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

RELIGIOSCOPE

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Islam regroups in post-authoritarian Tunisia— a special report

In the context of the ongoing Tunisian revolution, an authoritarian restoration seems unlikely, but besides the organization of the political scene becoming more pluralistic, questions are raised about the ways in which the religious field can be restructured, considering the changes brought about by the years of former President Ben Ali's rule. Under President Bourguiba and then under his successor, Ben Ali, the traditional institutions associated with the Islam of learned *ulemas* (Islamic scholars) were considerably weakened and placed under strict government control, thus losing their autonomy in relation to the state. Political Islam was obviously repressed. Finally, Sufism has been weakened by the modernist emphasis of successive Tunisian regimes since the country gained its independence from French rule.

In an authoritarian environment, two new lines of Islam developed, in contrast with the previously mentioned currents. Firstly, a kind of "light," non-political, individualist understanding of Islam has developed. This trend was supported by transnational influences, such as new preachers (e.g. the famous Egyptian preacher Amr Khaled) as well as by local ones: Ben Ali's son-in-law, Sakhr al-

Matri, launched Radio Al-Zeitouna, promoting such a kind of piety, and also launched several charitable organizations and an Islamic bank, under the leadership of a young preacher, Mohamed Masfar. Secondly, Saudi-inspired Salafism gained an audience via satellite television channels from Egypt (the channel Al-Nas, i.e. "the people") and from the Gulf countries. It introduced a more radical kind of religiosity. Since the revolution, it has already started to express itself: a few Salafi groups have taken control of some mosques, forcing their former *imams* (prayer leaders) to resign.

It seems likely that the institutions promoted by the son-in-law of the former, now exiled, president will lose their credibility. At the same time, the En-nadha movement, representing political Islam, seems neither willing nor able to take over. During an initial period, Salafi trends might benefit from that situation. Then, provided political Islam manages to restructure itself, a polarization of the religious field might occur, unless the state manages to bring about its own structuring of religious life.—By Patrick Haenni, a researcher at Religioscope Institute, reporting from Tunisia

Shared parishes—a new kind of pluralism in American Catholicism

Just as national churches catering to distinct immigrant groups defined early Catholicism and suburban parishes marked much of the 20th century, the shared parish is destined to define Catholic life in our time, writes Brett Hoover in the *American Catholic Studies Newsletter* (Fall). Shared parishes are defined as

churches that minister to two or more cultural/ethnic groups and have especially risen to prominence since the late 1990s with increasing Hispanic immigration. A 2008 study of five geographically distributed dioceses found that 45 percent held masses in two languages. In

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studying diocesan websites in 2009, Hoover found that 71 percent of parishes in the diocese of Miami, 34 percent in the diocese of Knoxville, 16 percent in the diocese of Port Jefferson in the Midwest, 23 percent in the diocese of Baker in Oregon, and 52 percent of the parishes in the Oakland, Calif., diocese held mass in more than one language. The move to shared parishes happened without diocesan planning, but rather is the result of ad hoc arrangements and what Hoover calls “intercultural negotiations.”

The “shared” dimensions of these parishes range from just holding masses in two languages to more structural changes that include different educational programs and other ministry programs. It is

often the religious education programs where there is the most conflict and thus more negotiation needed, according to Hoover. The shared parish he studied had Hispanic and Anglo educational tracks with very different dynamics, challenges and goals. The Hispanic program was concerned with preventing an exodus of young people to evangelical churches and meeting immigrant needs, while the Anglo program addressed a milieu that included low birth rates, the out-migration of people of marriage age and the need for school age programs for parents. Often the founding community of the parish views the newcomers in a shared parish as interlopers and sees the church as really belonging to them—an attitude that is heightened when the immigrants have illegal status.

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Most dioceses cannot start separate parishes to minister to immigrant groups.

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Hoover found that those over 40 with memories of “pre-1990 cultural hegemony” have such a proprietary attitude. He concludes that with limited financial resources and staffing, most dioceses cannot start separate parishes to minister to immigrant groups and that such pluralism will mark American parish life for the foreseeable future.

(American Catholic Studies Newsletter, Cushwa Center, 407 Geddes Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556)

Racial diversity versus denominational unity in Seventh Day Adventism?

The long-standing debate about how religious institutions can attract interracial leadership and members is being played out in Seventh Day Adventism (SDA). The fall issue of *Spectrum*, an independent Adventist magazine, reports that the denomination’s regional conferences, which were started 60 years ago to minister to black Adventists, have been criticized and even threatened with being dismantled by leaders who view them as segregating blacks and dividing SDA. The regional conferences still have black and other minority administrators, but are now open to all races, while the other local conferences remain largely run by white administrators, even in racially diverse congregations. Economist Henry

Felder looks at membership and financial figures of the regional conferences versus the rest of the denomination, known as the North American Division (NAD), and finds that they show healthier indicators than the other local conferences. By 2008 (the most recent year for which membership figures for both kinds of local conferences are available), the regional conferences were larger than the other local conferences and had a higher rates of baptisms and growth, as well as having indicators of administrative effectiveness that were greater, on average, than the rest of the NAD.

Figures on the regional conferences from 2009 show a growing membership (269,700, or 25 percent of the NAD) and robust tith-

ing (representing 18 percent of the NAD). There are 994 churches in the regional conferences and they have average memberships of 271.3; the 4,230 churches in the rest of the NAD have an average of 192.3 members. Leaders propose dismantling the healthy African-American-led regional conferences to support a “west coast model” of administration that would turn the leadership over to “overwhelmingly white-administered structures that are largely headquartered in suburbs,” Felder writes. Such a plan is “ill-conceived on efficiency, effectiveness, and missiology grounds.”

(Spectrum, P.O. Box 619047, Roseville, CA 95661-9047)

Evangelical shift in theological publishing

Religious publishing trends show a shift toward cutting edge theological books coming from evangelical publishers, as well as a growing interest in books on life after death and apocalyptic themes, reports Rodney Clapp in the *Christian Century* magazine (January 11). In reporting on the meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, Clapp

writes that although “denominational and university presses continue to publish copious and important work, the center of gravity in publishing has arguably shifted to houses with evangelical bases or connections. The conspicuously large bookselling booths, and presumably concomitantly robust sales, now belong to Eerdmans, InterVarsity Press, Baylor University Press and

Baker Academic and Brazos Press.” These presses boast a lineup of sophisticated theological thinkers, including Miroslav Wolf, N.T. Wright and David Gushee. Other book trends show a revival of interest in books on the Apostle Paul, the afterlife, and apocalyptic thought and literature.

(*The Christian Century*, 407 S. Dearborn, Chicago, IL 60605)

Baby boomers the fastest growing demographic at American seminaries

Baby boomers “embarking on a second or third career by answering a higher calling” are the fastest growing segment in theological seminaries, reports *Time* magazine (January 31). While those under 30 are still the largest cohort of students—accounting for one-third of the enrollment—the 50 or older group has

grown from 12 percent of students in 1995 to 20 percent in 2009 (the most recent year for which data is available). While some baby boomers enter the ministry after suffering career setbacks, it may also be that this new wave of seminarians are pursuing lifelong passions and goals now that they are no longer burdened with mort-

gages and children’s tuitions. Many of the boomer theological school applicants have been active in their churches for a long period of time and have recently increased their involvement. “They all seem to have had a calling to the ministry at some point,” said McKennon Shea of Duke Divinity School.

CURRENT RESEARCH

► **The number of religious “nones,” or the unaffiliated, in the last two decades has grown significantly, but this group may be about evenly split between secular and more religious elements, according to a recent study.** Surveys showing the percentage of religious nones have indicated that they range between 11 percent and 20 percent of the population; this variation itself may show the diversity in this population, write Chaeyoon Lim, Carol

Ann MacGregor and Robert Putnam in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (December). Using data from three separate panel studies (the Faith Matters study, General Social Survey [GSS] and American National Election Study), the researchers find that religious nones comprise two distinct groups: a largely secular group, accounting for 10 percent of the nones, who may believe in a higher power, but do not practice religion on a regular basis nor consider religion important in their lives; and a more “luminal” group that fails to identify with the “no religion” camp consistently, accounting for another 9–10 percent of the respondents in the Faith Matters and GSS surveys. This group is more religious than

those in the first category on most measures, yet they are less consistently religious on these measures than affiliated Americans.

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

► **Congregations are increasingly turning to social networking sites such as Facebook, although 40 percent do not use any such Internet tools, according to a survey by Lifeway Research.** Facebook was the most popular of these networks (47 percent), followed by networking tools provided by church management software packages (20 percent). Large churches use Facebook more than small ones (81 percent versus 27

percent for small congregations of up to 100 members). City and suburban congregations were also more likely to use these social networks—from a high of 57 percent of suburban churches to a low of 39 percent of rural churches. Most use these networks for congregational interactions (73 percent), as well as for distributing news and information to members (70 percent) and interacting with individuals outside of the congregation (62 percent). A previous Lifeway survey found that nearly half of Protestant pastors personally use Facebook.

(<http://www.lifeway.com>)

▶ **Caribbean blacks in the U.S. have a high rate of religious involvement, although those born in America have lower rates of affiliation than immigrants, according to a study in the *Review of Religious Research* (December).** In the first quantitative study of Caribbean blacks in the U.S., researchers Robert Joseph Taylor, Linda Chatters, Jacqueline S. Mattis and Sean Joe analyzed data from the National Survey of American Life, which had a sample of 1,621 Caribbean blacks. As with many past studies of immigrants, it is the most recent immigrants who are the most religiously involved. Only those immigrants most recently arrived in the U.S., who may tend to view their stay as temporary, were less likely to attend church than American-born Caribbean blacks. Baptists, Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists registered the highest affiliation. But rates of affiliation differed according to countries of origin: Jamaicans attended church more than those from Trinidad-Tobago, although those from the latter country were more likely to be members of a church.

(*Review of Religious Research*, 618 SW 2nd Ave., Galva, IL 61434)

▶ **Between 2000 and 2010 the total number of Orthodox parishes in America increased by 16 percent, according to the 2010 Census of Orthodox Christian Churches in the U.S.A.** The census, a part of the Religious Congregations and Membership Study, 2010, finds that those Orthodox bodies showing the greatest parish growth were: the Bulgarian Orthodox Eastern Diocese (+122 percent increase in parishes), the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese (+121 percent) and the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church (+89 percent). Only three Orthodox Churches declined in number of parishes during the period 2000–10: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church of America (Catholicosate Cilicia).

(For more information on the census, visit: <http://www.orthodoxreality.org>)

▶ **While Shi'a Islam in the U.S. has had the reputation of being more quietist than its larger Sunni cousin, new research suggests that the smaller branch of the faith can generate activism as well.** Writing in the journal *Politics and Religion* (published November 1 online), Cyrus Ali Contractor draws from the Muslim Public Opinion Survey (2009) to compare Shi'a and Sunni responses on issues of identity, views of being a Muslim in the U.S and political participation. While the Sunni Muslims agreed to a greater extent that the teachings of Islam were compatible with political participation in the U.S., Contractor was caught off guard by the finding that Shi'a Muslims were more likely to participate in a rally or protest (by a significant four to five percentage points higher than Sunnis).

It was especially Shi'as in Dearborn, Michigan where this sentiment was the strongest about such political participation (and found not be corre-

lated with ethnicity, such as being Lebanese and supporting causes involving Lebanon). The author cautioned that his sample of Shi'as—mainly from Michigan and the Los Angeles area—was smaller than for Sunnis (960 versus 96) and needed confirmation. The protests and rally included events outside the Shi'a community—such as dealing with Palestinian rights, usually a Sunni cause—and it may be that “narratives that drive Shi'ism are also empowering many Shi'as to act politically for the benefit of society as a whole, not just for Shi'as' or Muslims' gains.”

(*Politics and Religion*, <http://journals.cambridge.org>)

▶ **The 2011 French *Annuaire Evangélique* (Evangelical Yearbook) has just been published, revealing that a majority of practicing Protestants in France are now of an evangelical persuasion.** According to Rev. Daniel Liechti, an evangelical missiologist, who has contributed a statistical analysis inserted in the yearbook, there are today some 1.7 million Protestants in France (not including the overseas regions, such as the French Caribbean). Among the 600,000 who practice their religion on a regular basis, 460,000 are reported to be evangelicals. Evangelicals thus represent one-third of French Protestants, but make up three-quarters of practicing ones. The yearbook covers all types of evangelical groups, from Baptists to Pentecostals, and includes congregations belonging to various unions, as well as to local, independent ones. Taken together, there were 769 evangelical congregations in France (excluding those overseas) in 1970; there are 2,068 today (2,380 if those overseas are included). This means that more than 1,400 congregations have been planted in France over the past 40 years.

But the listings also show a fragmentation of the evangelical presence in

France; there are more than 45 different unions, plus more than 200 independent congregations. The largest organization (in terms of affiliated congregations) are the Assemblies of God, with 382 congregations, followed by the Evangelical Gypsy Mission (218). Nearly half of the unions belong to the National Council of Evangelicals of France, which was created in June 2010 and actually comprises nearly 70 percent of the congregations. Some of the unions also belong to the French Protestant Federation, the "official" Protestant body originally representing mainstream Protestant Churches in France. The current president of the French Protestant Federation is an evangelical minister. Thus the dynamism of evangelicals (one new congregation is born every ten days in France, Liechti reports) is increasingly changing the face of French Protestantism.

(The *Annuaire Evangélique* contains all the addresses of congregations and ministers in France. It is available only in French and can be ordered through its publisher, BLF Europe, <http://www.blfeurope.com>)

▶ **Depending on the cultural groups considered, there are different attitudes toward religion among young people in Germany, according to the results of a study commissioned by the Shell company in 2010.** Since 1953 Shell has commissioned an annual survey on youth attitudes in Germany regarding a variety of topics. The 2010 survey results are based on a representative sample of more than 2,600 young people aged between 12 and 25. For most of the youth, religion only plays a minor role. However, this pattern is not uniform. For most young people in the former East Germany, known to be one of the most secularized areas in Europe, religion has lost any significance. And Christian world-views have become fringe: only 8

percent still say they believe in a personal God.

These results confirm observations by several sociologists: contrarily to some expectations following the fall of the communist system in East Germany 20 years ago, and despite the key role played at the time by the Protestant Church as a space for opposition to the former regime, there has not been a religious revival there. In what used to be West Germany, religion still plays a moderate role among young people. But in a third group, religious beliefs play an important role, i.e. among young people with roots in migrant groups. Not only do religious beliefs remain strong in that group compared with other groups, but they have even tended to increase in recent years.

(The main results of the Shell study can be read and downloaded (in German) from the website: http://www.shell.de/home/content/deu/aboutshell/our_commitment/shell_youth_study/. For insights on secularization in Germany and comparisons between the former West and East Germany, see the article by Christol Wolf, "How Secularized Is Germany?", *Social Compass*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June 2008)

▶ **The world's Muslim population is likely to increase by about 35 percent in the next two decades, going from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion, according to new study by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.** Globally, the Muslim population is projected to increase at about twice the rate of the non-Muslim population over the next two decades—an average annual growth rate of 1.5 percent for Muslims, compared with 0.7 percent for non-Muslims. Current trends, if they continue, suggest that Muslims will make up 26.4 percent of the world's total projected population of 8.3 billion in 2030, up from 23.4 percent of the estimated 2010 world population

of 6.9 billion. While the global Muslim population is expected to grow at a faster rate than the non-Muslim population, the Muslim population nevertheless is expected to grow at a slower pace in the next two decades than it did in the previous two decades.

(The full study is available at: <http://pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx>)

▶ **A study of changing social attitudes among Australians toward other religions and cultures finds that religious orientation is a factor in the degree of openness they feel to such newcomers.** *Pointers* (December), the newsletter of the Christian Research Association of Australia, cites the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) as showing that beside age, education, social class and income, religion was also a factor that affects the level of acceptance toward other religions. Of those who attend church monthly or more often, 35 percent say they feel positive to people of other religions. "In comparison, among Australians who do not attend religious services at all, just 18 percent say they feel positive," writes Philip Hughes. The exception to this pattern was found among more exclusive religious groups, such as the Pentecostals. Nevertheless, even among the latter, only 29 percent rejected the statement "We should respect all religions." The Australian findings are similar to a study from the United Kingdom on practicing Christian openness to religious immigrants [see the November/December RW].

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

▶ **Claims that there could currently be up to two million Christians in Nepal are considered as exaggerated by several observers of the local religious scene.** But the growth of Christianity is real, reports

the news agency Eglises d'Asie (January 16). The figure of two million was quoted in the recently released 2010–11 edition of the *Nepal Catholic Directory*: this would have indicated an extremely strong growth, since there were 1.5 million Christians two years ago and 1.8 million last year. In fact, according to the Protestant secretary of the Nepal Christian Society, such numbers are inflated and the real numbers are re-

ported to be closer to one million. In the current context, he comments, figures are not innocuous: anti-conversion movements are active in the country and inflated numbers fuel their resentment. The official Nepalese census indicated 2,541 Christians in 1971 and 101,976 in 2001. However, it is true that there have been dramatic changes in the religious landscape of the country during the last decade. While the Roman Catho-

lic community remains small (around 8,000 faithful), there has been an explosion in the number of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, now found in all 75 districts of the country. But precise statistical data is still missing. Research has found 2,500 Christian places of worship around the country.

(Eglises d'Asie, 128 rue du Bac, 75341 Paris Cedex 07, France; <http://eglasiemeepasie.org>)

Anti-Coptic terrorism, conflict spreading beyond Egypt?

The intensifying violence and terrorism committed against Egypt's Coptic Christians show signs of spreading into Egyptian diaspora communities in the West, reports *The Tablet* magazine (January 8). The current revolts in Egypt and the participation of Egyptian immigrants in Western countries in such protests suggests the strong transnational ties that exist beyond that country. Since a New Year's day suicide bombing in a Coptic church in Alexandria, killing 21 people and injuring 79, Coptic churches in France, Germany and the Netherlands have received threats by Muslim extremists of impending attacks. Plans to attack the Copts in Germany had been made over the Internet and were "to a certain extent credible," according to one German church authority.

It is not clear what the current crisis in Egypt will mean for its Christian community at home and abroad. Writing on the evangelical website *EthicsDaily* (January 31),

Ayman Ibrahim, a student at Fuller Seminary, reports that Egyptian Christians fall into two main groups: one group "supports the demonstrators and calls for 'change,' without being sure of what the future might hold for them. The other group stays home or within church territories in continuous prayer for God to save Egypt." He adds that some are concerned that the Muslim Brotherhood may gain power and move the country in more strongly Islamist directions.

(*The Tablet*, 1 King's Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0QZ, UK; World, P.O. Box 20002, Asheville, NC 2880; <http://www.ethicsdaily.com>)

New tensions between Vatican and China

"Is the honeymoon over?" asks the magazine *Inside the Vatican* (December), following a consecration of a Chinese bishop deemed to be illicit by the Holy See on November 20. Subsequent nominations at the helm of "official" Chinese Catholic bodies in China have seemed to confirm the assessment that relations between the Roman

Catholic Church and Beijing are again going through rougher waters. Chinese Catholics continue to be divided between the "official" church, recognized by the state, and the "clandestine" church, which refuses to submit to state-controlled bodies, considered as illegitimate from the church's perspective (the word "clandestine" should not be understood too literally, since many of the "clandestine" communities and their clergy are actually well-identified, although toleration may greatly vary from one place to another; arrests of "clandestine" priests and bishops are frequent). In recent times, however, a kind of gentleman's agreement had been established: since 2006, only "official" clergy approved by Rome would be ordained to the episcopate, thus granting them a kind of dual status: being both part of the "official" Chinese Catholic Church and in communion with Rome.

In 2010 only ten new bishops had been created in such a way, reports the news agency *Eglises d'Asie* (December 1). In some places, it is reported that "official" and "clandestine" parishes share the same place of worship. On November 20, however, a priest in a high position in the "official"

Catholic Church apparatus was elevated to the episcopate without the Pope's approval. Bishops taking part into the ceremony had apparently been put under strong pressure to do so. The move gave a clear sign that Chinese authorities are unwilling to relinquish their control over Catholic Church life in China. While the reaction of the Holy See was unambiguous, even more strongly worded statements came after the 8th Assembly of the Representatives of the Church in China, which took place from Dec. 7 to 9 in Beijing. An "illegitimate" bishop (i.e. one who had been ordained without Rome's approval) was elected as the new chairman of the Chinese Bishops' Conference. At the same time, a "legitimate" bishop (but generally considered as compliant) was elected as the chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the ruling body of Chinese Catholics, which refuses Rome's interference. Two "illegitimate" bishops will assist him.

The votes were quasi-unanimous, and anyway there was only one candidate for each position. The new situation will make it difficult for Rome-recognized "official" bishops to avoid concelebrating with "illegitimate" ones (*Eglises d'Asie*, December 16). The Holy See denounced the assembly and violations of religious freedom in China, describing state interference in religious life as a sign of "weakness" rather than strength. Dated Dec. 17, the Holy See's communiqué stated that many bishops and priests had been forced to attend the assembly, and called the others to repent of their participation. The Holy See also stated that both the recent illicit ordination and the assembly had

damaged the dialogue and atmosphere of trust between Rome and the Chinese government. Members of the "clandestine" church in China rejoiced over the reaction of the Vatican: they had felt that Rome had become too soft in recent years for the sake of diplomatic dialogue with China. By taking moves that would make dialogue more difficult, the Chinese leadership has apparently wanted to show clearly who is in control.

(*Inside the Vatican*, P.O. Box 57, New Hope, KY 40052-0057)

Moldova's Orthodox competition, political involvement drives down church influence?

Since 1992 there have been two competing Orthodox jurisdictions in the Republic of Moldova. Nearly two decades later, the situation seems only to have contributed to a weakening of the influence of both groups, reports Andreai Avram (Moldova-Institut Leipzig, Germany) in the monthly magazine *G2W* (January). Following the emergence of a national movement in Moldova in 1989 in the context of liberalization and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet regime, the Moscow Patriarchate made a Moldovan the bishop of Chisinau, later elevating the see to an archbishopric, and to metropolitan status in 1992. In the same year a bishop and group of priests left the Moldovan Orthodox Church to join the Romanian Orthodox Church, claiming that the dissolution of the Romanian

diocese that had existed earlier in the century, when the area had become Romanian territory, had been illegitimate.

The Romanian Orthodox Church accepted the group, only claiming, however, jurisdiction over the Romanian-speaking population of Moldova—while the Moldovan Orthodox Church considers its own jurisdiction as purely territorial, including Romanian-speaking and Russian-speaking Orthodox faithful, beside other ethnic-linguistic groups. Supported by some political forces, the new Romanian diocese faced difficulties in getting state recognition, as well as various other hurdles, until the Moldovan government was forced to register it in 2002, following a decision of the European Court of Human Rights. Moldovan authorities claimed the group was a tool for pan-Romanian aspirations threatening the very existence of the young republic. While this political debate has settled down in recent years, the Romanian diocese is now an established, though smaller, player on the Moldovan Orthodox scene: it numbered 309 parishes in 2009, while the Moldovan Orthodox Church (Metropolis of Chisinau) had 1,281 parishes.

In such a context, it is not surprising that both Orthodox churches in Moldova have been interacting with politics. But Avram observes that, despite the fact that surveys have revealed a rather high level of trust toward the church among the Moldovan population, neither of the two groups has managed to influence significantly the political life of the country. Neither church-supported pan-Romanian views nor church-supported "Moldovanism" has convinced

local voters. Apparently, inter-church conflict and church involvement in politics tend to make citizens suspicious. Consequently, one can expect the role of both Orthodox churches in Moldovan political life to continue to decrease, and this could accelerate secularizing trends in Moldovan society.

(G2W (in German), Birmensdorferstrasse 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland; <http://www.g2w.eu>)

Indian megachurches—cell-based, ornate and pastor-led

India's megachurches are growing and tend to be housed in huge, luxurious buildings, are based on networks of cell groups, and show strong leadership from the senior pastor, reports an article in *Lausanne World Pulse* (January/February), an evangelical newsletter on world missions. The article provides case studies of three Indian megachurches (without reporting on how many such congregations exist in India): the Mark Buntain Memorial Assembly of God Church in Kolkata, the Full Gospel Assembly of God Church in Bangalore, and the Bethel Assembly of God Church, also in Bangalore.

The large and ornate buildings these churches are housed in “provides attendees with a psychological boost in a place where belonging to Christianity makes one a minority,” writes Imchen K. Sungjemmeren. The numerous cells or small groups of these churches tend to “multiply mitotically,” with a new group breaking

off after its parent group reaches 20 members. Along with having a strong senior pastor who draws visitor to these churches, they also are strongly seeker-friendly, for instance, using the term “Jesus’ followers” for believers as a way not to offend those who associate Christianity with its colonialist legacy.

(*Lausanne World Pulse*, <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com>)

Behind India's newfound love for Buddha—an analysis

India is a Hindu majority country, but the recently opened Terminal 3 of the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi, the capital, showcases statues of the Buddha. There are no other religious symbols at the airport apart from the Buddha, although Buddhists form less than one percent of the country's 1.2 billion people. In addition, the Indian parliament recently passed a bill to revive the ancient Nalanda University in eastern Bihar state, a renowned Buddhist center of learning from 427 to 1197 CE. The university will be portrayed as a global center for Buddhist studies. High-caste Brahmins and Muslim invaders destroyed the university three times, the last being in the early seventh century. Its demolition was a key point in the waning of Buddhism in India.

Why this show of love for the Buddha centuries later? Perhaps, the fact that most Buddhist devotees from Western nations head to South-East Asia—although India is the seat of the Dalai Lama and it is here that the Buddha was

raised and attained Nirvana—has invoked India's jealousy. Moreover, Tibetan Buddhism is catching on in the West. It is estimated that several hundred thousand Westerners are interested in Mahayana Buddhism. Another reason could be that India has long been trying to engage with South-East Asia and the former's commitment to promote Buddhism may strike a chord with some of the region's Buddhist nations.—By Vishal Arora, a freelance writer based in New Delhi

Intensifying 'Buddhist warfare' in southern Thailand

With a bomb explosion killing nine people on January 25, this month's toll of insurgency-related deaths in Muslim-majority southern Thailand rose to 22. Around 30,000 soldiers and thousands of paramilitary troops guard the three provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat that border Malaysia. At least 4,000 people have been killed and over 7,000 injured in the tensions between Muslim insurgents and the Buddhist kingdom of Thailand after the conflict reignited in 2004. The Thai government blames the rampant violence on Islamist groups, but many accuse the security forces of carrying out killings with impunity. The region under conflict was a Malay sultanate and partially under Thai suzerainty until the early 20th century. It was principally a Malay-speaking, Muslim-majority region, and in the late 20th century a segment of residents took up arms against the Thai state, seeking independence.

The Thai government was able to broker a ceasefire deal with some

key armed groups, but, for unknown reasons, militancy soon began to resurface. Along with the killings of many Malay Muslims, the minority Buddhist community reacted too. The ethnic, local and migrant Buddhists sought to consolidate themselves in relation to the majority Malay Muslims. In November 2004 the queen of Thailand added force to the emerging collective Buddhist identity and aggression by calling upon the region's 300,000 Thais to learn how to shoot in one of her public speeches.

The Buddhist-Muslim conflict of southern Thailand is part of a larger pattern of Buddhist militancy, according to the recent book *Buddhist Warfare* (Oxford University Press) by Michael Jerryson and Mark Jurgensmeyer. The authors write that ordained Buddhist monks in southern Thailand have been involved in secret missions to kill Muslim insurgents. Monks condoning violence is not a new development. In 1976 a right-wing monk, Kittwutho, declared that "killing communists is no sin," according to an article

in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (Volume 40, Issue 1). It is believed that Thai Buddhism—belonging to the Theravada school—became political and nationalistic particularly after the death of Bhuddadhasa Bhikkhu, an influential Buddhist philosopher, in 1993. The article also points out that Thai armed forces have been accused of large-scale brutalities under the pretext of serving the nation, the Buddhist religion and the king since the early 1970s.—
By Vishal Arora

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

■ The password for access to the RW archives, at: www.religionwatch.com, remains: **Standard**.

■ Olivier Roy, a prominent Islamic specialist, has branched out considerably to study the contours of globalized religion in his new book *Holy Ignorance* (Columbia University Press, \$27.50). Roy looks at the whole spectrum of contemporary religion and sees a dominant trend of individualized faith and a separation of religious faith from cultural roots and identity. Roy argues that secularization and globalization have not resulted in an absence of faith as much as anti-intellectual religions—such as Pentecostalism and Islamic revivalism—that have split off from political and cultural bases. He sees this development not as a religious resurgence, but as a sign of the greater visibility of religion—Roy thinks this explains why there are more battles over religion in public, even as rates of affiliation decline. Increasingly, religion becomes more ephemeral, appealing to specific

generations and affinity groups, but losing its sense of place and community.

Roy's argument is complex, made more complicated by an awkward English translation, but he is not saying that revivalist religion has not become cultural. These new religious currents depend on conversion (with even traditional faiths stressing conversion more than in the past), but converts have to educate their children in the faith, thus bringing culture back into the picture. But these cultural forms mainly serve as "religious markers" (Islamic head scarves and Christian rock) that differentiate the believer from the surrounding culture. Roy also provides an interesting account of how religions lose their cultural bases as a result of internal schisms, as "neofundamentalists" seek ever-greater purity, while the surrounding culture loses its religious knowledge. The book is an intriguing examination of contemporary religion outside of the usual secularization debate, covering, for instance, how religions are "formatted" and standardized under globalization. But in his portrayal of the sharp split between religion and culture, Roy seems to

give short shrift to the idea that religious involvement can generate social capital and other forms of social change.

■ Margaret Poloma and John C. Green's new book, *The Assemblies of God* (New York University Press, \$47), attempts to explore how this Pentecostal denomination has sought revitalization while it develops a more formal and institutional posture. In previous writings, Paloma had argued that the church body was moving toward the religious establishment and had departed from its revivalist beginnings. Through using surveys and qualitative methods to study 22 congregations, the authors revise the earlier view and adopt a more open-ended perspective where they see segments of the denomination getting in touch with revitalization currents through participation in the global Pentecostal movement. The book categorizes the Assemblies of God into a typology of "evangelical" (emphasizing a broad evangelical identity and downplaying Pentecostal practices such as speaking in tongues), "traditional" (including both ethnic and Anglo churches that

stress classical Pentecostal roots and denominational belonging), “renewalist” (high on supernatural, “signs and wonders”, but low on Pentecostal identity), seeker-sensitive “alternative” congregations that downplay their Pentecostal identity, and an emerging category of “progressive” churches with a strong social action thrust.

The authors write that the evangelical congregations have significant influence in the Assemblies of God (AoG), while the post-denominational, alternative sector may be a destabilizing element in the denomination. They also note that prosperity teachings are increasingly finding a hearing among members. A major theme of the book applies what the authors call “Godly love,” meaning a close relationship to God and benevolence toward others generated by “primal experiences” (revivals), to findings on the attitudes of AoG members. Experiencing such Godly love (which, quite uniquely, the authors use as a sociological variable) seemed to conflict with traditional external standards (stressing institutional loyalty and strict moral codes) and correlate with a network-based approach to church authority and social activism.

■ Understanding the nature and degree of political and religious prejudice in American academia remains a hotly contested issue, but the new book **Compromising Scholarship** (Baylor University Press, \$34.95), by sociologist George Yancey, wades into the controversy in a fair-minded and balanced manner. Yancey looks specifically at the social sciences (and, to a lesser extent, the humanities and natural sciences) and how its professors view religious and political minorities in their midst. He conducted surveys of faculty in both religious and secular universities, asking them to rate whether they

would accept as job candidates a wide range of groups, including Democrats, Republicans, vegetarians, evangelicals, fundamentalists, Mormons, gays, National Rifle Association (NRA) members, Muslims and communists. In his survey of sociologists, Yancey found that almost half of them—especially women and those studying marginalized populations—showed more hostility toward fundamentalists, evangelicals, NRA members and Republicans than other groups.

The author then examines blogs by sociology professors (acknowledging that blog writers are often more activist) to understand the roots of this hostility and finds that a linkage is often made between right-wing politics and evangelical Christianity. Yancey also conducted another survey among professors in the other social sciences, humanities and natural sciences. He finds a similar pattern of bias against fundamentalists and evangelicals, as well as Mormons and NRA members. Professors in anthropology and English registered the highest degree of bias against these groups, while those in the fields of the natural sciences were somewhat more favorable toward them. Professors from religiously affiliated colleges also scored more positively in their attitudes toward these groups, although also showed bias against political conservatives.

Yancey acknowledges that negative personal or even collegial attitudes toward conservative religious and political groups do not necessarily lead to bias in research (a task he leaves to other researchers). But in the conclusion he warns that a systemic pattern of exclusion and hostility toward religious, political and lifestyle groups, preventing the formation of a truly inclusive academic culture, cannot help but close off paths of inquiry and the questions

and interests that lead to innovative research.

■ **Black Megachurch Culture** (Peter Lang, \$32.95), by Sandra Barnes, attempts to show how megachurches started by African-Americans serve important educational needs in the black community. Barnes studies 16 black megachurches—mostly Baptist, but also including congregations ranging from United Church of Christ to independent charismatic—and finds that entertainment and education co-exist in these congregations. Rather than mimicking the white megachurch style, most of the congregations are “heavily influenced by historic Black Church worship,” even as they swap music styles ranging from hip-hop to gospel. With their well-trained staffs, professional buildings and hi-tech equipment, Barnes argues that worship itself in black megachurches represents a time of “collective instruction where a captive audience can be socialized toward the specific vision and theology of a charismatic senior pastor.”

The whole socialization process is more effective in black megachurches than other congregations because it melds “cultural components from the most indelible aspects of the Black tradition and Black history with extreme biblically justified expectations.” The megachurches excel at offering practical education (not to mention Sunday schools and faith-based schools) ranging from sermons to workshops and other programs that target specific issues—from weight loss to at-risk youth. It is in their social and political views that Barnes’s sample of black megachurches differ sharply from their more conservative white counterparts. She finds that liberation theology themes find their way into black megachurch pastors’ sermons, although pastors and other respondents seem to blend social

justice concerns with self-help themes. Barnes concludes that the wide range of educational programs and resources of black megachurches are significant and can be more effective if such “church capital” can be harnessed through more alliances between such congregations.

■ While a good deal of attention is given to the battles between religion and science, the ways in which religious groups have adapted and appropriated scientific ideas are often ignored. A new anthology, the ***Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*** (Brill), provides scores of examples of “scientific” religions, even if the science that is sacralized is often not of the orthodox variety. This massive book—running to 924 pages and containing 32 contributions—is edited by James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer and looks at both new religious movements and the major world religions. In the first chapter, Lewis writes that religions are appealing to the authority of science as a strategy for enhancing their legitimacy in societies where science has higher status and holds a “mystique” for non-believers. He makes an interesting distinction between the rational authority of science for an active scientist and the “charisma” of science, which appeals to people often on the basis of their experience with technology and its practical nature (solving problems). Religions that have adapted this aspect of science include Christian Science, Spiritualism and Scientology.

Other ways that science is adapted by religions and spiritualities that are covered in the handbook include adopting a scientific philosophy (the New Age movement), using science as an apologetic tool to support and spread the faith (Koranic and Vedic science, including yoga), borderline science (Ufology), mainstream empiri-

cal research on religion (biofeedback research on Buddhist monks) and what can be called an academic qualification focus (stress on a spokesperson’s doctoral degrees). These categories are explored in chapters dealing with issues ranging from Muslims and evolution to the role of science and science fiction in various faiths, archeology and the goddess movement, and skeptics’ use of science.

[RW’s editor contributed a chapter on the scientific ethic of American Sikh applied science professionals]

■ The new book ***HIV Is God’s Blessing*** (University of California Press, \$24.95) by anthropologist Jarrett Zigon provides an examination of Russian Orthodox programs treating drug addicts and HIV sufferers as they blend Orthodox spirituality with self-help therapy. HIV infections show the fastest growth rate in the world in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, with Russia registering the highest number, reaching up to one million people and spread mainly through intravenous drug use. Most of the funding to fight the disease has come from outside funding agencies. Even Orthodox programs targeting HIV and drug addicts receive most of their funding from outside groups and get little support from the official church, according to Zigon.

It was not until 2004 that the church issued a statement on HIV, committing itself to fighting the epidemic and viewing it as detrimental to the moral life of the nation. The statement also chastised Western churches and other relief organizations for their “pragmatism” and “harm reduction” approach that tolerates the behaviors that have spread AIDS, such as drug use and homosexuality. The most concerted Orthodox effort to rehabilitate and treat heroin users, who are often

infected with HIV, is the center on the outskirts of St. Petersburg run by clergy, psychologists and laity, many of whom are former addicts. The compound is known as “The Mill,” which offers a three-month residential program where church-approved self-help techniques are added to such strategies as talk, art, and film therapy, and Orthodox teachings and practices, such as prayer and confession. While full conversion to Orthodoxy is the goal of the program, there is also the realization that the majority of clients will not convert and therefore hold out for the secondary goal of their living a normal, drug-free life. Zigon notes that The Mill reports a success rate of 25 percent.

The key concept emphasized at The Mill is the need to “work on oneself.” This idea has its basis in both Orthodoxy and in the nation’s Soviet history and relates to the belief that one can remake oneself into a new moral person. Orthodoxy teaches that through personal discipline and spiritual assistance from the church, one can achieve a state of holiness and spiritual perfection. Zigon concludes that a program such as The Mill, with its emphasis on self-help and discipline, is suited to the “new Russia,” where the values of personal responsibility and decentralization are prized over those of the welfare state. Such values may appear to conflict with the human rights statements of the Russian Orthodox Church that criticize Western capitalism and individualism. But he writes that the church-run program for drug addiction and HIV finds itself producing “responsibilized subjects who are now better disciplined to participate in the very Western-oriented neoliberal world from which the church had hoped to save them.”

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About Religion Watch

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

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

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

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

Since January 2008, *Religion Watch* is associated with *Religoscope Institute* (Switzerland) and its bilingual website (French/English), *Religoscope* - www.religion.info, which makes available more than 1,200 free, original articles.

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