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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.

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Rally representing ‘tipping point’ for atheist activism, influence? An analysis

It was billed as the “largest secular gathering in human history,” but the Reason Rally, held on March 24 in Washington, DC, also revealed how organized atheism has gained considerable unity and a measure of support and traction in popular culture during the last decade. The rally, which was organized and sponsored by 20 atheist and secular humanist organizations and attended by **Religion Watch**, was widely reported as a “coming out party” for atheists to publicly declare their unbelief and demand a place for themselves at the table. These objectives were not much different than those of its 2002 predecessor event called the “Godless March on Washington” (see the November 2002 issue), but there were notable contrasts between the two gath-

erings. The Reason Rally drew an attendance of up to 10,000 (with some sources estimating a crowd of 20,000), while the 2002 march attracted about 2,500 secularists.

Richard Dawkins, the doyen of the “new atheism” and clearly the main attraction of the event (with the crowd chanting his name as he made his entrance to the stage), told the audience that the rally could represent the “tipping point” for atheism; the mass of people declaring their unbelief would help lead to a rising tide of “everyone else coming out” as atheists. The long-time atheist interest in showing their numerical strength was on display at the rally with the frequent

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Evangelical and Catholic alliance recharged over religious freedom

Religious freedom has become a new galvanizing force in the Catholic–evangelical alliance, particularly as Christianity is coming under new repression in Islamic societies and as orthodox Protestant and Catholic churches charge that their convictions are being driven out of the public square in the West. Evangelicals and Catholics Together, an ongoing dialogue group organized by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, brought together 70 evangelical and Catholic leaders to sign on to its latest statement, “In Defense of Religious Freedom.” The introduction to the statement published in the March issue of *First Things* magazine notes that when Evangelicals and Catholics started in 1994, a “new era of religious freedom seemed at hand.” Today, the authors claim that “proponents of human rights, including governments, have begun to define religious freedom

down, reducing it to a bare ‘freedom of worship.’”

The statement focuses on how Christians are the victims of persecution in Islamic societies and that even the “Arab Spring” is likely to lead to further deterioration of the situation of Christian minorities. Aside from the repressive regimes of North Korea, China and Vietnam, the statement takes particular aim at Western nations where “coersive state power is being deployed to impose a secularist agenda on society while driving religious faith and practice out of public life.” The statement cites cases in Canada, where evangelical pastors have been fined for preaching their views on sexual morality, and in the UK, where evangelical couples have been denied foster children. In the U.S., the statement says that religious freedom is being curtailed through

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courts and through legislation, including limiting “conscience protections” for religious organizations to opt out of providing objectionable services and treatments, such as contraception. The issue of providing contraception as part of the proposed national health-care system was (and to a certain extent, still is, even with Obama’s revisions) such a unifying force for conservative religious groups because it is seen as having a secularizing effect on the

country, according to the journal *Society* (March/April). “In the case of contraception, the legal right to its access has evolved from the freedom to choose it to the requirement to provide it (even at no cost) as a matter of public health. In one sense the policy recommendations of public health are a proxy for modern science and its alliance with government, thus implicating both in an enduring process of secularization.” The article concludes that “when it comes to the ‘science’ of sex, the

alliances among media, government and science are so profoundly empowering of one another that it appears unlikely that beyond the claims for religious liberty (to be excluded and not coerced) there will be any kind of national conversation about these facts of life that does not stir the depths.”

(*First Things*, 35 E. 21st St., New York, NY 10010; *Society*, Springer, P.O. Box 2485, Secaucus, NJ 07096)

Not one, but many emerging churches

The use of the label ‘emerging’ for describing a variety of congregations suggests similarity, but it actually covers a range of distinctive practices, writes Jason Wollschleger (Withworth University, Spokane, WA) in an article published in the *Review of Religious Research* (March). The article is primarily based on case studies of three congregations in the Pacific Northwest. The emerging church is generally understood as the latest step in a transition from Church 1.0 (traditional and institutional) to Church 2.0 (contemporary) to Church 3.0 (emerging and missional). Culturally postmodern and blending ancient forms and current local styles, the emerging church is an outcome of evangelical efforts to reach out to younger populations. It tends to be portrayed as a monolithic movement, but it is not. Wollschleger identifies three types of emerging congregations. The ‘emerging’ represents a notably distinct Christian subculture, with its own moral worldview. The ‘relevant’ congregations are evangelical conservative congregations engaging young adults. The ‘wilderness’ congregations are ‘struggling to-

ward emergence’ without yet achieving it.

Describing a congregation of the ‘emerging’ type, Wollschleger reports that the core allegiance is to radical authenticity, overcoming the divisions between liberal and conservative while incorporating aspects of both: rather than being in the middle, it would see itself as being at both ends at the same time. Such congregations also reject the sacred/secular dichotomy and refuse to see the world in compartmentalized terms: “thus, this congregation is willing to ‘do church’ in a nightclub.” The layout of the sanctuary can adapt to the themes of each liturgy. There is room for individualized worship experience. Leadership is about creating a space for participation. Genuineness in worship, community, hospitality and egalitarianism characterize this type of congregation.

The congregation of the second type has a very strong evangelical foundation, clearly expressed in the preaching. Regarding music, its ‘experimental orchestra’ can be described as “rock meets Gregorian chant.” While it shares little

with other emerging congregations studied, it has a congregational life that makes it appear similar from the outside and engages in ‘hip’ practices appealing to younger people (e.g. theology pub nights). All three types of groups observed connect with the pop culture, have a young leadership and reach the “missing demographic.” Otherwise, however, they represent a spectrum of congregations. Further research shows that they gather people with different previous experiences in relation to (Christian) religion: for instance, many faithful in the congregation of the first type are people alienated from the conservative evangelical milieu in which they were brought up, while the second type attracts people with positive experiences, but looking for a congregation not clashing with their culture. This may not yet be the end of the road: “The pastors of ‘emerging’ congregations [first type] interviewed ... indicated that they were increasingly looking to their denomination and tradition.”

(*Review of Religious Research*, <http://rra.hartsem.edu/>)

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claim made that they represent 16 to 17 percent of the population (taken from survey results showing a growth of unaffiliated—though not necessarily secular—Americans). There was a much larger presence of young adults at the rally than in 2002; the founding of the Secular Student Alliance and its rapid growth in colleges and high schools (doubling since 2009 from 143 campuses to 350) may be a factor in that change.

Much of the success of the rally can be credited to the greater coordination and unity among the various secularist groups, ranging from such veterans as the American Atheists and the Freedom from Religion Foundation to the influential Center for Inquiry, Humanistic Judaism, and the well-funded Richard Dawkins Foundation. In 2002, the fractious ten-

dency of secularist groups was more evident, with several groups declining to participate. Even the more moderate American Humanist Association took an active part in the rally; as AHA spokeswoman Maggie Ardiente told RW: “Atheism is the first step on the path” to a more positive kind of humanism. The rally also demonstrated how the new atheism and its professionalized, if polemical, style has raised secularism’s status in the worlds of entertainment and popular culture. The rally’s performers, such as singer and comedian Tim Minchin, the rock group Bad Religion, comedian Eddie Izzard and Adam Savage of the *Mythbusters* TV show, are prominent in the entertainment world, while also finding a niche market among secularists, along with a host of bloggers with large followings.

The prominent role of celebrities

and the calls for reason and “coming out of the closet” to claim a place in American society were joined with the irreverent attacks on religion that are a staple of organized secularist events. “We’re not here to bash anyone’s faith, but if it happens, it happens,” comedian and master of ceremonies Paul Provenza announced to laughter and applause at the outset of the event. The bashing and attacks on religion, mainly Christianity (in its evangelical and Catholic forms), happened as much if not more than positive portrayals of secularism and were in sync with Dawkins’ advice to “mock and ridicule” people’s beliefs. The tension, if not conflict, between the secularists’ strategies of debunking religion and calling for acceptance in a largely religious, if pluralistic, society is as apparent in 2012 as it was in 2002.

Santorum as standard bearer of the religious right

The most obvious sign of the strength of the Catholic-evangelical alliance is the wide support of evangelicals for Catholic Rick Santorum in the Republican primary races. *Time* magazine (April 2) notes that the force propelling Santorum to his unexpected victories is his “devout and driven network of social conservatives,” made up of religious leaders, anti-abortion activists, homeschooling advocates and Christian businessmen. What is striking about the Christian right

support for Santorum is its high level of unity compared to previous campaigns. In the previous presidential campaign, conservative Christians were split between several candidates, with Pat Robertson inexplicably throwing his support behind socially liberal Rudy Giuliani.

In the current campaign, candidates were more carefully vetted, with about 150 religious leaders voting for Santorum by a ratio of 3 to 1. That Santorum, a conserva-

tive Catholic, has become “a standard bearer for a resurgent Christian right” has surprised most observers. But according to a recent Pew Poll, 35 percent of evangelical Republican voters believe Santorum is a fellow evangelical, more than the percentage that correctly identified him as a Catholic. Other religious factors may also be at work in the high evangelical support for Santorum, including the problems evangelicals have with Mitt Romney’s Mormonism.

Black theology looks back to ancient church for racism critique

Black theology has often occupied the radical edge of the Christian theological spectrum, but a spate of recent books by black theologians suggests that it is reaching

back to more traditional sources, reports the *Christian Century* magazine (February 8). Such theological works as Willie Jennings’ *The Christian Imagination*, J.

Kameron Carter’s *Race: A Theological Account* and Brian Bantum’s *Redeeming Mulatto* “represent a major theological shift that will—if taken as seriously as it

deserves—change the face not only of black theology but theology as a whole,” Jonathan Tran writes. These books rely heavily on dogmatic texts from the patristic period to the Reformation. This is a long way from James Cone, the dean of black theology, who charged that American theology was racist and that African Americans needed to disconnect themselves from the Anglo-European white tradition and develop their own voice with their own

sources. Tran notes that many Western theologians in the last few decades have returned to premodern theological sources. “However, what is quite surprising is that persons of color and women are increasingly finding their way to these sources.” He adds that this shift will make it harder for the rest of Christians to ignore these contributions and dismiss them as just theological versions of radical black social and political thought, as many did

with black theology. The new line of thought implicates the Enlightenment in a universalizing mission that led to colonialism and slave holding. Jennings, Carter and Bantum view the source of racism as the early church heresy that sought to overturn the Jewish identity of Jesus, with gentiles and hence European Christians eventually establishing the “universality of whiteness.”

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

Buddhism in the U.S.—global and hybrid

Buddhism in the U.S. today represents a global religion more than an American one, particularly as it is entering a stage of “hybridity,” according to Buddhist scholar Charles Prebish. In an interview with the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* (Spring), Prebish says that talk of developing an “American Buddhism” is “almost passé ... Buddhist communities everywhere in North America are now so networked that I started using the phrase ‘global Buddhist dialogue’ to talk about a worldwide Buddhism rather than just an Asian, European, or American one In the seventies and even into

the eighties and early nineties, groups were distinctly one tradition or another. Today lots of communities combine bits and pieces of various Buddhist traditions into something that works for them. For example, you might have a group that picks up bits and pieces of doctrine and practice from Zen and also from Theravada.”

Prebish cites such ecumenical groups as the American Buddhist Council and the Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California as getting the ball rolling for various Buddhist groups to talk together,

even if they were not altogether successful in creating unity. An example of the new hybridity can be seen in Zen Buddhists, who had little to do with ethnic Buddhists, and the Japanese-based Buddhist Churches of America sharing a temple called the Cleveland Buddhist Temple. Prebish adds that the older divisions made between ethnic and “white” (or convert) Buddhism are also no longer so strong, since regional differences are increasingly important.

(*Tricycle*, 1115 Broadway, Suite 1113, New York, NY 10019)

Jainism blends asceticism with body maintenance

The strong ascetic nature of Jainism has not prevented a growing movement within the religion from appealing to yoga-seeking Westerners with practices and teachings stressing a healthy mind and body, writes Andrea Jain in the journal *Nova Religio* (February). The Jain religion has traditionally emphasized spiritual enlightenment through renunciation of the body and its senses, as well as withdrawal from society. A Jain reform movement, known as the Terepanth, has sought to recover a “lost” form of Jain yoga while

adapting the religion to the modern world. The Terepanth’s main organization is the Jain Vishva Bharati (JVB), which has promoted this form of yoga, known as “*preksa*” in both Asia and the West. *Preksa* represents a unique departure from the ascetic teachings of Jainism in that it involves an affirmation of the body and includes a plan of diet and exercise “aimed at worldly goals in regard to health.”

In order to spread Jain yoga, the Terepanth introduced another in-

novation in the religion in the 1980s as it relaxed the monastic lifestyle for certain members, allowing them to skirt the traditional restrictions on travel and have closer relations with the laity. While the JVB centers in India may view yoga as a means of attaining a separation from the body, in the U.S. and the UK *preksa* caters to a “yoga market” concerned with health and emotional well-being. *Preksa* teachers in the West rarely address Jain teachings or even hold meditation classes. These JVB centers show

the shift from “ascetic body work for the sake of the body’s subordination to the soul ... to body maintenance as a legitimate in itself.” JVB marketing strategies include using English in their literature, a new emphasis on teach-

ers having master’s degrees from JVB University in India, and discarding traditional Jain monastic trappings such as the mouth shield. Jain concludes that this form of Jainism still upholds the principle of withdrawal from soci-

ety and the limitation of bodily action for monastic members while including the “dual ideal” of the healthy body.

(*Nova Religio*, 2000 Center St., Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704)

Anglican ordinariates as channels for Protestant conversions to Rome?

The personal ordinariates established for allowing Anglicans to keep their religious patrimony while coming into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church may become a new bridge toward Rome for “a whole range of Protestants Christians,” writes Fr. Dwight Longenecker in the magazine *Inside the Vatican* (February). Ordinariates have now been erected in England and the U.S., with another one to follow in Australia. Among all three, they will gather over 100 clergy and “several thousand lay people.” Later “waves” of converts are expected. But Longenecker believes that the ordinariates will welcome more than a small number of conservative Anglo-Catholics as the Anglican Church will change beyond recognition, leaving no other

option for Anglicans than to join the Catholic Church (a majority of Anglicans are evangelicals, and not all Anglo-Catholics want to be Catholics, while the liberal wing of the Anglican has no interest). But he sees another alternative: noting that a group of “conservative, liturgically-minded” Lutherans has already been allowed to join the ordinariate, Longenecker claims that the future of these new structures may be to pave the way for Protestants of various kinds to join the Roman Catholic Church.

If Lutherans can join the ordinariate, why not Methodists, with their historical roots in Anglicanism? For this to happen, the ordinariates need not be merely conservatories of venerable traditions, but to see their mission as evangelization and outreach. “One of

the best groups to whom they might reach out are American Evangelicals.” Longenecker warns about simplistic views of evangelicals: many of them also have an interest in the historic faith and long for a church that is liturgical, “rooted in a deep spirituality.” When they engage in such a search, usually they first come across Episcopal or Lutheran Churches, but may find a modernist agenda. Joining Roman Catholic parishes—if they overcome anti-Catholic prejudice—presents other problems, as well as a cultural gap. According to Longenecker, Catholic parishes in the Anglican tradition might offer them an atmosphere where they could more easily feel at home.

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

CURRENT RESEARCH

► **The Millennial generation's movement away from organized religion has recently accelerated, writes political scientist Robert Putnam in the journal *Foreign Affairs* (March/April).** Between 2006 and 2011, the fraction of non-affiliates as a whole rose from 17 percent to 19 percent. Among younger Americans, however, the fraction increased approximately five times as much, according to the 2011 Faith Matters survey. Over the same

five-year period, the fraction of Americans who reported never attending religious services rose by a negligible two percentage points among Americans over the age of 60, but tripled among those aged 18–29. Putnam writes that young people’s (and other “nones” who reject affiliation with any particular religious tradition) disenchantment with religious institutions may be due to the “melding of religion and party politics.” In fact, a wide range of Americans—both religious and secular, conservative and liberal—are lowering their own estimates of religion’s role in American life.

Putnam told **RW** (in an e-mail exchange) that the 2011 survey findings do “suggest that the Millennial disaffiliation from religion that we and others have reported in previous work may now be hardening into a rejection of religion per se, and not merely of organized religion.” He added that between 2005 and 2011 “our national Faith Matters surveys found that among 18–29 year olds, the ‘nones’ rose from 25 percent to 33 percent, while the number of atheists and agnostics (those who say they do not believe in God or are not sure about God’s existence) rose from 15 percent to 24 percent.

Among older cohorts the comparable shift toward atheism/agnosticism was from about 9 percent to about 12 percent.”

(*Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137100/david-e-campbell-and-robert-d-putnam/god-and-caesar-in-america>)

▶ **American young people raised with no religious faith are more likely to maintain a secular stance in later life and raise a non-religious family than those of previous generations, according to a study in the new online journal *Secularism & Nonreligion* (Vol. 1, Issue 1).** Stephen Merino of Penn State University writes that despite their growing numbers, individuals raised with no religion have received little attention from scholars. Merino analyzes data from the General Social Surveys between 1974 and 2010 and finds that more recent birth cohorts (starting with the 1944, but especially those born between 1971 and 1992) who were raised with no religion hold more secular beliefs; 15–20 percent of those in the 1944–1955 and 1956 and 1970 cohorts are atheist or agnostic, while 24 percent of the 1974–2010 cohort are atheist or agnostic.

This pattern may be due to the less religious period of the lifecycle for the still-young 1974–2010 cohort, but Merino argues that there is a higher percentage of non-religious young people with non-religious upbringings than in previous cohorts. That marriage may encourage a switch to a religious preference may be less true today than in the past as the growing number of unaffiliated young adults provides a pool for marriage partners of similar backgrounds. Members of the younger cohort also show differences from older ones in their higher rates of political liberalism and lack of confidence in religious organizations and political liberalism. Because political liberalism and lack of trust in organized religion are associ-

ated with decreased odds of a switch to religion, the younger cohort may be the carrier of a long-ranging secular trend.

(*Secularism & Nonreligion*, <http://secularismandnonreligion.org/index.php/snr/issue/view/1>)

▶ **While religious concerns are prominent in the Republican primary elections, the majority of Americans are less interested in whether a presidential candidate shares their religious views, according to a recent ABC News/Washington Post poll.** Six in 10 Americans expressed disinterest in whether a presidential candidate shared their religious views; six in 10 also say political leaders should not rely on their religious beliefs in making policy decisions. In comparison, available Republican primary exit poll data shows 64 percent of Republicans saying it matters that their candidate shares their religious beliefs.

▶ **A majority of American congregations have experienced giving increases because of a better economy, higher attendance and more church teaching on giving.** The survey, called the annual “State of the Plate” constituency survey, polled more than 1,360 congregations across the denominational spectrum and found that 51 percent of churches saw giving increase in 2011, up from 43 percent in 2010 and 36 percent in 2009. The survey showed higher budgets, which brought more church spending on staff salaries, missions, facilities and benevolence. Trends also included greater attention to fiscal transparency and board governance, and a rise in electronic giving through technological tools, such as cell phone applications and automatic bank withdrawals. The survey was a collaborative research project sponsored by MAXIMUM Generosity, Christianity Today, and the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

▶ **The number of mosques in the U.S. has increased significantly, while American Muslims are less likely to see America as “hostile” to Islam, according to researcher Ihsan Bagby of the University of Kentucky.** The study, which was conducted with researchers from Hartford Seminary and the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, counted 2,106 mosques in the U.S., showing an increase of 900 new Islamic centers being established since 2000. Since that time, many new mosques have been established by immigrants outside of the predominant South Asian diaspora, such as Somalis, Iraqis, West Africans and Bosnians. Many Muslim groups that do not have public spaces, such as mosques on college campuses, were not counted in the survey.

The study also found that the majority (56 percent) said they took a flexible approach to their faith and interpreting their scriptures, with 21 percent reporting a more conservative stance; 6 percent said they belonged to the conservative Salafi tradition. Bagby, who conducted a similar survey in 2000, found that a majority of mosque leaders had earlier thought that America was hostile toward Islam; today only a quarter of such leaders feel that way.

▶ **Mormons are distinctive in their approach to immigration and other controversial moral issues; while they are more Republican than other religious groups, they show more pro-immigrant attitudes than any other believers aside from Jews, according to a new survey.** At a conference on Mormons and politics at Columbia University in February attended by RW, Notre Dame University political scientist David Campbell presented findings from the newly completed “Peculiar People Survey,” which polled 500 Mormons in the U.S. on a wide range of social and religious

issues. Aside from immigration, the Mormons were more likely than Catholics and evangelicals to allow for exceptions in the cases of dangers to the health of the mother and rape. Campbell said that one of the more unexpected findings is that there is significantly less politics preached from Mormon pulpits than in other religious groups. The survey found that Mormons do discuss politics, but such discussions take place outside of their churches. Mormons can also be mobilized relatively rapidly, especially when leaders endorse a social cause and when all the general authorities of the church present a united front on an issue.

► **One of the largest studies of black Catholics in the U.S. finds that members of this group are more religiously involved than their white counterparts, while also being more educated and more economically successful than African-American Protestants.** The study, conducted by University of Notre Dame University researchers, is said to be the first ever to have a large enough African-American Catholic sample to draw statistically reliable data on their attitudes and other demographic information. Compared to the white Catholic weekly church attendance figure of 30.4 percent, 48.2 percent of black Catholics attend weekly. About 44 percent of black Catholic households reported incomes above \$60,000, while only 20 percent of black Protestant households reported

such incomes. While half of African Americans report that their educations ended at high school graduations or below, only a quarter of black Catholics said their educations ended at these levels, according to an article on the survey published in the *National Catholic Reporter* (February 3–16). The study also found far less of a generation gap among black Catholics; young African Americans are more likely to attend Mass than their white counterparts.

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

► **A pattern of culture conflict fueled by religious differences is taking shape in Canada and in several aspects resembles the beginnings of the “culture wars” in the U.S., according to a study in the journal *Politics and Religion* (issue 5, 2012).** Authors Adrian Ang and John Petrocik look at data drawn from the Canadian Election Studies between 1997 and 2006. They find there is significant division on gay marriage, abortion and other moral issues according to different levels of religious commitment—a “moral divide” very similar to that which exists in the U.S. Because the divide tends to cut across denominational lines, there is the potential for moral-cultural issues to serve as “wedge issues.” Canada is not divided by deep religious differences, but it is a society where religion continues to be linked to party allegiance. This means that it is possible for an aspiring “political entrepreneur” to reshuf-

fle party supporters along religious lines—“perhaps parallel to the American experience of the 1980s,” write Ang and Petrocik.

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

► **The growth of faith-based organizations (FBOs), at least in the case of England, does not necessarily mean an expansion of religious proselytism or even advocacy, reports Sarah Johnsen in *The Tablet* (March 17).** Johnsen is one of the researchers in the government-funded Religion and Society program focusing on faith-based services and the homeless. The researchers studied a wide range of Christian, Muslim, Hindu (including Hare Krishna) and Sikh faith-based groups working with the homeless. They found only a small minority of homeless people reported receiving pressure to talk or hear about religion.

The only major difference between secular and FBOs was that staff were required to be “in sympathy with” the sponsoring organization, even though “front-line” staff were not required to be profess their faith. Contrary to what is presumed, it was the secular rather than the religious organizations that tended toward interventionist “rehabilitative” approaches. The “growing invisibility of religion” in many FBOs may due to the increasing restrictions imposed upon them by local authorities, such as removing religious symbols.

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

Religious dynamics not primary in most conflicts in Africa

Writing on the conflicts in the middle and the Horn of Africa in the *Strategic Trends 2012*, a newly released report of the Swiss-based Center for Security Studies, researcher An Jacobs admits that competition for resources and

ethno-religious differences does often contribute to these conditions, but the crucial factor in most cases is bad governance. One exception is Somalia, with thriving Islamist radicalism of various shades. What happens is more perverse: political figures play off ethnic and religious groups against each other for strategic purposes.

While Sudan has supported Islamist insurgents in neighboring countries, it has also provided support to the notorious Lord’s Resistance Army, which has nothing to do with Islam. In Somalia, however, religion is said to play a key role: the main characteristic is Islamic fragmentation, with different Islamic groups opposing each other. The absence of na-

tionwide governance structures has created a space for religious leaders.

(*Strategic Trends 2012* can be read online or downloaded: <http://www.sta.ethz.ch/Strategic-Trends-2012>)

Leftist-Muslim alliance heading for breakup in Britain?

An alliance between Muslims and political leftists in Britain during the last decade on anti-war and economic issues has largely dissolved due to a clash of world-views, writes Sarah Glynn in the journal *Ethnicities* (February 17, online version). Glynn focuses on the founding of the Respect Coalition, an effort that came out of the British anti-war movement, as a case study of how the British left and Muslim alliance broke down. The coalition was launched in 2004 under the inspiration of George Galloway, a leading figure in the Labour Party. Respect aspired to be an inclusive coalition and toned down its socialist roots, to the consternation of hardline leftists, as it sought to reach out to Muslims on anti-war and economic issues. Respect managed to gain the support of the large British Bengali Muslim community and other Muslims, while trying to retain its white voter base.

The coalition did have an election victory in East London (an area with many Bengalis), but in general it did not find wide support, with Galloway being elected as Respect's only MP (while fielding 12 Bengali candidates). But larger Muslim groups, such as the Muslim Association of Britain, were too pragmatic and politically astute to tie themselves to the small opposition group. By the 2010

general elections, Respect candidates had lagged behind others, all but dissolving as a viable coalition. While organizational problems may have played a part in Respect's demise, Glynn writes that Galloway and other leftists misconceived the strong Islamist nature of many British Muslim voters and activists. Defining Islamism as the attempt to infuse one's politics with Islamic teachings, Glynn notes that the Muslims' religious morality "supplants socialist understandings, and religious loyalties cut across class-based organization." Although joint action over shared issues is possible, "it is impossible to combine the two different and complete worldviews of Marxism and Islamism," she concludes.

(*Ethnicities*, <http://etn.sagepub.com/>)

Renewal movements take up greater role in Eastern Orthodoxy, with mixed results

Renewal movements are playing a greater role in Eastern Orthodoxy throughout the world, although their track record in generating change in churches is uneven, writes Paul Ladouceur in the current issue of *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (55:4, 2011). The two main structures in Eastern Orthodox churches are the parish and the monastery, but in the last century there have been many movements seeking to counter the effects of communism, fascism, and, more recently, secularism. The Greek Orthodox renewal movement Zoe was instrumental in reviving religious life among the laity in Greece in the 1940s and 1950s, but lost much of its influence due to internal problems and the rising indifference

and materialism of Greeks. In contrast, the Orthodox Youth Movement (MJO) in the Middle East's ability to complement the clergy and parishes rather than substitute for them (as in the case of Zoe) and its role in publishing has made it a major force in the churches of Lebanon, Syria and the diaspora, and the most successful renewal movement in Orthodoxy.

In Russia, Orthodox brotherhoods or fraternities have themselves been revived since the fall of communism. On one hand, the brotherhoods have been instrumental in strengthening the weak condition of the Orthodox Church, even starting a university and a range of media. On the other, several of the brotherhoods have veered into "fundamentalism," espousing nationalism and anti-Semitism and fanning these elements in the wider church. In contrast, the revival of the Martha and Mary House of Mercy in Moscow and a related religious order in Belarussia has combined monastic practices with social ministry under the work of deaconesses. There are also uncanonical Orthodox groups that have experimented with new communities, such as Bethanie in France experimenting with a Gallican (early French) rite and serving as a retreat center for various Christians and spiritual seekers (not common in Orthodoxy). Ladouceur concludes that these attempts at renewal remain controversial for churches because they are fleshing out a "theology of the laity" that remains undeveloped in Orthodoxy.

(*St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 575 Scarsdale Road, Crestwood, NY 10707-1699)

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

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

■ The journal **Society** devotes its January/February issue to the future of social conservatism and includes several interesting articles on its varied religious dimensions. The articles look at world developments and more specific case studies: Joshua Duna's reports on the political effects of evangelicals in their "headquarter" city of Colorado Springs. Duna finds that on issues such as gay rights, education and marijuana rights, the city's religious conservatives have had uneven success. Efforts to prohibit medical marijuana dispensaries were voted down in 2010, while same-sex partnership benefit restrictions found support after a close vote. Along with a shift toward charitable ministries, there appears to be disenchantment with evangelical political activism in the city, Duna concludes. Other noteworthy articles include one noting increasing evangelical diversity beyond the religious right and another on American Muslims. Author Peter Skerry argues that conservatives have lost credibility among Muslims both in the U.S. and abroad for their increasing support of freedom, while downplaying their moral commonalities with them.

For more information on this issue, write: *Society*, Springer, P.O. Box 2485, Secaucus, NJ 07096

■ The issue of the relation between countries with an Orthodox tradition and the West has been a topic for discussion since the end of the communist regimes; several articles in **Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West** (January) are devoted to

that topic. A Romanian theologian, Prof. Radu Preda, stresses that 12 out of 16 autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Churches are located in Europe, and eight of them on the territory of the European Union (EU) (Finland, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus): from this angle, Orthodox Churches can no longer be considered as "Oriental" or "extra-European." Moreover, an Orthodox diaspora is growing in Western Europe. Still, it is true that there are Orthodox fears in relation to Europe. The first one is a fear of secularization: there is a perception of a European trend for excluding religion from the public square, and also a tendency to ignore Europe's religious roots. Another Orthodox fear is related to the understanding of human rights, since they have been used after the end of communism by organizations advocating abortion or same-sex unions, and thus are perceived as divisive and not positive.

In the case of Greece, a member of the EU since 1981, Prof. Vasilios Makrides (Erfurt University, Germany) observes that competing pro- and anti-Western trends are at work. Although the Greek Orthodox Church has often been labeled as anti-European by Western European media in recent years, Makrides notes that the Church has for years maintained close relations with European institutions and established a representative office in Brussels in 1998. Makrides doubts that theology or history plays a major role in Greek Orthodox sometimes-suspicious attitudes toward Europe, although such themes are reactivated when tensions occur. Various conspiracy theories (both intellectual and popular ones) find a fertile ground among Greek Orthodox believers and reinforce suspicions, in extreme cases even demonization of the West. More

recently, the severe economic crisis has given an additional impetus to anti-European trends.

Since Russia is a member of the Council of Europe, its decisions and guidelines have a direct impact on Russians. Thus the Russian Orthodox Church charges that the Council is a mouthpiece of "ultraliberalism" in Europe and thus a challenge to the faith. Since 2005, the strategy of the Moscow Patriarchate has been to look for a pragmatic strategic alliance between Catholics and Orthodox for defending traditional Christian values against secularism, liberalism and relativism (considered as dominant in modern Europe). The Church considers itself not merely as a religious institution in its relations with the EU, but also as a legitimate representative of Russian civil society. The Church approves the existence and widening of the EU, but—Alshanskaya concludes—its demands do not make a rapprochement between the EU and Russia any more likely in the near future.

For more info, write: *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Birmensdorferstrasse 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland, www.g2w.eu.

■ The new online journal **Secularism and Nonreligion** seeks to provide a scholarly forum and publishing venue for research on atheism and other forms of non-theism. The journal, which is open access, is interdisciplinary, exploring what it means to be secular, whether on personal, institutional or national and international levels. In the first issue there is an article on the pressing question of the growing ranks of the non-affiliated and their diverse makeup and an article by Christopher Smith and RW's editor on the role of the Internet in the formation of a secularist (our term for atheists and secular humanists) identity and activism.

The journal is available at: <http://secularismandnonreligion.org/index.php/snr/issue/view/1>

■ Keeping up with the new scholarly interest in atheism, the *Journal of Contemporary Religion* devotes its January issue to “non-religion and secularity.” The articles, which were originally presented at a conference sponsored by the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network, cover a wide breath of topics, including organized secularism in India (see the book on this subject reviewed below), the relation of secularization in Britain to its policy on anti-terrorism, and discrimination against atheism and other non-religious people in the U.S.

Why all the current interest in atheism and secular studies? In their introduction to the issue, co-editor Stephen Bullivant and Lois Lee write that the new surge of interest in the non-religious may be because of the emergence of the “new atheism” and the rise in number of this population (although in the U.S., it is not clear to what degree the rise of the “nones” means an increase of atheists), or it could be a reaction to the surge of religion, “which many societies might feel as an encroachment on what are, possibly for the first time, powerful non-religious or secular investments or normativities.” The issue also includes several reviews of books on secularism and atheism.

For more information on this issue, write: *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Taylor and Francis, Customer Service Dept., Sheepen Pl., Colchester, Essex, CO3 3LP, UK

■ The edited collection, *The Post-Secular in Question* (NYU Press, \$50) sustains the recent scholarly attention given to the contested and rather murky notion of post-secularism, although it approaches the topic in a more interesting way than many other works. The con-

tributors tend to view the slippery concept as a window into explaining how and why religion has been marginalized in much of academia. The introduction provides an overview on the history of the secularization thesis, noting how it emerged in social science disciplines shaped by the Enlightenment view and its presumption of unbelief and that religion is in inevitable decline. More recently, post-secularism emerged in the same disciplines seeking alternatives to “Enlightenment fundamentalism” and scientific naturalism, yet trying to account for the non-traditional ways that religion, spirituality and secularism are being expressed globally.

Several chapters, especially in the second half of the book, provide accounts of new religious and secular approaches of the various social science disciplines, including a look at how a “post-secular sociology of religion” would reconsider the Enlightenment concept of objectivity; an in-depth examination of the return of religious scholarship and even spirituality in disciplines from ranging from social work and education to political science and sociology (also noting a backlash among scholars fearing that universities’ hard-won independence from religious influence is being forfeited in their embrace of religion); and a few chapters paying special attention to the recent work of political philosopher Jurgen Habermas—particularly as he is the key progenitor of post-secularism.

■ In *The God Market* (Monthly Review Press, \$18.85), Indian scientist and writer Meera Nanda attempts to explain the phenomenon of the growing Hindu consciousness in India, especially among the new middle class and upper classes. Nanda disputes the secularization theory that holds that the more “existential security” a nation has the more

secular it will be. It is exactly those in India who are the most economically secure that are in the forefront of the Hindu revival. Nanda also takes issue with those who saw the failure of the Hindu nationalist party BJP in the 2009 elections as signaling the demise of Hindu political influence in India. She claims that Hinduism is taking a greater public role through a “state-temple-corporate complex.”

The growth of capitalism and globalization in India has opened up more public spaces “into which popular and nationalistic expressions of Hinduism” can be expressed,” she adds. In such an environment the new middle classes are “successfully blending their religiosity with growing appetites for wealth and profits.” Nanda, also an outspoken secularist, provides interesting accounts of how Hindu rituals have moved from the home to the public square and business sector (especially among IT professionals). In a somewhat angry tone, she notes that the elites are not reviving their former scientific and secular humanist form of Vedanda Hinduism; rather, it is a popular, mystical and ritualistic Hinduism that nevertheless uses scientific concepts and terminology.

■ Meera Nanda is one of the secularist figures who come under study in the new book *Disenchanted India* (Oxford University Press, \$39.95). Author Johannes Quack looks at a different India than the country widely viewed as the cradle of mysticism and Eastern religions. Quack provides an ethnographic examination of India’s leading rationalist or atheist group, Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti (Organization for the Eradication of Superstition or ANiS), focusing on how it portrays itself as originating from a long line of Indian skeptics and rationalists dating back to the writing

of the Vedas. Quack traces the rationalists more to the British influence in India in the 19th century and argues that their claim of an ancient lineage is part of a strategy to disassociate themselves from the West while attacking Indian religions.

The author reports that the ANiS is growing, although much of its work attempting to debunk miracles and mysticism (often traveling around small villages in vans seeking to disprove the supernatural power of gurus) is “preaching to the choir,” rather than “deconverting” believers. But the rationalists are portrayed as being tireless in their work, seeing it as a form of social work that will counter injustices and rampant “backwardness” in the country. Quack sees the ANiS as part of a global secularist network that shares in similar discourse and strategies.

■ **Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society** (Ashgate, \$89.96), edited by Milda Alisauskiene and Ingo Schrodter, is an in-depth look at the relation of the once-predominant Roman Catholicism in Lithuania to the new pluralism that has emerged in the small Baltic nation since the fall of communism. While Catholicism thrives in rural areas of Lithuania, the urban landscape is marked by the growth of groups as diverse as Hare Krishna, various kinds of indigenous and imported pagans (such as the revived national pagan tradition known as Romuva), Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Swedish Pentecostal group Word of Life. The contributors, mostly anthropologists, provide ethnographic studies of a region where such research has been limited. The contributors tend to view the history of Catholic establishment in Lithuania as shaping other trends that may unfold differently than in countries with other religious backgrounds.

Thus, while there has been an ex-

pansion of the religious field after the fall of communism, such pluralism in Lithuania (as in Poland) is often in contention with Catholicism and its strong political and social influence. But even here there are changes. The religious situation in Lithuania shows a leveling off of religious interest (belief in God had increased from 62 percent in 1990 to 80 percent in 1999, but has stayed the same since), with many of the new religious communities that grew in the 1990s now showing signs of decline. While new religious movements (from paganism to Pentecostalism) are considered “sects” and receive less state recognition than “traditional” religions (such as Catholicism, Judaism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Lutheranism), there are signs of some softening in the attitudes of the Catholic Church toward such “newcomers.” An interesting article by Alisauskiene suggests the growing influence of alternative spiritual or New Age-based ideas and teachings on Lithuanian Catholics (from visiting New Age spiritual sites to acceptance of reincarnation), but who rarely identify themselves as “New Age.”

■ In his book **Sacred High City and Sacred Low City** (Oxford University Press, \$29.95), Steven Heine selects two historically distinctive neighborhoods of Tokyo to demonstrate how religious practices are interwoven in everyday life in Tokyo and in Japan in general. Heine, a scholar of Japanese Zen Buddhism, goes back to the Edo era to illustrate how Tokyo’s distinctive two cities, Akasaka and Inarichō, were formed and have retained the atmosphere and the spiritual traces of that period. From Akasaka, the High City, he introduces three major Shinto and Buddhist sites to illustrate how they are still cherished and deeply rooted in the everyday life of people to this day. While Akasaka is related to political power and thus the upper class,

Inarichō, the Low City, was historically inhabited by the lower classes, and it is where one can find all sorts of religious products related to Shintoism and Buddhism in specialized stores. This is because the city has been historically close to life and death, since it has many Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines that were in close proximity to execution grounds.

By introducing those two areas of Tokyo that still play an important part of the spiritual life of the people, Heine questions the notion of “born Shinto ... die Buddhist,” a widely accepted understanding of Japanese religiosity. He proposes a new notion, “Born Shinto ... live Inari ... die Buddhist,” adding that “the use of the phrase ‘live Inari,’ refers to customs or practices habitually carried out within a worldview of myth and magic found in both Buddhist and Shinto contexts.” He supports this new understanding of the spiritual practices of Japanese by describing death-related rituals and the close relations they have with ancestors represented by the *Butsudan*, Buddhist altars, as well as the occasional visiting of shrines and temples. Heine argues that the widely discussed understanding of Japanese religious practice as being for *genze riyaku* or for this-worldly benefits is more of an “Orientalist judgment.”—By Ayako Sairenji, a freelance writer and doctoral candidate in sociology at the New School for Social Research

■ In **Bonds of the Dead** (University of Chicago Press, \$29), Mark Michael Rowe shows how mortuary practices are closely related to the realm of the living, as well as to the state of Buddhism in Japan today. It is well known that most Japanese have Buddhist funerals while they do not really consider themselves Buddhists; therefore, Buddhism in Japan is often described as Funer-

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ary Buddhism. Rowe discusses the changes in the mortuary practices, especially changing of ways of dealing with the ashes after cremation. Not only does the change reflect people's spirituality and religion, but also touches on such issues as politics, family structures, the economy and the funeral industry. Lack of land for graveyards and the increase of nuclear families, for examples, are causing Buddhist temples and people to rethink their mortuary practices from a traditional parishioner system that is passed on to their descendants, to individual memberships that do not require supporting temples throughout generations as *dnaka* or parishioners. However, these changes of the family structure from extended families to nuclear families have been affecting the survival of temples. During the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japanese were required to be certified as Buddhists by registering at their local temples. This was mainly for proving a non-Christian affiliation, which was banned at that time. Therefore, for a long time, temples had been supported by those people whose ancestors were registered there, and usually those extended families took care of family graves at the

temples where their ancestors were registered.

Rowe focuses on the idea of *En* (bonds) as a key to understand these issues, and says that it is the fear of *Muen* (the "absence of bonds") that is the "driving force behind the development and acceptance of new graves." The decline of the extended family has been increasing the number of abundant graves, which causes people to become abandoned dead. The abandoned dead would become the "hungry ghosts" without proper ceremonies and prayers from the living. One example of these new forms of graves is the eternal memorial grave: without people who will take care of the grave after the person's death, the grave will be taken care of by temples. The mortuary practices are seemingly separated from people's everyday lives; however, this book reminds us that death has more meanings to the living than the dead, and thus mortuary practices are closely related to changes in society. This book serves as a significant contribution to the understanding of what Rowe calls the "post-danka era" of Japanese mortuary practices.—*By Ayako Sairenji*

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

1) Because blacks register a low level of atheism, in February, **African Americans for Humanism** (AAH) launched an advertising campaign showcasing religious skepticism in the black community. The campaign targets six U.S. cities (New York City; Washington, DC; Los Angeles; Chicago; Atlanta; Durham, North Carolina; and Dallas), using the slogan "Doubts about religion? You're one of many." AAH activists are aware that "African Americans may be the nation's most religious minority," where "believing seems as natural as breathing," acknowledges a young atheist from a Seventh-Day Adventist family in the Bronx. Turning away from God is often understood as "acting white" and leaves African-American atheists out of important aspects of social life centering around churches. Still, the non-believing minority is reported to be growing, although it represents probably no more than half a percent of all African Americans.

What is new is the willingness to express doubts and unbelief openly. Internet resources have also helped atheists to connect. From three local groups in the entire country two years ago, AAH has now grown to 15. As could be expected, most reactions are not very warm. AAH has set realistic goals at this stage: "We want only to make know that there is an alternative

to church and that every doubter is welcome," explains AAH leader Debbie Goddard. (Source: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, March 15; AAH, www.aahumanism.net)

2) **Baroness Sayeeda Warsi** is the first Muslim woman to be a cabinet minister in Great Britain as well as among the few Muslim voices arguing for the importance of Christianity in Europe. She is also co-chair of the Conservative (or Tory) Party, which may help explain her less secularist orientation than many European politicians. Warsi recently led a British ministerial delegation to the Vatican, where she addressed a prestigious Catholic institution and agreed with Pope Benedict XVI about the importance of religion in public discourse and echoed his opposition to the growth of militant secularism in Europe.

In a subsequent interview, she added that "Europe would not try to erase the church spires on our horizons; then why would you try to erase our religious history or the role of Christianity in the development of values in our nations? Europe needs to be more in tune with its Christian identity." Before the Vatican visit, Warsi, whose parents are from Pakistan, caught media attention by entitling one of her addresses "This Government Does God." She was referencing a statement Tony Blair's press secretary had made in reference to the Labour Party, "We don't do God here." She was saying that David Cameron's Conservative Party had a more affirmative view of religion's role in public. (Source: *The Tablet*, February 18).