Red Brick Review(14) Redneck Review(2) Renditions(12) Santa Barbara Review(10) Willow Springs(9) Kayser Review(22) Xenophilia(10)

Scholarly Journals

Devoted to the forte of the publishing auspices, these "learned journals" usually emanate from university circles. They attract readers immersed in similar studies and are quite specific to their field. Typically available to the public through somewhat pricey subscription rates, these tend to be the cream of the crop in content and professionally produced - a joy to the scholar and a bit dry for those with more general tastes. A fine representative of this type of work is *Cross Currents: The Journal of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life*.(6)

Voice of the People

What a gamut! Each with its own distinctive voice, these range from mouthpieces for the rantings of a solo prophet to friendly, well-designed magazines that tend to feature the work of their regular authors. Sometimes wildly eccentric in content, irregular in frequency, and short-lived in duration, they can also be longstanding, regular, and of consistent quality, gathering a loyal readership. Quality varies from the clunkily-typed pages, photocopied and stapled together, to attractive desktop productions, published with aesthetic knack. Unique is the keyword here.

Typically financed through a combination of subscription income, advertising revenue, and the publisher's wallet, these are the pulse of the grassroots spiritual movement - enterprises of passion for a cause or a field. Reader participation is almost always welcomed, for these mags depend heavily on the receptivity of their readers for the community spirit they exude.

A Look Around the Niche

As publisher of a special niche mag - *Christian*New Age Quarterly*, a journal devoted to the dialog between Christianity and the New Age Movement - I've come to know the challenges and satisfactions of creating a periodical attuned to a specific concern within this new religious spectrum. Special niche endeavors like mine confront mind-

hogging hurdles, perhaps chief among them the reliance upon the stamina and ingenuity of a single person, or small core of volunteers. Financing such magazines is often a day-to-day scrape, a factor which undoubtedly contributes to the short life-span of many of these attempts.

One obstacle faced by the editor of a small, specialized periodical is the rise of simultaneous submissions. While formerly the norm was writers, acquainted with the particular style and subject of the mags to which they would submit, I have observed, especially in New Age circles, an increasing tendency of writers to generalize their submissions in an effort to appeal to many different readerships at once. The upsurge of mass-submitted material means more than repetition of the same piece among various periodicals closely related in the network. It means that developing a distinctive subject focus depends, more than ever before, upon establishing a core of regular writers, conversant enough with the subject and loyal enough to a periodical, to provide the very grist of it all.

Ironically, the very uniqueness that draws readers mitigates against usual marketing methods. Think of it! There is no ideal mailing list for a periodical like *Christian*New Age Quarterly* to borrow or buy! A new subject focus, developed for a select interest group, grows word-of-mouth, hit-or-miss. Both for readers to find the likes of *Christian*New Age Quarterly* and for publishers to market such, the links of the network which lead to and grow from each special niche are crucial.

The rewards of this special type of publishing are, however, immeasurable. One creates a voice that actively contributes to the cutting-edge of a paradigm shift. While voicing the concerns of a select group of readers, this trend in publishing depends upon the flow of new concepts, seeded and nourished within the network at large. To make my point specific, there is no other mag like *Christian*New Age Quarterly*. And yet there would be no *Christian*New Age Quarterly* without the myriad others of its kind within a spectrum of cooperative, tangent periodicals. A new way of envisioning ourselves and our cosmos is emerging, largely voiced by small magazines which are

mutually interactive and yet each unique.

Endnotes

- 1) Two excellent collections of essays informing on these themes are *New Age Spirituality: An Assessment*, Duncan S. Ferguson, ed., Westminster/John Knox Press (Louisville, 1993) and *Perspectives on the New Age*, James R. Lewis & J. Gordon Melton, eds., SUNY Press (Albany, NY, 1992).
- 2) *Transformation Times*, PO Box 425, Beavercreek, OR 97004.
- 3) *The New Times*, PO Box 51186, Seattle, WA 98115-1186.
- 4) *New Worlds*, PO Box 64383, St. Paul, MN 55164-0383.
- 5) *The Epistle*, First Baptist Church, Church Street & Trinity Place, Montclair, NJ 07042.
- 6) *Cross Currents*, College of New Rochelle, New Rochelle, NY 10805.

Catherine Groves is publisher/ editor of *Christian*New Age Quarterly: A Bridge Supporting Dialogue*. For info, send #10 SASE. Or sample an issue for \$3.50. *Christian*New Age Quarterly*, PO Box 276, Clifton, NJ 07011-0276.

Developing

Pacific Coast Journal, Vol. 1 #4, Spring 1993.
Edited by John S. French
4/yr; PO Box 355, Campbell, CA 95009-0355. \$10/year.

Arnold Skemer

A modest little journal with some interesting work. Noteworthy is James E. Walton's essay on the dilemma facing Afro-American male English majors and why there are so few of them. An interview with Cecile Pineda reveals a highly amusing writer, discussing her fiction and the female literary world. The poetry seems largely pedestrian but one "Ellen" is an exception. Anonymity is her right and seems somewhat in step with a journal that as yet lacks an obvious personality. But it is young yet and will hopefully develop one.

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