January-February 2009
volume 24 number 2

RELIGION WATCH
A NEWSLETTER MONITORING TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGION

INSIDE

Catholic identity remains front and center in 2008 and beyond

The controversies and excitement surrounding the US election season have obscured trends and issues that are unfolding in world Catholicism—from the rehabilitation of the Jesuits to the growing concerns over the issue of identity in Catholic charitable organizations, writes John Allen in the *National Catholic Reporter* (December 26). Allen cites such neglected news stories as renewed Catholic activism and outspokenness on immigration, and October's bishops' Synod on the Bible that were virtually ignored by the media due to the US presidential election. Focusing more on long-range developments, he notes that in 2008, Catholic–Muslim relations received a boost in November (it so happens, on election day) when Catholic and Muslim leaders signed a joint statement recognizing the right to religious freedom. On the Catholic–Jewish front, last year marked a series of setbacks, including Pope Benedict XVI's decision to revive the Latin liturgy, which included a prayer for the conversion of Jews. While the Vatican removed some of this language, critics were dissatisfied. Soon after, the US bishops removed a line from their catechism on the eternal validity of the covenant God made with the Jews, followed a few months later by the pope's defense of his predecessor, Pius XII, whom some Jews fault for his alleged silence on the Holocaust.

Continued on page two

Black churches follow congregants in exodus from cities

While blacks have been following whites in fleeing cities for the suburbs for several decades, it is only recently that African-American churches been following their members in their exodus from urban areas, according to research by Michael Emerson of Rice University. *Christianity Today* (January) cites Emerson's research as showing that the change is most evident among second-generation blacks who, unlike their parents, don't feel an attachment to cities and to the houses of worship there. This trend breaks with the tradition of urban black churches having a large share of commuter members. Suburban churches are also viewed as more attractive because of the contemporary services they hold and such ministries as after-school programs.

The dilemma is that urban black churches have also been important social service centers, and as they move with their members to the suburbs, there are few social resources left, aside from small, poor storefront churches and the occasional megachurch that attracts suburban commuters. The outward-moving trend is likely to continue, according to Emerson. What may happen in some cities is that poorer residents will be pushed out of central urban areas by gentrification to the outskirts and "inner ring" suburbs, where they may move back into the sphere of churches again, Emerson says.

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.

RELIGIOSCOPE
This is a publication of Religioscope Institute

Continued from page one

Other emerging trends include a lessening of the tensions between the papacy and the relatively liberal Jesuit order, evidenced by Benedict appointing Jesuits to key posts. The effort to revive Catholic identity in the church's institutions may have started with colleges, but in 2008 reached down to Catholic charities, according to Allen. With Vatican support, Denver's Bishop Chaput threatened to shut down church-run charities if the state barred them from hiring according to religious affiliation. Later in the year, Catholic Relief Services came under fire for its AIDS prevention program, and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development faced criticism for its links to the controversial community-organizing network ACORN. Allen notes that a generational change may be moderating the course of the Catholic Theological Society, once a bastion of liberal Catholic scholarship. A cohort of younger theologians in the society appear less interested in challenging the church than taking issue with secular culture, and for whom the traditional polarizaton between left and right doesn't hold much appeal.

(*National Catholic Reporter*, 115 E. Armour Blvd. Kansas City, MO 64111-1203)

Devotion to bodhisattvas and ritual grows among American converts

There is a growth of devotion to bodhisattvas, or Buddhist gods and goddesses, among American converts to Buddhism, particularly the Chinese figure Kuan-yin. In the *Journal of Contemporary Religion* (October), Jeff Wilson writes that supernaturalism has not held a significant place among the large segment of converts in the US. But partly because of a rise of female leaders and a new interest in ritual, such figures as Kuan-yin are viewed as being more accessible and compassionate than the more dispassionate Buddha. Kuan-yin has been marketed and merchandised in New Age circles and Buddhist workshops, and has become increasingly present in publishing, merchandising and even temples.

The use of Kuan-yin statues, along with the use of votive candles, has increased the possibility of ritual in temples alongside seated meditation among converts. Wilson concludes that other bodhisattvas are gaining a place for American converts, such as Jizo (especially in his role as a savior of aborted and miscarried fetuses), and that this more ritual-based worship gives converts and ethnic Buddhists something more in common, though each group venerates these figures for its own purposes and needs.

(*Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 4 Park Sq., Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN, UK)

UFO belief split between New Age and scientific wings

Contrary to predictions, belief in UFOs has not significantly declined in the 60 years since such claims have been made, but it has changed, with a major split occurring between "New Age" and "scientific" UFOlogists, writes Robert Scheaffer in the *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine (January/February). Scheaffer, a skeptic regarding UFOs, writes that UFO belief has come in different phases. The phenomenon started with the alleged sightings of spaceships (the last large-scale national wave of UFO sightings was in 1973), and then by the late 1960s the interest had shifted to alien abductions. But since the early 1990s, the claims of abductees have been marginalized in UFO circles. Now the movement is divided between "New Age" UFOlogists, who usually claim to receive extraterrestrial messages via dreams or channeling, and "scientific" UFOlogists, who seek to prove the phenomenon as a scientific fact.

The New Age camp, which tends to downplay scientific evidence for UFOs, is taking on increasingly end-times themes, such as a metaphysical change happening with the ending of the Mayan calendar in 2012. The scientific wing is represented by the Mutual UFO Network, the largest UFO organization, and is currently focused on UFO crashes and recoveries and the conspiracies surrounding them, which are often promoted on cable TV shows and talk radio. But with the memory and publicity fading over Rosewell, the most celebrated UFO case, a new phenomenon is needed to sustain the movement, probably offering devotees an element of personal relationship and involvement, writes Sheaffer. (*Skeptical Inquirer*, P.O. Box 703, Amherst, NY 14226)

> **The New Age camp, which tends to downplay scientific evidence for UFOs, is taking on increasingly end-times themes.**

CURRENT RESEARCH

▸ **Recent research of mosques in both southern California and northern England finds that the most successful tend to create social integration between members and their respective societies.** The *Christian Century* (January 13) cites the journal *Muslim World* as finding that the mosques in these two areas with the highest concentration of post-1965 immigrants who tend to "primarily use English, actively pursue outreach and public relations and reject foreign funding" demonstrated the most success. Researcher Vincent Biondo found that in southern California some of the more assimilationist of the mosques are modeled after evangelical megachurches; they tend to use the name "Islamic centers", and deal with issues such as premarital sex and the risk of gang and drug involvement, and often address educational concerns. (*Christian Century*, 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite #700, Chicago, IL 60603)

▸ **Door-to-door recruitment by such groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons hardly ever works and expends enormous amounts of their members' energy and time, and yet this strategy "failure" has contributed significantly to these religions' worldwide growth, argue Laurence Iannaccone and Rodney Stark.** In a preliminary paper presented at the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Louisville last October, Iannaccone acknowledged the counterintuitive nature of the theory that he and Stark call the "logic of long shots." Past research has shown that most religious conversion within a movement takes place within existing members' social networks rather than among strangers. But a movement such as the Jehovah's Witnesses has required members to conduct hours of "cold-call evangelism," even when it's been shown that each dedicated Jehovah's Witnesses evangelizer "faces a 95 percent chance of failing to convert any strangers in any given year…." Members of the Family, formerly known as the Children of God, face an equally dismal rate, getting one new convert per 7,619 hours of street evangelism. (The Mormons' conversion rate among strangers is similar, though it is more difficult to estimate due to members' high rate of unofficial evangelism and the larger numbers of nominal members of the movement.)

Iannoccone and Stark theorize that most successful religious movements, if they survive long enough, will face the "threat of network exhaustion," which means that the social base from which they recruit (such as family and friends) will eventually become depleted. It then becomes necessary to "transcend the strong-tie barrier and grow through 'weak-ties' and totally

new ties," according to Iannaccone and Stark. This weak-tie growth may be small and difficult, but over a long period of time it results in exponential increases, as seen in the global growth of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. Most religious bodies are satisfied with the growth and stability resulting from strong-ties outreach, and it takes a specific "organizational logic" for a highly evangelistic group to grow through weak ties. For this reason, these groups, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, the Family and Salvation Army, tend to have functionally similar patterns of hierarchy, control, monitoring (maintaining a "culture of counting"), volunteerism, resource mobilization, and ideology, even with their different theologies.

▸ **Religious behaviors such as attendance at services, childhood religiosity, spirituality, biblical literalism and even being born again appear to be the product of both genetic and social factors, according to a recent study by Matt Bradshaw and Christopher G. Ellison.** Writing in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (December), the researchers note that the social-scientific study of religion has tended to dismiss biological factors in religious belief and behavior, but that recent evidence is pointing in that direction. Bradshaw and Ellison examine data from the National Survey of Midlife Development, which is a large national sample of twin siblings covering a wide range of social and religious behaviors.
The researchers find that especially on such matters as making a spiritual or religious commitment and being born again, there was a large degree of genetic influence (65 percent in explaining individual variation). Genetic factors are sizable also for such measures as religious service attendance (32 percent), spirituality (29 percent), daily guidance and coping (42 percent) and biblical literalism (44 percent). Although Bradshaw and Ellison were unable to explain how genetic factors influence religious outcomes, they add that it is likely that shared environmental influences are of prime importance during the earlier stages of life and that genetic and non-family influences become more important in adulthood and old age. (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Dept. of Sociology, 2040 JFSB, Brigham Young Univ., Provo, UT 84602)

▸ **A review of 50 studies on the relation of religion to altruistic behavior finds that there is "an association between self reports of religiosity and prosociality," but that the association "emerges primarily in contexts where reputational concerns are heightened."** The review, published in the journal *Science* and cited in the newsletter *Sightings* (January 8), further finds that behavioral studies searching for a "good Samaritan" effect in an anonymous encounter experiment document that "unobtrusively recorded offers of help showed no relation with religiosity in this anonymous context." It was also found that "active members of modern secular organizations are at least as likely to report donating to charity as active members of religious ones." The authors suggest that more research is needed to "establish the specific conditions under which costly religious commitment could evolve as a stable individual strategy and whether these models need to take into account intergroup competition ... the extent to which religion is implicated in human cooperation, and the precise sequence of evolutionary developments in religious prosociality" are important questions.

▸ **The high rate of out-marriage between American Hindus with Christians and Muslims may have been overestimated, according to a recent study cited in *Hinduism Today* magazine (January–March).** Informal community estimates of Hindu out-marrying have ranged as high as 50 percent and even 90 percent. In an analysis of Macy's extensive online marriage registry, Dilip Amin found the Hindu out-marriage rate to be a good deal lower. For instance, 170 of 494 individuals named Patel, or 34 percent, married partners of Abrahmic religions. (*Hinduism Today*, 107 Kaholalele Rd., Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304)

▸ **A new Gallup poll finds that two-thirds of Americans think religion is losing its influence in**

society, a sharp increase from 2005, when Americans were nearly evenly split on this question. The poll found that 67 percent of Americans agree that religious influence is on the wane, while only 27 percent say it is increasing. The record low in confidence regarding the influence of religion in American life was in 1970, when just 14 percent said it was increasing. *Christian News* (January 12) reports that another finding of the poll was that the view that religion "can answer all or most of today's problems" has reached an all-time low (at 53 percent).

▸ **Organized religion is far from making a comeback in Europe, according to a recent poll.** The survey, commissioned by the BAT Foundation for Future Development in Germany, asked residents in nine European countries to what degree they thought that religion was important for their contentment and happiness. The German newsletter *idea* (December 18) cites the survey as showing that while Italy was the most religious country, less than one in two Italians (48 percent) agreed that religion is essential. Finland came next with 32 percent, followed by Russia and the UK with 31 percent each, Hungary (28 percent), Belgium (27 percent), France (26 percent), Switzerland (25 percent) and Germany (24 percent). When asked about what they considered sacred, 71 percent of Germans answered "the family." Faith in God (18 percent), religion (14 percent), and prayer and church (10 percent) are least important to them. Horst W. Opashowski, scientific director of the BAT Foundation, said that instead of a comeback of religion, we are seeing the substitution of the "sacred family" for religious institutions. (*idea*, P.O. Box 1820, D-35528, Wetzlar, Germany)

> "Interest in religion is especially strong among young people in China."

▸ **Religious affiliation is gaining momentum in China, according to a paper presented by Yuan Cai and Roderick O. Brien at the conference "Globalising Religions and Cultures in the Asia Pacific," which took place during the first days of December at the University of Adelaide (South Australia), and which RW attended.** While most of the research published on religion in China used to be normative or descriptive, more statistical data has started to become available in recent years, in the context of a growing interest in religion. Data can thus be gleaned from a variety of sources and provide a more detailed picture, although it remains uncertain how far results of specific studies can be extrapolated: samples tend quite often not to be representative, observes O'Brien. More than 30 percent of the Chinese are reported to consider religion as important. If such results are representative, it might indicate more than 300 million believers in China—in contrast to the figure of 100 million that has been quoted for years in official literature and websites.

Interest in religion is especially strong among young people: there is a significant decrease of percentage among the population above 60 years of age. The prime sources of beliefs are family and friends, not missionary activities by religious groups. Any analysis of religion in China should also keep in mind important movements of internal migration: currently, there are 200 million people not living in their birth areas. This involves changes in religious geography, for instance, mosques now being built in regions where there was previously no Muslim population.

The Communist Party clearly feels the need to be able to assess what is happening. Some party ideologues would like to continue to promote atheism, but are not very imaginative: atheist propaganda tends to be repetitive. An important question for the future is to determine if additional religious groups should be recognized and, if this is to be the case, how many and which ones.

Christianity, Buddhism and Taoism seeking and finding converts in Singapore

Different religions are competing in Singapore, although only a segment of the nation's population is open to conversion, according to recent research. *Pointers* (December), the newsletter of the Christian Research Assocation of Australia, cites research from the recent book *Rationalizing Religion* that shows that members of mainly the Chinese population of Singapore have converted to other religions in the last 40 years. The Indian and Malay populations who are Hindu and Muslim have largely resisted conversion, while many Chinese dissatisfied with the folk and magical elements of Taoism have converted to Christianity and, more recently, Buddhism. The appeal of charismatic Christianity and the spread of Christian schools are among the factors in such conversions.

But between 1990 and 2000, the number of Christians in Singapore grew by just 1.9 percent, while Buddhists grew by 11.3 percent, with many of the converts coming from Taoism. Part of the reason is that Buddhists have adopted Christian practices, such as Sunday school classes, charitable work and societies that provide fellwship, as well as promoting the religion as rational and practical. For many, the fact that Buddhism is not Western, like Christianity, has also drawn many Chinese to Buddhism. Taoism itself has responded to its decline by stressing moral virtues, such as loyalty to country and filial piety rather than rituals deemed "superstitious." Taoism has likewise codified its religion as a rational system, as well as promoting educational and social programs.

(*Pointers*, P.O. Box 206, Nunawading LPO, VIC, 3131, Australia)

Korean Protestantism suffering from image problem?

A recent survey reveals a level of distrust toward Protestantism in South Korean society, reports the *Union of Catholic Asian News* (November 27). The survey was conducted by the Christian Ethics Movement of Korea, a group that has been involved for years in promoting church reform and renewal (and thus is not entirely "neutral"). More than 48 percent of respondents said they didn't trust Protestant churches. Forty-two percent said that Protestants needed "consistency of action with speech." Apparently, due to its important social work, the Catholic Church enjoys on average a better image in Korea. According to the 2005 census, there were 18.3 percent Protestants in Korea, a decline from the 1995 census, while both Buddhists (22.8 percent) and Catholics (10.9 percent) had grown. Buddhism is reported to have a strong appeal among the younger generation. At a seminar presenting the results of the survey, Lee Sook-jong (Sungkyunkwan University) said that "[t]he distrust comes mainly from ethical issues involving Protestant leaders and their faithful, and their exclusive attitude toward other religions."

An analysis of the results of the recent survey should take into consideration the wider background, including political developments. In an article published in the Winter 2004 edition of the *Korea Journal*, researcher Lee Jin Gu had reported on the spread of anti-Christian websites in South Korea since the beginning of this decade. These websites—in which a number of lapsed Protestants are said to play a prominent role—target primarily fundamentalist types of Protestantism, seen as intolerant and depreciating the intellect. Beside the criticism of exclusivism (seen as essential to Christianity), several scandals involving Protestant leaders have fueled resentment. Such sites are not unlike those critical of major conglomerates or the media: in a country where nearly everybody goes online, cyberspace has become a favorite place for such "anti-drives." In part, anti-Christian Internet activism had also been a consequence of the irritation caused by the heavy missionary activities of some Protestant groups across Internet platforms. It had met very little organized Protestant reaction, the article added.

(*Union of Catholic Asian News*, www.ucanews.com; *Korea Journal*, www.ekoreajournal.net)

Recent moves in world Orthodoxy opening new perspectives?

In the ongoing issue of the unity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the (autonomous) Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate is asserting its role as an independent actor, write two Russian Orthodox theologians, Priest-Monk Savva (Tutunov) and V.V. Burega, in an article translated into German in the monthly *G2W* (January). Orthodoxy in Ukraine is currently divided into three competing jurisdictions, only one of which is recognized by all other Orthodox churches, i.e. the autonomous Ukrainian Church headed by Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev, in communion with Moscow. It is also the most important of the three main Orthodox groups currently active in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Presidency would like to have a united Ukrainian Church as a way to strengthen the Ukrainian nation. Ukrainian politicians had set their hopes on Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who might give support to the "schismatic" bodies as part of the rivalry with Moscow over the leadership of world Orthodoxy. Moreover, the article's authors remark, even traditionally pro-Russian churches such as Serbia's and Bulgaria's have attempted in recent times to keep a neutral stance in tensions between Moscow and other Orthodox churches. To some extent, this might indicate a weakening of the influence of the Russian Church in Orthodox countries outside of the former Soviet Union. However, the Ecumenical Patriarch refused to enter into negotiations with "schismatics." At the same time, when he visited Kiev in July, he stated his intent to contribute to any possible solution, thus prompting Moscow to become more active at the inter-Orthodox level.

An interesting development then took place at the pan-Orthodox assembly that gathered in Istanbul in October, when Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev raised the Ukrainian issue as a question set to all Orthodox churches—thus refuting possible claims that Constantinople was in charge of solving it—and stated that his church had the potential to bring unity to Ukrainian Orthodoxy—thus asserting the role of the Moscow-linked Ukrainian Church as an independent actor. **RW** might add here that observers would do well to pay attention to the role of Ukrainian bishops (which now make up about a third of the Russian epicopate, following the creation of a number of new dioceses) during the election of a new patriarch of Moscow in late January. This might also indicate some trends in the new assertiveness of the Ukrainian Church.

(*G2W*, Postfach 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland, www.g2w.eu)

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

■ The password for access to the archives at the **RW** website, at: http://www.religionwatch.com, remains: **Crisis** Nam tortor sapien, pulvinar Nam tortor sapien, pulvinar

■ ***EnlightenNext*** is the latest incarnation of the New Age alternative spirituality magazine known as *What Is Enlightenment?* The change of title, along with its new subtitle, *The Magazine for Evolutionaries*, reflects the magazine's concern to blend holistic spirituality with evolutionary science. An editorial in the inaugural issue (December/February) of the revamped magazine defines an "evolutionary" as one who embraces the evolution of consciousness in areas such as science, spirituality, morality and philosophy. Much about the magazine remains the same, such as its featuring the writings of New Age thinker Ken Wilber and the Dalai Lama. And it is the case that the New Age movement has always tried to mesh its teachings with evolutionary thought. Yet evolution has often been synonymous with the idea of spiritual transformation rather than with Darwinian evolution, which is featured prominently in *EnlightenNext*.

The issue carries articles on John

Haught, a Catholic theologian seeking to reconcile religion and science, as well as a primer on what is known as the integral movement. Integralism is said to be the next step beyond the fragmentation and relativism of postmodernism, as it will unify the various disciplines, practices and teachings promoting cultural and spiritual evolution based around such networks and institutions as the new Boulder Integral Center, the Integral Forum in Germany, and the Integral Institute, the think tank founded by Wilber. A subscription to the quarterly magazine is $24. For more information, write: *EnlightenNext*, P.O. Box 2360, Lenox, MA 01240.

■ While the ethnic character of Judaism would seem to be resistant to a market interpretation, Carmel U. Chiswick argues in her new book, ***Economics of American Judaism*** (Routledge, $140), that the home-centered nature of the religion in the US, whose adherents have experienced rapid financial success, actually lends itself to this approach. Chiswick applies religious economy theories to a wide range of topics, including Jewish immigration, intermarriage, religious education and American–Israeli Jewish differences by the year 2020. Her basic thesis is that the time-consuming nature of Judaism (Sabbath observance and other practices) is becoming costly to maintain as the value of time has risen for American Jewish men, women and children. Such challenges have resulted in new innovations in non-Orthodox synagogues, as well as continuing disaffiliation of singles from the Jewish community.

In this new environment, Jewish organizations engage in competition with other groups in reducing time cost, which results in less intensity and quality in Jewish institutions. A "reverse bandwagon" effect takes place as Jews increasingly abandon time-consuming practices, thereby decreasing the quality for those still engaging in these practices, according to Chiswick. In another chapter, the author finds that the economic advancement of American Jews makes them in some cases able to combine religious time with family time, creating new kinds of Jewish innovations, such as in the area of family worship and religious education. Chiswick concludes with an interesting look at how Israeli and American Jews are converging in economic status, making the former more open to American Jewish innovations. But in keeping with the religious economy theory that state monopolies dissipate religious vitality, Chiswick sees less religious diversity taking shape in the Jewish state.

■ Should the world be a wide open field for missionaries of all faiths? Should religions spread along free markets, without any limitation as long as they do not infringe laws? While such views would be accepted by many people in the US, they meet with far more nuanced or negative responses in other places across the world, as evidenced by the articles published in an information-packed book recently edited by Rosalind Hackett, ***Proselytization Revisited*** (Equinox Publishing, $29.95). The book started with a symposium on the topic at the 19th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions in Tokyo in 2005. The result is a 480-page volume with articles from 20 contributors (including **RW**'s associate editor, Jean-Francois Mayer, who authored an opening overview and comparative perspective).

Anti-proselytization cuts across cultures and religions. In the current context, observes Grace Y. Kao (Virginia Tech), proselytizers must increasingly defend the appropriateness of their actions—proselytism tends to become a dirty word, to the extent that many religious groups are eager to differentiate between what they see as legitimate, proper missionary activities and ethically questionable "proselytism." There are different types of and

and different motivations for opposition to proselytization, including secular ones, putting, for instance, the emphasis on the protection of collective identity and integrity of groups.
Proselytism may also be seen as a threat to balance in a society. In a chapter on Singapore, Jean DeBernardi (University of Alberta) describes how a state concerned about maintaining religious harmony has developed strict rules on activities that might undermine it. Moreover, several articles show how anti-proselytism represents much more than tension between religions. Olga Kazmina (Moscow State University) reports how it has occurred along with the politicization of religion and rising nationalist tendencies in post-Soviet Russia. There is often a tendency to see (Christian) proselytism as a tool of US/Western imperialism—although the reality today, insofar as evangelicals are concerned, is that new missionaries always come from the South, as reported in Paul Freston's (Calvin College) chapter. The role of Koreans has also become important, for instance, in the Asian regions of Russia, as can be seen in an article by Julia S. Kovalchuk (Russian Academy of Science).

The current model of conversion is limited to a Western, Christian understanding, which can at best include Islamic forms in some other cases, write Sarah Claerhout and Jakob de Roover (Ghent University) in their chapter on India. This may also partly explain some of the reactions encountered by missionary activities on the subcontinent, and not only in India. Stephen C. Berkwitz (Missouri State University) offers an informative analysis on the debate about conversions in Sri Lanka, where it interacts with international interests (US agencies and NGOs want to support the freedom of Christians to spread their faith)—and where both sides, Buddhists and Christians, see themselves as victims. While a majority of the contributions understandably focus on reactions to Christian missionary activities, there are also chapters on Falun Gong, Dhammakaya (a Buddhist movement in Thailand), the followers of the Islamic teacher Fetullah Gülen in Central Asia, reactions to the proselytization of new religious movements in Japan, and the Wiccan use of the Internet. All this makes the volume a rich resource on a topic that won't lose its significance in years to come.

■ Mark Juergensmeyer's new book, ***Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al Quaeda*** (University of California Press, $27.50), is a broad survey on the different modes in which religious movements opposing national secularism have portrayed themselves in the last decades of twentieth century and the first few years of the twenty-first. *Global Rebellion*'s main aim is to make sense of the standpoint of movements in several parts of the world animated by religious faith that have resisted the secular state without having an alternative government in mind. It attempts to find a common ground among different radical thinking and action in different religious traditions, while placing them in a wider context of sociopolitical change. The book's main premise is that the notion of secular nationalism is a Western construct exported to non-Western societies, for whom no clear distinction exists between religion and politics.
The author suggests that the revival of "religious politics" at the end of the twentieth century is a response to the loss of faith in secular nationalism and increasingly global political trends. Juergensmeyer's analysis is informed by data from dozens of religious movements from Egypt, Iran, Israel, Palestine, Iraq Lebanon, Syria and Jordan in the Middle East; Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Kashmir and Bangladesh in Central and South Asia; and Russia and the Balkan states in Europe; as well as Japan and the United States.

Juergensmeyer considers both secular nationalism and religion as "ideologies of order"—frameworks of thought able to provide coherence and meaning to everyday life. His approach stresses the similarities between religious and national modes of thinking in order to put forward the idea that they are potential rivals. Both of them can imprint order on society, claim to be the legitimate authority and provide moral sanctions, and, more importantly, make decisions about life and death. Therefore, they both offer a moral order that not only provides meaning, but also commands loyalty and obedience.

The line dividing the two has always been thin and fluctuating. The last years of the twentieth century witnessed a decline in the appeal of secular nationalism, due in part to its inability to fulfill its promises of justice, peace and equal treatment for all religious minorities (as in the case of Muslim revolts in India and Kashmir against Hinduism) and, more frequently, to the lack of moral standards set by some religious groups (such as Muslims in Iran, Afghanistan or Egypt and Jewish Zionist groups in Israel, the Gaza strip and the West Bank). So the book points to two rather different shortcomings of secular nationalism as the main cause of the development of radical religious challenges. One of them is functional and keeps hope open, since the failure of modern secular states in bringing peace and equality; ending poverty; and providing people with political freedom, decent living standards and fair justice systems can be ascribed not to the secular state per se, but to the ways in which politicians have conducted their business. Their inability, incompetence or dishonesty are the things to blame, not the secular model itself. The Indian–Pakistani cases fit here, since in both cases the state did not do enough to provide every minority with full rights.

On the other hand, Juergensmeyer stresses a deeper, more powerful overarching critique. Christian militias in the US, Hamas militants and radical Zionists share a view of the secular state as not setting a good enough moral standard for their peoples to live by. Non-religious states are perceived by these movements as a moral threat to be destroyed. What many of them seem to reject is secularism more than nationalism, although global networks (Jihad International is the best example) have emerged to challenge nation states as well.
—By Marisol Lopez-Menendez, a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the New School for Social Research

■ With China rising as the new economic and political world power in the late twentieth century, ***Chinese Religiosities*** (University of California Press, $29.95), a volume edited by Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, is a response to Talal Asad's call for a new approach to social science, which has always studied religion, myths and rituals as social manifestations needing interpretation. The book is also a recognition that there are a plurality of secularization processes and secular ideologies in the modern world. This timely and rich volume contributes to the important question of what made Chinese secularization different from the Western experience. This ambitious volume looks at the diverse religiosities in China through the transitions of modernization and state formation, which coincided with the twentieth century. The volume ably documents the empirical changes that Chinese religious life underwent during the modernization process.

The collection of essays by historians, anthropologists, sociologists and religious studies scholars provides a historical background to the vicissitudes of Chinese religious life in the twentieth century, a period of cataclysmic social change, warfare, trauma, poverty and rapid growth of economy in the 1990s. At least two genealogies are stated in this secularization

experience: firstly, the structure of religious-political authority in China's past; and, secondly, the semi-colonial history of China's entry into modernity. The essays cover a wide range of traditions and new religions, including Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Confucianism, Protestantism, Falun Gong, and popular religions both in China and Taiwan However, this volume is somewhat incomplete because other Chinese societies, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, were not included in this research.—*By Weishan Huang, a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the New School for Social Research*

■ ***Religion and Democracy in Contemporary Europe***, edited by Gabriel Motzkin and Yochi Fischer, is a new 200-page report by the Alliance Publishing Trust that brings together leading scholars on European religion to focus on the "religious resurgence" and how it relates to social and political processes in the region. The volume offers a conceptual, historical and empirical examination of religion and democracy in contemporary Europe, covering such topics as secularization, religion and education, the Islamic revival in Europe, changing church–state relations, and religion and youth. In one chapter, Jose Casanova examines the secular identity of Europe and why many Europeans view religion as leading to conflict and jeopardizing democracy, while tracing how notions of European integration and democracy had religious roots and still have the support of the various religions. In another chapter, Detlef Pollack surveys religious change in Europe, arguing that the data still supports secularization, even if there are signs that religion is also changing in more de-institutionalized directions. There is a chapter on how previous patterns of state regulation of religion are changing under a new cultural and ethical pluralism (exceeding the older religious pluralism), resulting from both a new individualism and immigration. All this can result in a new religious dimension in politics and public life, throwing the various church–state arrangements into flux all across Europe. The report can be downloaded at: www.nefic.org/documents.php

---

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

1) Dorothy Rowe has created a niche for herself as an atheist self-help guru. Rowe, a British clinical psychologist and author, has recently written *What Should I Believe?*, which merges the two worlds of atheism and self-help. With strong influence from "new atheist" spokesman Richard Dawkins, Rowe's basic argument is that religion, by which she mostly means Christianity, has left many people with a debilitating sense of guilt and shame in exchange for its function of alleviating the fear of death. Her thesis charts the way in which church and state have historically coerced people into believing things to suit their purposes, and points to the role of clergy and other believers in blaming illnesses on a lack of faith and fostering a sense of self-superiority. Rowe mainly relies on case studies of those consulting psychologists in her approach, although she adds that there are people of faith who are not as desperate as her clients, although they would have been okay anyway, whatever their beliefs. (*The Tablet*, November 1)

2) Ahmad al-Shugairi is the latest rising star among a new generation of "satellite sheiks" whose religion-themed television shows have helped fuel a religious revival across the Arab world. Over the past decade, the number of satellite channels devoted exclusively to religion has risen from one to more than 30, and religious programming on general-interest stations, like the one

CONTACT

EDITORIAL OFFICE:
Religion Watch,
P.O. Box 652,
North Bellmore,
NY 11710

PHONE:
(516) 225-9503

E-MAIL:
relwatch1@msn.com

WEBSITE:
www.religionwatch.com

EDITOR:
Richard P. Cimino

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:
Jean-Francois Mayer

BUSINESS OFFICE:
Religion Watch,
P.O. Box 18,
New York,
NY 10276

E-MAIL:
subs@religionwatch.com

January-February 2009

volume 24 number 2

that features Al-Shugairi's show, has soared. Al-Shugairi and others like him have succeeded by appealing to a young audience that is hungry for religious identity, but deeply alienated from both politics and the traditional religious establishment, especially in the fundamentalist forms prevalent in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The 35-year-old Al-Shugairi mixes deep Islamic teachings with humor. With a background in business (he sometimes speaks about Islam as "an excellent product that needs better packaging"), as well as a past that includes living a secular lifestyle in California and a divorce, Al-Shugairi speaks the language of Muslims seeking a modern middle way between secularism and fundamentalism.

Al-Shugairi is not the first of his kind. Amr Khaled, an Egyptian televangelist, began reaching large audiences eight years ago. But the field has grown greatly, with each new figure creating Internet sites and Facebook groups where tens of thousands of fans link to clips of their favorite preachers. Al-Shugairi's main TV program, *Khawater* ("Thoughts"), contrasts sharply with the dry lecturing style of so many Muslim clerics. Part of his inspiration, Al-Shugairi said, came from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which hit him especially hard as someone who spent his formative years in the US. "Many of us felt a need to educate youth to a more moderate understanding of religion," he said, during an interview at a café. Yet his approach to Islam, as with most of the other satellite TV figures who have emerged in the past few years, is fundamentally orthodox. Al-Shugairi's own life—and especially his struggle with the poles of decadence and extreme faith—is an essential feature of his appeal to many devotees. (*New York Times*, January 3)

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. 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.

Subscribe

❍ New subscription ❍ Renewal
❍ $ 33 ($ 36 for libraries) ❍ $ 20 for electronic version (PDF, via e-mail)

Name:

Address:

City: ZIP Code:

Country:

E-mail:

Payment:

- US cheque

- or **pay online via Paypal** – you can use your credit card with Paypal, it is simple and safe, visit our website: http://www.religionwatch.com/subs.htm

Send with payment to our business and circulation office:

Religion Watch
P.O. Box 18
New York
NY 10276, U.S.A.