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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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## Christian right takes on congregational and charismatic flavors

While rumors of the Christian right's demise are regularly invoked by the media and pundits, such obituaries are just as easily revoked as the U.S. presidential campaign season approaches. This is not to say that the Christian right has not changed: in 2011 conservative Christian activism appears more localized and attuned to charismatic and Pentecostal sensibilities than in the past. The conservative evangelical weekly *World* (October 22) reports that in such a highly politicized state as Iowa, churches were roused to political activism by hate-speech legislation that was feared would constrain what may be preached from the pulpit. Three Iowa Supreme Court justices who ruled with the majority were voted off the bench, bringing a new confidence to pastors. Outside of Iowa, pastors are increasingly heeding the call to speak out on politics. Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention describes the emerging national movement of activist pastors as a "congregational version of the tea party."

But it is in the Pentecostal and charismatic milieu where the promise—or

temptations—of political activism is mostly strongly felt. The November issue of *Charisma* magazine is devoted to Pentecostals and politics, noting that current Republican candidates Michelle Bachman and Rick Perry are appealing to Pentecostals, who are "prone to like authoritative candidates who speak with the same authority of a traditional Pentecostal preacher." Charismatics tend to be more open than other Christians to minority candidates, such as Herman Cain. But the current political season has particularly reinforced the feeling of bigotry against Pentecostals, writes John Stemberger. The article points to media attacks against "Pentecostal-friendly" candidates and their connections to a shadowy movement known as the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR).

Stemberger writes that the NAR, often associated with charismatic teacher Peter Wagner, has been compared to a Christian "jihadist" movement. When the NAR refers to concepts such as the "seven mountain" strategy of asserting

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## Occupy Wall Street's religion—syncretistic and makeshift

The Occupy Wall Street movement has re-energized congregations and other religious groups on the left side of the spectrum and antagonized those on the right, but so far there are few signs that it is having a broad impact in American religion. *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* (October 28) reported that a "growing number of leaders from across the religious spectrum have been supporting Occupy Wall Street's protest against greed

and economic inequality." Yet it is clearly mainline Protestant and liberal movements of Catholicism, Judaism and other faiths that have most strongly made their presence felt at the various protest sites. Interfaith prayer services and the support provided by "protest chaplains," usually seminarians, have been the main corporate religious activities at the pro-

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test sites. Religious organizations and congregations have also provided practical assistance to the protesters, such as donating tents, food, money and even shelter when protesters were forced out of the park in New York.

The religious left blog *Religion Dispatches* (November 4) reports

that there are “cross-pollinations that exceed interfaith politics, and to which some faithful 99%ers may be opposed.” A makeshift “community altar” has been set up in New York’s Zuccotti Park, where protesters of all faiths come to pray or meditate before images of Ghandi, Alex Grey, John the Baptist and Kwan-Yin. At the Occupy Boston site, there is a “Sa-

cred Space” tent that invites meditation between a Buddha statue and a picture of Christ. Occupy Phoenix built an improvised shrine where First Nations traditions interact with Catholicism and Neo-Paganism.

(*Religion Dispatches*, <http://www.religiondispatches.org>)

## Vatican document shows global South inspiration

A new Vatican document calling for reform of the world’s economic and monetary system suggests the rising influence of the global South church in Catholic social thought, writes John Allen in the *National Catholic Reporter* (November 11–24). The document, entitled “Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority,” received wide notice for its critique of free

market or neoliberal economic principles and its call for a world governing structure and a central world bank. Conservative critics dismissed the statement as coming from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, a department with little clout with the pope, and as a throwback to failed socialism.

But Allen writes that even without papal influence, the document bears a striking resemblance to the

social thinking that has come out of previous documents from global South church leaders. “It’s fitting that the Vatican official responsible for the document is an African, Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, because it articulates key elements of what almost might be called a ‘Southern consensus.’”

(*National Catholic Reporter*, <http://www.ncronline.org>)

### CURRENT RESEARCH

► **The growth of non-denominational Christianity in the U.S. is often linked to the megachurches, but there are important differences between the two phenomena, according to Scott Thumma of Hartford Seminary, who presented research at the October conference of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) in Milwaukee.** Thumma, a specialist on megachurches, used data from the RCMS survey, estimating that there are 35,493 non-denominational congregations with roughly 12 million adherents, making them the largest church grouping in in the U.S. Non-

denominational churches have the highest concentration in Florida and California and have a median church membership of 150. These churches look a lot like evangelical churches, but only about 40 percent belong in that category, with about 20 percent falling into the fundamentalist family, 14 percent Pentecostal, 11 percent charismatic, and only a small percentage liberal (0.3 percent) and New Age (0.3 percent). The relatively high proportion of fundamentalists among the non-denominational churches makes them quite different from the megachurches, according to Thumma.

The median year in which the non-denominational churches were founded was 1983, but 20 percent were founded between 2000 and 2010. The congregations show a median growth

rate of 20 percent, with one-third showing decline and another one-third growing by 20 percent or more. Twelve percent reported having departed from a denomination; most of the congregations are “truly independent” of any church bodies or associations, although only 35 percent of the congregational contacts acknowledged that they were. The non-denominational church members tended to be younger and have more children than members of evangelical congregations. The non-denominational churches also were more likely to be male, slightly better educated and stricter than evangelical groups. In general, non-denominational churches tend to be more internally focused and not as socially active, but also more joyful, with greater use of contemporary worship.

► **Reports of a decline of religious belief and practice among American women are exaggerated, although young Catholic women may be an exception.** The report in the September/October RW of a Barna poll showing significant religious decline among women came in for criticism by sociologists Rodney Stark and Byron Johnson. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* (August 26), Stark and Johnson note that the stability of attendance and Bible reading patterns found in most surveys conflict with the Barna study showing a decline in these measures between 1991 and 2010. Barna found that 40 percent of both men and women read the Bible in 2010, compared to 50 percent of women doing so in 1991. In contrast, the 2007 Baylor Religion Survey confirmed other surveys' findings of the gap that has long existed between the sexes in Bible reading—29 percent men and 40 percent women (a 1988 NORC survey likewise found a 25:39 percent sex ratio in terms of Bible reading). Given the “remarkable stability of the statistics over the past several decades,” it is unlikely that there has been a major drop in women’s Bible reading in three years. Similarly, Barna’s reported 11 percentage point drop in women’s attendance and the narrowing of the gender gap conflicts with NORC data—38 percent of women and 28 percent of men attended weekly in 1991, compared with 34 percent of women and 25 percent of men in 2010.

But American Catholic women, especially those from Generation X and the Millennial generation, show particular religious disaffection, according to an analysis by sociologist Patricia Wittberg. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the broad pattern of Catholic women’s religiosity exceeding that of men began to change: while older Catholic women remained more religious than men their age, Generation X Catholic women barely equaled males their age. Recent results from General Social Survey show that Millennial women are slightly more likely than their male counterparts to say they never attend Mass, and they are significantly more likely to hold heterodox positions on papal infallibility and whether homosexual activity is always wrong.

None of the Millennial Catholic women agreed they had complete confidence in churches and religious organizations. In data on religious vocations, Wittberg finds similar trends of Millennial Catholic women disaffection: for instance, a recent study of vocation formation in Philadelphia finds far more men than women preparing for religious life. In contrast, Protestant Millennial women have not shown religious decline; they are significantly more likely to have confidence in religious institutions than men of their age (and even older Protestant women). Wittberg, who is writing an article based on this paper for the Catholic magazine *America*, notes that both Catholic and Protestant

Millennial women are significantly more likely to consider themselves “very spiritual” people. But she concludes that the challenge is to compete with other religious groups and secular society in providing a spiritual outlet for younger women in the church.

► **Strict historical evidence may not be the only criterion in determining the authenticity of Jesus’s words among a group of biblical scholars known as the Jesus Seminar, according to a study of the group by sociologist Sean Everton presented at the SSSR conference.**

The Jesus Seminar, a group of select scholars meeting to decide the historical veracity of the Gospels and other biblical writings, has been in the forefront of revisionist attempts to recover the “historical Jesus.” The method of the group, which met twice yearly, was to vote on whether they thought a particular saying was uttered by Jesus or whether later writers of the Gospels put the words in his mouth. The group has concluded that Jesus never referred to himself as the “Messiah” or “Son of God,” but was an itinerant wisdom teacher who preached liberation from injustice, mainly based on criteria including that multiple and earlier sources are preferred in establishing the validity of Jesus’s sayings.

Everton ran a statistical analysis of the votes cast by Jesus Seminar scholars, who drop beads of various co-

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Christian influence in various spheres of society, it is wrongly accused of pressing for a Christian government. But he adds that Pentecostals and charismatics may make themselves targets of media criticism and derision with their tendency to run their churches with “singular authority” that is

backed up with questionable prophetic teachings. Stemberger concludes that emerging charismatic leaders in politics, such as Samuel Rodriguez and Bishop Harry Jackson, defy an across-the-board Republican agenda, such as on immigration, and appeal to non-charismatics. Other influential leaders who have mobilized char-

ismatics include Rick Joyner (who founded the Oak Initiative); charismatic prayer leader Lou Engle; Jim Garlow, who rallied thousands to defeat the California gay marriage initiative; and Rod Parsley of the Center for Moral Clarity.

(*World*, P.O. Box 20002, Asheville, NC 28802-9998; *Charisma*, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746)

lors into a container to signify whether or not (to varying degrees) they think a particular passage was Jesus's own words. In his analysis of the votes (the records of which are published in the seminar's journal) the scholars cast on 1,544 versions of sayings of Jesus, Everton found that they appeared to value "unorthodox" sources, such as the Gospel of Thomas, over canonical sources. But after controlling for the effects of other factors, he found that the number of sources appeared to play little or no role in whether a saying was deemed authentic. After controlling for the Gospels and sources from which each saying comes, the date of the saying also appeared to play little or no role in whether it was deemed authentic. Everton concludes that the "evidence appears to suggest that even with tools of social science and modern literary theory, the Jesus Seminar Fellows are no less biased" than earlier scholars who sought to uncover the true life of Jesus.

▶ **A segment of Americans who are hostile to conservative Christianity may also show classic prejudicial attitudes toward such adherents, according to a paper presented at the SSSR conference by sociologist George Yancey.** In a previous study, Yancey found that 15 percent of individuals in the U.S. can be categorized as anti-fundamentalists, meaning that they have a more negative view of this group of Christians than other religions. In his new paper, Yancey attempts to find out whether or not this animosity toward conservative Protestants, most often displayed by the highly educated and "political progressives," is similar to the type of bigotry documented by their less educated and politically conservative peers. This classic type of bigotry often involves adopting a dehumanizing attitude toward a group (such as viewing them in animalistic, childlike

or "coarse" terms). Yancey conducted an Internet survey of 3,577 respondents who were members of organizations (which he does not identify by name) resisting Christianity (in the case of atheists and agnostics) or the Christian right.

He asked respondents their views of various religious adherents and then requested that they rate the desirability of having one of the following individuals as a neighbor: "A vocal Republican who is not a Christian" or "A vocal Christian who is apolitical." This question allowed the researchers to assess whether the religious or political nature of the Christian right is more likely to cause an emotional reaction against the group. Yancey found that 69.2 percent of his sample had more problems with vocal Christians than vocal Republicans. In analyzing the open-ended responses of this group (who tended to be male, white, wealthy and highly educated), he found that many, "if not most," Christians were described in terms of being culturally undeveloped, irrational, coarse or animalistic (as "sheep"). Yancey concludes that his study "provides a generous amount of evidence that certain individuals have developed attitudes of dehumanization toward conservative Christians, and especially towards fundamentalists."

▶ **A study of intolerance in 48 European countries finds that the stronger the rate of religious belief, the lower the level of intolerance.** The study, presented at the SSSR conference by Stephanie Dobbler of the University of Manchester, was based on an analysis of the 2008 European Values Survey, which polled 67,786 people from 48 European countries. Respondents were asked questions about their level of tolerance toward immigrants, those of different races and homosexuals. Dobbler finds that the effect of be-

lieving tends to decrease levels of intolerance. Religious believing has stronger and more strongly significant effects than religious adherence (including church attendance) and the importance of religion."

Dobbler adds that this finding supports previous research suggesting that intrinsic religiosity and private belief "seems to be good for tolerance almost everywhere in Europe." But church attendance and the importance of religion actually are correlated with higher rates of intolerance in countries in Southeastern Europe, particularly Muslim majority countries and some post-Communist countries (such as Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia and Moldavia). Dobbler adds that it is not Muslim denominational membership that is related to intolerance; rather, country-level effects (such as corruption and lack of democratic governance) appear to encourage intolerance and religious bigotry.

▶ **A study based on Brazil's 2010 census finds a significant loss of young adults in the Catholic Church.** The study, based on 200,000 interviews conducted for the census by Brazil's Getulio Vargas Foundation, shows that the Catholic share of the population reached its lowest level since census figures tracked religion in 1872. The number of people under the age of 20 in Brazil who say they follow no religion is growing three times more quickly than among those 50 or older, with nine percent of young Brazilians saying they belong to no religion.

The study, cited by *Fox News Latino* (October 8), finds that Catholics make up the greatest share of the upper and lower classes, but are losing ground among the middle class, the segment of society that is expanding thanks to Brazil's growing economy. In 2003, before Brazil's economic



boom, 72.5 percent of the middle class were Catholic. By 2009, the Catholic share had fallen to 67.4 percent of the middle class. There has also been a loss of Catholic women, but rather than giving up religion, many have shifted toward the historic Protestant churches, such as Methodists and Presbyterians, for their more liberal views on such issues as contraception and abortion. Meanwhile, the Pentecostal growth rate has been modest, increasing from 12.5 to 12.8 percent of the population since 2003.

► **A comparative survey of Egyptian and Saudi youth on religion and democracy finds that in the former country it is the most religiously conservative young people who support democratic reform.**

The analysis, presented at the SSSR conference by Jaimie Kucinkas of Indiana University, is based on the Youth, Emotional Energy, and Political Violence Survey, which interviewed close to 2,000 young Saudi Arabians and Egyptians. In Saudi Arabia, where there is less variation in interpretations of Islamic beliefs, religious ideology was found to be unrelated to democratic attitudes. In contrast, youth in Egypt who were rated the most “fundamentalist” are

the most likely to support democracy and believe that it has problems.

“These results suggest that there is a large potential base support among young people for religiously conservative political groups in Egypt, such as the Muslim Brotherhood . . . . My research suggests that if democracy should spread in the region, among young people, its most likely supporters will be very religious and adhere to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam,” Kuinkas writes. She adds that those youth who rely most on domestic media, the Internet and satellite TV have more favorable attitudes toward democracy.

► **According to recent sociological research on religion in Russia released by the Moscow-based Levada Center and presented on September 28 at a conference of the St. Philaret Institute, many Russians have found in the Orthodox Church a substitute for their previous Soviet identity in ethno-religious terms.** *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (December) cites the research as suggesting that the “Orthodox revival” in Russia, while real, must be assessed in a nuanced way. There has been a pro-

found change in the self-identification of Russians over the past 20 years: 72 percent of the adult population describe themselves as Orthodox, but only 55 percent of those self-described “Orthodox” believe in God.

Less than 10 percent of Orthodox believers attend religious services on a regular basis (something that actually matches a similar pattern in many European countries, including Western ones, it could be added). More than half of them visit church only twice a year (Easter and Christmas) and never pray, not even knowing the basic Christian prayers. Less than one-third of Orthodox parents speak with their children on religious topics. Still, there is an expectation that the Church could give some moral foundations and meaning to life, as well as contribute to social cohesion in a society where trust is found to lie at a very low level and where materialism is perceived as ruling life.

*(Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West, Birmensdorfertrasse 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland, www.g2w.eu)*

**Roma’s pan-ethnic identity assisted by evangelical churches—a special report**

A pan-ethnic identity is developing among Roma people, often with the help of evangelical and especially Pentecostal churches. Our recent study of a Spanish neighborhood with a high percentage of native Spanish Gitanos and Roma immigrants from Eastern Europe found how everyday interactions and involvement in

Pentecostal churches give rise to a common identity. Previous research has identified a common identity in the case of Roma political leaders and activists in Europe, while emphasizing existing differences among Roma ethnic subgroups. In recent years, Western Europe has been transformed by its reception of migrants from Eastern Europe, who included a significant proportion of Roma people.

In our fieldwork, we observed that people from both subgroups not

only shared a common identification as Roma, which is promoted by the mainstream society and media, but they also shared narratives through their involvement in Pentecostal congregations, such as the Philadelphia Church and the Church of the Open Bible. Both churches located in the *barrio* adapted rituals to the needs of Gitanos, while building ties with Roma immigrants as soon as they arrived, serving both groups within the same buildings.

The new Roma immigrants also

sought help from the churches' pastors and other members of the community in renting a place to live and tackling bureaucratic formalities; these churches thus provide services that other mainstream institutions and churches do not offer. Roma Pentecostalism emerged in Spain during the 1960s through the influence of French Roma pastors. Although initially it faced difficulties due to the Franco dictatorship, Pentecostalism grew during the 1980s and 1990s because it successfully adapted Roma cultural traits and music. By 2004 there were an estimated 150,000 Roma Pentecostals, comprising 10–15 percent of Roma people in the country, according to the Spanish Federation of Evangelical Churches.

Even those Gitano and Roma immigrants in the neighborhood not participating in political organizations tend to adopt this common Roma identity. They are influenced not only by media and images from mainstream society that encourage them to be part of the same group, but also by their daily interactions with evangelical churches and with pastors who through their services offer support to all Roma people. Thus, a common identity is being constructed for converts and non-converts through their interactions in churches and in the neighborhood. —By *Oscar Prieto-Flores, a sociologist at the Universitat de Girona, and Teresa Sordé Martí, a sociologist at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. A different and longer version of this article appeared in the journal Ethnicities.*

## European- and Canadian-funded research programs view religion as a new resource

Rising government concern about pluralism, social cohesion, and the role of Islam in Europe and Canada has led to the establishment of several large and unprecedented research programs on religion in these nations. When speaking of this trend at the SSSR meeting, sociologist Grace Davie noted that these national programs have “generated enormous activity and a new generation of scholars, although the research findings have not reached many lay people.” The largest programs include the Religion and Society program in Great Britain, with 75 separate projects; the Future of the Religious Past program in the Netherlands; VEIL in France; Religion, State and Society in Switzerland; the Role of Religion in the Public Sphere in Scandinavia; and Religion and Diversity in Ottawa, Canada. The European Commission is also funding 22 projects that deal in some way with religion.

There is often a large Islamic component to these programs; for instance, one-third of the projects in the Swiss program concern Muslims, even though they represent four percent of the population. But Davie argues that it is more than Muslim growth that is bringing the millions of euros to fund these programs. From the 1960s religion was largely ignored if not invisible in the public sphere, but in the 1980s and 1990s there was increased visibility to religion, even though it was seen as a “problem to be solved ....

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Religion was seen as a problem to be solved. Now religion is seen as a resource to be used.

”

Now religion is viewed as a resource to be used,” as in the case of faith-based social services. But while religion is re-emerging in public debate, the “increasingly religiously illiterate public don’t have a clue to what is happening,” Davie adds. The problem of getting the results of the research from these programs to lay people and religious groups is not helped by the media, which are often more “story-focused” rather than concerned with research, Davie concludes.

## Church of Sweden—disestablished, but increasingly politicized?

The disestablishment of the Church of Sweden in 2000 has led to a weakening of the national church and, somewhat surprisingly, greater interference in church matters by politicians, according to Thomas Girmalm of Umea University. In presenting a paper at the SSSR conference, Girmalm noted that the Church of Sweden (COS) had been “too bound up with the state to be completely free of state control” even after disestablishment. Since disestablishment, there has been an increasing “congregationalist” position of the church, even though such a posture was officially re-

jected by the COS in 1995. Local church services are increasingly distinct from the national church. This fragmentation within the same church is expressed as “different services for different people,” although it conflicts with traditional compliance with the church service manual.

The church traditionally has two “lines” of authority—the lay line and the bishop line. This double line is now being erased as the authority of bishops is being put into question. At the same time, the lay segment of the church is increasingly represented by local politicians who see themselves as representatives of society. In 2005 the church structure was challenged as being in conflict with a total “democratized organizational structure.” There is a shift in episcopal leadership from “control to support, resulting in a church where the bishop cannot intervene in its theological life or doctrine.” In such a transformation, the COS is increasingly viewed as a “guardian of democracy,” with little attention being given to doctrinal limits, according to Girmalm.

## Loss and challenges face British Catholics in northern heartlands

A special section in the British Catholic magazine *The Tablet* (October 29) reports on the significant decline of the “northern Catholic heartlands,” marked by parish closings and mergers, as well as declining membership. The heartlands, with its two largest dioceses in Liverpool and Lancaster, served a thriving Catholic

population that was part Irish and part recusant (families that remained Catholic after the Reformation), but is now facing a dearth of new priests (a 40 percent drop in the number of priests in 10 years) and changes in people’s attitudes to Catholic traditions. In the Lancaster Diocese, 22 parishes have merged since 2009 and 10 others have been linked, while there has only been one ordination this year. There may well be as many Catholics living in this region as before, but a much larger proportion of them are non-practicing.

Recent research by Durham University’s Centre for Catholic studies finds that part of the current problems may stem from the expectations and building projects from the 1931–61 boom period, marked by population growth and a rise in religious vocations. Dioceses have to deal with the legacy of too many buildings, often in the wrong places, and too few priests to serve them. In response to these changes, there are new initiatives that often take an ecumenical approach, for instance, borrowing from the Anglicans, who developed a “minister model, which, rather than spreading a pool of ministerial talent thinly across many communities, invests in the creation of a smaller number of beacon parishes as a focus for the evangelization of an area,” write Paul Murray and Marcus Pond. Another article suggests that where parishes have introduced the practice of perpetual adoration of the eucharist, “there has been a noticeable increase in the number of young men considering a vocation.”

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

## Dutch Bible Belt still vital, but feeling political pressures

Despite the Netherlands’ reputation as a bastion of secularism, a “Bible Belt” of conservative Protestantism has maintained itself in the small nation, which includes a political wing feeling new pressure from the secular right, writes Phillip Jenkins in the *Christian Century* (October 4). The Dutch Bible Belt runs from the northeast to the southwest of Holland, representing a substantial portion of the country. Many of the small conservative Calvinist churches that refused to merge into the liberal mainline bodies are represented in these towns, which still observe and in some cases legally enforce the sabbath. In other areas, these churches have taken to American innovations, with megachurches growing in such belt towns as Zwolle and Barneveld.

The traditional “pillars” of Holland, where adherents of different faiths had their own social institutions (such as newspapers, schools and political parties), have long collapsed, except in these Reformed enclaves. As in the U.S., the Dutch Bible Belt has been a base for conservative political activism, from the traditionalist Reformed Political Party to the more open Christian Union, which has taken its communitarian and pro-family message to wider Dutch society. Jenkins adds that there is concern that such a secular right-wing group as the Party for Freedom, led by Geert Wilders, with

its anti-immigrant and anti-Islam platform, will seek to co-opt or “threaten to seduce tradition-minded religious voters.”

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

## Alevi in Turkey clash over identity as government policy changes

A posture of openness on the part of the current Turkish government toward the Alevi is taking place at the same time that this quasi-Muslim group is experiencing internal divisions regarding their identity in relation to Islam, write Bayram Ali Soner (Izmir University) and Şule Toktaş (Kadir Has University, Istanbul) in the September issue of the journal *Turkish Studies*. The Alevi have consistently supported the secular foundations of the Turkish Republic, even as it institutionalized Sunni Islam while keeping it under strict state control. This was welcomed by the Alevi, explain the authors, because it prevented Sunni Islam from dominating the public sphere. However, with the rise of identity politics in Turkey in the 1980s, Alevi circles started to demand communal rights. Clashes, such as the infamous killing of 35 Alevi intellectuals in 1993, reinforced those trends, as did Alevi revivalism in the diaspora.

Due to European Union pressure and Alevi demands, a recognition of Alevi communal identity has emerged. The current government, with its ideological roots in Islam, started with a Sunni view of Alevism, but broader views developed within Islamist intellectual

circles. A rapprochement between the government and the Alevi appeared just before the 2007 general elections: several Alevi were nominated by the ruling Justice and Development Party and elected to Parliament. A process of dialogue started in 2008, with a document made public two years later that could pave the road to practical steps in order to meet a number of Alevi expectations.

“Alevi are experiencing internal divisions regarding their identity in relation to Islam.”

The document defines Alevism as a belief system within Islam. On this issue, Alevi themselves are divided. Soner and Toktas describe one wing as “traditionalist-religious Alevi” and the other one as “modernist-secularist Alevi.” Members of the first group, headed by the state-friendly Cem Foundation, have a religious understanding of Alevism, which they see as the original version of Islam. On the other hand, the modernist-secularist Alevi emphasize the non-Islamic elements of Alevism and see it as a syncretistic religion outside of Islam; they are gathered under the umbrella Alevi-Bektashi Federation. This second camp tends to support liberal secularism. Both groups agree, however, that Alevism is non-Sunni and thus opposes a Sunni-centric system.

(*Turkish Studies*, Routledge Journals, Taylor & Francis Inc., Journals Department, 325 Chestnut Street, 8th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19106, www.tandf.co.uk)

## Muslim–Coptic tensions intensify after Maspero massacre

Muslim–Coptic Christian tensions are at their height in Egypt after security forces killed 27 Copt civilians demonstrating peacefully. The October massacre at Maspero—a Cairo neighborhood—is the latest of several cases of violence and repression against Egypt’s Christian minority. The democratic revolution in Tahir Square was marked by a religious consensus, but since last spring, this interfaith tolerance has given way to sectarian violence and fears of discrimination, write Anthony Banout and Emran El-Badawi in the e-newsletter *Sightings* (November 3). The violence at Maspero was unleashed against protesters of recent demolitions of several churches in Upper Egypt.

The way in which false information about the supposed violence of the demonstrators was spread by state television suggests the “continued role of the federal government—now controlled by the armed forces—to manipulate the religious sensibilities of Egyptians in order fan the flames of sectarian violence,” according to the authors. The mistrust between the Muslim and Coptic communities may have been heightened “in the wake of a costly revolution and subsequent economic hardship...” Even after redrafting the Egyptian constitution and promising equal citizenship, Copts remain wary; they are not mentioned in the constitution and Islam is still referred to as the religion of the state, with Islamic jurisprudence as the principal source of legislation.



## Kazakhstan seeks to manage religious fragmentation and Islamicization

The growth of orthodox—and in some cases militant—forms of Islam is leading to a belated attempt to manage the new religious pluralism in Kazakhstan. A special section on religion in Kazakhstan in the the journal *Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Volume 12, Number 3) reports that the delicate balancing act maintained by the Kazakh leaders between the Russian Orthodox Church (representing about one-quarter of the population) and Islam (63 percent) is failing, particularly after extremist incidents took place last summer. The government has attempted to control Islam through the organi-

zation SAMK (Spiritual Administration of Muslim Kazakhstan), which encourages traditional Sufi and moderate expressions of the religion. But the younger generations now gravitate toward orthodox and in some cases extremist Islam. By SAMK's own estimate, by 2009 only about half of the mosques were under its administration, according to writer Kadyrzhan Smagulov.

While religious devotion was previously strongest in rural areas and among ethnic minorities, today religious revival is most prevalent in the large cities and among Kazakhs. Arab "missionaries" from Saudi Arabia, particularly in the western oil-rich regions of the country, have spread Salafi Islam. The government's involvement in Islamic financing

as an alternative to the weakening Anglo-American model during the economic crisis has also facilitated Islamic growth. The Russian Orthodox Church has also become alienated from the government, at the same time as new Kazakh theologians and their followers are coming into conflict with the official clergy in Russia. Non-traditional religions—from evangelical Protestantism to Scientology—have likewise grown (from 671 organizations in 1990 up to 4,300 today). Smagulov concludes that these developments have forced the government to pay more attention to religious issues, including regulating non-traditional groups.

(*Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Press AB, Hubertusstigen 9, 97455 Sweden)

### FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

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

■ In its October 28–November 10 issue, the **National Catholic Reporter** features a 20-page special section comparing the five major surveys it has published on American Catholicism since 1987. Compared to the 2011 survey, the results show both decline and stability in Catholic beliefs and practices. The most recent survey, which, like the others, was conducted by the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, shows continued Hispanic growth, especially among the Millennial gen-

eration, who show higher rates of belief and practice than their white counterparts. But overall, there is consistency of Catholic belief: 70 percent of all Millennials held the resurrection as being very important to their Catholic faith. There was a significant drop in the importance of helping the poor since 2006, which the researchers attributed to economic conditions and the much-documented decline of confidence in bishops due the sex abuse crisis.

For more information on this report, visit: [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org).

■ Phil Zuckerman's **Faith No More** (Oxford University Press, \$24.95) examines the phenomenon of apostasy, or people rejecting their religions. Zuckerman notes that while there have been several quantitative studies of apostasy, they have often been conducted mainly on college students. He adds that his ethno-

graphic approach is better suited to understand the motivations that go into breaking from one's religion. Based on his study of 87 people, obtained through snowball sampling, Zuckerman finds a number of subtypes of apostasy: "shallow apostasy," i.e. defecting from one's religion early on; "deep apostasy," i.e. forsaking one's religion after heavier involvement in it; and "transformative apostasy," i.e. where defection is a momentous experience followed by the adoption of a secularist worldview.

From these case studies of apostasy, Zuckerman draws large conclusions: he argues that apostasy is part of a wave of secularity impacting America—a claim based on surveys showing a growth of religious non-affiliation (which does not necessarily mean apostasy). He writes that the existence of apostasy shows that religion is not universal or nec-

essary, even arguing that there is an “apostate personality.” Such a personality type is marked by such values as courage, “free-thinking” and a love of life. But the reader is left wondering whether these values can be related to apostasy from one religion to another as well as to apostasy from religion to secularism.

■ ***Homies and Hermanos: God and Gangs in Central America*** (Oxford University Press, \$24.95) is a noteworthy study of an influential subculture that, as with the Central American populations in general, has felt the evangelical and Pentecostal surge. Author Robert Brennenman interviewed 63 former gang members from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, most of whom had converted to evangelical and Pentecostal churches. He charts the history and structure of these transnational gangs as they developed in the U.S. among impoverished illegal immigrant youth, but then (through the mass deportation of gang members to Central America in the 1990s) were transplanted back to this region (even though most had American upbringings). The gang members quickly found new recruits and developed a system of disciplined cells and a pyramid leadership structure that linked members across Central and North America.

Brennenman notes that evangelical churches and these gangs both share a similar transnational structure and strong emotional bonds among participants. It is the similarities, but also the clear differences between the gangs and the churches that lead many of these youths to seek out the evangelical alternative. Especially interesting is Brennenman’s account of how the strict lifestyles and clean break with the gang life demanded by the evangelicals serve as one of the few ways that ex-members can actually

survive. If ex-gang members demonstrate a “real” conversion and change of life, they generally are given a free and respectful pass to leave the gang (which normally prohibits desertion); leaders and fellow members reason that the ex-member will not be joining a rival gang and passing on secrets.

However, if the evangelical ex-gang members “backslide” into their old lifestyle, they may be met with stiff repercussions, including death. Brennenman writes that the evangelical approach of defining the gang issue as a spiritual problem demanding the spiritual solution of “restoration” (meaning rehabilitation and reintegration into the community) differentiates it from the less effective secular and even Catholic approaches that stress prevention and address the social causes of gang membership rather than working with the members themselves. He concludes that the evangelical emphasis on cultivating an alternative masculinity, demanding sacrifice and courage, makes these churches strong competitors with the gangs.

■ The conclusions and methodology of the new ***World Almanac of Islamism 2011***, issued by the American Foreign Policy Council (Rowman & Littlefield, \$95) may be contested by some Islamic scholars, but the massive volume (just short of 900 pages) provides a good deal of useful information and many findings about the political and extremist elements of Islam in almost every corner of the globe. The almanac defines the term Islamist as describing movements, groups and individuals that “harness religious values and ideals to serve a larger political agenda aimed at spreading or imposing Islamic law, either regionally, locally or internationally.” Later in the book, some contributors make the distinction between “hard” (or

extremist) and “soft” Islamism, but some entries, such as on the U.S., do not mention this difference, treating popular organizations such as the Muslim Student Association (with some of its members advocating a Muslim state) and the Council on American Islamic Relations with jihadist groups in the same chapter.

Preceding each regional overview are summaries of the current state and prospects of Islamism for a given region. The section on North America argues that soft Islamism is growing, but is relatively ignored by the American Canadian governments, preoccupied as they are with violent groups, while in Latin America, the contributors see radical Islamist groups (and connections with Iran) making inroads in several countries, particularly Venezuela and Bolivia. The profiles of other countries likewise tend to see Islamism as being on the upswing, with the new freedoms of the Arab spring facilitating Islamist groups in the Middle East and North Africa. But the contributors—who range from policy analysts to academics—do not demonstrate very clearly how these sharply different groups with conflicting ambitions for social and political influence fall under the same Islamist label.

■ France has become notorious for its regulation and stigmatization of new religious movements—a reality borne out in vivid detail in Susan Palmer’s new book ***The New Heretics of France*** (Oxford University Press, \$74). Palmer, a specialist in new religious movements, examines the history of what she calls the “French sect wars” and how discriminatory policies toward unconventional faiths have become institutionalized in society. She traces the anti-sect campaign from its beginnings in the wake of the 1994 controversy over the deaths of mem-

bers of the Solar Temple, an esoteric society, to a succession of government reports, lists of suspected groups and watch dog groups that reveal the most stringent policy of “managing” new religious movements in Europe.

Palmer does an interesting job of fleshing out the conflict between new religious movements and the French government through provid-

ing case studies of various new religious groups under scrutiny, including Scientology, the Raelian movement and alternative healing. Each of these movements or groups has run afoul of a particular aspect of French secularist Republicanism, such as science, sexuality and, most commonly, the law. There has been a new incarnation of the anti-sect movement in the organization MIVILUDES, but Palmer does not see

significant changes being made to the discriminatory French approach to unconventional religions; it still views many new religious movements as brainwashing members, even if it is now called “mental manipulation.” She sees the effects of these sect wars being played out in the current public and government opposition to Muslim religious expressions in France’s public sphere.

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

1) At a time when about 100 million people a year make religious pilgrimages, new initiatives are planned to avoid heavy consequences of this activity for the environment. The **Green Pilgrimage Network** was launched at a meeting of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation in Assisi, Italy. A number of projects for the network have been announced, according to the press release of the gathering, including the following: “a ban on cars on pilgrimage routes is part of the Green Pilgrimage plan of Kano, Nigeria; solar panels are to be installed on St Albans’s cathedral roof in the UK; ... fresh clean, water is to be provided for pilgrims to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, while the planting of thousands of trees around sacred sites is an initiative of Etchmiadzin, Armenia.”

As part of the Green Pilgrim Cities project, a first draft of a handbook of the network is available online. A Green Guide to the Hajj was

also launched at the Assisi meeting and can be downloaded from the Alliance website. As well as practical tips for pilgrims, the guide invites Muslims to use their Hajj experience as an opportunity to “reflect on their own lives and move away from material culture and the waste it leaves behind.” (Source: *The Economist*, November 5; Alliance of Religions and Conservation, [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org); [www.arcworld.org/downloads/Green\\_Pilgrimage\\_Network\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Green_Pilgrimage_Network_Handbook.pdf))

2) A comic book series called “**The 99**” featuring superheroes who represent the virtues of Islam has gained a wide readership among young Muslims. The series is the brainchild of a Kuwaiti psychologist, Naif Al-Mutawa, who sought to counter the influence of Islamic extremism among young people. Considered the first attempt to create popular cultural heroes in the Islamic world, “The 99” refers to the 99 attributes of Allah taught in the Koran. The comic books portray 99 superheroes from around the world who each represent one of God’s attributes, such as generosity, strength and wisdom, in the battle against evil. At first, working with comic book illustrators and writers

from the West, Al-Mutawa found modest success with Muslim youth, but also ran into obstacles from Muslim authorities and leaders in various countries.

Al-Mutawa was challenged about the “immodesty” of the characters of the superheroes and that some of the women do not wear head coverings. Some Muslim booksellers criticized “The 99’s” identification of Allah with the human superheroes and refused to sell the comic books. Al-Mutawa argues that the comic books do not seek to portray Allah in human terms—something strictly forbidden in Islam—but rather show how the superheroes reflect God’s virtues. It was only after securing financing from an Islamic investment bank in Bahrain that “The 99” gained access to Saudi Arabia and the worldwide media market. A “The 99” theme park has opened in Kuwait and the European broadcasting company Endemol has agreed to produce the animated series in 2012. The series provoked controversy in the U.S. after it was reported in the media as an attempt at “indoctrination,” leading to its cancellation. (Source: *Independent Focus*, *New York Public Broadcasting*)

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## About Religion Watch

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

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

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

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

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