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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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Rev. Moon rekindles millennial expectations

Recently on what has been described by followers as his last world tour, the founder of the Unification Church and of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (among many other organizations), Rev. Sun Myung Moon, is also seizing this opportunity for claiming that God's Kingdom is coming soon, a message he proclaimed during his talk to a private gathering at the United Nations (UN) in Geneva, which **RW** attended. The world tour started in late April and has special significance for members of the Unification Church, since it is understood to be the last of its kind for the aging religious leader. Among people ac-

companying him during this travels is his seventh and youngest son, Hyung Jin Moon, who holds an MA from Harvard Divinity School and "has been designated by his father as the person who will carry on his religious work."

Despite the passing of years and increasing old age, Rev. Moon (born 1920) continues to cultivate grand perspectives and affirm his own role as a pivotal figure in the history of humankind. On April 18, Rev. Moon proclaimed "the era after the coming of heaven through which a new heaven and new earth will be realized by

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Gay rights in the Presbyterian church—another domino or the end of a trend?

The debate on gay rights that has raged in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for more than three decades culminated in the recent ratification of a measure allowing the ordination of gay and lesbian ministers and lay leaders while giving regional church bodies the ability to decide the issue for themselves. The denomination is the fourth mainline Protestant church to allow gay ordination, after the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It was the fourth time the church had voted on issues related to gay ordination, and the votes may reflect a shift of attitudes in the church and the broader society, reports the *Los Angeles Times* (May 11). Since the last time the matter was brought to a vote in 2008–09, some 19 presbyteries have switched their votes from "no" to "yes," including some in relatively conservative areas, such as central Nebraska and northern Alabama.

The e-newsletter *Religion Today* (May 14) reports that while gay rights activists say the wind is at their backs with such a decision, other observers note that the Presbyterian vote may be less of a bellwether of future change than the completion of a trend that has made the rounds among exclusively mainline church circles. The remaining United Methodist Church is unlikely to give up its opposition to gay ordination anytime soon, since it is an international body with a significant representation of "global South" churches opposed to such measures. The other largest American denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Catholic Church, are not likely to consider such changes in the near future. "There is not another denomination I see on the horizon right now that is on the cusp of this," said Robert P. Jones, CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, a non-partisan research and consulting firm.

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returning to true love.” The aspiration to world peace and to an ideal world remains intact and is even revitalized through Rev. Moon’s current preaching. Commenting on the recent disaster in Japan, he took it as a sign that the Last Judgement is now taking place: we are living “in a historic time of great cosmic transition” that will change history and “create the ideal kingdom of heaven that God has longed for since the beginning of time.” January 13, 2013 will be the Foundation Day, i.e. the actual beginning of God’s Kingdom. The spiritual and earthly worlds will be connected and brought into oneness, hence his call to intense commitment during the next two years “under the guidance of the True Parents” (i.e. Rev. Moon and his wife).

The fact that the meeting took place at the UN, thanks to the ac-

credited NGO status of several Unification Church-sponsored organizations, emphasized the significance attributed to the UN’s work by the movement. In contrast with a number of millenarian movements that view the UN and other international institutions with suspicion, Rev. Moon sees them as instruments for bringing a better world. The founder of the Unification Church also continues to promote media projects: for instance, he would like to see regional newspapers appear across the US under the aegis of the *Washington Times*, a newspaper under the control of the Unification Church. He also continues to promote projects such as the building of undersea tunnels between Korea and Japan, as well as across the Bering Strait, as part of efforts toward the unity of humankind at a symbolic and practical level. The Unification Church remains a strongly millenarian

movement, but this does not contradict visionary projects that are expected to be achieved through human efforts. Apparently, the dream of “a world where all people are equal and all nations become like brother nations”—in Rev. Moon’s own words—remains strong enough to inspire a number of “Moonies,” both first and second generation.

What remains to be seen is how the mantle will be passed to new leaders after Rev. Moon leaves the scene, and if Hyung Jin Moon will manage to keep the direction of a united movement. While lacking his father’s kind of charisma, he might be the person who can steer the Unification Church out of its PR problems, according to *The Independent* (May 12). Some observers have described him as “the acceptable face of the Moonies.”

Anti-circumcision movement gaining momentum

A proposal to ban circumcision in San Francisco is only the latest sign of conflict growing over this traditionally Jewish practice. The proposal will appear on the November 2011 ballot in San Francisco, after enough signatures were collected from city residents. If it passes, it would make the circumcising of males under the age of 18 a misdemeanor offense, and there would be no religious exemptions (*International Business Times*, May 20). Despite a decline in the circumcision rates in recent year (apparently down to 33 percent currently), a majority of American males are circumcised (*Boston Globe*, May 25). Advocates of circumcision claim it has health benefits (lesser risks of infection, easier genital hygiene),

although not compelling enough to make it a routine; they claim that to equate it with female genital mutilation (which has no known health benefits) is dishonest. Opponents say it is a mutilation imposed on newborn boys without their consent and evokes possible health risks as well as an alleged lesser level of sexual enjoyment.

The proposal will no doubt generate heated debates, with issues of religious freedom playing a central role (both Jews and many Muslims practice circumcision for religious reasons). The debate is not only a Californian one: if one pays attention, there are people in other parts of the U.S.A. and in various parts of the Western world

calling the practice into question. Many anti-circumcision activists are themselves of Jewish descent, observes Jan Jaben-Elion (*Jerusalem Report*, April 25). One of the leading U.S. activists, Matthew Hess, president of MGMBill.org, says that social networks such as Facebook have helped support for the ban to explode: he intends to make it a top civil rights issue for this decade. Jewish community leaders say that the increasing number of American Jews not circumcising their sons is related to the high degree of assimilation of the Jewish community. Increasing numbers of Jews in Israel are making the same choice—another sign of the rift between religious and secular people in that country.

Extremist Islam targets alienated youth in U.S. for 'lone wolf' terrorism

Since the death of Osama bin Laden, security analysts have been anxiously surveying the prospects for new terrorist threats. Writing in the journal *National Interest* (May/June), terrorism analyst Jessica Stern writes that contrary to the message of the recent Congressional hearings on Islamic extremism, most threats come not from “radicalized” mosques and clerics as much as from alienated youth with tenuous ties, both ethnically and socially, to the established American Muslim community. Stern writes that Al-Qaeda has been targeting American youth in its publications (even publishing the magazine *Awake* to radicalize youth), encouraging them to act on their own at home. The strategy is bearing fruit, as Stern recounts a roster of recent

“lone wolf” terrorist actions that has expanded since 2009. The pattern somewhat resembles European terrorist actions in that the perpetrators are delinquent youth from a disenfranchised ethnic group (along with a high number of converts).

In this case, several of the American terrorists are children of Somali immigrants who came to the U.S. as refugees from the civil war raging in their country; many of them have also been recruited by the Somalia-based extremist group known as Al-Shabaab. Unlike earlier Muslim immigrant groups, Somali Americans have the highest rates of unemployment and lowest rates of college education among the East African diaspora. While some of these young

Somalis come from traumatic backgrounds, even those who are more integrated into American society have been susceptible to the call to extremism. Stern concludes by criticizing the recent attempt to scrutinize the American Muslim community, especially since Muslims have been important sources of information in tracking down terrorists. She cites a recent study by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security showing that of the plots thwarted since 9/11, Muslim citizens provided critical information to the law-enforcement community 40 percent of the time.

(*National Interest*, 1615 L Street, N.W., Suite 1230, Washington, DC 20036)

University chapels as interfaith laboratories?

Universities are increasingly putting their chapels and religious affairs offices to use in fostering interfaith relations and religious tolerance, reports the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 15). The Obama administration has recently issued a message to American universities to encourage interreligious tolerance and local service projects, but there was little reference to the way university chapels and chaplains are already engaged in this function, writes Mark Edington. It is the case that in some colleges, chaplains are mainly seen as counselors, having little or no public function; in other schools, a growing trend is the emergence of external experts—where outside agencies are

called in to teach the language of interfaith dialogue, usually without any reference to chaplains or existing religious ministries.

A “multifaith model” is coming into its own whereby colleges ensure the equality of all religious organizations and, sometimes through an interfaith chaplaincy, numerous events are held where students of different faiths come together or engage in volunteer projects. Edington, who is a minister in the Memorial Church at Harvard University, sees the “established church” model as providing the one thing that the other models don’t—a shared worship experience for all students and faculty. He adds that the estab-

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A “multifaith model” is coming into its own.

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lished church-type chapel is still present in both religious and secular colleges (including Harvard, Princeton, Stanford and Duke Universities) and that “new interpretations of [this model] may help create a commons among those of different religious traditions, different ethnic identities, different class locations, and different political persuasions.”

Christian rappers' Calvinist edge

The growing genre of Christian rap has taken an unexpected turn towards conservative Reformed or Calvinist theology, reports *Christianity Today* (May). The magazine reports that not since contemporary praise music came from Calvary Chapel and the Jesus movement in the 1970s “has a genre of Christian music become so associated with a specific stream of evangelicalism. And while not all Christian rappers are

Reformed ... the growing edge of the movement is explicitly taking its cues from Calvinist leaders.” Such Christian rappers as Grammy nominee Lecrae, Trip Lee, Flame, Voice and Shae Linne are strict Calvinists who rap on the Westminster Catechism, the sermon topics of prominent preacher John Pieper and such Reformed doctrines as limited atonement. Theologian D.A. Carson notes that most Reformed

rapping is done in performance at conferences rather than in congregations. With its heavy masculine style and focus on reciting lyrics and text, the affinity between rap and conservative Calvinism is not as incongruous as it may seem, adds Anthony Bradley of The King's College.

(*Christianity Today*, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)

CURRENT RESEARCH

► **While it is not difficult to find a correlation between individuals' religious views and their rate of cohabitation, a new study argues that a similar association is present on the country-wide level.** The study was presented at the April meeting of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics and Culture (ASREC) in April, which was attended by *RW*, and is the first community-level examination of the impact of religion and moral communities on the increasingly high levels of cohabitation in American society. Baylor University researchers Martha Gault-Sherman and Scott Draper look at U.S. Census data and the 2000 Religious Congregation and Membership Study and find that those counties with higher rates of membership of evangelical churches show a smaller percentage of the population that is cohabitating.

Outside the South, the mainline membership rate has a similar, although smaller, effect. The only Catholic effect is in the South, where there is actually a significant positive

relationship between the Catholic adherence rate and the percentage of people cohabitating. The researchers speculate that, regardless of one's individual religious beliefs regarding cohabitation, “the existence of a large group of religious others may prevent people from cohabiting in an effort to avoid embarrassment or social sanctions.” Spatial location and region also have an effect on these rates, as counties in the South show the greatest effect of what Sherman and Draper call “moral communities” on cohabitation

► **Churches are slowly rebounding from the recession, according to a new report from the 2010 Faith Communities Today survey.**

The survey, conducted among more than 20 religious groups and 11,000 congregations, finds that about one congregation in 10 has begun to recover from the financial losses experienced during the recession and more than 40 percent of congregations polled are now stable or improving financially. More than half (57 percent) of U.S. congregations reported that their income had declined due to the recession. Larger congregations appear to have recovered more easily, but the recession cut across the theological spectrum,

hurting both liberal and conservative congregations, according to the article in the *Christian Century* (May 17).

► **The preliminary results of a first-of-its-kind census of Hindus in the U.S. presented at the ASREC conference arrives at a total of 606,000 active adherents of this religion.** The census, conducted by J. Gordon Melton (Institute for the Study of American Religion) and Constance Jones (California Institute for Integral Studies), counted both Hindu temples and Hindu adherents, assuming that for every active Hindu there is another one who may identify with the community, but at present is not showing this preference actively. For this reason, Melton and Jones suggest that the total number of Hindus in the U.S. would be about 1.2 million—close to the figures found in recent polls of the number of people self-identifying with the religion. The researchers find that the Hindu community is divided between autonomous Hindu temples, consisting of various Indian regional and ethnic identities, numbering around 260, and temples and centers attached to different Hindu movements that arose in India in the 19th and 20th centuries, estimated at more than 400.

Over 100 groups are found to have given up temple worship and rituals and meet together in small numbers at meditation centers, often called *satsangs*, stressing a particular Hindu-based spiritual practice, such as yoga, or philosophy, catering to many Westerners. There are also hundreds of guru-based movements that emerged since World War II and, after attracting controversy in the 1970s and 1980s, experienced stability and growth as they approached the new millennium. While there is at least one Hindu center in every state, a large percentage of these groups “remain small and fragile, with no permanent home or facilities.” Melton and Jones conclude that American Hinduism exists on an upward trajectory, growing at a rate far ahead of population growth, although substantially less than what appeared to be happening in the 1970s.

► **Openness to the free trade of goods and services is correlated with the role religion plays in one’s life, according to a preliminary study presented at the ASREC conference.** The study, presented by Martin Leroch, Carlo Reggiani, Giampaolo Rossini and Eugenio Zucchelli, is based on results from a survey of 1,753 students from 16 universities from 14 different countries from around the world. Respondents were asked about their preference for home or foreign goods and services as well as a wide number of issues in the economic and religious spheres. The researchers find that the importance of religion in one’s life appears to increase the bias towards making use of foreign goods and services. Although the researchers caution that they could not yet establish whether the respondents’ religious affiliation and beliefs cause the openness to trade, they hypothesize that religion may generate trust, which in turn affects the level of trade between local

communities, different villages and even different nations.

► **High levels of civic engagement and social capital have long been associated with Nordic societies and those with Nordic or Scandinavian ancestry, but a new study suggests that both religion and ethnic traditions are important in this regard.** An article in the online *Journal of Religion & Society* by Terry L. Besser of Iowa State University examines a longitudinal study of 99 towns in Iowa conducted in 1994 and 2004 that used Census data and surveyed residents on religion and civic engagement. The case for what Besser calls the “Nordic exception” is upheld in the analysis, but it is also found that the Lutheran affiliation of Scandinavian descendants accounts for higher levels of social capital (involving social trust of those within and outside of one’s ethnic group). In fact, the Lutheran affiliation is positively related to social capital, while Scandinavian ancestry is not.

The higher level of civic engagement of towns with Scandinavian Lutheran descendants prevails even when social and economic variables are controlled. The assumption that all mainline Protestant denominations are similar in their impact on social capital and civic engagement is also called into question. Small Iowa towns with a large proportion of Methodists or Catholics are “different from towns with more Lutherans in prevailing attitudes of trust, friendliness and neighborliness; norms of reciprocity; and residents’ involvement in the community.” Besser concludes that the results demand the question being asked of “what is unique about Lutheran traditions and culture that enhances community wide social capital?”

(*Journal of Religion and Society*, <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/toc/current.html>)

► **A poll commissioned by the German Catholic weekly *Christ und Welt* finds that 180,000 Catholics left the Church in 2010.** This is an increase of 40 per cent over 2009. In certain Bavarian dioceses, the increase is as much as 70 per cent, possibly indicating a particular reaction to the cases of large-scale abuse at the Benedictine Ettal Abbey near Oberammergau. More Catholics than Protestants left their churches in 2010 for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic, reports *The Tablet* (April 16), a British Catholic magazine. Several Catholics in senior positions in the German church are concerned that the exodus is now reaching the “inner core of German Catholicism,” as many committed members are leaving. Also new is the fact that many of those leaving the Catholic Church are now joining Protestant congregations. The statistics are based on those who “signed out” of the church in 2010, petitioning their local municipal authority that they want to leave the church.

(*The Tablet*, 1 King’s Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0QZ)

► **While Estonia is considered one of the most atheistic countries in Europe, it may be the case that Estonians have become as much “Easternized” as secularized, according to a study in the journal *Social Compass* (March).** According to the Eurobarometer (2005), only 16 percent of Estonian residents believe in God, a smaller percentage than in other European countries. Yet 54 percent believe in some sort of spirit or life force, and several studies show more than 25 percent consider themselves as “seekers” or falling between being religious and non-religious. With 28 percent of Estonians believing in reincarnation, researcher Lea Altnurme writes that there has been a significant shift toward a “church-free spirituality” based on a non-

Christian mythology, even among many Christians.

Altnurme conducted 77 interviews focusing on people's life stories and finds that the "Christian myth" predominated among those born between 1918 and 1940. This group's religious views are often based on biblical themes—sin, heaven and hell—while later generations are characterized by a more Eastern or "New Age" myth (although not using the term "New Age") marked by syncretistic and self-centered (rather than God-centered) spirituality. These changed attitudes also include those who became Christian after the fall of communism in 1992, as they tend to supplement Christian references with those of self-spirituality, including the belief in reincarnation. It is particularly the "negative" teachings of Christianity, such as suffering resulting from sin, that have been eclipsed by New Age concepts of gaining wisdom from suffering. Altnurme concludes that in Estonia a "new monistic/holistic paradigm has taken its place alongside the monotheistic/dualistic paradigm that has dominated for centuries as the foundation of Christianity."

(*Social Compass*, <http://scp.sagepub.com>)

► **The number of Christians in China remains a highly disputed question, but one of the more extensive attempts to reach an accurate figure finds that the number is**

close to 70 million. Writing in *First Things* magazine (May), Rodney Stark, Byron Johnson and Carson Mencken note that figures as far apart as 16 million to 200 million have been asserted in accounting for China's Christians. The sociologists cite a national survey conducted in 2007 as among the most accurate. Horizons Ltd., one of China's largest and most respected polling firms, conducted a national multistage probability sample of Chinese in mainland China and reached a total of 35.3 million Chinese Christians over the age of 16. Stark, Johnson and Mencken write that the figure is likely too low, since many Chinese refuse to participate in surveys, with Christians more likely not to participate.

The sociologists launched a follow-up study in cooperation with colleagues at Peking University in Beijing. Based on contacts, they were able to obtain samples of members of Chinese house churches from many of the same areas used in the original Horizon survey sample. This yielded an estimate of 64.3 million Christians 16 and older. Since this was the total for 2007, the researchers adjusted the figure to 70 million Christians in 2011. When excluding Communist Party and Youth League members (who tend to be in the higher income bracket), they found the higher their income, the more likely Chinese are to be Christians.

(*First Things*, 35 E. 21st St., New York, NY 10010)

► **The first large-scale economic study of religious organizations in India finds that they are growing rapidly and are increasingly offering non-religious services to their constituencies, according to Cambridge University economist Sriya Iyer.** Iyer directed the study of 568 religious organization and presented a paper on her preliminary findings at the ASREC conference in April. She finds that the religious component of these organizations is "very strong" among Hindu and Muslim groups, and that most of them emphasize having a place of worship rather than home-based rituals and worship—even among Hindus who have traditionally stressed the latter. Such practices as caste-based segregation and child marriages are increasingly being abandoned by Hindus.

Non-religious social services are increasingly offered by organizations of all religions, although Hindus are more involved in food-based services and Muslims and Christians are more likely to provide education, even to those outside their folds. Iyer finds that these organizations—which can range from radical to more liberal—tend to offer more social services when there is a perception of economic inequality, which has grown since the 1990s. She concludes that the Indian government is viewing these organizations as being important in managing interfaith relations.

Disputed numbers and outcomes for faith-based organizations in the developing world

The rise of faith-based social service organizations in the develop-

ing world is undisputed, but determining just how many of these groups there are and the types of people receiving these services is far more difficult to ascertain, according to World Bank specialists speaking at a special session at the ASREC conference attended by **RW**. Jill Olivier of the World Bank said that in sub-Saharan Af-

rica, the "health work done by churches is vastly overstated," citing current estimates of the proportion of the church-run sector as being anywhere from 40 to even 70 percent. Olivier said it is actually more like 10 to 20 percent. Part of the reason for the inflation of these numbers is that for many faith-based organizations it is use-

ful to cite the most favorable rates for continued support. It is also the case that there has been a dearth of data on the smaller faith-based groups, even for such fast-growing religions as Pentecostalism. There is also a good deal of mixture in these organizations; many may have a faith-based approach, but are in the government sector.

The other presenters at the sessions gave somewhat mixed assessments of the outcomes of faith-based organizations (FBOs). A paper on the African nations of Burkina Faso and Ghana finds that seven or eight percent of health services in the latter country are provided by FBOs rather than the 30 percent claimed by such organizations, according to Quentin Wodon of the World Bank. He finds that FBOs are no more likely to reach the poor than non-FBOs, while there is often a higher cost for the services of the latter. In Burkina Faso, 57 percent of social services are provided by secular agencies, although the share of FBOs is growing, especially in education.

A survey of FBOs in Cambodia presented by Claudia Zambra of the World Faiths Development Dialogue finds that such groups do not form a unified “faith sector”, but rather a patchwork of poorly studied and coordinated groups. She finds that many of these groups are more pragmatic than ideological in approach. Muslim FBOs have received funding from Saudi Arabia in building mosques and *madrassas*, and those who study abroad often come back to Cambodia more conservative, such as wearing head coverings. Few Buddhist organizations are doing develop-

ment work as of yet, although working with the growing movement of socially engaged Buddhists may be the best strategy for delivering social services, Zambra concludes.

Europe's prison chaplaincies cooperating in multicultural societies

Chaplaincies in European jails have to meet the challenges of a growing religious diversity, while those of different Christian denominations are increasingly drawn into cooperating with one another and integrating the various religious traditions that they encounter into their practical work. Beside such common features, there is, however, a considerable variety in the space given to religion and to the work of chaplains from one country to another, and even from one jail to another, explains James A. Beckford (University of Warwick) in his introduction to several articles on the topic, published in the *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* (January–March). Increasingly, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists have been hired by prisons in European countries in recent years, notes Irene Becci (Bielefeld University). This means that chaplains are no longer required to fulfill some roles to the same extent as earlier, and thus can focus on more-specific work, while relaxing some of their denominational characteristics.

In some countries, chaplains continue to belong to Christian

churches, while visitors from other faith groups are allowed to work in such settings, but not as full-time chaplains. Mainstream chaplains visit inmates of all religious beliefs, or even those without beliefs, and hold interconfessional or even sometimes multireligious services, as they attempt to have some knowledge on other religious traditions, writes Mallory Schneuwly-Purdie (University of Lausanne) in her research on Muslim visitors to prisons in Switzerland. In contrast, Muslim volunteers coming to visit prisoners are limited to their own faith group and usually have no opportunity to see inmates of other religious traditions.

In their comparative research on Muslims in Norwegian and Danish prisons, Inger Furseth (KIFO, Oslo) and Lene Maria van der Aa Kühle (Aarhus University) come to the conclusion that prison policies do not necessarily correspond with general religious policies in the respective countries, in contrast with findings on other countries. In Denmark, prison imams are paid by the prisons, and there are plans to hire a growing number of them in the near future, partly as an element of a policy for preventing Islamist radicalization. In Norway, where the Lutheran Church has a relatively large number of prison chaplains, Muslim communities are expected to cover the costs of prison visitors. In England and Wales, there are today around 40 full-time Muslim chaplains, in addition to more than a hundred working in a part-time capacity, reports Stephen Hunt (University of the West of England). This is one of the results of the prison chaplaincy reforms instigated since July 2001, while in previous decades

non-Christian inmates depended on volunteer visiting ministers who themselves worked under full-time Christian chaplains.

(*Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 10 rue Monsieur-le-Prince, 75006 Paris, <http://assr.revues.org>)

Greece's financial crisis hits the Orthodox Church

Due to support given to the church by the state, Greek Orthodox institutions are feeling increasingly under pressure in the crisis-hit country. According to Greek sources quoted by the Paris-based *Service Orthodoxe de Presse* (May 23), the Greek government intends to cut by half the budget used for paying the salaries of Greek clergy. Moreover, it would like to have all Greek Orthodox institutions transfer their money from accounts with private banks to the Greek National Bank. Out of 757,500 permanent employees in the public sector, in 2010 the government paid the salaries of 10,800 priests and church staff. Since the government will now apply the rule of hiring only one civil servant for every five leaving as part of austerity measures linked to the international bailout loan arrangement, it had announced in late 2010 that the rule should also apply to the church.

Such a move would mean a drastic reduction in the ordination of new priests. Bishops protested, but some have already announced that they would nevertheless proceed with new ordinations, although the new priests would not be able to receive a state-paid salary for the time being. Other options are being considered, such as

having part-time priests with secular jobs, or salaries directly paid by parishes (*Service Orthodoxe de Presse*, April). During the second half of 2010, 240 priests went into retirement, and the total number of state-paid church employees had gone down to 10,421 by the end of the year. Church officials would like to have 300 new priests ordained in 2011. Several dioceses are already strongly hit by the crisis, and the situation could worsen. Moreover, a number of social work programs are also being affected at the very time that poverty is on the rise and social needs are greater than ever.

Evangelicals' work in rehabilitation centers in Russia brings growth and conflict to churches

Evangelical churches' involvement in running a large number of rehabilitation centers for substance abusers in Russia is bringing a new wave of participants into congregational life, but is also causing conflict with the more middle-class constituencies they are also reaching. *Christianity Today* (April) reports that this is particularly the case in Siberia, where visitors to Baptist, charismatic and Pentecostal churches "will sometimes see rows of silent men between the ages of 20 and 50, unaccompanied by women and children. They represent the success of evangelism efforts among Russian drug addicts and alcoholics." There are over 500 evangelical rehab centers in a country where a reported 6.5 million people suffer from drug and alcohol depend-

ency. A Russian journalist notes that this ministry is changing the composition of Russian evangelical churches, and also introducing some strains among members. He cites the example of congregations in the regions of Leningrad and Perm that have experienced splits among middle-class members over this ministry.

The centers have also drawn criticism for their non-medical approach, stressing Bible reading and recitation, prayer, and confession. An Orthodox priest running a rehab clinic in St. Petersburg said that the evangelical programs substitute dependency on drugs and alcohol with dependency on the evangelical churches or "sects" (Orthodox churches have recently become more active in rehabilitation work; see January/February 2011 RW). One Baptist program in Siberia's Novosibirsk region claims a success rate of 30 percent, while government rehab centers report a long-term success rate of just two percent.

Islamic banking on the rise in Pakistan

Deposits in Pakistan's Islamic banks rose from \$3 billion to \$4 billion last year, reports Pamela Constable (*Washington Post*, April 30). According to business experts, the trend is a consequence both of turmoil in the Western financial systems in recent years and of a surge in religious feelings. Not only banks, but also all kinds of products deemed to be halal (i.e. permissible according to Islamic law) benefit from this religious mood. Several Western banks also offer "sharia-compliant services" in Pakistan. But there

are also non-religious reasons for choosing Islamic financing, for instance, reduced financial risk. The principle of risk sharing is at the core of the system.

Despite such trust in the supposed security of Islamic finance, it is not immune to problems encountered by other types of firms.

From this angle, 2009 had been a critical year in the Gulf, the cradle of the industry, according to an analysis published a few months ago by *Asharq Al-Awsat* (September 6). It makes clear that adequate supervision had been lacking in some cases, leading some executives to regard Islamic fi-

nance "as nothing more than a means of marketing"—although the system itself was not the cause of the problems. The prospects for the growth of Islamic finance and ethical financial products in general remain strong, but risks inevitably go along with a rapidly growing industry.

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

■ The password for access to the RW archives, at <http://www.religionwatch.com>, remains:

Katallagete.

■ In 2006, the Italian marketing expert Bruno Ballardini attracted a good deal of attention with his book **Gesu' lava più bianco** (Jesus washes whiter), which argued that the Roman Catholic Church invented marketing. Products like soap are commercialized through marketing campaigns and branding, and in the same way the Roman Catholic Church created a brand for its own 'product', which is faith. More recently, Ballardini has written a second volume, **Gesù e i saldi di fine stagione** (Jesus and end-of-season sales), published by Piemme Edizioni. Even if the Roman Catholic Church invented marketing, now it has to face new problems: many young people are no longer attracted by religion, there is little trust in religious authorities and the brand needs an urgent re-branding. Ballardini imagines being called in by the Vatican as a marketing expert to find a solution for the church and he proposes a "SWOT" analysis of in-

ternal and external threats of the type used by marketers. Many new religious movements with better marketing skills are more attractive to people, e.g. Buddhism schools like the Soka Gakkai or Kofuku no Kagaku, Pagan traditions, and also atheism as non-religion.

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church is also internally threatened by the numerous schools and organizations that work inside the religion itself. One example is Opus Dei, a Catholic organization very active in recruiting young people and with a rigid and independent organizational structure. Those groups not only do not help the church to attract more people, but they also contribute to making the brand more fragmented and the message of faith less clear, according to Ballardini. The solution he proposes is to return to the original church, which had a unique and clear message that is more appealing to believers and more likely to be used as an 'advertisement'. From the point of view of marketing, one factor that influences the image of the church is its major 'testimonial', the Pope. The choice of John Paul II in 1978 was also surely an innovation from a marketing point of view: he was young and was from a Communist country, so he represented a Vatican political strategy aimed at Eastern European countries. He developed marketing-oriented innovations, especially big mass events to

attract young people, like the World Youth Day and the Jubilee, preceded and followed by big marketing campaigns and characterized by strong mediatization.

However, Benedict XVI, who became Pope in 2005, was a less innovative choice, since his theological ideas were very similar to the ideas of his predecessor. He showed his conservatism with controversial decisions, like the attempt at the reintegration of Levebvre's traditionalist supporters into the church, and continued the marketing strategy of John Paul II without significant innovations. Benedict XVI answers the needs of more conservative Christians and attracts young people in the World Youth Days he organizes, but because of his lack of innovation he is not able to compel non-believers to come back to the faith and have confidence in the leadership of the church. In the pedophile priests scandal, for example, he tried to deny the scandal at the beginning, then failed to take a strong position condemning pedophiles, and then recognized the problem only at a very late stage; according to Ballardini, this sequence of errors can be compared to the failed attempts of the CEO of British Petroleum to save the situation after the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.—By Giulia Evolvi, a Brussels-based writer specializing in new religious movements and marketing.

■ The link between class and religion has been overshadowed in recent years with the attention given to the religious pluralism and mobility of Americans. The new book ***Ranking Faiths*** (Rowman & Littlefield, \$49.95) by sociologists James Davidson and Ralph Pyle argues that while there has been a narrowing of religious stratification (or class systems), these divisions persist in American society. They find that the “overall religious group status ranking remains largely unchanged from the rankings of fifty years ago. Jews and liberal Protestants remain at the top, Catholics and moderate Protestants continue to occupy the middle ranks of the socioeconomic hierarchy, and Black and conservative Protestants remain at the bottom.”

Recent findings on the high rate of religious switching among American Protestants would seem to contradict Davidson and Pyle’s claims, but they argue that other research finds more continuity than flux in people’s religious affiliations. Even if mainline Protestantism has declined dramatically in membership in the last 50 years, they write that the mainline’s “power relative to Catholics and Jews has not declined very much.” At the same time, they acknowledge that the laws and codes enforcing the power of “elite” religions have declined, while new laws have been enforced limiting the use of religion to discriminate and allocate resources. Davidson and Pyle conclude that when religious stratification intensified, as it did during the 1930s–1950s, its negative effects have been muted; when inequalities declined, from the 1960s to the present, “their destabilizing effects have increased,” as seen, for instance, in cases of anti-religious prejudice directed at Catholics, Jews and Muslims.

■ The recent appearance of the ***Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Religion*** (Oxford University

Press, \$120), edited by Rachel McCleary, suggests the growing sophistication and diversity of this new field. The book’s contributors review key concepts and thinkers engaging in economic thinking about religion and present new research on a wide range of topics. The book covers religious economy theory, which explains religious change through economic concepts, as well as the historical and contemporary interaction between the marketplace and churches that takes place in areas with strong religious competition. Examples include the growth of Protestantism; the fact that canonizations in Latin America have gone from a share of 0 percent of the total in the period 1900–1949 to 14 percent in the 2000s; a study of how the religious component of communes such as the Hutterites survives such problems as the brain drain and how these communes maintain themselves more successfully than secular ones like the Israeli kibbutzim; and an examination of former Protestant missionary countries and higher levels of gross domestic product and democracy.

■ Although there are countless books on Islamic identity, the new book ***Are Muslims Distinctive?*** (Oxford University Press, \$22.40) takes a strongly “evidenced-based” look at Muslims around the world. The book, by University of California political scientist M. Steven Fish, is based on individual-level data (mostly from the World Values Surveys) and country-level data comparing Muslims to other believers and non-believers in terms of personal religiosity, social capital and tolerance, corruption and crime, terrorism, social inequality, and democracy. When dealing with country-level data, there is always the problem of controlling for factors that may be responsible for the results other than Islamic beliefs and identity. But Fish maintains that his results show

that Muslims tend to be like other believers—only more so. Muslims rate the importance of God in their lives more highly than non-Muslims. But they are not particularly more supportive of the idea that religious leaders should influence people’s political behavior, although they are unusual in their opposition to atheists holding public office. On a sociability index created by Fish, which measures the level of intra-group loyalty and activity (such as joining religious organizations), Muslims are found not to be significantly more “sociable” than Christians.

Intolerance levels are not necessarily higher for Muslims than non-Muslims, although there is less acceptance of abortion and divorce and particular opposition to homosexuality. There is some influence of national contexts; for instance, living in a country with a significant Christian population increases a Muslim’s tolerance for divorce (although far less for homosexuality). As for crime and corruption, Fish makes a significant effort to control for political and socioeconomic factors and finds that Muslims are not unusually prone to corruption and that at least on a national level, Muslim countries are low on the “anomie” that leads to high murder rates (a 2.1 percent murder rate in Muslim nations compared to a 11 percent rate in non-Muslim countries). Fish finds that in places where Muslims predominate, “females tend to fare relatively poorly” in terms of income and political equality. The chapter on terrorism, the longest and most complex, finds that most acts of terrorism are committed in Muslim countries and that such acts are geographically concentrated in seven of them. Self-proclaimed Islamists have been responsible for three-fifths of all such incidents and nearly seven-tenths of all terrorist-related deaths in the world.

■ **A Convergence of Civilizations**

(Columbia University Press, \$24.50) is a translation of the 2007 French book arguing that Muslim societies are converging with other nations in demographics and thus joining the rest of the “modern” and secular world. The book, by demographers Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd, challenges the long-held view that Islamic religious values inevitably lead to high fertility rates. The brief book (134 pages) does an interesting job of accounting for the diverse Muslim landscape and in what ways these patterns do and do not shape demographic trends. The varying rates of Muslim fertility range from about two children per woman (Morocco) to close to seven (Afghanistan and Yemen), reflecting differences between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, as well as minority and majority status in their societies. For instance, minority Shiite areas in Pakistan have retained higher fertility rates as a defensive measure in the face of the Sunni majority.

In other cases, Courbage and Todd are hard pressed to explain the patterns along Islamic lines, such as the stagnation of the fertility rate in Bangladesh. But they theorize that as the literacy rate hits a majority threshold among men, these societies enter a transitional periods that can be expressed in outbreaks of fundamentalist and other forms of “ideological revival;” the authors argue that Afghanistan has entered such a stage and counsel caution in dealing with the country. Courbage and Todd conclude that Muslim societies are following other societies up the demographic ladder toward modernization as they gain higher

rates of literacy, which tends to drive family size down. Just as the once-sharp fertility rate differences between Protestant and Catholic nations lost relevance during modernization in accounting for their economic and demographic divergence, the same process is underway both between Sunni and Shiite Muslims and among Muslim societies as a whole.

■ **Innovation in Islam** (University of California Press, \$24.95) attempts to answer claims that Islam makes little room for and even in principle opposes the idea of religious change. In the introduction, editor Mehran Kamrava cites historical examples of Muslim authorities condemning everything from coffee to television only to reverse these positions later and embrace such changes, showing that it is often the social and political context that determines whether an innovation will be condemned or suppressed. The book’s contributors focus on innovations both throughout history and in contemporary times, jumping from Sufi poetry and Islamic visual design to new methods of interpretation of basic beliefs. Particularly noteworthy are the chapters on Muslim reformers in Iran and how they are innovating Islamic jurisprudence; American Muslims and the novel yet contested ways they relate to the government; and how the choice of wearing the head scarf for Muslim feminists is a notable innovation in itself. Also interesting is the chapter by John Voll arguing that the Muslim Brotherhood and even Al-Qaeda and its offspring of “leaderless jihad” groups are clear institutional innovations in that they adopt more “post-

modern” and decentralized electronic networks of activism.

■ **Isma’ili Modern** (University of North Carolina Press, \$24.95), by Jonah Steinberg, presents the Isma’ilis, a sect of Shi’i Islam, as a case study of a religious movement adapting quite flexibly to the processes of modernization and globalization. The book is based on ethnographic work conducted by Steinberg in the Himalayan regions of Tajikistan and Pakistan, as well as among the religion’s diaspora in Europe. The religion is highly centralized under the leadership of the head imam, known as the Aga Khan, where followers participate in local social organizations (based on farming, small business and the development of local infrastructure) organized largely by the Afa Khan Development Network, creating a durable transnational network.

By participating in these social groups, Steinberg finds that the “borderland societies” in the Himalayas are becoming increasingly integrated into global networks and socialized to the values of liberal individualism and modernity in general. Through in-depth ethnography, the author adroitly fleshes out how the scattered Isma’ilis in isolated locations who are marginalized in their own countries rely on these networks for support and even for providing them with a new kind of citizenship that exists alongside the nation state. Steinberg also shows how since 9/11, Isma’ilis have increasingly portrayed themselves as the “anti-fundamentalist” Muslims who affirm modernity, democracy and capitalism.

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

Amahoro is the African version of “emergent” Christianity, which is

generally considered a “post-modern,” post-denominational movement seeking to restore the importance of community and worship among Christians. In the last several years, emergent Christian leaders, such as Brian MacLaren, have sought

to make the movement less focused on organizations, such as Emergent Village, while taking on a more global approach. This in turn has led to the growth of transnational networks with sympathizers in the global South, especially Africa.

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Amahoro is the result of emergent Christians in America and Africa seeking to build networks of consultation and cooperation that function outside of established denominations and the mindset of the prosperity gospel that has flourished in many churches in Africa. Just as emergent Christianity has positioned itself as an alternative to the Christian right in America, Amahoro is critical of individualist Christianity and prosperity teachings in Africa.

Although stressing equal relationships between partners and an African identity, Amahoro still has significant Western and

American input (the board consists of Americans). The organization sponsors gatherings led by African theologians that stress "justice-oriented" and transatlantic approaches to ministry (worship, unlike for Americans, is not an area of concern for African participants). An example of a project that resulted from an Amahoro gathering is African Road, which seeks to sustain a structure for one of its participants in his work with Rwandan orphans.

(Source: paper presented by April Vega at the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics and Culture conference)

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 1,000 U.S. and foreign periodicals (including newspapers from across the country, as well as newsletters, magazines and scholarly journals, as well as the Internet), and by first-hand reporting, that *Religion Watch* has tracked hundreds of trends on the whole spectrum of contemporary religion.

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

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

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