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Religion Watch is a newsletter monitoring trends in contemporary religion. For more than two decades we have covered the whole range of religions around the world, particularly looking at the unofficial dimensions of religious belief and behavior.

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## Everything new is old again for the religious vote?

The 2008 U.S. election was supposed to be different than the previous presidential races, at least when it came to religion and politics. This was the case for the Democrats especially, as the party made early strides to engage religious, even evangelical voters, and close the “faith gap” [see July/August RW]. Meanwhile, 2008 was the year in which the “new evangelicals” would make their political debut, stressing conciliatory issues, such as the environment, rather than rehashing the culture wars. But according to new polls and seasoned observers, the 2008 election may turn out to be very similar to the contentious 2004 election. At the mid-September meeting of the Religion Newswriters Association in Washington, DC, which RW attended, religion and politics specialist John Green presented a new survey showing that the basic patterns set in 2004 still hold: evangelicals are the most supportive of McCain, just as they were of George W. Bush, and Barack Obama has made few inroads into the evangelical community. The political configurations of mainline, Catholic and non-affiliated Americans are also similar to 2004.

But some surprising changes were revealed in the survey, which was conducted in the summer of 2008. For one thing, Hispanic Catholics and Protestants swerved back to a Democratic preference after showing some Republican sympathy in 2004. There was also a shift among all respondents toward stressing economic rather than social and foreign policy issues, especially among “traditionalist

Catholic” voters. In fact, it is the way in which these pressing economic matters can be addressed by religious values that may be decisive for voters from many faith groups, Green added.

Since Green found, somewhat to his surprise, that Obama had as little impact among evangelicals as John Kerry had in the 2004 election in his summer poll, than it might be expected that the selection of fellow evangelical Sarah Palin as McCain’s running mate would solidify that pattern. A new survey by the Pew Research Center released during the conference does show that, among all groups, it was the evangelicals who became the most favorable toward McCain as a result of the Palin selection. The percentage of voters saying that they back McCain strongly climbed from 17 percent in August to 25 percent currently, with the strongest growth being among white evangelical Protestants and Catholics. In fact, 27 percent of white evangelical supporters of McCain say they almost wish Palin could be the presidential nominee.

Meanwhile, Amy Sullivan, a writer for *Time* magazine, had to revise her optimistic view of young evangelicals serving as a Democratic vanguard. Sullivan, who has written books and advised candidates on the evangelical political change, admitted at the conference that events since last summer, especially starting with the conventions, sent many evangelical voters back to the 2004 mindset. The significant drop in Republican identification among young evangelicals, declining from 52 percent

in 2004 to 40 percent in 2008, may have meant that they were becoming independent or undecided rather than going to Obama.

Even before the Republican convention, there were signs of retrenchment among evangelicals. Sullivan said that Rick Warren, seen as an important representative of the new centrist evangelicals, appeared to pull back from his advocacy of non-culture war issues (the environment, world poverty) during his forum where he interviewed Obama and McCain. Sullivan added that Warren had come under pressure and criticism

from more conservative evangelicals to return to a focus on culture war issues, such as abortion, gay marriage and embryonic stem cell research. On the Democratic side, there has been a similar movement of retrenchment. The attempt to moderate pro-choice language at the Democratic convention—seen in a minor change to the party's platform to work to prevent unwanted pregnancies—has been rolled back as significant elements in the party have attacked the pro-life policies of McCain and Palin. Sullivan concluded that while Obama hired religion advisors, his campaign never gave them many

resources on the ground; since the convention, the campaign has “cut the budget in their religious

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While Obama hired religion advisors, his campaign never gave them many resources on the ground.”

outreach.” If Democrats lose in November, there will be pressure to further downplay the appeal to religious voters, Sullivan speculates.

## Former Muslim Christians form fragile, yet growing networks in North America

Ex-Muslims who have become Christians are increasingly forming a movement of “Muslim-background believers” in North America, reports *Christianity Today* (September). While there are few reliable figures for the number of ex-Muslims who have converted to Christianity, either in their home countries or in the U.S. and Canada, there are at least 50 organizations that seek to minister to such believers. Some of these converts have tried to integrate themselves into American congregations, but the feeling of being a minority has led these new believers to find community often in “reclusive urban groups of 10–

20 believers.” Last fall, Muslim-background believers' leaders convened at conferences and summits in Toronto, Detroit, Indianapolis, Atlanta, Dallas, and Washington, DC.

But many of these fellowships are fragile and prone to schism and dissolution, writes Christopher Lewis. These struggles over leadership and ethnic tensions are most evident in the more diverse Arab and Asian groups. In New York City, more than 10 groups have folded in one generation. Many ex-Muslim Christians are “loners,” either marginalized in American congregations or relying on the Internet for their

spiritual needs. There is more stability in the monolithic Iranian churches, which are the most numerous and organized, and are linked (however unofficially) with a growing underground evangelical movement in Iran. But it was only recently that Iranian congregations have been organized and united enough to plant other congregations in the U.S., through the California-based Iranian Christian Church (ICC). The ICC has also established an international television ministry that links believers to their counterparts in Iran. (*Christianity Today*, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)

# Property development brings new partnerships and challenges to urban congregations

Urban congregations are increasingly redeveloping their property for profit, and in the process are forming new partnerships with secular organizations, as well as changing the way they interact with their own members, according to new research. At the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) meeting in Boston in August, which **RW** attended, Nadia Mian of the New School presented a study of congregations in New York City that have become more entrepreneurial by engaging in property development. While churches and other religious organizations have been involved in property and housing development for decades, “presently, more and more churches are selling their air rights and property to developers in various schemes that result in housing, commercial and retail projects,” according to Mian. In

her research, which is published in the September issue of *Urban Studies Journal*, she counted at least 30 different real estate projects involving congregations in New York. “The trend continues, as one developer working with a church will seek out more churches to partner with, in order to gain access to scarce property in Manhattan.” Mian added that this trend is also evident in other American cities.

Religious institutions involved in real estate tend to move in two directions—towards market-rate condominiums/commercial property or affordable/senior housing. Although religious organizations can act independently, most partner either with other religious or secular groups (such as a corporation or government), implying new forms of cooperation. These congregations tend to learn from

one another, and through sharing “information and even resources, they begin to act in ways that are cooperative as opposed to individualistic. Pastors interact with other churches in the community to share knowledge about the development process, architects, finances and other issues,” Mian writes. She adds, however, that in such projects “there is a lack of emphasis on and consideration of preservation and historical conservation efforts” (especially since landmarking status tends to make reconstruction difficult). Another pitfall that Mian finds among congregations is that as churches become more entrepreneurial (and take on additional real estate projects), they drive away the people they are trying to help, losing congregants as the community becomes gentrified and too expensive.

## CURRENT RESEARCH

► **The widespread view that Christians, especially evangelicals, have among the highest divorce rates in the US may be rooted more in “moral fears” and culture wars among and between conservative Christians and non-believing critics than in actual fact, according to sociologists**

**Bradley Wright, Christine Zozula and Bradford Wilcox.** In recent years, both Christian leaders and groups and atheist organizations have cited research, often conducted by the evangelical pollster George Barna, showing that conservative Protestants have the highest divorce rates in the country. The researchers, who presented a paper on their findings at the ASR meeting in Boston in early August, note that Barna’s research is easily disputable, since he tends

to define Christians as “born-again” evangelicals and collapse non-born-again Christians (such as mainline Protestants and Catholics) into the non-believer category. Since in many studies mainline Protestants and Catholics do have somewhat lower divorce rates than evangelicals, the Barna research appears to show the “Christian” divorce problem. Wright, Zozula and Wilcox note that most sociological research continues to find that non-affiliated Americans have higher

divorce rates than those who are religiously involved, including evangelicals.

They examine data from six different data sets up to 2004 that recorded respondents' religious affiliations and level of religious activity, and found that those with no affiliation (51 percent) had higher divorce rates than Catholics (34 percent), Jews (39 percent), mainline Protestants (39 percent) and evangelicals (45 percent). The gap between believer and non-believer widens when taking into account religious participation, such as church attendance. The paper adds that the media and the general populace have also tended to focus on the higher divorce rates among Christians: in an experiment conducted by the researchers it was found that news readers are more likely to pay attention to articles critical of or negative about Christians than those that are positive. Wright, Zozula and Wilcox conclude that "bad news" about Christians and divorce is popular, because for Christian leaders it serves to spur Christians into better behavior, while for secularist critics such supposedly higher divorce rates reveal the hypocrisy and failure of religion. But Christian leaders playing on the "moral fears" of believers may have the unintended consequence of discouraging and alienating them from their faith, the paper concludes

► **A high number of congregations in the New**

**Orleans area are still not functioning three years after Hurricane Katrina hit the city, according to a study by William H. Day of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, which was presented at the ASR meeting in Boston.** In surveying 1,503 congregations in five parishes (or districts) in the New Orleans area, it was found that 50 percent of churches were not functioning one year after the hurricane (meaning that they were not operating anywhere outside this area either). Two years after Katrina, one-third of these congregations were not operating. Today, three years after the catastrophe, that percentage still holds. Most congregations have significantly less people attending than they did in the period before Katrina hit the city.

In studying those congregations that not only survived, but actually flourished in the years after Katrina, Day found that they held several characteristics in common. They were not necessarily megachurches, since these large congregations were as adversely affected as many other churches. But the determination of churches to survive and grow was an important factor in these flourishing congregations. Those congregations with ties to NGOs and other church groups and social organizations across the country also tended to maintain themselves. Day pointed out that churches that maintained themselves often had to attract new people to replace those that left the area. So, for instance,

Celebration Church had a 2,000 attendance weeks before Katrina hit, but 65 percent of the people had not returned in the months after the hurricane. Today, the church again has a 2,000 attendance, although most of this growth consists of people who did not attend before Katrina.

► **Although the events of September 11 were often reported to strengthen spirituality among many Americans, including youth, a recent study finds only modest and short-lived effects on young adults' religious and spiritual lives after the attacks.** The study was presented at the ASR meeting in Boston in August, which RW attended. The study, conducted by Jeremy E. Uecker (University of Texas at Austin), which is to be published in the September issue of the journal *Sociological Spectrum*, used longitudinal research on 20,745 American adolescents from 1994 to 1995 and then again from July 2001 to May 2002.

Although Uecker found that the 9/11 attacks evoked a turn to religion and spirituality among many Americans, including young adults, such a shift did not "drastically alter the religious and spiritual makeup of the young adult population. Only modest differences were noted in young adults' levels of religiosity and spirituality after the attacks, and the differences were generally short-lived," Uecker says. But there were differences in the effect

of 9/11 among different groups of young adults. Those from religious traditions with the most individualistic adherents—Catholicism, mainline Protestantism and the unaffiliated—were the most likely to increase their religiosity and spirituality after the attacks. In contrast, evangelical and black Protestants actually showed declines in their religiosity and spirituality after these events.

► **Megachurches continue to diversify their offerings, as they start more satellite congregations, increasingly encourage small group ministries and take up social concerns, according to a recent study.** In an update study to two previous surveys of megachurches in 2000 and 2005, Scott Thuma and Warren Bird find that megachurches continue to grow in size and are doing well financially. In the new survey, 30.1 percent of the megachurches reported that they have started services at a satellite church in another location within the last five years. Megachurches are also continuing to plant or help plant new churches (from 70 percent in 2005 to 77 percent in 2008); those with satellites were in fact more likely to plant new churches.

There are signs that megachurches are becoming increasingly independent of denominations (and many of them are independent to begin with), as they invest more in homegrown pastor training

conferences, educational literature, and worship and music material. Perhaps the greatest growth is in the area of small group ministries; there is a 34 percent increase in megachurches making small groups a central component of their Christian nurture and spiritual formation efforts between 2005 and 2008. The rate of megachurches that say they are “working for social justice” has jumped from 34 percent in 2000 to 51 percent in 2008. The megachurches were found not to be overtly political: the recent survey confirmed the earlier findings that about 16 percent of megachurches had joined with other churches in political activity over the last five years. (The new study is available at: <http://www.hartfordinstitute.org>.)

► **A recent survey suggests there is a change of mind among many Americans about whether churches and other religious organizations should be directly involved in politics.** A Pew survey finds a “narrow majority” of the public agreeing that congregations should keep out of political matters. This is a change from just a few years ago, when majorities of Americans had voiced support for religious institutions getting politically involved. The survey finds that most of the change has happened among political conservatives. Four years ago, only 30 percent of conservatives believed that congregations should abstain from political involvement. Fifty percent of conservatives express

this view today. Two other signs of the declining support for such involvement is the small, but significant increase since 2004 of people saying they are uncomfortable with politicians talking about their religious faith—from 40 to 46 percent. While the Republicans have been seen as the most religious party, that is also changing; the survey finds 38 percent viewing the Democratic Party as friendly to religion; two years ago only 26 percent said that. As a result of these changes, Republicans and Democrats are no longer so sharply split on the question of the relation between faith and politics.

► **The growth of religious diversity is largely related to the human drive to reduce the risk of contagious disease by intermarriage, according to University of New Mexico biologists Corey Fincher and Randy Thornhill.** *The Economist* (August 2) cites a study by the two researchers in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society* that argues that in places where disease is rampant, religious differences served to reduce one group mixing with another and spreading viruses. In seeking to show that patterns of behavior promoting group exclusivity will be stronger in disease-ridden areas, Fincher and Thornhill calculated the average number of religions (31, with a range including 159 in Brazil to 15 in Canada) against the average number of parasitic diseases found in each country (200). When taking into account population and

area differences for each country, they still found a strong correlation between the number of religions in a place and how disease ridden it is. "There is less than one chance in 10,000 that it has come about accidentally," the magazine reports. The researchers found anthropological data showing that people in religiously diverse (and disease-ridden) places moved around to different parts of the world much less than those in healthier and religiously monolithic societies. The implication that religious diversity causes people to keep to themselves more (avoiding germs from the "infidel") can be applied to other forms of group difference, such as language and xenophobic attitudes, the researchers conclude.

▶ **The growing involvement of Christian youth and young adults in short-term missions and mission trips has had a significant influence in their subsequent interest in activism and volunteerism for various social causes, according to researchers from Arizona State University**, who presented a paper at the American Sociological Association, also meeting in Boston in August. Congregations are increasingly sponsoring their youth and young adults in short-term mission trips consisting of anything from a few days (such as "alternative spring breaks") to a few months to work in social service projects, sometimes in partnership with a non-profit organization (such as Habitat for Humanity). While some studies

have shown a negligible role of these programs in forming youth religious and social involvement, in comparing participants with non-participants, the researchers find clear social effects among those involved in such trips. Sixty-six percent of participants were involved in volunteering for social programs 12 months after their trips, with 12 percent continuing such efforts two years after the trips. In all, 16 percent of participants were involved in activism, and 82 percent in volunteerism. Those who participated in the mission programs were 1.4 times more likely to be involved in activism than those who did not participate.

▶ **The number of Muslims in Germany reached 3.5 million in 2007, the Islam-Archiv-Deutschland Institute reports (August 17)**. This is based on the results of a yearly survey conducted by this Muslim research center. According to the same survey, there were 206 "classical", fully equipped mosques in Germany and approximately 2,600 other, simpler places of Islamic worship. A total of 284,000 Muslims visit them daily, while 539,000 attend Friday prayers in ordinary times. The survey finds that 1.1 million Muslims hold German citizenship, with around 21,000 of them being born Muslims. In 2007, some 2,400 Germans converted to Islam. (Islam-Archiv-Deutschland, [www.islamarchiv.de](http://www.islamarchiv.de))

▶ **Overall, religion and Catholicism continue to decline in France, as shown by research based on a sample of more than 10,000 respondents, according to a study in the French National Institute for Demographic Studies' (INED) newsletter *Population & Sociétés* (July–August)**. While only five percent of men and three percent of women above age 65 say they have no religion, the percentages are 27 percent and 23 percent, respectively, in the 18–24 age range. And the level of practice of those above 65 is low: 68 percent of men and 55 percent of women in the 65–79 age range never attend a religious service (except for baptisms, weddings and funerals). Among people who report belonging to a religion, there are two million Muslims, a lower figure than most previous estimates. The level of religious practice is higher among Muslims, since 34 percent of Muslim males in France claim to visit a place of prayer at least twice a month. (*Population & Sociétés*, INED, 133 boulevard Davout, 75980 Paris, France – [www.ined.fr](http://www.ined.fr))

▶ **There is a considerable split between belief and practice among Iranian Muslims, particularly those receiving a university education, according to Iranian sociologist Hossein Gadozgar of the University of York**. Gadozgar's paper (given in his absence due to visa problems) at the American Sociological Association meeting in Boston reported on findings from a survey

he conducted among 305 undergraduates on their beliefs and practices. Islamic authorities in Iran from the 1990s to the present day have charged that university students are increasingly irreligious. But the survey does not find irreligion as much as Islam moving to a private sphere among these students. Compared to their high school years, the college students reported that there was a decrease in their level of communal prayer, but that they maintained their level of individual prayer. While this non-institutional practice is seen as a sign of growing irreligiosity by the authorities, students tend to see it as an improvement over their previous communal practice. Both Sunni and Shia Muslims are “reacting to the state monopoly [of Islam] in similar and negative ways,” though the Sunnis have a lower level of public practice, Gadozgar writes. This move to private practice is not confined to students, with other segments of

Iranian society also reflecting this change.

► **The perception of the Muslim world being besieged and under attack from the West, followed by an awareness of the plight of Muslim populations in various parts of the world, are the root causes of commitment to jihadist militancy among young Muslims in France, writes researcher Luis Martinez in the Spring 2008 issue of *Cultures & Conflicts*.** The research is based on interviews conducted with young people of North African descent who are willing either to go and fight in Iraq or Afghanistan, or carry out attacks in the West. Jihad is justified by those young people as being nothing more than self-defense. The Internet plays a key role in propagating jihadist views, especially since it is considered as a more reliable source of information than “Western-controlled” media.

However, when it comes to attacks against civilians, Martinez finds an initial reluctance.

Similarly, a number of interviewees deny the legitimacy of targeting people in countries that are not under Western attack. For the time being, a majority of jihadist supporters in France seem to favor only defensive jihad (i.e. in Muslim countries where foreign troops are present). Those limitations tend, however, to disappear among people who went to fight in faraway places and have returned. However, Martinez concludes that, for a number of people whom he interviewed, going overseas in order to fight might remain a dream: as long as they do not take that step, mosques and Islamic scholars may still have a restraining influence on them. (*Cultures & Conflicts*, 34 rue de Montholon, BP 20064, 75421 Paris Cedex 08, France – [www.conflits.org](http://www.conflits.org))

## Salafism: the real new insider among Egyptian Muslim Brothers

Since the several attempts to establish the Wasat party as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood since 1997, innovation inside the Islamic organization seemed to be guided by a liberal, even a democratic, spirit. But this tendency is now being reversed by the assertion of a strong conservative Salafist current inside the organization. Traditionally, Egyptian Salafism

often developed outside and as a rival (sometimes state-supported) to the Muslim Brothers. During what has been called the “Cairo spring,” the emergence of serious American pressure on the Egyptian regime to open up the political system and the appearance of an Islamic blogosphere contesting the old guard hegemony and criticizing a martial, authoritarian militant culture gave the impression that the trajectory of the Muslim Brothers might be moving towards a more liberal stance.

This seems now to have been an illusion.

A liberal trend exists through the alliance of political democrats (Abdel Meneim Abou al-Futûh being the unique representative of this group among the Guidance Office, the executive body leading the organization) and a new generation of militants searching for a “downsized” political organization that was less authoritarian and capable of granting some space for individual autonomy. But it is not on the rise

anymore, neither at the elite level, nor at the level of the rank and file. Four factors explain this stagnation: first of all, the liberals need a certain level of political openness; secondly they are more exposed than Salafism to political repression (more strict in religious terms, but less keen to get involved in politics); thirdly, they mobilize on a discourse of openness (among non-Islamic actors inside Egyptian society; among non-Islamic categories at a conceptual level), but this openness is not based on an ideological *aggornamento*; and, last but not least, they lack the financial support that their rivals inside the organization have.—*By Patrick Haenni, senior researcher, Religioscope Institute*

### **Tripoli : a breakthrough in the Sunni-Shiite confessional divide?**

A recent memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed August 18 between the Shiite party Hezbollah and certain Salafist clerics from Tripoli in North Lebanon reveals the emergence of a new brand of Salafism, more independent of the local political scene and less focused on an exacerbated confessional discourse. The MOU stands in contract with the process of radicalization of confessional identities in Lebanon after the 2006 Israeli war on Hezbollah. From Hezbollah's point of view, the move is quite clear: establish new channels of influence inside the Sunni community in a context of hardening relations with its

Islamic Sunni counterpart, the Jamaa Islamiyya. The situation is highly different for the Salafist groups, who are closely connected to the Future Current, Saudi Arabia's and America's ally, and who interact with a radicalized Sunni constituency still traumatized by the West Beirut takeover at the beginning of May by Hezbollah's fighters.

This MOU has to be understood as the result of two processes: the crisis between this movement and the Future Current and the diversification of the Salafist movement in Lebanon. The relation between the Future and the Salafist leaders is suffering from two major points of tension. The first one is the incapacity of the Future Current to deliver, due to its weak influence on some of the security bodies in charge of the surveillance of radical Islamic groups, as promised in an informal deal during the parliamentary elections of 2005. Secondly, despite its informal political alliance, the Future Current works to undermine Salafist groups' influence by relying on clerical networks close to the Egyptian Islamic University of al-Azhar and by preparing to reinforce their alliance with the Islamic counterweight to the Salafist movement: the Jamaa Islamiyya, which is close to the Muslim Brother school of thought.

This context of discontent about the ties between Salafists and the Future Current increased the internal polarization of the Salafist groups. If the dominant trend, represented by the leadership of

the al-Shahâl family, is still the key player among Lebanese Salafists, it is facing the expansion of a serious challenger: the Kuwait-supported Jama'iyya al-Ihiyya al-Turâth al-Islâmiy headed by Safwan al-Zoabi, a young dynamic religious entrepreneur who wants to reform the Salafist experience. His goals are twofold: to go beyond mere teaching of religious principles and develop a new presence in the social field through expanding development-oriented local initiatives. This new Salafist current was able to capitalize on the internal divisions and conflicts inside the historical wing directed by Dai Islam al-Shahal. It disagrees with its radical confessional orientation and believes in the necessity of dialogue with its Shiite counterparts— with Hezbollah not least among them. The memorandum was quickly frozen after heavy Saudi pressure. Still, it is a new blow to the Future Current's domination of the Sunni community a few months before the parliamentary elections of 2009, where the formal domination on the political system might switch from Sunni to Shiite hands, a first in Lebanon's history. — *By Patrick Haenni*

### **Russian Orthodox Church versus the West?**

Western countries apply their principles only when they suit their interests, and Russia should have the ability to resist attempts to make it subservient to the West, said Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, the deputy head of the Moscow



Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations (DECR), in late August on a Russian television channel (*Interfax*, Sept. 2). There have been a number of statements from Russian Orthodox public figures in recent years asserting Russia's right to develop its own model, instead of adopting Western lifestyles or political and social models. In 2005, the influential DECR chairman, Metropolitan Kirill, had blessed the release of a "Russian Doctrine", written by some 70 Orthodox conservative thinkers. They stated that Russia is entitled to its rightful place in the current world (dis)order and should at the same time strive to promote its "spiritual sovereignty," proposing what they described as "tradition-based modernization."

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**The Moscow Patriarchate is concerned about the spread of secularism in Europe.**

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This cannot be reduced to a simple alignment along the Russian government's lines: while such cooperation is strongly in evidence, the Russian Orthodox Church also attempts to put its own concerns forward. Several of its leading members see the Western model as morally flawed

and tending toward materialism. Beside geopolitical concerns related to U.S.–European influence and the perceived need to counterbalance the trends toward global dominance by the West, the Moscow Patriarchate is also concerned about the spread of secularism in Europe. At a dialogue meeting that took place on July 24 in Kiev (Ukraine) between representatives of the Orthodox Church and of the Europeans People's Party (Christian Democrats), the secretary for church and society relations at the DECR, Fr. Georgy Ryabykh, claimed that the spirit of "aggressive secularism" in Western Europe was "similar to the Soviet course in [the] religious field," though in a liberal variant (*Interfax*, July 31). Such views explain why some high-level churchmen in the DECR, while wary of alleged Roman Catholic penetration on Russian territory, have been proposing a "strategic alliance" with the Roman Catholic Church in order to counter secularizing trends in Europe.

### **Pentecostal women find new voice in public sphere in Kenya**

Pentecostal women are gaining a new place in the politics of Kenya, both on an official and unofficial basis, according to Damaris Parsitau of Egerton University. Parsitau, who was presenting a paper at the ASR meeting in Boston, said that Pentecostal female clergy in

particular are moving into Kenyan public life and taking on new political roles. Many of these women are influenced by Bishop Margaret Wanjiru, who serves in Kenya's Parliament. Wanjiru was the first woman to be ordained a bishop in Kenya. Also influential on a more unofficial basis is Teresa Wairimu, a well-known evangelist, teacher and healer who has increasingly laced her sermons and "prophetic utterances" with social and political messages.

For instance, Wairimu has recently attacked tribal and ethnic clashes and corruption during elections. Wairimu and other women "use their public speaking in Pentecostalism to insert themselves in the public sphere," Parsitau added. She noted that these female leaders and their women followers becoming involved in politics are often single and often face discrimination by male politicians. Women mentored by these leaders have engaged in a new wave of activism, even taking to the streets in protests. These Pentecostal women have also formed political networks, which include men, that are "transferring the spirit to the public sphere," Parsitau said.

## FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

■ The password for access to the **RW** archives, at: [www.religionwatch.com](http://www.religionwatch.com), remains: **Jubilee**.

■ A special section on “Future directions in the sociology of religion” in the journal **Social Forces** (June) suggests that Islam is becoming an important concern for up-and-coming scholars. Four of the eight articles in the section deal with some facet of Islam, including a study of “fundamentalism” among young Muslims in Egypt and Saudi Arabia and another one on women activists in Indonesia. Aside from Islam, Christian Smith writes in an introductory article that other issues likely to occupy a good deal of scholarly attention include genetics, emotions, ecology, the role of elites in religion, cross-national religions, and beliefs. This last topic may seem obvious for sociologists studying religion, but Smith maintains that more attention is given to behavior and practices than to the actual processes and content of belief. Other articles of interest in this issue include an examination of secularization among elite scientists and a study of the social and genetic influences on religious attitudes and practices. For more information on this issue, write: *Social Forces*, Rm. 168, Hamilton

Hall, CB 3210, Dept. of Sociology, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3210.

■ A special issue of the evangelical **Outreach Magazine** reports on the 100 largest and fastest-growing churches in the U.S. The magazine helpfully lists the churches by region, denomination (or lack of one, since the majority of these churches are non-denominational) and size. Coming in first in the “largest” category is Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Houston with 43,500 attenders, followed by Second Baptist Church in Houston with 23,659. The fastest-growing church is the Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama, which grew by 72 percent, or 3,418 attenders. The issue also includes articles profiling several of these churches. For more information on this issue, write: *Outreach*, 2230 Oak Ridge Way, Vista, CA 92081 or visit the website at: [www.OutreachMagazine.com](http://www.OutreachMagazine.com).

■ The summer issue of the **Review of Faith & International Affairs** covers the well-trodden ground of religious freedom and U.S. foreign policy with a variety of articles that deserve a wider reading. Much of the issue could serve as a “wrap-up” of the issues and developments on this matter that unfolded during the Bush administration, with some forecasting about what may happen after the November election. Brian Grim’s article looks at the relationship between religious freedom and social well-being, drawing on extensive

international data. He finds that religious freedom is often “bundled” with other freedoms conducive to democracy and that religious freedom tends to reduce conflict by removing grievances religious groups have toward government and their fellow citizens.

José Casanova takes a somewhat different tack, arguing that the U.S. movement for religious freedom can best avoid conflict with other countries by recognizing the “creative tension” between individual religious freedom and the need of groups to maintain their cultural and confessional identity. Other articles include an examination of how religious freedom has found a place in U.S. national security, starting with the Clinton administration, but accelerating under Bush, and how a host of unofficial organizations, including Human Rights Watch, have “institutionalized” the concern with religious freedom. But an article by Tad Stahnke notes that even as religious freedom concerns have gained a place in U.S. policy, the ability of America to encourage these values in many parts of the world is shrinking. For more information on this issue, visit the journal’s website at: <http://www.cfia.org>.

■ The findings of the extensive Baylor Surveys of Religion are succinctly explained and expanded on in Rodney Stark’s new book, **What Americans Believe** (Baylor University Press, \$24.95). Stark draws on all three waves of the surveys (2005–06) to discuss and challenge

conventional wisdom on everything from megachurches (they really are not impersonal places of worship), denominationalism (it is not extinct), atheism (it is more embattled and has fewer adherents than claimed) and gender (the greater rate of religious belief and practice among women may not all be due to socialization) to religious media consumption (consumer behavior exposes many secular Americans to religion) and civic participation (there is more of it than popularly believed by social critics). In his introduction, Stark compares the surveys to his early 1960s surveys, noting that the themes of stability and diversity underlie many of these findings. Many of Stark's key concepts, such as the value of competition and strict standards in church growth, as well as new research that adds to the Baylor findings, are woven together in an engaging manner.

■ *The Easternization of the West* (Paradigm, \$36.51) by British sociologist Colin Campbell has been published for several months, but has not received much attention. Yet Campbell's view that Western civilization is being replaced by Eastern religious and cultural worldviews is a unique one that will likely be hotly contested. For one thing, much of the evidence Campbell marshals for his argument can be read in different ways. The decline of involvement in

institutional religion, the growth of spiritual seeking, the syncretism of beliefs and the new interest in environmentalism can be—and have been—explained by theories of both secularization and desecularization. For instance, it could be argued that it is *because* people have lost faith in organized religion and a transcendent God that they have, in many cases, elevated the importance of the environment and given it a special meaning. Other critics will focus on the way Campbell tends to view any deviation from orthodox Christian belief as being Eastern in nature (even viewing the upsurge of charismatic Christianity within the framework of its affinity to New Age tendencies), thereby glossing over the Western roots of much religious innovation and heterodoxy. Campbell insists that an underground Eastern current has long co-existed with predominantly Western values. He painstakingly traces how a conjunction of forces came together in the 1960s to force this Eastern current to resurface and then be generalized to the wider public, largely via the New Age movement. Campbell concludes that Western civilization's loss of influence to an Eastern worldview was inevitable, given its failure to provide meaning to the lives of younger generations shaped by societal disenchantment and secularization.

**On/File: A continuing survey of people, groups, movements and events impacting religion**

**Peter Zhao** has become one of the most important dissenting voices in China, publicly arguing that Christianity and its related ethical system is the key to economic growth. Zhao, a Communist Party member and advisor to the Chinese Central Committee, is among a group of Chinese intellectuals who are looking to the West to find the secret of economic prosperity. He has written over 200 articles (with such titles as “Market economies with churches and market economies without churches”) to explain his theories of how Christianity leads to long-term economic success. Zhao, who became a Christian after a visit to the U.S., has so far been allowed to speak his mind about the relation of economic growth to Christianity, even when it comes to criticizing China. He says that whereas Chinese who get wealthy tend to become complacent, Christians have a higher motivation to use their wealth for the betterment of others. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*, August 8)

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## About Religion Watch

*Religion Watch* looks beyond the walls of churches, synagogues and denominational officialdom to examine how religion really affects, and is affected by, the wider society.

It is through monitoring new books and approximately 1000 U.S. and foreign periodicals (including newspapers from across the country, as well as newsletters, magazines and scholarly journals, as well as the Internet), and by first-hand reporting, that *Religion Watch* has tracked hundreds of trends on the whole spectrum of contemporary religion.

Published every two months, the twelve page newsletter is unique because it focuses on long-range developments that lead to, and result from, world current events.

*Religion Watch* does much more than just summarize articles. To provide you with solid background information on the trends presented, we also do research, reporting and analysis on many subjects. A special section in each issue keeps an eye on new books, special issues and articles of publications and new periodicals in religion. We also profile new organizations and prominent figures that are making an impact on the religious scene.

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