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RELIGION WATCH
A NEWSLETTER MONITORING TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGION

INSIDE

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
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Musar and the moral revival in American Judaism

American Jews are reviving an emphasis on moral discipline and the cultivation of virtues that was prominent in the 19th century, writes Geoffrey Claussen in the *Hedgehog Review* (summer). What was called the "Musar (moral discipline) movement" among Orthodox Jews in 19th century Lithuania is being revamped and expanded beyond its Orthodox base to include Jews who keep journals, commit to good deeds and daily prayer, and pledge to limit their consumption. The original movement began as a response to the stress on Jewish scholarship and the neglecting of practical virtues and morality in Jewish culture. Although Musar never became a mass movement among the Jews, its influence persisted and it eventually found a home among Conservative and Reform Jews in recent years, Claussen writes. Particularly prominent as leaders in the contemporary movement are Rabbi Ira Stone, who runs Musar Leadership, which guides leaders and groups in these teachings, and Alan Morinis, a former film producer and anthropologist of religion, who runs the Vancouver-based Musar Institute.

A book such as Morinis's *Everyday Holiness* seeks to make the disciplines of study, meditation, journaling, visualization and chanting accessible to a popular audience. These practices and teachings seem similar to the mysticism of the Jewish renewal movement, but Claussen notes that the Musar movement tends to stress reason and the deliberate development of moral character rather than esoteric experiences. In fact, the growth of this movement may even be a reaction to the mystical and emotion-based tendencies of the Jewish renewal and neo-Hasidism. The socially activist cast of American Judaism, as well as the general American stress on personal autonomy and happiness, may conflict with the rigorous task of developing personal moral virtues as found in Musar. But Musar's strong point is that it allows the many disaffiliated American Jews to engage in traditional practices outside of traditional communal structures and to tailor them to their own needs.

(*Hedgehog Review*, P.O. Box 400816, Charlottesville, VA 22301)

Convention highlights: Mending the Presbyterian–Jewish rift; Missouri Synod tilts right

❍ The rift between mainline Presbyterians and the American Jewish community over the former's critical position on Israel's policy on the Palestinian issue was mended to some degree during the denomination's General Assembly in early July. Since 2004, the position of the Presbyterian Church (USA) on Israel, calling for divestment from multinational companies operating in the nation, has been a source of conflict between the denomination and the Jewish community. Although "divestment" was changed to a strategy of "corporate engagement" at the 2006 assembly, two years later the church issued a report on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that was highly critical of Israel. Leading up to the 2010 assembly, Jewish groups and leaders were active in starting talks and consultations with church leaders and laity, building relationships across the

lines of faith. The input was effective enough to convince the Presbyterian delegates to amend the report to state the right of Israel to exist and replace language that had called for Israel to end its blockade of Gaza with milder language recommending that the country allow humanitarian aid and commercial goods into Gaza.

❍ With the election of Rev. Matthew Harrison as president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) at the denomination's convention in Houston, American Lutheranism is likely entering a period of significant polarization. In a rare victory over the incumbent Rev. Gerald Kieschnick, Harrison was the favored candidate of "confessionalists" who seek to revive adherence to the Lutheran confessional documents and maintain strict orthodoxy, drawing a clear distinction from the liberal Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Kieschnick had a more moderate approach that allowed for borrowing from evangelicals, such as church growth methods. The convention plans to conduct a study of the ELCA's decision, taken last summer, to allow the ordination of gays and lesbians. While the July 26 *Huffington Post* headline "Tea Party Insurgence Ripples through Missouri Synod Election" may be over the top, already conservatives are agitating against "liberal" currents in the denomination, such as toleration of women in leadership positions and intercommunion with those outside the LCMS.

A post-denominational future for dissenting Lutherans?

The dissent and divisions that have resulted in American Lutheranism following the 2009 decision to support the ordination of gays and lesbians in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has followed a distinctly "post-denominational," decentralized pattern. *Network News* (May/June), the newsletter of the conservative Lutheran renewal group Word Alone, notes that even before last summer, various organizations and initiatives emerged to represent either more orthodox Lutherans remaining in or those leaving the ELCA, such as Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, Sola Publishing, the Institute for Lutheran Theology and Lutheran CORE. What has happened since the ELCA decision is that these and newer groups have been networking to create a situation where those congregations remaining in the denomination (for now) are sharing the same resources and connections as those that have left (over 300 congregations), even as the former's ties to the official bureaucracy and hierarchy weaken.

This can be seen clearly in the development of Lutheran CORE, which was formed as a denominational renewal/reform group about a year before the ELCA decision. By last fall, Lutheran CORE had proposed a "reconfiguration" of American Lutheranism and planned to establish a new denomination, to be called the North American Lutheran Church, by August of 2010. At the same time, Lutheran CORE seeks to provide programs and resources for congregations, individual members and clergy who are remaining in the ELCA. Ryan Schwartz, a leader of Lutheran CORE, remarks that "We are trying to do something that has proven difficult in other Reformation traditions: maintain tangible unity and organic relationships between those who leave and those who stay. But we see no other path."

(*Network News*, 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220, New Brighton, MN 55112-2202)

CURRENT RESEARCH

▸ **Americans born in the 1960s and 1970s will probably be less likely to disaffiliate from religion as they grow older compared to those born in the 1940s and 1950s, according to an analysis by University of Nebraska sociologist Phillip Schwadel.** In the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (June), Schwadel analyzes data from the General Social Survey from 1973 to 2006 and notes that the percentage of Americans raised with no religious preference has risen among every birth cohort since 1950–54, increasing from five to six percent for the 1955–59 cohort to more than 14 percent for the 1980–84 cohort.

Yet Schwadel finds that the likelihood of reporting no religious preference tends to be higher for those born between 1945 and 1959 than for subsequent cohorts. Americans who matured in the 1960s are especially likely to report no religious preference. But while the probability of

disaffiliation is relatively low for those born between 1960 and 1974. There appears to be a return to the pre-1945 cohort level of disaffiliation among the youngest cohorts," Schwadel writes. He concludes that a substantial portion of the growth of non-affiliates in recent years is due more to Americans being raised with no religious preference than solely due to an increase in disaffiliation among young adults.

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030)

▸ **Jewish organizational life includes few young adult groups and is still largely based in New York, even though the state is no longer the Jewish population center it once was.** These are some of the findings of a new study using data from the Internal Revenue Service's database on charitable organizations. The use of IRS data to understand Jewish organizational changes is unprecedented, but it allows the researcher to obtain a more complete picture of Jewish life than he would using other sources, writes Paul Burstein in the journal *Contemporary Jewry* (August). Religious organizations were the most numerous, followed by educational groups; other surveys have found educational groups as the most numerous.

Although New York now homes only 25 percent of the American Jewish population, the state has half of the religious organizations and 55 percent of the educational institutions. Burstein writes that this finding may be related to organizational inertia, as well as due to the link between population density and organization building. Of the 742 organizations targeted at specific age groups, only six percent focused on young adults, and most of these were campus ministries. Although congregations are not required to register with the database, Burstein found that the IRS data shows that the number of synagogues rose from an official count of 37 in 1850 to a high close to 4,000 in 1990, with perhaps a small decline since then.

(*Contemporary Jewry*, 233 Spring St., New York, NY 10013)

▸ **Religious giving continues to outperform other charitable and philanthropic donations, although some question the accuracy of such financial figures, reports the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* (June 17).** Citing the annual report *Giving USA* for 2009, the newspaper reported that those causes drawing the biggest givers of over $1 million were down by 63.6 percent. Giving to colleges was down 17.8 percent, while the decline was 11 percent for hospitals. But among the 1,247 organizations in the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, it was found that giving decreased 3.7 percent. According to another monitoring agency, Empty Tomb, overall giving to religion, after inflation, was down only 0.3 percent.

▸ **North American Seventh Day Adventists are significantly more likely to be college educated and are taking a more relaxed attitude toward Sabbath observance in some segments of the population, according to a new study on Adventist families.** The study, entitled *Adventist Families in North America* and conducted by Monte Sahlin, finds that the proportion of Adventist college graduates has nearly doubled in the last 15 years (to 41 percent), while the proportion with higher degrees has more than doubled. The rate of college education only increased by one percent from 1974–75 to 1993–94. The survey, conducted among 1,397 families, also finds that "Native-born church members seem to be practicing a more and more self-centered Sabbath experience, while immigrants retain a traditional notion of the Sabbath as a day of reaching out to others."

(For more information on this study, visit: http://www.creative.org)

▸ **A recent major survey shows Australia experiencing significant rates of religious decline and disaffiliation in the past two decades.** The survey, conducted in late 2009 and part of the International Social Science Survey, is important since it repeats a number of questions on religion asked in 1993 and 1999, thus providing a picture of changes over time. The major finding was the sharp decline in religious attendance—from 23 percent to 16 percent of the population between 1993 and 2009. *Pointers* (June), the newsletter of the Christian Research Association, cites the survey as showing that belief in God fell from 61 percent to 46 percent over the same period. Meanwhile, identification with a Christian denomination fell from 70 percent in 1993 to 50 percent of the population. There is a concurrent large increase in Australians claiming to have "no religion"—up from 27 percent in 1993 to 43 percent in 2009. But there was also little sign that the Australians are losing their spirituality: 23 percent considered themselves "spiritual but not religious."

(*Pointers*, CRA, P.O. Box 26, Nunawading, LPO, VIC 3131, Australia)

▸ **Wales continues to have more congregations than other countries in the UK, although religious involvement is steadily declining, especially among young people, reports the newsletter *Future First* (June).** With one congregation for every 670 people, Wales stands out as an apparently highly churched country. But appearances may be deceiving, as a 2008 survey that allows observers to compare Welsh churchgoing over a 12-year period suggests. The survey, conducted by the Council

of the Christian Voluntary Sector in Wales, found a significant drop in congregations, with the country losing approximately one per week. Since the last major survey was taken in 1995, Wales experienced a decline in the proportion of the population attending church every week, going from around 8.7 percent in 1995 to 6.7 percent in 2007.

While 6.2 percent of Welsh under 30 were estimated to attend church in 2005, only 3.5 were found to do so in 2007. While all of the major denominations reported that half of their congregations were over 65, the picture was different for the smaller evangelical churches. Total attendance was up by almost 40 percent in "newer denominations" since 1995. This is especially the case for Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Other denominations in this category, such as the Chinese Christian Church, the Iranian Fellowship and the Persian Church, suggest that immigration may also be a factor in such growth.

(*Future First*, The Old Post Office, 1 Thorpe Ave., Tonbridge, Kent, TN10 4PW UK)

▸ **The stability and continuing growth of Catholicism in Korea in comparison to the declining fortunes of other churches and faiths may be related to the positive image Korean Catholics have of their leadership, according to a study in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (June).** From 1995 to 2005, the Catholic population was the only one to increase among the other religious groups in Korea. In the previous period (1985–95), all the major religions—Protestant, Catholic and Buddhist—showed growth. Researchers Jibum Kim, Sang-Wook Kim and Jeong-Han Kang also find that compared to other religious leaders, Catholic leaders have the most positive image, both in the media and among Catholics themselves. This positive public image is partly because Catholic leaders have avoided the corruption scandals that have beset Protestant and Buddhist clergy and monks. The researchers caution against making a correlation between the positive public image of the hierarchy and Catholic growth, although they suggest that it may be one factor in the church's growth and popularity.

Haiti's Catholic charismatics recovering Protestant losses, gaining social conscience

The Catholic charismatic movement in Haiti, one of the fastest growing and largest in the world, is helping the church rebound from losses to Protestant groups and is poised to be a major social force in the country, writes Terry Rey in an article in *Pneuma*, a biannual journal on Pentecostalism (issue 32, 2010). In an in-depth ethnographic study of Haiti's charismatic movement (which was written before the earthquake, although Rey adds in a footnote that some of the renewal's leading parishes, such as Sacred Heart Church, were destroyed in the disaster), Rey finds that the growth of the charismatic movement has dramatically slowed the growth of Haitians joining Protestant, often Pentecostal, churches. This is because Catholic churches and priests influenced by the renewal have, like the Pentecostals, sought to provide Haitians with supernatural "protection" from Voodoo and other ancestor-based religions, mainly through veneration of the Virgin Mary and Michael the Archangel. In fact, the Pentecostal and Catholic charismatic growth in Haiti has been significant in halting—and probably even reversing—the growth of Voodoo in recent years, Rey writes.

Yet the growth of the charismatic renewal has been criticized by some Haitian Catholic leaders and theologians as rolling back the influence of the liberation theology-inspired movement known as Tilegliz. As with other liberation theology movements in Latin America, the Tilegliz movement created "base communities" to empower lay activism against authoritarian government, such as the Duvalier regime of the 1980s. Rey writes that by the 1990s, the movement had failed to sustain much support from the masses, who became as disenchanted with calls for revolution as they were with promises of democracy as the country moved toward a state of disintegration. He concludes by noting that the Catholic charismatics have clearly eschewed the confrontational politics of Tilegliz, but these Catholics and their co-religionists in other parts of the world have been called "Progressive Pentecostals" as they "seem now to be rekindling an interest in humanitarianism, if not yet political reform."

Chill settles on evangelical–Orthodox relations

After a period of engagement, Eastern Orthodox and evangelical Christians have hardened their attitudes toward each other, result-

ing in a curtailment of dialogue between the two groups. The evangelical missions journal *Transformation* (July) notes that the dialogue and cooperation that emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s between Eastern Orthodox and evangelicals was mainly over recognition of a common conservatism in doctrine and an attempt to resolve conflicts over the latter's evangelizing in former communist areas. For several years the World Council of Churches facilitated many of these talks. The Baptists, one of the most populous Protestant denominations in the former Soviet Union, also engaged in conferences and dialogue with Eastern Orthodox through the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague (although neither communion has engaged in official dialogue).

But in recent years, "those advocating any kind of engagement are liable to come under attack from their co-religionists as well as those from the other side of the fence," writes Tim Grass. Romania was considered a promising place for evangelical–Orthodox relations, given the country's history of religious pluralism. Several studies of Orthodoxy were conducted by Romanian evangelical scholars with the appreciation of the Orthodox. But in the last five years, interest in following up this emerging dialogue has receded, especially on the Orthodox side. England and the U.S. remain the few places where Orthodox–evangelical initiatives have formed, mainly because Evangelicals have higher visibility in the field of theological studies and the lack of conflict over perceptions of one group poaching on the other's religious territory. Grass concludes that any dialogue in the future will most likely be unofficial—mainly because of evangelicals' lack of structure and hierarchy—and engaged in projects of joint concern, such as dealing with the importance of preaching for the Orthodox and renewed appreciation of the patristic heritage for evangelicals.

(*Transformation*, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, St. Phillip and St. James Church, Oxford OX2 6HR, UK)

Malta—a bastion of Catholicism shows weaknesses

Malta, known as a stronghold of Roman Catholicism in secular Europe, is undergoing secular challenges, mainly resulting from its membership of the European Union and because of the tarnished public image of the church due to clergy sex abuse scandals. *The Catholic World Report* (June) notes that Malta is still a strongly Catholic country both officially and in practice. It is among the few countries in Europe to prohibit abortion and divorce. The Maltese church has a ratio of seminarians to Catholics higher than any in Europe (five times higher than in Ireland, for example). Although parishes still often serve as social centers in Malta, Mass attendance has seen a recent decline—from 82 percent in 1967 to 51 percent in 2005; even the more devout island of Gozo has showed a drop in such attendance from 97 percent in 1982 to 82 percent in 2005.

The significant number of alleged sex abuse cases that have been reported in the country may further undermine the trust of the Maltese in their church, according to one priest. The lay associations that have been important in turning out religious vocations, such as the Society of Christian Doctrine and the charismatic movement, are also showing signs of weakening, says Roderick Pace of the University of Malta. On an official basis, support for the ban on divorce is likewise losing its hold, with Pace estimating public opinion split 50/50 on the issue. That issues ranging from divorce and cohabitation to same-sex marriage are going concerns and are being addressed by both of the island's political parties suggests to some the secularizing influence of other nations—Malta joined the European Union in 2004. It is in this context that Pope Benedict visited the nation last April and made a point of imploring the Maltese people to resist the tide of secularism and remain faithful to the church.

(*The Catholic World Report*, P.O. Box 2512, Alexandria, VA 22301)

Hindu and Sikh remnants hang on in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is an Islamic country, predominantly Sunni (with a 15 percent minority of Shi'a), of 30 million people, but against all odds, some 2,000 Hindus and Sikhs have survived in the country, reports German scholar Manfred Hutter (Bonn University) in an article in *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* (dated 2009/2, but actually published this summer). These two religions have a long history behind them, but their future in Afghanistan looks uncer-

tain. While there had been a strong Hindu (and Buddhist) presence in Afghanistan in the first millennium, the advance of Islam had erased it entirely. A permanent Hindu presence started again in the 18th century, not without a number of restrictions. After 1945, these were removed and both Hindus and Sikhs could prosper with their own community networks and places of worship, as well as having regular contacts with India. In the early 1990s, at the end of the civil war that had started with the Soviet intervention, there were some 50,000 Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, mostly in cities. A peculiarity of Afghan Hinduism is veneration of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, considered as a Hindu saint, thus encouraging Sikhs to visit Hindu temples on occasion.

There were already some signs of hostility against Hindus and Sikhs in, for instance, the attack by mujahideen against the Sikh temple of Jalalabad in 1989 (57 people killed). When the mujahideen came to power in 1992, the situation started to worsen for religious minorities. Echoes of Hindu activism in India (e.g. the destruction of Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992) reinforced such tendencies and were used to legitimize anti-Hindu actions by Islamic militants. When the Taliban came to power in 1996, persecution became even fiercer and increasing numbers of Hindus and Sikhs saw no other way but exile. When the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001, no more than 1,000 Hindus were left in the country. Some returned in the following years.

However, the fall of the Taliban has not meant a return to the pre-1992 situation. The 2004 Constitution states that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam" and that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law." Hindus and Sikhs experience various restrictions, for instance in the exercise of their funeral rituals. Conversions to Islam are encouraged, while there are difficulties in educational and professional areas. Not being able to enjoy the same rights as Muslim citizens, Hindus and Sikhs who had fled from Afghanistan feel reluctant to return, despite important Indian investments (and strategic interests) in the country, and tend to settle permanently in India or in the West: today there are six Afghan-Hindu temples in Germany.

(*Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, diagonal-Verlag, Alte Kasseler Strasse 43, 35039 Marburg, Germany; http://www.diagonal-verlag.de)

Islamist extremism fuels Christian persecution in Pakistan —an analysis

On July 13, the Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission warned that two Christian men from Pakistan's Punjab province, Rashid and Sajid Emmanuel, were in danger after their arrest on frivolous charges of blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad. Five days later, suspected Islamist extremists shot them dead outside a courthouse, reports the U.S.-based *Compass Direct News* (July 19). Reports of murder, rape, arson, abduction and forced conversion of Christians are routine in Pakistan, an Islamic republic. According to Pakistan's Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), Christian persecution increased after the U.S. military's Operation Enduring Freedom in neighboring Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11, even though Pakistan is an ally of the U.S. in its "global war on terror." Last year, at least nine Christians were killed and over 45 houses were burned in a Christian hamlet in Korian village near Gojra town in central Punjab on July 31. The attackers, masked and carrying sophisticated guns, were supposedly from an Islamist militant outfit known as the Sipah-e-Sahaba, linked to the Afghan Taliban. Its offshoot, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, is believed to be al-Qaeda's front in Pakistan.

The 2010 annual report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom also noted that thousands of religious schools reportedly continue to provide ideological training and motivation to those who take part in violence targeting religious minorities. Human rights groups see Pakistan's blasphemy law as the main instrument of persecution—not only of Christians, but also Shi'a Muslims, Ahmadis and Hindus. Of the total population of 170 million, around three million are Christians, mainly concentrated in Islamabad, the Capital Territory, and Punjab and Sindh provinces. Over 96 percent of Pakistanis are Muslim—more than 80 percent of them Sunni, mostly Barelvis and Deobandis.

The blasphemy law, Section 295 and 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code, carries a death penalty. None has ever been executed under it, but about 10 accused have

been murdered before the completion of their trials, according to the BBC. Islamist extremists believe that killing a blasphemous person earns a heavenly reward. An extreme Islamist killed a judge of the Lahore High Court, Justice Arif Iqbal Bhatii, in 1997 for acquitting three Christians in a blasphemy case two years earlier. In May 1998, a Catholic bishop, John Joseph, shot himself outside a courthouse to protest the blasphemy law. However, CLAAS notes that allegations of blasphemy often "stem from the Muslim accuser's desire to take revenge" and to "settle petty, personal disputes." There is no law to punish a false accuser or a false witness of blasphemy. And Islamist extremists are ready to back blasphemy cases. The prevalent political turmoil, corruption and resultant impunity in Pakistan make extra-judicial "punishment" easier.

Pakistan's politics is in crisis. It is often debated who is in control—right-leaning military and the intelligence agency ISI or the more progressive government led by President Asif Ali Zardari, a Shi'a Muslim in a Sunni majority country. The apparent agenda of the former is to create or allow unrest in the country as the only means to remain relevant, for their predominance is under threat ever since military rule ended. Regrettably, the unprecedented growth of extremism, reflected in routine bomb explosions and the gunning down of minorities, suggests that they are far stronger than the government. This is why Zardari's party, the Pakistan People's Party, has not been able to revoke the blasphemy law, as it had vowed to do in its election manifesto. Unless and until the tables turn, peace may remain a distant dream.
—By Vishal Arora, a New Delhi-based journalist

Dagestan seeks ways to contain Islamic radicalism

In several parts of the Muslim world authorities have been tempted to promote Sufism, the mystical Islamic movement, as a way of counteracting Islamist ideologies. This strategy is also in play in Dagestan, in the Russian part of the Caucasus, although not everyone—including Sufis themselves—is enthusiastic about giving a religious monopoly over to one strand of Sufism, reports Geraldine Fagan of the *Forum 18* news service (May 25). The state may now have come to realize that attempting to control Muslim life is futile in the long term and it might consider relaxing the policy, Fagan writes in a second article (June 3). Before the Soviets came to power, Dagestan was known as a strongly religious area. Religious revival had already started in the 1970s, before the end of communism. Sufism is prevalent, but Salafism, stressing a return to the purity of original Muslim teachings, opposes some of the former's practices and has gained some ground (probably less than 10 percent of Dagestan's population). Sufis themselves are not united: a number of sheikhs appeared at the end of the Soviet period, and the legitimacy of some is contested by others.

Salafism tends to be viewed with suspicion by state authorities—not without reason, since radical Muslims were engaged in armed insurrection in the late 1990s. "Wahhabism" was officially outlawed in 1999. Sufis resolutely opposing Salafism have been granted control of Dagestan's Spiritual Directorate (founded in 1998). According to Forum 18, it is not an absolute domination, but it has reduced public space for other Muslims, not all of them militants. Only a minority of Sufi sheikhs recognize the directorate. The directorate exercises control over religious publishing and education, including material sent from abroad, although control is not always strictly enforced.

While other Sufi sheikhs can find ways to cooperate with the Spiritual Directorate despite reservations on some issues, this is impossible for Salafis, who strongly disagree with Sufi practices. Recent developments seem to indicate that authorities have come to understand that criminalizing Muslims other than those associated with the directorate can be counter-productive—insurgent activities have only increased in recent times. Repression is apparently becoming more targeted against people actually involved in militant activities. A distinction between moderate and radical Salafis might help to counter radicalization more effectively. Dagestan's religion law allows only one umbrella organization per confession. In Dagestan, as in some other former communist states, religious diversity is perceived as a challenge with political consequences for national cohesion and security. Time will still be needed to adjust to the facts of contemporary pluralism, but security concerns add to the complexity of the task.

(Forum 18, http://www.forum18.org.

For some background information, see also Mikhail Roshchin, "Sufism and Fundamentalism in Dagestan and Chechenya," *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, July–Dec. 2004; http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/publica/cemoti/textes38/roshchin.pdf)

Controversial Israeli conversion bill causes turmoil abroad

Conservative and Reform Jews in the U.S. have expressed concerns about a conversion bill recently discussed in the Israeli Knesset that could erode the legitimacy of conversions performed by them. Fearing that the bill could create a rift in the Jewish world and affect political support for Israel among North American Jews, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that he opposed it in its current form (Associated Press, July 18). The bill will now be frozen for six months, in the hope that it can be redrafted in a form more acceptable to non-Orthodox Jews (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, July 23). It is not the first time that issues related to the dominance of Orthodox Judaism in Israeli religious life have led to tensions with American Judaism, where 85 percent of the Jews are not affiliated with Orthodox Judaism.

Ironically, the bill was meant to make conversions easier, in consideration of the huge number of Israelis of Russian extraction who immigrated since the 1990s and are not Jews according to Jewish law (which states that one is Jewish by virtue of having a Jewish mother). District and municipal rabbis in Israel would have greater authority to perform conversions of Israelis, regardless of the place of residence of the convert, while this is currently a complicated matter with special conversion courts and curricular requirements (classes, exams, pledges to be religiously observant), writes Uriel Heilman in a Jewish Telegraphic Agency report (April 28). But the bill also consolidates the control of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate and does not guarantee that conversions performed overseas, especially by non-Orthodox Jews, would be recognized: this might put into question the eligibility of some under the Law of Return.

The fact that the Rabbinate retroactively annulled thousands of conversions performed by religious Zionist rabbis two years ago brings no comfort to opponents of the bill, notes Yehuadah Mirsky (*Jewish Ideas Daily*, July 26). Non-Orthodox Jewish movements in the U.S. feel that the legislation would revive the debate over who is a Jew and undermine progresses made through the Israeli Supreme Court on the legitimacy of non-Orthodox groups, whose converts are considered to be Jewish under the Law of Return (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, April 30). The Reform movement in the UK has also warned its members that the bill could lead to "losing recognition in Israel of Reform and other non-Orthodox conversions for ever" (*Jewish Chronicle*, July 22).

Whatever the fate of the bill, discussions on the role of Orthodox Judaism in Israel and the status of non-Orthodox Jewish movements will continue. Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, expressed his wish to see the religious monopoly in Israel "overthrown for a free market society," but admitted that this would not happen in the shorter term, reports Jordana Horn in the *Jerusalem Post* (July 22).

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

■ The new password for access to the RW archives, at http://www.religionwatch.com, is: Activist.

■ Glenn Beck's Mormon faith has been one more source of controversy swirling around the popular and provocative conservative radio and television commentator—a fact not lost on American Mormons, judging by the June issue of ***Sunstone***. The independent Mormon magazine features several articles on Beck, arguing that he is better versed in the faith than is often acknowledged and embodies tensions among a segment of the Latter Day Saints. A lead article by Robert Rees argues that along with his colorful rhetoric and antics, Beck positions himself to appeal to both conservative Christians and Mormons. Beck borrows a good deal from Cleon Skousen, a right-wing Mormon author who claimed the U.S. Constitution to be divinely inspired and, with other members of the John Birch Society, saw America as embracing socialism in a conspiratorial manner.

Beck seems to be a proponent of what is known in Mormon circles as the "white horse myth," a prophesy attributed to founder Joseph Smith teaching that as the end times approached there would be a falling

away of the Republic from the Constitution. Another article notes that Beck is a devoted Mormon and that his appeal to evangelicals—as seen in his giving the commencement address at and receiving an honorary degree from Liberty University—may be a factor in greater Christian acceptance of Mormons. A concern running through these articles is that Mormon political respectability, recently tested by the failed presidential candidacy of Mitt Romney, may be seriously jeopardized by the controversy surrounding Beck and his public identification with the faith. For more information on this issue, write: Sunstone, 343 N. Third West, Salt Lake City, UT 84103-1215

■ Twenty years ago not a single academic journal was devoted primarily to the study of new religions. There are now several journals devoted only to that subject, or at least with a significant part of their content focused on new religions. In addition to the already well-established Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, a new journal has just been launched, and the impetus comes this time from Scandinavia. In the inaugural issue of the ***International Journal for the Study of New Religions***, published by Equinox, editors Carole M. Cusack (University of Sydney) and Liselotte Frisk (Högskolan Dalarna University, Sweden) explain the background of the new journal. In 1997, a Swedish association called FINYAR (Association for Research and Information about New Religions) was formed and started organizing conferences and publishing a yearbook. In 2009, thanks to a grant from the Swedish Central Bank Foundation, FINYAR was able to create a Nordic network and decided to initiate an international organization on the model of FINYAR: the International Society for the Study of New Religions (ISSNR); in cooperation with Equinox, the ISSNR launched a monograph series as well as the International Journal for the Study of New Religions. The initiative intends to be truly global and to encourage interaction beyond the networks of Western scholars.

The global thrust is not yet obvious in the first issue (although it is definitely not U.S. centered), since all the contributors come from North America or Europe, with the exception of an article by Australian researchers. This article is worth reading, since it deals with an unusual subject: the conversions of Aboriginal Australians to Islam, which is apparently a growing phenomenon, although not a massive one (there were slightly more than 1,000 Aboriginal Muslims in 2006, i.e. 0.22 percent of the total Aboriginal population). Authors Helena Onnudottir, Adam Possamai and Bryan S. Turner put the phenomenon in perspective by locating it in the wider cultural and social context.

Jessica Moberg (Södertörn University) pays attention to the early years of the Swedish UFO movement and shows how the global UFO narrative got mixed with certain themes reflecting the local situation, an approach leading to quite interesting observations. The localization took place in two ways: historiographically (digging into the past and contemporary events in Sweden) and ideologically (introducing socialist thought in the mythical complex, as Sweden was dominated by the Social Democratic Party for many years).

James R. Lewis (University of Tromso) analyzes how young people become Satanists: before the development of the Internet, LaVey's Satanic Bible played a key role in the propagation of Satanism. Similarly to paganism, most Satanists do not feel that they converted, and many believe they were "born Satanists" and were "coming home" to the faith. Moreover, in many cases, they do not become involved in group religious activities, but mostly interact online.

The journal will be published twice yearly. Beside the articles, there is a section for book reviews. It is a welcome addition to academic literature on new religions. Moreover, the layout is simple and clear, like other Equinox journals, making it easy and pleasant to read, something that is not the case with all academic journals nowadays. For more information, write: International Journal for the Study of New Religions, Equinox Publishing, 1 Chelsea Manor Studios, Flood Street, London SW3 5SR.

■ In comparison to France or England, the number of Freemasons is modest in Germany, acknowledges the first issue of ***Winkelmass*** (a reference to the Masonic square), a new German magazine on Freemasonry, in its first issue (number 0; issue 1 to appear soon). It is true that it endured severe suppression both during National Socialist (Nazi) rule and in East Germany during the years of communism, although there might be other reasons, such as insufficient efforts to make its ideals and practices more widely known. An independent magazine, Winkelmass says its target audience is primarily non-Masons, thus potentially contributing to propagating knowledge of Freemasonry.

According to Winkelmass's overview of the situation in Germany, there are some 15,000 Freemasons, with 430 lodges belonging to five Grand Lodges, which all belong to the United Grand Lodges of Germany (Vereinigte Grosslogen von Deutschland). The female Grand Lodge counts 17 lodges and some 350 members. The mixed Grand Lodge Humanitas has nine lodges and 160 members. For more information, visit: http://www.winkelmass-das-magazin.de.

■ In her new book, ***A Faith of Our Own*** (Rutgers University Press, $23.95), sociologist Sharon Kim writes how second generation Korean-Americans are establishing evangelical churches that both retain yet go beyond their ethnic base. Kim studies 22 Korean-based churches (about half are denominational and half are independent) that have distanced themselves from their immigrant identity, such as using Korean and maintaining ethnic traditions. Kim makes it clear that there are no clear-cut boundaries between first- and second-generation churches; members attend and serve in both kinds of churches because of family obligations and dissatisfaction with white or "Anglo" churches. But the younger generation has protested against the leadership style and ethnic exclusivity of the churches in which they grew up and many have sought alternatives. The book is most informative in describing how the second generation has created "hybrid spaces" that draw on both mainstream American and their Korean Christian backgrounds.

The megachurch model, particularly found in the writings and style of Rick Warren and the Saddleback Church, was prominent in almost all the second-generation congregations studied by Kim. But they also tended to retain or reinsert Korean practices and teachings, such as the fervent prayer meetings (often praying in unison) and in general a stronger emphasis on community than that found in most white American churches. The stress on prosperity in churches in Korea has also influenced second-generation churches, such as the Disciple Church network based around prestigious U.S. campuses, although this approach often comes with a call to invest in missions and a critique of the drive for the upward mobility and materialism that are said to mark many immigrant and mainstream congregations In general, the call to world missions and social action is also prominent in these congregations; they are also much more likely than immigrant congregations to seek to minister to non-Koreans, often viewing themselves as "pan-Asian" or multiracial. The book sees the second-generation churches as being in a state of flux and experimentation that is nevertheless challenging an older assimilation model where ethnic churches would inevitably move into the white mainstream.

■ ***Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal*** (Brill, $141), edited by Amarnath Amarasingam, is one of the first books to look at the new atheist phenomenon through a wide range of scholarly perspectives—theology, science, sociology and philosophy. Rather than arguing with the new atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris, and their caustic attacks on religion, the contributors tend to view the phenomenon as saying more about the place of atheism than about the plausibility of religious belief. The chapter most favorable to the new atheism is the one by sociologist William Sims Bainbridge, who writes that the new atheists' use of cognitive science and psychology stands in contrast to previous atheists' use of philosophical arguments against God. Bainbridge then launches into an exposition about how cognitive psychology is explaining such concepts as soul and spirit.

Other chapters include a comparison of how the new atheist arguments square with theological movements proclaiming the death of God, and a comparison between fundamentalism and the new atheism, with author William Stahl arguing that both attempt to "re-create and impose belief [in reason and science as the new atheists define them] as a form of external authority." The sociological section of the book carries an interesting chapter by Stephen Bullivant, who finds that the emergence of the new atheism was unexpected in many quarters—from sociologists who saw secularization emerging more from indifference than militant opposition to religion to American believers who viewed their country as inhospitable to anti-religious attacks, not to mention best-selling ones. Bullivant concludes that judging by the numbers of atheists encouraged by the new atheism and believers newly engaged in polemics with atheists, the new atheism may benefit both the religious and secularists. RW's editor and Christopher Smith contributed a chapter on how the new atheism has been received by those in organized secularist groups (we will soon put a longer version of this article on the RW website).

■ ***Secularization in the Christian World***, edited by Callum Brown and Richard Snape (Ashgate, $80.96), broadens the debate over secularization by including both historians and sociologists in redefining and rethinking this contested concept. Most of the contributors take aim at the way in which the secularization thesis views modernization as leading to the gradual decline of religion. Using social and local histories, the contributors argue that secularization, especially in Europe, is more often related to specific social and political changes (such as those in class structure) introduced during the 1960s. The book, which is published in honor of the work of social historian Hugh McLeod, brings this historical approach to bear on the current religious situations as well as the pasts of northern Europe, Australia, Canada and the U.S. The chapter on Australia confirms the continuing decline of religious belief and practice in that country, but also notes how recent years have seen a greater public role given

to religion, such as in welfare, while religious revitalization can be found in the newer churches.

The same is true of Canada, where there has actually been a pattern of stability rather than decline in recent years, according to Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau. Using oral histories, Peter van Rooden argues that the sudden collapse of a particular collective and ritualized form of Christianity in the Netherlands in the 1960s even today forms the conception of religion that the secular Dutch rebel against. As in other books challenging the secularization thesis, leading supporter of the theory Steve Bruce is included and argues that the loss of religious vitality and its relation to modernity were evident well before the 1960s and that the social-historical approach tends to ignore the steadily decreasing levels of religious socialization that is an integral part of the theory.

■ While the recent flowering of studies in the anthropology of Christianity has been confined to the Global South, the appearance of the book ***Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*** (University of California Press, $24.95) suggests that this field of study is attaining a more global reach. The book, edited by Chris Hann and Hermann Golz, challenges the anthropology of religion in general, since it has often treated Christianity as embodying Western concepts and practices in its relation to other cultures and religions. The editors note that since the new anthropological studies of Christianity have tended to stress the rupture of conversion in the formation of the post-colonial self and culture, the case of Eastern Christianity, with its strong links to national identity, is concerned with continuity, a concept more in line with older themes in anthropology. The contributions, all based on ethnographic fieldwork, look at such anthropological themes as globalization and the formation of the self in post-socialist societies, but they also provide valuable accounts of the changes in and dynamics of Eastern Christianity.

A chapter on the social welfare system of the Russian Orthodox Church shows how it is caught between the demands of religious nationalism and civic nationalism, particularly as the church has recently limited its services to Russian Orthodox believers rather than to all Russian citizens. Also noteworthy is an ethnography of how both Orthodox believers and Muslims share shrines and festivals in Macedonia and Turkey, suggesting the ways in which contemporary Muslim and Orthodox communities interact and sometimes blend "outside of—and sometimes in spite of—the official positions staked out by their respective religious authorities," writes Douglas Rogers in the epilogue. Other chapters cover Orthodox pilgrimages, the practice of choral singing in Estonia and how it reveals and accentuates tensions between Russians and Estonians, and the growing "Eastern trend" in Byzantine Catholic churches in Hungary and Romania.

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

The current leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church has for years emphasized the need to improve the quality of its theological education. As part of such efforts, a significant step has been taken with the launch in 2009 of the Cyril and Methodius Postgraduate and Doctoral School under the direction of the influential Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), who in the same year had become the new chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations. The first 65 students started their training in October 2009 and came not only from Russia, but also Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Serbia. According to the school statutes, students of other confessions can also be admitted, while non-Orthodox guest professors are already regular visitors. Orthodox students need a recommendation from a church authority in order to apply. Beside theological disciplines, entrance examinations also include foreign languages. Moreover, a master's program will start in fall 2010.

In addition to academic training, the school also provides practical training for people who will later work in church diplomatic services. A number of language courses are offered, since lack of language training was a weakness at theological academies during the Soviet period. The church hopes moreover to train people who would become future bishops. The school should function as a role model for other theological institutes and provide doctoral levels equivalent to those of secular universities. Students will be required to have already published in renowned domestic or international academic journals before they can ob-

tain their doctoral degree. The curriculum aims at integration into the Russian state educational system, as well as into the current European-wide academic system (the so-called "Bologna System").

(Source: *G2W*, Birmensdorferstrasse 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zürich, Switzerland; http://www.g2w.eu)

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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.

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