January-February 2012
volume 27 number 2

RELIGION WATCH
A NEWSLETTER MONITORING TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGION

INSIDE

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

RELIGIOSCOPE
This is a publication of Religioscope Institute

Mormon leadership on an assimilationist path

From the mid-1950s, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) went through a phase of re-emphasizing its distinctiveness in relation to wider American culture, but during the Hinckley era, starting in 1995, the pendulum of church culture has swung somewhat toward assimilation, writes Armand L. Mauss in an essay published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Winter 2011). Mauss reflects about developments in Mormonism that occurred in the nearly two decades since he published his book *The Angel and the Beehive* (University of Illinois Press, 1994). At the grassroots, little may have seemed to change. But LDS leadership has been partly softening the tone on a number of topics, including some distinctive Mormon doctrines that are controversial in the eyes of other Christians, such as "heavenly parents, the eternal progression of God from a mortal state and the potential human destiny of godhood." While there is a desire to reshape the image of Mormons, these are not merely statements for public consumption: a look at recent church manuals shows that some traditional LDS teachings "have been eliminated or seriously watered down."

In relation to scholarship, independent scholars not employed by the church "have lately enjoyed a tacit acceptance by leaders." There is more openness toward dealing with controversial issues and generous access to church archives is given to these scholars. In the same way, the Department of Public Affairs of the LDS Church had been quite proactive toward the media and willing to deal with questions and criticisms. Quite remarkable has also been the embrace of social media and the encouragement to faithfully engage in discussions on church teachings; Mauss also observes the absence of efforts to discipline individual dissenting bloggers.

Continued on page three

Graphic novels, popular culture—last refuge for the paranormal?

Graphic novels are the latest form of popular culture and media where mysticism and the paranormal are given free reign, writes Jeffrey J. Kripal in the *Chronicle of Higher Education Review* (December 16). Kripal, who authored the recent book *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics and the Paranormal* (University of Chicago Press), writes that there is a long list of comic book writers and artists ranging from Jack Kirby of the 1970s to Alan Moore and Grant Morrison (inspirers of the X-Men movies) today who were deeply involved in occult and paranormal activities. In his research, Kripal found that many contemporary popular artists and writers report mystical and paranormal experiences, "and they just as commonly identify those events as the source of their creative powers."

Kripal argues that sci-fi novels and films, superhero comics and now graphic novels often function as the "media of deeply meaningful paranormal experiences," because such phenomena have continually been excluded since the mid-20th century from academic and religious life. "The rise of behaviorism, Marxist materialism, social constructivism, computer modeling of the brain, and contem-

Continued on page two

Continued from page one

porary neuroscience all have helped to expel the categories of the psychic and the paranormal from academe, along with notions of soul, spirit and now mind itself as legitimate subjects of research worthy of financial support," he adds. Religious institutions have likewise rejected paranormal experiences as conflicting with doctrinal and institutional life, even though these encounters have functioned as "religious building blocks." Thus, popular culture and esoteric communities have been the two remaining places where "paranormal events are free to speak and spark … [escaping] rational and religious censors."

(*The Chronicle Review*, 1255 23rd St., N.W., Washington, DC 20037)

Drop in abuse cases pointing to changes in Catholic priest formation

Reforms enacted in the training and formation of American Catholic priests, some of which took place 20 years ago, may be responsible for the sharp decline in child abuse cases in the last decade, according to an article in the Jesuit *America* magazine (January 2–9). The most reliable studies that have been conducted, such as the in-depth survey conducted by John Jay College, found that most cases of abuse occurred between 1960 and 1985, after which the numbers dropped substantially and remained low (although most of the abuse cases were reported after 1995). Sociologist Katarina Schuth finds that church documents about preparation for the priesthood only began to treat celibacy in a serious way in the 1980s, culminating in the fifth edition of the key document "The Program of Priestly Formation" in 2005, which paid extensive attention to celibacy, with instructions of how seminarians should develop a theological rationale for celibate life and cultivate a moral character and conscience through ascetic practices. Paralleling these changes were shifts in seminary formation.

Before the mid-1990s, seminarians who might have identified their struggles with celibacy and sexuality did so only under strict confidence with a spiritual director and not with other formation personnel who could have acted on the information. By the mid-1990s, the confidential nature of spiritual direction was balanced by each student also being provided with a formation advisor. By the mid-2000s, a separate "human formation" program was incorporated in seminaries, which included extensive instruction on celibacy, admission processes paid closer attention to matters involving life-long celibacy, and the Vatican initiated visitation to seminaries in 2005–06. There are anecdotal signs that these changes have helped lower the abuse rate, according to Schuth. The few seminaries that already introduced some of these innovations in the 1960s, such as instruction in celibacy, showed a lower rate of abuse among their graduates. As these few early programs have mushroomed, the accusations of abuse have likewise dropped—from 975 accusations in 1985–89 to 73 in 2004–08.

(*America*, 106 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019-3803)

Declining Conservative Jewish day school movement tied to denomination's membership losses

The Jewish day school movement associated with Conservative Judaism has shown a steep decline, paralleling the membership losses suffered by the Conservative movement as a whole, reports Forward.com (January 27). The website reports that the schools, known as the Schechter Day School Network, were long considered the "crown jewel of the Conservative movement." But since the late 1990s, the schools have experienced a 35 percent drop in enrollment, according to an analysis by Forward. The number of Schechter schools has shrunk to 43—down from 63 in 1998. Most of the remaining schools are discarding the Schechter label and their denominational identity and have become non-denominational community day schools. One day school specialist said there is a "feedback relationship" between a denomination and its sponsoring schools.

(*The Chronicle Review*, 1255 23rd St., N.W., Washington, DC 20037)

Continued from page one

Church leaders are obviously aware that it is not possible to keep full control of the way the church is discussed. According to Mauss, the processes that can be observed over a long time span seem to be "two steps toward assimilation and only one back toward retrenchment;" in the long term, the result should be a well-assimilated community—remembering that the growth of a movement sometimes means, from a sociological angle, finding an optimal level of tension. Mauss ends by wondering what other course corrections might be around the corner and what the consequences will also be not just for the LDS faithful in the United States, but for Mormons around the world.

(*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, P.O. Box 58423, Salt Lake City, UT 84158)

Political science's 'conversion' to religion real but unsteady

Political science has awakened "from a long, secular slumber" and started to grapple with the question of religion in politics and conflict, giving rise to competing political science approaches on these questions. This has a direct impact on suggestions about ways to solve conflicts with a religious dimension, writes Sabina A. Stein (Center for Security Studies, Zurich) in an article published in *Politorbis* (Issue 52, 2011), a journal published by the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs. According to Stein, three theoretical perspectives on religion and conflict can be identified: primordialism, instrumentalism and social constructivism. Primordialism sees differences in religious traditions and beliefs as a key cause of conflict. Samuel Huntington has been the most prominent proponent of such views, seeing religion as central in the constitution of individual and collective identity. Threats to religious frameworks can thus provoke violent reactions. Current conflicts are seen as a resurgence of ancient hatreds.

Instrumentalism considers that the causes of conflict are material. Religion is instrumentalized by elites in order to mobilize support: it is the "opium of the warriors." Religion is a tool for creating identity and for absolutizing conflict, thus rendering violence morally justifiable. Religion thus serves a legitimating function. Social constructivism admits that religion can play an important role in constituting identities, but insists on the fact that social actors are never defined by a unique identity. Similarly, religious cognitive structures can be manipulated by power-hungry elites as a tool of legitimation; but they cannot just be used according to one's whims. Indeed, religions contain resources that can be used for various purposes, promoting either conflict or peace. Religious beliefs do not "inherently push adherents toward violent conflict." Identities are not fixed and can be transformed through the interpretation of religious doctrines.

Stein insists that people involved in peace promotion in those contexts where religions play a role should be aware that a theoretical lens shapes our understanding of specific situations. Various articles in the issue elaborate on lessons from specific cases (from contemporary Islam to the Branch Davidians in Waco) in order to understand the dynamics of religion, conflict and tools for transforming religious-political conflicts. These tools include innovative approaches such as arts-based approaches to conflict resolution (Michelle LeBaron, University of British Columbia). Bob Roberts, pastor of NorthWood Church (Keller, Texas) explains his work for connecting Evangelical Christians and Conservative Muslims, which he understands as "multi-faith" and not "interfaith" work.

But at least in its more academic expressions in the United States, much of political science continues to largely ignore religion, despite the fact of religious influence in politics, according to Steven Kettell of the University of Warwick. In an article in *PS: Political Science and Politics* (Vol. 45, No. 1), the official journal of the American Political Science Association, Kettell studied the importance of religion in the 20 highest ranking journals in political science and found that just 1.34 percent of them deal either directly or tangentially with religious themes; this figure is far lower than the proportion of articles dealing with more mainstream political science concerns, such as democracy and conflict. Those articles that involve religion usually are focused on a narrower range of issues, such as violence and Islam, and U.S. politics.

In contrast to a field such as sociology, political science fares poorly; Kettell compared the top

20 sociology journals with the top political science publications and found that in the case of the former, religion receives "primary" attention at the rate of two-and-a-half times higher than the latter. Although the total number of political science articles on religion has increased since 2000, the overall proportion of such articles has increased by just a quarter of one percent. Kettell concludes that political science's origins, emerging during the creation of an "increasingly secular system of territorially sovereign states of the 17th century that has encouraged the discipline's blind spot on religion."

(*Politorbis*, Dept. of Foreign Affairs, Bernastrasse 28, 3003 Bern, Switzerland; *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036)

CURRENT RESEARCH

▸ **American Mormons feel discriminated against and misrepresented by non-Mormon society and yet are also increasingly optimistic about the prospects of greater acceptance, including the possibility of having a Mormon president, according to a new study by the Pew Forum.** The survey found that 62 percent of Mormons believe that Americans are uninformed about their religion, with nearly half (46 percent) holding that they face discrimination in the country. Two-thirds of respondents say the American people do not see Mormonism as a part of mainstream society. Mormons see the most discrimination and negative attitudes coming from the entertainment media (54 percent) and evangelical Christians (50 percent). Yet only 38 percent said the news media coverage of Mormonism is unfair. Yet 63 percent of Mormons see their religion becoming more a part of mainstream society; 56 percent of those surveyed say the American people are ready for a Mormon president.

▸ **Segregation of African-American from other Muslims is prevalent in mosques, according to a paper by sociologists Catherine Tucker and Jennier van Hook.** In a paper presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in October, Tucker and Van Hook analyzed the 2000 Mosque Study and found that while mosques are more integrated than the average U.S. Protestant congregation, the degree of segregation is still significant. The average Arab attends a mosque that has 21 percent Arab attendees, while the average African-American goes to a mosque that is 67 percent African-American. Arabs and South Asians resemble each other very closely in such factors as the rate of making converts and the use of Arabic, but differ greatly from the survey's other large ethnic group, African-Americans. For instance, one-third of African mosques reported that women were separate from men during prayers, compared with 11.59 and 13.19 percent, respectively, for Arabs and South Asians. The researchers add that such segregation may be self-imposed, since African-American mosques offer more social services, and could have decreased since 9/11.

▸ **Researchers are finding a connection between the growth of religious beliefs and the spread of diseases in various societies.** *Utne Reader* (January/February) reports on new research suggesting that both historically and in contemporary times, infectious diseases often led to the establishment of various religions in new regions. Evolutionary biologist David Hughes, demographer Jenny Trinitapoli and historian of religion Phillip Jenkins, all of Penn State University, found that several modern religions emerged during 800 BCE and 200 BCE when there were deadly plagues capable of killing up to two-thirds of a population. The different belief systems influenced how people responded to these epidemics and whether they fled from disease or tried to help those who were sick. A religion such as Christianity fostered strong altruism toward the sick, with its major example being Jesus the healer, and believers holding that visiting the sick brought them eternal rewards. Other religions were less altruistic in dealing with diseases, leading to less growth in areas experiencing epidemics.
This pattern of Christian growth in the midst of epidemics holds true today, according to the researchers. Trinitapoli surveyed 3,000 people in 1,000 villages in Malawi, where AIDS is the leading cause of adult deaths. The populations were mixed across Muslim and Christian areas of the country, but she found that about 30 percent of Christians regularly visit the sick, compared to seven percent of Muslims doing so. The survey also found that the prospect of receiving help was enticing, with about 400 shifting religions. Many of them have moved to Pentecostal of African Independent churches, where the prospect of receiving care is greater and the stigma of AIDS is less.

(*Utne Reader*, 1503 S.W. 42nd St., Topeka, KS 66609)

▸ **A study of the growth of global Christianity by the Pew Forum found 2.18 billion Christians, representing nearly a third of the estimated global population of 6.9 billion people.** The study confirms the dramatic shift in the distribution

of Christians over the past century. Whereas the bulk of Christians were found in Western countries a century ago, today only about one-quarter of all Christians live in Europe and 37 percent in the Americas. About one in every four Christians live in sub-Saharan Africa (24 percent), and about one in eight is found in Asia and the Pacific (13 percent).

▸ **A recent report from the Israeli Bureau of Statistics finds that Christians have the lowest growth rate among the Israeli populations.** *The Huffington Post* reports that the bureau reports that the Christian growth rate of 0.9 percent lags behind the Jewish rate of 1.7 percent and the 2.7 percent growth rate of Muslims. Christian Arabs have a growth rate of one percent, while the rate among non-Arab Christians is 0.7 percent. About 154,000 Christians live in Israel, representing about two percent of the population. Yet the percentage of Christians in Israel has remained relatively stable since the mid-1980s. About 80 percent of Christians living in Israel are Arabs, with the remainder mainly those who emigrated to Israel with Jewish members of their families under the Law of Return. The estimated birth-rate for Christian women is also the lowest among the other religious groups. The average number of children expected to be born to a Christian woman is 2.1, compared to 3.8 for a Muslim woman, 3.0 for a Jewish woman and 2.5 for Druze woman.

▸ **A study of how the Sikh faith is being passed on to the younger generation finds moderate success in engaging young adults with Sikhism, reports the newsletter *Future First* (December).** The newsletter cites a study by Jasjit Singh, who interviewed 600 young Sikhs from the ages of 18 to 30, finding that 40 percent of them were attending *gudwaras* (the Sikh congregation). Such young attenders were doing so to learn more about their faith and pray, as well as to meet friends. Most saw the *gudwaras* as a place in which they could relax, although Singh did not find many young people in leadership positions. The most effective *gudwaras* among young Sikhs were those led by charismatic individuals. There were also Sikh courses that are the equivalent to the Christian Alpha program. Sikh camps are also run in August that both teach the faith and provide a social outlet. These camps and their connections—often found online—to local *gudwaras* were essential to their success, according to the study.

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

'Global hotspots' for Christian mission in unlikely places

Charisma magazine (January) reports on "12 global hotspots" of Christian mission and growth that includes countries not usually associated with evangelical or charismatic Christianity. Although much of the information is based on self-reporting by missionaries and church planters, the overview does at least show where charismatics see new centers of influence emerging. While China has long been identified as Christianity's new powerhouse, the article reports that charismatic renewal has "identified state-sponsored churches." In India, "indigenous church-planting" is occurring, while in Iran, believers are "finding increased openness to the gospel," despite government crackdowns on church gatherings.

In Brazil, economic expansion is being accompanied by a "Christian awakening," particularly as Presbyterian, Baptist and Nazarene groups have adopted Pentecostal practices (although RW reported relatively stagnant growth among Pentecostals in the November/December issue). The magazine reports on large church-planting efforts in Ethiopia and Romania, where many of the Pentecostals are "leaving old traditions and embracing a more relevant, charismatic faith," as well as sending missionaries to the Middle East. Singapore is becoming a "strategic base for both missionary sending and funding." In such Muslim-dominant countries as Pakistan, Indonesia and Kazakhstan, the article reports new receptivity to Christianity.

(*Charisma*, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746)

Zionist sentiment finds doubters among evangelicals?

Zionist circles are expressing concerns that a growing number of evangelicals who were formerly committed to supporting Israel have been "changing sides" recently. Abraham Cooper and Yitzchok Adlerstein, both working at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, claim that evangelical and conservative Christians—deemed to be "Israel's most important allies"—are increasingly targeted "for conversion from Christian Zionism to Christian Palestinianism" (*The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition*, Dec. 2011). They mention the Christ at the Checkpoint Conference (CATC), a pro-Palestinian

initiative aimed at evangelicals—with some success, according to the authors. The 2012 CATC conference is said to include names of people who used to be supporters of Israel. The president of the World Evangelical Alliance is also reported to be one of the scheduled speakers. The authors claim that this is also linked to a trend to a theological switch toward another understanding of the place of the Jews and of the land of Israel. One could add that these trends are probably also linked to wider changes in the perception of the state of Israel and Zionism in Western public opinion.

(*The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition*, Jerusalem Post Building, P.O. Box 81, Romema, Jerusalem 91000, Israel)

Chinese government more concerned with political activities than beliefs

The Chinese government is primarily concerned with the potential political and organizational power of religion even more than with the content of religious teachings, states Kristin Kupfer (University of Freiburg, Germany), an expert on contemporary Chinese religion and society, who spent several years in China and in 2009 completed a doctoral thesis on the *Emergence and Development of Spiritual-Religious Groups in the Peoples Republic of China after 1978*. In an interview with the magazine of the Swiss Bible Society, *Die Bibel Aktuell* (4th quarter 2011), Kupfer states that consumerism is today a major trend in China, and this creates no concern for the government, since people attempting to improve their wealth have no time left for political activities; however, more and more people are also asking themselves questions about the meaning of life. The official churches do not differ very much from mainline Christian churches in Europe, explains Kupfer: they have Bible studies and social activities, and the average believers are not young people. The unregistered house churches are quite similar to free evangelical churches in Europe, with younger participants and a wide range of activities. Concern appears with Chinese authorities in those cases when churches turn to political topics, attract intellectuals or grow large, with a strong organizational strength.

In the milieu of dissidents and activists, a number of Christians can be found. Some Christian lawyers, journalists and teachers also engage in public life and publish Christian texts—especially on the Internet, since it is more difficult to have them published in periodicals. The social commitment of Christians has been developing too. As long as there are no missionary activities, the state may even support social projects. Kupfer reports having seen crosses hanging on the walls of some hospitals and a small chapel in a nursing home: this depends very much on local circumstances and officials. Registered churches also suffer from state control. Thus, they would not be opposed to a more liberal religious policy for fear of competition from dynamic groups. But they are afraid of fundamentalist groups with aggressive missionary approaches. Some extreme cases (including kidnappings and murders) in a few groups have reinforced such fears, although Kupfer notes that such isolated cases have also been used by the Chinese government for labeling house churches as dangerous cults (heretical teachings in Chinese) that they felt were growing too much, and thus banning them.

(*Die Bibel Aktuell,* Schweizerische Bibelgesellschaft, Spitalstrasse 12, 2501 Biel, Switzerland, www.die-bibel.ch)

China shows multifaceted Buddhist renewal

From near extinction, Buddhism has been on a path of renewal in China since the 1980s and has been growing to the extent of now being the religion with most adherents in China—at least 100 million, according to reports by several scholars in an issue of *Social Compass* on "Social Implications of Buddhist Revival in China" (Dec. 2011). According to official statistics, there are now more than 20,000 registered Buddhist monasteries in China, possibly with more than 200,000 monks and nuns. Numbers could, however, hide the considerable diversity of Buddhism in China, stresses Sun Yanfei (Columbia University Society of Fellows), ranging from state-recognized institutions to groups having a precarious relationship with the state or outside of institutional Buddhism. The second type is linked to Buddhist teachers outside China and the third one includes groups mixing Buddhism with popular religion, as well as religious sects with Buddhist refer-

ences. Due to their links with official institutions in charge of registration of religious groups, recognized Buddhist groups can play an important role either in supporting Buddhist imports or in denying them access.

Benefitting from China's booming economy, the recognized temples have sometimes become quite wealthy, but do not always manage to handle this sudden prosperity judiciously, since the renewal is recent and they lack highly qualified people. Teachings from abroad is making inroads, including through regular media channels due to the more dynamic environment that exists today in China. Some of them are welcomed by local officials when they bring foreign capital for rebuilding temples or establishing centers, boosting local economies. But the absence of full legal status limits their growth. Syncretist sects tend to be opposed both by the Buddhist establishment and the government. In case of popular religion, this can encourage a process of Buddhification that is sometimes superficial, but allows temples linked to popular religious practices to come under the aegis of state-sanctioned religion through adopting Buddhist externals (such as Buddha statues and services), although it leads to a dilution of their identity.

Research by Gareth Fisher (Syracuse University) shows how lay Buddhist believers in Beijing are attempting to transform museified temples in the Chinese capital into zones of living religiosity: they challenge admission fees to these tourist spots on the ground that they are believers and participate in religious activities inside tourist temples. Ji Zhe (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris) suggests that there is also an attitude of adjustment to the new interest for Buddhism in the form of a summer camp for young people organized by the Bailin Temple (Hebei Province). Traditional rituals are important, if only for the legitimacy of Buddhist temples, but Buddhist festivals, based on the lunar calendar, no longer overlap with the calendar followed by modern Chinese people. Targeting urban educated youth, the temple has launched summer camps since 1993 for socializing young people into Buddhist practices, presenting them as adjustable to the life environment of contemporary people.

The camps are not meant for already active Buddhist believers and there are few requirements: many have little knowledge of Buddhist practices and come because they are curious to learn more about Buddhism. A conversion ritual takes place on the fifth day for those who want to become Buddhists, but a significant percentage does not choose to take that step. Other monasteries have started to organize such camps, seen as a valuable approach for reconciling Buddhism with youth. Finally, Alison Denton Jones (Harvard University) pays attention to the phenomenon of ethnic Han Chinese adopting Tibetan Buddhism as part of a "proliferation of old, new, and hybrid ways of practicing Buddhism." There are both cases of Han Chinese converting to Tibetan Buddhism and of Chinese Buddhists incorporating Tibetan practices. There had already been such trends in earlier decades, but this was repressed by the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), along with other religious practices.

Due to the politicization of the Tibetan issue, the state is uncomfortable with Han Chinese adopting Tibetan Buddhism. Where there are few Tibetan Buddhist temples, lamas from Tibetan areas come as itinerant teachers. The fact that established Han Buddhist temples are not well prepared to serve lay populations in urban areas leaves niches in the Buddhist market: Tibetan teachers are able to provide a systematic introduction to Buddhist doctrine as well as a teacher-disciple relationship. Tibetan lamas act as "spiritual entrepreneurs" for spreading the dharma, or specifically Tibetan teachings, not forgetting an economic motivation in some cases. Believers following Tibetan Buddhism perceive it as more powerful and efficacious—which is helped by Tibet's exoticism. They also feel that Tibetan monks abide by higher standards than their Han Buddhist counterparts. Moreover, they consider Tibetan Buddhism as authentic, systematic and rational.

(*Social Compass*, L2.08.13, Place Montesquieu, 1348 Louvain la Neuve, Belgium; published by SAGE Publications, http://scp.sagepub.com)

Japan's earthquake creates new religious alliances

Over ten months have passed since Japan's devastating earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Sociologist Peter Berger once said that religion legitimates the "marginal situation" that is best represented by death. This legitimation can be seen individually and collectively,

and the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami will definitely be seen as "marginal situations." Although it did not become major news, various religious organizations in Japan have helped the victims of these natural catastrophes. After the earthquake and tsunami, a few interfaith organizations started to support the victims. The Faith-based Support for the Earthquake Relief in Japan is one of the groups that started after the earthquake, and it still has a page on the Facebook where people contact each other (www.facebook.com/FBNERJ). The Japan Religion Coordinating for Disaster Relief is another group that also formed after the earthquake to support the victims across different religious beliefs (www.indranet.jp/syuenren/). Right after the earthquake and tsunami, local shrines and temples were offering shelters for those affected. According to the newspaper *Shūkan Asahi* (December 30), religious organizations, whether considered "new" or "old," have attempted to avoid putting their identities as religious organizations and practitioners forward in their relief efforts.

One leader from an alliance of new religious movements said that because some people are so sensitive to some religious organizations, they dared not reveal their identity; the important thing was to help the victims. Some Buddhist monks who opened up their temples right after the disaster accepted and supported those who were affected, regardless of religion. Many other Buddhist monks volunteered to pray for those who lost lives in the disaster by chanting Buddhist sutras, as the practice is a major funerary activity in Japan. Not all the adherents of those religions share the same attitude toward the relief operations: some individuals are openly revealing their religious affiliations. Some victims reject those individuals with open religious affiliation, and yet as time passes, religious affiliations start losing their importance. It does not have to be actively evangelized, but the interaction of the religious practitioners and the people with a pure intention to help could awaken religious sentiments.

The January 18th *Sankei News* reports on an alliance between such different religious traditions as Buddhism and Christianity in Miyagi prefecture, one of the major disaster areas. A significant number of people have claimed to see "ghosts" and "monsters," yet there are no places to talk about this issue. Religious organizations are now helping people regardless of their religious affiliations by offering a helpline. Religious differences are not a major issue when facing such a harsh reality. This alliance also has a practical aspect, as the organization is more effective in working with the municipal government, because it does not fall into a particular religious tradition. Although their religious affiliations are different, their sincere efforts at alleviating the suffering of the victims of the earthquake and tsunami continue. An afternoon in Miyagi brings people coming to see Buddhist monks at "Café de Monk" to mend their broken hearts. It soon will be the one-year anniversary of the disaster. Religious leaders with diverse backgrounds are now planning an interfaith ceremony to mark the anniversary.—*By Ayako Sairenji, a doctoral candidate in sociology at the New School for Social Research*

(http://sankei.jp.msn.com/life/news/120118/trd12011811500005-n1.htm; http://www.chunichi.co.jp/kenmin-fukui/article/kenmin-news/CK2012012402000162.html)

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

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

■ Every January, **RW** had featured a review of religious developments from the previous year. When we switched to the bi-monthly schedule and now publish the January/February closer to February, we discontinued this feature. But it is early enough in the year that a review of religion in 2011 written by RW's editor and associate editor might be of interest to readers. The article is on Religioscope, RW's parent company and news service, and can be found at the following address: http://religion.info/english/articles/article_560.shtml

■ ***Reflections***, the magazine of Yale Divinity School, devotes its fall issue to religion and theology and the social media. The issue serves as a window into the question of how mainline Protestants are dealing with the new technology. The issue's 22 articles suggest a growing engagement with the new media, yet also a concern about its challenges to traditional forms of community and relationships. Particularly noteworthy is the article by Verity Jones of

the New Media Project, which reports on a study of young clergy by the project showing almost universal adoption of Facebook (97 percent) and its use for ministry (83 percent). Jones and other writers argue that the social media will reshape theology, looking at how God is present in interconnectedness and networks as well as traditional groups. Other articles in the issue include an interview with the religion editor of the online Huffington Post, and an article on social media and parish life. Episcopal priest Scott Gunn writes that the most effective ministries are not coming from denominational leaders as much as from laypeople and clergy working together via social media.

For more information on this issue, write: *Reflections*, YDS, 409 Prospect St., New Haven, CT 06511.

■ The November issue of the ***Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*** is devoted to presenting the findings from the NOREL program, which studied the changing shape of church-state relations in the Scandinavian countries. The NOREL program studied church-state relations and the position of religion in the public sphere in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland from 1988 to 2008, looking both at the majority Lutheran churches and minority religions such as Islam. Most of the articles report that the state churches are moving toward a position of de-facto disestablishment (and in Sweden, actual disestablishment since 2000, although the government still has a measure of control in the Church of Sweden, especially in faith-based welfare programs) as concerns grow about freedoms for minority faiths. Denmark remains the exception, with strong church-state connections and more restrictive policies toward minorities, although even this case may be slowly changing, writes Marie Vejrup Nielsen and Lene Kuhle.

For more information on this issue, write: njrs@kifo.no.

■ ***The New Evangelicals*** (Eerdmans, $20), by Marcia Pally, seeks to portray a distinct movement of evangelicals who have moved away from the religious right to embrace causes of peace, environmentalism, anti-consumerism and other issues not easily classifiable on the left–right spectrum. In fact, many identify themselves on a case-by-case basis. After the election of President Barak Obama, there was much talk of liberal evangelicals disenchanted with the religious right and the politicization of Christianity. Pally outlines several subgroups in this broad and ill-defined movement: emergent churches, which take a post-modern approach to mission; those working on what can be considered "common ground" issues, such as the environment and "civil society;" and the older "evangelical left" with its roots in the 1960s. These evangelicals tend to approach these issues by stressing the ethical and political importance of engaging other views, as well as developing structures that encourage building consensus and coalitions, according to Pally.

Most new evangelicals are opposed to abortion, but tend to bundle that issue with other life concerns, such as opposing the death penalty; on gay rights, they would stress ministry to gays more than fighting for legal restrictions on homosexuality. Throughout the book, Pally focuses on high-profile new evangelical leaders, such as Joel Hunter (advisor to Obama) and Jim Wallis of Sojourners, but she also interviews (featured in question-and-answer format) lay people, activists and pastors. While signs of a shift away from strict Republican identification may be evident among circles of evangelical intellectuals and a subset of activists, Pally pays less attention to their evangelical constituency, which surveys suggest are more conservative on the issues (including many younger evangelicals).

■ ***The Anointed*** (Harvard University Press, $29.95), by Randall Stephens and Karl Giberson, looks at the role of "evangelical spokesmen" and "experts" in the evangelical community. The authors, both evangelical professors from Eastern Nazarene College, are clearly critical of the way in which conservative evangelical leaders, such as James Dobson (in psychology), David Barton (in history), Ken Ham (science) and Hal Lindsay (biblical interpretation) assume expert status while actually being amateurs in relation to established scholarship (although they struggle with making this case for Dobson, since he actually is a psychologist, although not an expert on the issues of homosexuality that he often addresses).

The author's basic argument is not new; there have been other treatments of the "parallel culture" of much of evangelicalism. But the book does document how various leaders and thinkers challenging secular knowledge rise and fall according to a "star-making" or anointing process that often spurns accreditation and is assisted by the democratic evangelical culture. Because such leaders combine the persuasive powers of great preachers with the credibility granted to academics, they generate more intellectual authority than either actual preachers or evangelical academics. Stephens and Giberson discuss various theories as to why they think non-factual beliefs are spread so effectively, tending to favor cognitive and evolutionary strategies, such as creating an "in-group" against a common enemy.

■ Robert Wuthnow's latest book, ***Red State Religion*** (Princeton University Press, $35), ventures as much into history as sociology, but it serves as an extended case study of the development of a conservative religious culture. Wuthnow traces the longtime link between Republican politics and the religious landscape in Kansas. He notes that the state's religious and political dynamics revolve less around fundamentalism than sustaining a social role for churches that had long played a central role in small-town life. The state was often more divided between moderate Methodists and Catholics than between liberal and conservative churches; it was a leader in women suffrage and prohibition. But it was the state's network of conservative religious activism, particularly on the issues of abortion and teaching evolution in schools, that gained the most notoriety.

Wuthnow cites an interplay of internal—the momentum shifting from mainline to evangelical churches—and external forces—such as the migration of many religious conservatives to Kansas—that encouraged Christian right activism. But Wuthnow tends to see "swatches of purple" defining large sections of the state, with small-town pragmatism and the fostering of local community marking red state religion rather than "contentious moral activism."

■ Despite a growing trend of people converting to Eastern Orthodox churches during the last 25 years, there have been few book-length treatments of this topic. ***The Eastern Church in the Spiritual Marketplace*** (Northern Illinois University Press, $25), by Amy Slagle, does a good job of filling this gap as it studies both the motivations of the converts and the impact they make on parish communities. Slagle interviewed 48 converts and studied two parishes in Pittsburgh and Jackson, Mississippi. She finds that the spiritual marketplace and the conversion to Orthodoxy are not poles apart; the potential convert discovers Orthodoxy through a process of searching and selection. The converts value the sense of community and the liturgical life of Orthodox Christianity, which they claim provides more freedom than the perceived "legalism" of Western Christianity.

The main conflicts stem from the ethnic nature of Orthodoxy and, in some cases, the sense of exclusion they feel from cradle (Slavic and Greek) members of these churches. But alienation is far from the whole story, as many of the converts admire and even identify with the deep "roots" (even if it meant exploring their own non-Slavic or Greek ethnicities) they found among parishioners. This was especially true for those who converted through marriage to an ethnic Orthodox member, seeing the change as providing a unified ethnic-religious identity for their marriages/families. As for the parishes, Slagle finds that they reported positive benefits from the presence of Orthodox converts, particularly in the way they infused spiritual enthusiasm and devotion into churches. Other interesting parts of the book include a chapter on the differences between the Orthodox situation in a non-Orthodox state such as Mississippi and in the Pittsburgh area, which has been considered the "Holy Land" of Orthodoxy in the United States.

■ Miklos Tomka's new book, ***Expanding Religion*** (De Gruyter, $105), is said to represent the first ever cross-national and cross-denominational analysis of surveys on religion in post-communist Europe in the period between 1991 and 2008. Tomka, a veteran Hungarian sociologist of religion who died in 2010, offers a complex view of the religious situation in Central and Eastern Europe, seeing patterns of both religious revival and decline in action. The drastic changes of the early 1990s in these regions, where religious institutions and actors suddenly re-emerged, struck many people as a "revival." The setbacks and naturally slower pace marking the subsequent rebuilding process has been viewed as a decline by some observers, although Tomka adds that it can just as easily be seen as a period of adjustment and stabilization. Traditional religious cultures, long under attack by communist governments, have certainly not returned and taken-for-granted beliefs have been replaced by independent choice that can both fragment old communities and ties, but also create new ones.

In such a fluid situation, churches may play increasingly public roles as post-communist political systems grow weaker. Tomka's analysis is based on international comparative surveys, such as the World Values Survey and a research project he conducted with colleagues. Tomka finds that there is a clear growth of trust in religious institutions in most post-communist societies, especially between 1998 and 2008—in contrast to Western Europeans' decreasing confidence in organized religion. He identifies several other differences from the West: denominational belonging, often tied to ethnic identity, is still important in Eastern and Central Europe, even when beliefs fade in importance; there is not so much a loss of belief in a personal God (as surveys of Western Europeans suggest) as a diversification of beliefs about God mediated by generation, denominational background and country; and younger people with a higher education actually tended to be more religious in countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and the former East Germany. Tomka is hesitant to provide any hard-and-fast forecasts about religion in Eas-

tern and Central Europe due to its ever-changing and complex nature, but the book's wealth of data, extending over almost a 20-year time period, makes it essential reading for those interested in the subject.

■ In his book ***Religion in China*** (Oxford University Press, $24.95), Fenggang Yang's seeks to answer the large question of how religions survive and revive in China under communist rule. For readers eager to learn the general trends of religious regulations and practices in contemporary China, chapters one to four offer a clear understanding of this picture. In these chapters, Yang informs readers on what he means by the scientific study of religions and Chinese religions, Chinese Marxist atheism and its policy implications, and religious regulations under communism in four periods after 1949. Yet the strength of this book is its focus on how the "limited tolerance of certain religious groups was governed by increasingly restrictive regulations" during the period 1979–2009.

The author explains religious vitality by building on the conceptual tools of market theories originating from Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, with his goal being to explain general religious patterns in China in the last six decades. The several research questions Yang raises throughout this book include: How much can the state control the growth or decline of religions? Why did eradication measures fail? To what extent can a secularist state promote secularization? In Yang's analysis, the restrictive regulations that intend to keep religion at a low level have instead created vivacious dynamics on the demand side, which, he argues, is a characteristic of a shortage economy of religion. His triple-market model of religious regulations (grey, black and red markets) describes the complex tripartite economy of religion in China and has strong influence on religious study among Chinese scholars today.

He adds that "[s]hortages cause loss and inconvenience to consumers. They often have to wait for supply, to queue up, and frequently, are forced to be content with goods different from their original wish." Yang cites Janos Kornai's shortage economy theory and criticizes supply-side theorists for assuming that religious demand in a society is relatively stable and distributed in a bell-curve shape. Yang concludes that a "growing demand in turn stimulates religious supply and forces the authorities to adapt their regulation and enforcement strategies .... The shortage of religious supply is not only a problem of central planning, but is also a driven part of ideology. As long as atheism is maintained as part of ideological orthodoxy, changes in religion policy will be no more than cosmetic and the shortage economy of religion will persist."—*By Weishan Huang, a research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, who is currently based in Shanghai, China*

■ The current ***Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*** (2011, Vol. 2, Brill, $166) is devoted to religion and politics, although the book's political dimensions are linked to broad issues of immigration, globalization and secularization. This approach is evident in a chapter on the relation between rates of secularization and the public role of religion in the West. By comparing party preferences and attitudes toward the expression of religion in public with affiliation rates, the study finds that where Christians are numerically most marginal, they nonetheless have "strong aspirations for a public role of their creed than in contexts where the proportion of Christians is high." This conclusion clashes with secularization theorists who argue that the social impact of religion is weaker in contexts where religion has declined. Other noteworthy chapters include an examination of the controversy over Christian conversion and its role in Hindu nationalism in India, and several contributions on how religion plays a role in mobilizing people and providing social cohesion, but also leads the way to interreligious conflict—a tendency seen in the case studies of the role of Santeria in Cuba and Pentecostalism in Brazil.

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

Remembering stories about heroic "Bible smugglers," few people in the West realize that one of the largest Bible printing plants in the world, the **Amity Printing Company,** is located in Nanjing, China. It is reported that 55 million copies of the Bible for Christians in China have been printed there since the printing plant was launched in 1985. After the "Cultural Revolution," it became nearly impossible to get a Bible in China. The state permitted three million copies of the Bible to be printed, but this was far from sufficient. This led to the establishment of the new plant in Nanjing, thanks to the support of the World Bible Alliance.

The new plant, which opened in 2008, can print up to 18 million copies of the Bible a year: this means that it does not only print

CONTACT

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

PHONE:
(516) 225-9503

FAX:
(516) 750-9081

E-MAIL:
relwatch1@msn.com

WEBSITE:
www.religionwatch.com

EDITOR:
Richard P. Cimino

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:
Jean-François Mayer

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

E-MAIL:
subs@religionwatch.com

January-February 2012
volume 27 number 2

© 2012 Religion Watch

Bibles for China, but also for 70 countries around the world in 80 languages. Around 500 people are working there. Since forests are sparse in China and recycled paper cannot be used for the thin but opaque Bible paper, the raw material for producing the paper must be imported from abroad. Bible societies around the world have been subsidizing paper for Bible printing in China: this allows the production of a copy of the Bible at a price of some $3.60, although they sell for $2.40 (16 Yuan), which represents about the price of 30 eggs.

(*Source: Die Bibel Aktuell*, Spitalstrasse 12, 2501 Biel, Switzerland - www.die-bibel.ch)

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.

Subscribe

❍ ***New subscription*** ❍ ***Renewal***

❍ $ 36 for print version ❍ $ 23 for electronic version

❍ $ 39 for libraries ❍ $ 39 for print version overseas

Name:

Address:

City: ZIP Code:

Country:

E-mail:

Payment:

- US cheque

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

Send with payment to our business and circulation office:

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