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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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Vitality and pluralism lead trends in world Judaism

Judaism is vibrant and more accepted than ever in U.S. society, while it is experiencing a growing pluralism in Israel, according to a special report on Judaism and the Jews in the magazine *The Economist* (July 28). Forty-three percent of the world's Jews now live in Israel. Among Jewish Israelis, 46 percent define themselves as secular, but only 16 percent do not observe any tradition, according to a survey conducted in 2009. Around 70 percent of all respondents would eat only kosher food and only 6 percent considered circumcision as not important. The arrival of immigrants from Russia marked a certain decline in attachment to religion and traditions, but as they became increasingly assimilated into Israeli society, it has started to increase again after 1999. After Israel and

its 5.7 million Jews, the United States with nearly 5.3 million is the country with the second-largest Jewish population in the world. "Jewish is cool in America," remarks writer J. J. Goldberg. People no longer want to hide their Jewish background or legacy; on the contrary, they are finding new ways to discover it (*see page 3*).

While Jews are prospering elsewhere too, nowhere is their sense of belonging as complete as in America. There is no doubt that drifting out of Judaism is widespread in the diaspora, but there is, on the other hand, a comeback of Jewish Orthodoxy, with more than 10 percent of the worldwide Jewish population being *haredi*, to which 10 percent more of

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Reform rabbis more willing to officiate at interfaith weddings

In attempts to approach the issue of intermarriages, about half of Reform rabbis in North America are willing to officiate at weddings between a Jew and a partner of another religious faith, reports Penny Schwartz in a *Jewish Telegraph Agency* article (July 3). Interfaith marriages are coming to be seen as "part of the world we live in," thus shifting the question from deciding on officiating or not to how to engage these families in the synagogue. It has become much more common for Reform rabbis to officiate at such marriages during the past decade. This summer, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR, gathering rabbis belonging to the Reform movement) will for the first time publish a premarital counseling guide for clergy. The guide will include discussion of the case

of intermarriage and will also contain suggestions on following up on such couples, something that had been neglected until now.

The CCAR had historically opposed its members officiating at intermarriages, but as early as 1973 it recognized that there were divergent views and practices among its members. Orthodox and Conservative rabbis do not officiate at such marriages, Schwartz reminds her readers, but the Conservative movement does outreach work with interfaith couples. In recent years, studies have questioned the assumption that intermarriages necessarily involve disengagement from Jewish life.

(*Jewish Telegraph Agency*, <http://www.jta.org>)

Growing acceptance of black Jews by Jewish mainstream

Black Jews, once known as Hebrew Israelites, are finding new acceptance among white Jewish institutions and leaders, reports *Forward.com* (July 27). Although Hebrew Israelites have existed for 80 years and number up to 10,000 in the United States, until recently they have been rejected as inauthentic Jews by many in the mainstream Jewish community. Much of this distrust was over black Jews' refusal to formally convert to Judaism, as they believed that

the roots of black identity reached back to the Israelites of the Torah. This has changed in recent years as an increasing number of black Jews have sought formal conversion (although they still maintain that conversion is not necessary).

Writer Len Lyons adds that "Today, a cadre of teens and young adults have graduated from yeshivas and Jewish day schools, creating educational parity and a shared frame of reference with the wider Jewish community." Last

year, Israel's ambassador to Washington, Michael Oren, paid an "unprecedented" visit to a black synagogue. Hebrew Israelite worship and practices are very different from those of mainstream Judaism—from the preaching based on call-and-response to the joyful music of the choir and the use of contemporary music accompanied by a band. Today, black Jews see themselves as reaching out to and educating other African groups who identify

Jews rethinking where to draw the lines on Christian support for Israel

While some Jews harbor lingering suspicions about the motives of the evangelical group Christians United for Israel (CUFI), the political support it provides not only for Israel, but also for Jewish initiatives is valued by others, notes Jan Jaben-Eilon in *Jerusalem Report* (July 30). CUFI, launched in 2006 and led by evangelical minister John Hagee—who calls the Bible "a Zionist text"—is reported to have more than one million members. In July it held its Washington Summit with 5,600 delegates. Neil Ruben describes it as "something of a Christian version of the annual Washington policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee" (AIPAC). Even Israel's prime minister was a guest speaker (via satellite). According to the director of inter-religious relations for the American Jewish Committee, Jews should welcome evangelical support without having to agree with every aspect of it (*Jewish Telegraph Agency*, July 17).

Hagee has stated that proselytizing is not acceptable to CUFI members. Not everybody is convinced that Hagee and fellow Christian Zionists can be trusted, though: websites such as *JewishIsrael.com* are strongly critical of alliances with evangelicals and look for connections between Christian Zionism and messianic missionary efforts. Indeed, the messianic movement is especially viewed with suspicion, as blurring the borders between Judaism and Christianity. Reform Jews also warn about anti-Muslim Christians or supporters of all West Bank settlements. The AIPAC prefers to see the positive side: it launched an outreach program to Christian groups supporting Israel and has a full-time employee for that purpose in Atlanta. At a local level in the United States pro-Israel evangelical inclinations have potential benefits: the new owner of the *Atlanta Jewish Times* intends to revitalize it by, among other things, expanding

readership in the Christian community of the Bible Belt.

Meanwhile, Mitt Romney's recent visit to Israel has highlighted Mormonism's relationship to Israel and Jews. The *New Republic Daily* (July 30) notes that both Mormons shares with evangelicals the belief that Israel is "an integral part of their own biblical-era past and humanity's apocalyptic future." Max Perry Mueller writes that more recently Mormon rhetoric about the end-times has become less explicit, mainly confined to "moralism" and the view that world is becoming increasingly sinful. "There is less talk about Christ's return, and more talk about the secular apocalypse they believe a nuclear Iran represents." After a period of tension, The LDS church has integrated itself in Israel through its BYU Jerusalem Center, which strictly prohibits proselytizing.

► Continued from page one

"modern Orthodox" should be added. About 1.1 million Jews in the United States are Reform, and an additional estimated one million would identify themselves as such. But despite efforts to

grow (such as through increasing acceptance of mixed couples), both Reform and Conservative congregations are losing members (more than 1 percent per year, according to sociologist Steven Cohen of Hebrew Union College). Samuel Heilman (City University

of New York) explains that Conservatives are especially vulnerable, being middle of the road and thus having members switching either to Reform or Orthodox.

DNA tests uncovering Jewish ancestry in Catholic populations

New technology used to trace one's genetic makeup is confirming and, in some cases, revealing a Jewish ancestral background for many Catholics, leading some of them to a new interest in Judaism, reports *Moment* magazine (July/August). Genetic testing, now an inexpensive technique, "has buttressed claims of Jewish ancestry, once solely based on anecdotal evidence such as family traditions of lighting candles on Friday night, refraining from eating pork or covering mirrors after someone dies," writes Daphna Berman. The main populations showing previously unconfirmed Jewish descent are in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and North and South America—places where those of Sephardic Jewish background were either expelled from or migrated to in hopes of

practicing their faith. Even in Spain and Portugal, from where most Jews were expelled during the Inquisition, it has been showed that 20 percent of Catholic men had Y chromosomes that indicated they were of Sephardic Jewish ancestry, according to a 2008 study.

One genetic testing organization official says that the number of people with Jewish ancestry is much larger than the number of Jews today, with some estimates putting this number as high as 10 million in Brazil alone. New efforts are under way to return these "Jewish Catholics" to the Jewish fold. Members of a community in Mallorca, an island off the coast of Spain, have returned to the Jewish fold after genetic testing confirmed that their ancestors

were likely forced to convert to Catholicism. New research to achieve similar ends will be conducted in Calabria, Italy, where many Spanish and Portuguese Jews fled to escape the Inquisition. Bennett Greenspan of Family Tree DNA, a genetic testing service, says that he finds a lot of interest in Judaism among those finding Jewish ancestry—"all the way from a general curiosity [about Judaism] to 'I want to fight in the Israeli army' to everything in between." Berman concludes that "At a time of growing secularism and the declining hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church, having Jewish 'blood' is seen as positive rather than a social risk."

(*Moment*, 4115 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Suite 10, Washington, DC 20016)

Academic rivalry, popularization challenge biblical archeology

A mixture of academic rivalry, journalistic sensationalism and religious concerns is changing the field of biblical archeology, reports the *Chronicle Review* (June 22). For decades, biblical archeology has been driven by debates over discoveries in the Holy Land, but more recently the field has been split by "maximalist" and

"minimalist" camps. The maximalists tend to see the biblical account as a reference helping to explain recent finds, such as the recent unearthing of shrines and other cultic objects that are said by proponents to show that biblical references to King David have some basis in history. The minimalists charge that the "tradi-

tional" account is marked by religious and nationalist (Israeli) bias, as they argue that such biblical figures as David, Solomon, Moses and Abraham are mythical figures, throwing doubt on the existence of a historic land of Israel.

Even beyond this debate is the turmoil surrounding and chal-

enges to the credibility of biblical archeology created by a wave of mass media interest in the latest archeological finds. Docudramas and movies on spectacular biblical discoveries, often funded by moguls such as director James Cameron and aired on cable channels like Discovery, have created a new market for “holy relics” that

often sidesteps credible scholarship, writes Matthew Kalman. One of the most well-known practitioners of the popularized biblical archeology is Simcha Jacobovici, who has claimed such controversial discoveries as unearthing Jesus’s tomb and, more recently, finding the nails used in his crucifixion. Critics have sought to

challenge such media claims of momentous discoveries, but find few opportunities for intellectual exchange. Jacobovici and other commentators charge that their scholarly critics are ordained ministers and have a religious agenda in delegitimizing “Jesus scholarship.”

Pre-Vatican II church architecture revives

A revival of traditional-looking Catholic churches is under way in the United States, in some cases replacing the “ubiquitous Modernist structures of the previous half-century,” writes Michael DeSanctis in the Jesuit magazine *America* (May 28). He adds that the anticipation of the conservative liturgical changes introduced by the Vatican in the last year may have spawned this architectural revival. Pope Benedict XVI’s “reform of the reforms” of Vatican II arrived in parishes several months ago in the form of changes in liturgical texts used during Mass. DeSanctis notes that “Perhaps the same impulse within the church that has caused such changes in ritual practice as the decanting of the blood of Christ from ‘cup’ to ‘chalice’—both literally and in the revised translation of the Roman

Missal—is also behind the return to traditional architecture.” Up until a decade ago, most church architects and design professionals “thought that dressing new structures in period costume did not square theologically with the Second Vatican Council’s demand for authenticity in every aspect of liturgical prayer.”

Citing Pope Benedict’s address to the Roman Curia in 2005, “neo-traditionalist” proponents of these changes argue that the “strictly forward-looking or Modernist architecture prevalent since the council embodies a ‘hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture’ that is inimical to the church’s role as conservator of sacred memory.” DeSanctis notes that the “neo-traditionalists stop short of proposing a one-size-fits-all pro-

gram” of modifying Modernist structures. He cites St. John Neumann Church in Tennessee, which shows a cruciform plan that has largely been absent in church architecture since Vatican II and which tends to delineate distinct spaces for the laity and clergy. This church also breaks with the widespread practice of placing the tabernacle somewhere other than at the heart of the sanctuary. The central position of the tabernacle gives new visibility to the reserved blessed sacrament—an observance growing in popularity. DeSanctis concludes that “Whether buildings like these are compromises, aberrations or the first fruits of a full-blown ‘movement’ in American Catholic church design is still uncertain.”

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

Secularist/skeptical movement faces gender imbalance and harassment charges

The long-standing disparity between men and women in atheist and skeptical groups is being accompanied by recent charges of sexual harassment in at least one quarter of this movement. The Amazing Meeting (TAM), an annual conference in Las Vegas for skeptics, humanists and atheists,

has reported a dwindling number of women who attend. The reasons for this decline—attributed to the downward-spiraling economy and the fact that men are less spiritually inclined than their female counterparts—have lately been overshadowed by accusations of sexual harassment. A re-

cent *Religion News Service* article (July 12) reports on these accusations at TAM and other atheist and skeptic events, with a number of women speaking out and claiming that they have been subjected to unwanted advances. Rebecca Watson, a skeptic blogger and TAM speaker, called off her presenta-

tion on account of not feeling “safe.” In response to her statement, TAM’s organizer, D. J. Grothe, called for common ground to be reached between the negative reports and the efforts that are being made to assure women that all of them should feel welcome.

Since the exchange, the blogosphere has been busy with debate between those siding with Watson and those supporting Grothe’s defense. In response to Watson’s claims, Richard Dawkins,

a new atheist leader and renowned British biologist, responded with the cutting remark that she should “grow a thicker skin.” Despite the attacks, an effort has been made to raise awareness of these growing concerns. A recent Women in Secularism conference addressed some of these issues. The article also reports on the instituting of anti-harassment policies by many atheist and skeptic organizations in the wake of the allegations and ongoing con-

troversy. Overall, although numbers of women are down at TAM and they are a minority in the general skeptic and atheist population, women continue to play a prominent role at these events and in several atheist/skeptical organizations. —*By Caitlin Maddox, an Oklahoma-based writer and history student*

(*Religion News Service*, <http://www.religionnews.com/culture/gender-and-sexuality/do-atheists-have-a-sexual-harassment-problem>)

Canada’s immigrant clergy move out of ethnic enclaves

First-generation immigrant clergy serving racially white congregations are becoming increasingly common in Canada, reports the Canadian evangelical magazine *Faith Today* (July/August). The experience of foreign and immigrant clergy ministering cross-culturally in Canada was relatively rare up until the 1990s. But by 2010, “observers of the Canadian church were talking about this [growing phenomenon] as a sign of ‘missionary rebound,’ a term describing how some regions that used to receive missionaries—for example from Europe and North America—are now sending missionaries back to those places.” Although no figures are provided on immigrant clergy,

writer Peter Bush notes that quite a few of them are arriving in Canada as intentional missionaries. One example of this is a group of 25 Korean Christian families, known as the “K-1” group, partnering with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada to start a ministry to native Canadian populations.

Other new immigrant clergy come to Canada as students or on an exchange program and then choose to stay in the country and feel called to minister there. Still other clergy come to Canada as refugees, some of whom are unable to find ministry opportunities serving congregations of their ethnicity or language group and “end up lead-

ing racially mainstream (mostly Anglo-Saxon) congregations. Others make the choice intentionally.” A fourth group consists of new arrivals who became Christians while in Canada and now serve Canadian congregations. There are cases of missionary rebound across the spectrum of Canadian churches, but the trend is most evident in the Catholic Church, where “for example, nearly one-third of priests in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg are first-generation immigrants.” Bush concludes that congregations with immigrant clergy develop “cultural competence” or cross-cultural understanding.

(*Faith Today*, <http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Page.aspx?pid=282>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

► **Confidence in institutional religion is at an all-time low, according to a new Gallup poll.** Today, confidence in American religion has dropped to 44 percent, compared to

the 1973 high of 66 percent. Through 1985, organized religion ranked first in Gallup’s “confidence in institutions measure,” outranking the military and the Supreme Court. The *Huffington Post* (July 13) cites the study as showing that in the mid- to late 1980s, organized religion started dropping below 60 percent, which was thought to be related to the tele-

vangelist scandals of that era. Organized religion now ranks fourth among 16 institutions. The poll finds that Protestants show more confidence in organized religion than Catholics (56 versus 46 percent, respectively); the Catholic disenchantment relative to Protestants started in 1981 and became more pronounced by 2002.

► **In behaving generously toward others, non-believers tend to rely on feelings of compassion to a greater extent than believers, according to researchers at the University of California at Berkeley.** In a series of experiments that involved testing how people react toward suffering (such as in an experiment asking people to decide how to spend a certain sum of money they were given), it was those who were less religious who reported high feelings of compassion and who were inclined to help the misfortunate. The study, published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* and cited in the *Christian Century* (June 27), did not find that non-religious people showed more prosocial behavior than believers. Rather, it is only that the former tended to rely on an emotional response as a motive to help, while religious people may base their generosity on additional motives, such as religious teaching and communal expectations.

► **A majority of Americans would vote for an atheist as president, a recent Gallup poll confirmed.** It is the second time in the past year that Gallup found this pattern, this time reporting 54 percent of Americans claiming that they would vote a “well-qualified” atheist into the Oval Office. This was the highest percentage since Gallup began asking the question in 1958; back then only 18 percent said they would vote for a non-believer. However, the survey showed that atheists still come in behind every other group polled for, including gays and lesbians (68 percent) and Muslims (58 percent).

► **The Jewish composition of New York City has shifted from secular to more religious Jews—a change that could have repercussions in American Judaism.** *Forward.com* (June 22) cites the survey, which was

conducted by the UJA-Federation of New York, as showing that New York Jews are poorer, less educated and more religious than they were 10 years ago. They are also more conservative, with more than half of them living in Orthodox or Russian-speaking homes, “both of which lean heavily conservative,” writes Josh Nathan-Kazis. These changes reflect the demographic reality of a shrinking base of Jewish residents in Manhattan and a burgeoning one in Brooklyn, where 40 percent of Jews identify as Orthodox. These trends are likely to accelerate, since six out of 10 Jewish children in the New York area live in Jewish homes.

Along with the sharp growth of the Orthodox, the study also shows a steep drop in affiliation among non-Orthodox Jews: 583,000 people identified as Reform or Conservative Jews, which was 80,000 fewer people than a decade ago. Besides the Orthodox, the second fastest-growing category was identified as “other.” Steven Cohen, one of the authors of the study, said that “other” means those who identify as Jewish, but say they are not members of any denomination; the large number of children from intermarriages may be part of this group. Since New York is the most influential center of Jewish activity in the United States, the shift may change the level of support for Israel among American Jews. Both the growth of Hasidic Orthodox groups, which are less attached to Israel, and the drop in affiliation in denominations that garnered the most support for Israel may signal this downturn.

► **A study of Islam among immigrants in the Netherlands shows that second-generation Muslims have not secularized as expected by some scholars.** The study, published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (June), looked at mosque

attendance by Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch between 1998 and 2006. The researchers, Mieke Maliepaard, Macels Lubbers and Merove Gijssberts, found that while there was a decline in mosque attendance, this pattern halted in 2004, after which the frequency of attendance stabilized. Attendance levels have actually revived among members of the second generation.

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“Mosques, rather than being places mainly first-generation (Turkish-Dutch) men visit, increasingly attract higher educated, second-generation (Moroccan-Dutch) men.” This pattern conflicts with the views of secularization theorists, who maintain that there will be religious decline among Muslim immigrants in host immigrant societies. While mosque attendance is not increasing among the Muslim population as a whole, the “lack of generational and educational differences in later years indicated that a downward trend among the Muslim population in the future is doubtful.”

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 11 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030)

German circumcision controversy ignites debate across Europe

The ruling of a German regional court against the practice of circumcision has intensified a debate on religious freedom across much of Europe. The ruling stated that the practice of circumcision inflicts bodily harm and infringes on bodily integrity. Hospitals in Germany have suspended the practice until further clarification is obtained, and some hospitals in Switzerland and Austria have also adopted similar measures until the legal situation and ethical issues are clarified. Two years ago a German Jewish weekly had observed that the discussion on circumcision remained an academic debate, but could gain significance over time (*Juedische Allgemeine*, Feb. 18, 2010). With the ruling in Cologne, Jewish observers now fear that it is sending ripples across Europe, and a threat to circumcision might grow (*Jewish Chronicle*, July 26).

The ruling followed a problem of bleeding of a four-year-old boy from a Turkish Muslim family who had him circumcised by a doctor in 2010. The boy was then treated at a hospital, but the case was reported and judicial authorities prosecuted the doctor. He was first acquitted, but the judgment was appealed. While equating circumcision with bodily harm when done on a person unable to consent and without medical reasons, the court said that the doctor should not be fined, since he had acted in good faith and the legal situation had been unclear. While a judgment by a regional court is not enforceable in the entire coun-

try, and still less abroad, it nevertheless creates a precedent, hence the turmoil. Chancellor Merkel has publicly stated her irritation over the ruling, commenting that her country could become a laughing stock if it failed to overturn the court ban, and most members of parliament have urged the federal government to create a legal basis for allowing circumcision.

The German ruling ignited a debate that had been brewing for some time, says University of Zurich criminologist Martin Killias (*SwissInfo.ch*, July 26). Actually, the debate had started in 2008 in a small circle of legal experts with the publication of an article by a professor at the University of Passau, Holm Putzke (*Relioscope*, July 25). In this scholarly article, Putzke concluded that the state should protect children against any infringement of their health and bodily integrity over the rights of parents to choose for the child. When notified about a case of circumcision for non-medical reasons, judicial authorities should intervene. Analyses by Putzke and some of his colleagues who expressed similar views in the following years were actually quoted in the ruling of the court in Cologne. According to the ruling, a ban on circumcision in no way interferes with religious freedom, but rather promotes it, since concerned individuals would be able to give informed consent when reaching an age when they can decide for themselves.

The debate on circumcision presents a striking case not only of different understandings of what religious freedom means, but also of competing rights. It appears also as an extension of the debate

on female genital mutilation (for which no health benefits are claimed, in contrast with arguments supporting circumcision). A number of Christian religious leaders have expressed concerns over the ruling as well, since it might signal attempts by authorities to take precedence over parental rights in matters of religious education. They also criticize the fact that the court has focused on strictly legal aspects, without any consideration of cultural and historical ones. However, people supporting a ban on circumcision answer that a number of practices that used to be widespread have changed with time and that the issue is not one of banning religious circumcision, but rather of applying legal rules on corporal integrity that have been disregarded when circumcision is concerned. Thus Europe may now be entering into a debate that anti-circumcision “intactivists” have already been promoting for some time in the United States.

Iranian immigrants in Germany showing high Christian conversion rates

Immigrants from Iran in Germany are showing a high level of interest in Christianity, despite the serious stigma attached to Muslims converting to another religion, reports *Christianity Today* magazine (July/August). Journalists Matthias Pankau and Uwe Siemon-Netto report that the small yet growing movement of Muslims converting to Christianity in parts of the Middle East and the Muslim diaspora is being felt in eastern Germany—one of the most secular regions of Europe.

Many of these self-reports of conversions often involve visions and dreams where the convert sees Jesus and is directed to a Christian church (a phenomenon that has also taken place in the Middle East). Reports have circulated that an average of 500 Iranians convert to Christianity every year, with evangelical missions specialists estimating that the number may be in the thousands.

The recipients of these conversions are usually evangelical, fundamentalist and independent Lutheran congregations. The phenomenon is also present in main-line and Catholic churches, although, out of concern for building interfaith ties with Islam, such conversions are not publicized. Iranians are more likely to convert because this immigrant group in Germany (the largest such community in Europe at 200,000 members) is made up of young professionals who are rebelling against Islam and seeking alternatives, report Pankau and Siemon-Netto. Some immigration officials suspect that immigrant are staging these conversions to stay in Germany, although the pastors interviewed discount this claim because of the danger Iranian Christians face in converting, as well as the rigorous catechetical process these inquirers are put through (often calling for public renunciation of Islam).

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

Foreign-trained preachers challenge local Islam in Albania

Stricter forms of Islam are being promoted in Albania by young imams who were trained in Tur-

key and Saudi Arabia, the head of the South-East Europe department of Aid to Church in Need reports. According to this international Catholic charity, this creates some tensions with Christians as well as with other Muslims (*Catholic News Agency*, July 24). In addition to the training of imams propagating forms of Islam different from the local, customary ones, both countries encourage the building of Islamic schools as well. Up to now, incidents reported have been minor, but there are concerns for the future. Since the 1990s, concerns have been expressed in various countries of the Balkans about foreign Islamic influences and the impact they have on the local Islamic culture, including the replacement of traditional Islamic architecture with models from other parts of the Muslim world.

(*Catholic News Agency*, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com>)

Changing face of Reformed clergy in Switzerland

Due to the numerical decline of the Reformed population in Switzerland, ministers celebrate fewer baptisms or weddings; nevertheless, there will not be enough young seminarians ready for the ministry in Swiss Reformed Churches when the next wave of retirements arrive, reports the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (July 14–15).

The Reformed faith used to be the largest religious family in Switzerland, before Roman Catholics took the lead in 1970 for various reasons (including large immigration from Southern Europe). In terms of percentages, both Re-

formed and Catholics have declined since, due to religious pluralization and (since 2000) the rapid growth of people without religious affiliation. However, Reformed decline has been more pronounced. According to a survey on a large sample of the Swiss population above age 15, in 2010 there were 38.8 percent Roman Catholics, 30.9 percent Protestants, 20.1 percent unaffiliated and 10.2 percent belonging to other religious groups.

In 2009, there were 1,399 male and 643 female Reformed ministers active in parishes, plus 675 deacons. While they celebrated 16,240 baptisms across the country in 2005, the number of baptisms was down to 15,178 in 2009; similarly, weddings went down from 5,561 to 4,939 over the same period. In some Swiss cantons where part-time ministers were once unheard of, there are now such positions. This does not mean there is an overflow of qualified candidates: a number of German ministers were hired in German-speaking Swiss cantons. Considering the number of ministers who will retire in the canton of Zurich in the coming years, for instance, there will not be enough young trained theologians on the job market, and this might mean a new influx of ministers from Germany.

Corruption charges in Korea's largest church show megachurch turmoil, rethinking

Recently, SoonBokUm (True Evangelical) church in Korea, also known as Yoido Full Gospel Church, which has the world's largest congregational member-

ship of 750,000, is facing the most serious challenge since its founding in 1958. Twenty-six elders of the megachurch filed a complaint against its founder, Cho Yong Gi (known as Paul Yongi Cho in the West), and his eldest son for an illegal use of church funds in 2009. This complaint has been followed by numerous allegations of corruption by the family members of Cho Yong Gi, resulting in the formation of the Special Committee for Church Corruption Investigation of SoonBokUm Church (SCCC) to look into further wrongdoings committed by the Cho family. Thus far, the SCCC investigation reports that approximately 33 billion won (about \$23 million) worth of financial damage was done by the Cho family. It is alleged that the main source of financial damage stems from a power struggle between two sons of Cho Yong Gi and his wife in the management of the church-supported newspaper company Kukmin Daily. The daily newspaper of Korea, *HanKyoRae* (June 14) reported that further investigation by the SCCC was abruptly ended by the incumbent pastor of SoonBokUm Church, Lee Young Hun, under pressure from the Cho Yong Gi clan, either directly or indirectly.

These allegations affecting the biggest Protestant church in the world are not unforeseen in the light of similar troubles facing megachurches in Korea nowadays. For example, Kim Chang In, a retired pastor of the 50,000-member Choong Hyun Church located in Seoul made an official apology for his decision to pass on his post to his own son, which resulted in the departure of many church members from his church

(*HanKyoRae*, July 10). However, it seems clear that Cho, who still exerts tremendous influence in the biggest Protestant church in the world, is not going to follow suit. Today, Korean society is striving to bridge the widening gap between the rich and the poor after its successful economic growth of the 1960s and '70s. In a similar way, Korean churches, after their unprecedented rate of growth of the last three decades, are hard pressed to find a sense of direction in relation to their present and future. Thus, currently, numerous conferences are being organized by theologians, lay members and church ministers to deal with problems facing megachurches in Korea, which have not been discussed openly before (*HanKyoRae*, July 14). —By K. T. Chun, a New Jersey-based writer and sociologist who specializes in Korean Christianity

Japan's Happy Science reaching Africa

Formerly known as Kofuku-no-Kagaku or the Institute for Research in Human Happiness, and now operating under the name of Happy Science, a Japanese new religion has been making inroads in Uganda. Thousands of believers are reported in the country and 10,000 gathered in June in the national stadium in Kampala to hear lectures by the religion's founder, Ryuho Okawa (b. 1956, actually named Nakagawa Takashi). The group started in Uganda in 2008 and now has a temple in Kampala, which it hopes to use as a springboard for spreading to other African countries, reports Rodney Muhumuza (*Associated Press*, July 10). Converts are reported to have been disappointed with other

religions. The emphasis on miracles seems to play a part in the attraction to the movement. Christian groups have warned about the beliefs of the group, especially the elevated status it assigns to its spiritual master.

Founded in 1986, Happy Science is one of the most successful recent Japanese new religions. It considers itself as a form of Buddhism, and Okawa is considered as a rebirth of the original Buddha and the incarnation of the "highest God," El Cantare. Okawa also acts as a medium and the teachings incorporate an eclectic range of references, some of them borrowing from Western alternative traditions. It has even launched its own political party, the Happiness Realization Party. Happy Science is not the first Japanese new religion to find a following in African countries: missionaries of new religions from various backgrounds have been active on the continent for years.

(*Happy Science International*, <http://www.happy-science.org>; Happy Science in Uganda, <http://www.happyscience-uganda.org>; Happiness Realization Party, <http://en.hr-party.jp>)

Western monks in Thailand preserving traditional Buddhist discipline

In contrast with the commercialization of many Buddhist temples in Thailand, those attracting monks born in the Western world tend on average to retain traditional forms of Buddhist monastic life, reports journalist Max Constant in *Asie Info* (June 24). He contrasts the strict discipline respected by residents of the Inter-

national Forest Monastery (Wat Pah Nanachat) in the Ubon Ratchathani province of north-east Thailand, which has affiliated temples in several countries of the world, with the commercialism of a number of noisy Thai temples, where a variety of products and cures are advertised. According to Constant, this goes along with a decline in the prestige of monks in Thai society: between 2000 and 2010, the number of Thai men becoming monks has gone down by 70 percent. Nearly all the respected, famous monks were born before World War II. Consumerism is said to have a strong impact on Buddhist practice and morality in Thailand.

(*Asie Info*, <http://asie-info.fr>; International Forest Monastery, <http://www.watpahnachat.org>)

Singapore shows church–society tensions, but not culture wars

Singapore's recent adoption of liberal causes—from stem cell research to gay rights and gambling—is leading to conflict with its increasingly influential Christian community, although it is unlikely to lead to American-style culture wars, writes Peter T. C. Chang in the journal *Religion, State and Society* (June). Since the early 1990s, Singapore's one-party government has been taking on more liberal stance on controversial issues, such as becoming a center of biotechnology and stem cell research (luring American scientists facing restrictions on such techniques in their home country), leading to criticism particularly from the evangelical

community. But the country has pragmatically adopted these measures in the hope of competing in the global market, while carefully avoiding open conflict with Singapore's conservative majority. While church–state relations have been strained by the government's "cultural experimentation," the soft authoritarian approach of the state that restricts the public sphere has prevented a polarized situation where conservative and liberal activists are pitted against each other. For instance, the government has steered a middle course on gay rights, opening venues for homosexuals while curbing gay activism. The government itself has cautioned against the "culture wars" of "extreme liberals and extreme conservatives", as found in the United States.

(*Religion, State and Society*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/crss20>)

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

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

■ The June issue of the e-journal **Approaching Religion** looks at the "New Visibility of Atheism in Europe." The articles, stemming from a seminar in January 2012 at the Donner Institute, cover a range of topics related to contemporary atheism in different countries. Teemu Taira looks at the position of atheism in Finland, showing how a greater public presence around "the new atheism" has not led to a greater popularity. This is the case even in a country with low levels of religiosity, due to non-belief being

conflated with communism in Finnish public discourse. American contributor Phil Zuckerman undertakes a useful comparative analysis between the United States and Scandinavia, showing how secularity and atheism take different forms and are adapted to local cultures. As a case in point, Thomas Zenk explores how "The New Atheism"—initially understood as an American phenomenon in the German press—came to be considered German. This happened through German activists, authors and academics commenting on "the New Atheism" or self-identifying as such in public by way of books, TV shows and other media.

Tiina Mahlamäki examines the understudied topic of gender and atheism, especially the pattern of women (including feminists) being statistically more religious than men, with the latter more likely to convert

to atheism. Mahlamäki surveys theories on why this is the case and looks historically at how this strong preference towards religion occurred, beginning with the education women received as compared to men, as well as a general lack of socialization and their traditional roles as mothers and care-givers. An insightful article by Steven Bullivant emphasizes how being non-religious and religiously indifferent are not synonymous. British society has a high percentage of non-religious individuals, but is still deeply interested in religion. Given this, it should be no surprise to find a strong presence of atheism there insofar as interest in belief and non-belief go hand and hand.

The issue is available at: <http://ojs.abo.fi/index.php/ar/issue/view/20>

—By Caitlin Maddox.

■ Nancy J. Davis and Robert V. Robinson study how orthodox religious movements create dense networks of social service and educational organizations in their new book, ***Claiming Society for God*** (Indiana University Press, \$25). The authors examine the Salvation Army in the United States, the Italian Catholic group *Comunione e Liberazione*, the Shas party in Israel and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, finding as many differences as similarities between them. But they all show two sides: they seek to transform society (although this argument is easier to make in the case of Shas and the Muslim Brotherhood than for the Salvation Army) while having a strong “caring,” communitarian dimension, creating a durable counterculture of schools and social welfare organizations. Of course, both dimensions tend to complement each other; as more organizations are created, the movement can have a greater transformative effect on society.

Davis and Robinson see these movements’ ideological strictness, disinclination to compromise and multi-pronged agendas as organizational obstacles. Yet their orthodox fervor and genius for bypassing the state make up for these deficiencies and the usual problems of social movements, such as the death of founders and the emergence of schisms. Their chapter on *Comunione e Liberazione*—particularly noteworthy since little on this movement has been published in English—is a case in point, showing how it has effectively bypassed the state, creating almost a “parallel Christian society,” with 32,000 business affiliates and 1,100 social service organizations.

■ ***Religion and Change in Modern Britain*** (Routledge, \$49.95), edited by Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto, is a thorough account of relig-

ious trends that have reshaped the United Kingdom in the last 50 years. The illustrated book serves as much as an encyclopedia of religions and religious topics in Britain as a historical and sociological account of religious transformation. There are lively accounts of the new diversity marking the country, ranging from old establishment churches to New Age and Neopagan alternatives, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and ethnic Pentecostal churches, as well as treatments of general topics, such as rituals, media and gender.

Much of the research in the book is the result of the government-funded, six-year Religion and Society Program, which is directed by Woodhead. Her introduction pays attention to the debates on secularization, de-secularization and the public role of religion that have been played out far beyond the UK, but they have a special resonance there, because there are signs of these tendencies co-existing and interacting. Most of the contributors argue that secularization has clearly occurred in Britain—church attendance and Christian belief has receded. Yet there is also recognition that religion interpenetrates much of British life, a reality carefully spelled out in the last chapter by David Martin with Rebecca Cato. That secularization does not explain all of the British case is evident in the fact that a majority of British still consider themselves to be Christian in some way, and there are signs of renewal, especially in such a center as London, where there has been substantial minority Christian growth and even an uptick of Anglican and Catholic participation in the metropolis.

■ ***What Matters? Ethnographies of Value in a Not So Secular Age*** (Columbia University Press, \$29.50), edited by Courtney Bender and Ann Taves, looks at the complex interac-

tion among religion, spirituality and secularism and the different ways they are understood, converge and take on value in specific contexts. The contributions include a chapter on how the commercialization of media with the institutionalization of democracy led to the emergence of a new public sphere in Ghana, a sphere where spirits, a mass-mediated Pentecostalism, democratic intentions and commerce mingle in a secular-spiritual-religious mix. In another intriguing piece, Jeffrey Kripal, exploring the outer fringes of the academic establishment, looks at the Sursem esoteric group. Both studies point to the fact that modern religious-spiritual experience is not necessarily all that disenchanting for being modern; the modern analytical distinction between the secular and the religious may be sharp, but empirically and experientially things are less clear cut.

Some of the other contributions include an article looking at the ways in which religious liberals refashioned 19th-century psychological discourses designed to explain away religion; a chapter showing how our secular humanitarian ethic, which is focused on a population’s immediate needs (as understood medically), functions as a form of the sacred or a secular morality; a study of homeschooling in the Southwest region of the United States, which argues that homeschooling is a means for parents to re-enchant the family outside the purview of bureaucracies and the state; and a unique article focusing on the international psytrance community, in which transcendence and a secular spiritual experience are sought in a very self-conscious, technological and marketed manner. The editors provide an insightful introduction that summarizes both the articles and the theoretical issues informing them. This is a unique, wide-ranging

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

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collection of ethnographies that should be of interest to anyone looking to move beyond any simplistic understanding of what it means to be religious, spiritual and secular today. -By Christopher Smith, a freelance writer and researcher

■ There have been several recent works on post-secularism, but the new book **Postsecular Society** (Transaction Publishers, \$49.95), edited by Peter Nynas, Mika Lassander and Terhi Utrianen, may be of more interest for its research and analysis of the religious situation than for its elucidation of this vague and debatable concept. As in other works on post-secularism, the book's contributors—mainly Finnish scholars—stress how this process means that religion becomes more public in na-

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

Soul Children choirs are an international phenomenon spreading gospel choir music to places where it is basically unknown. The movement

started in Chicago as an outlet for at-risk youth, but has spread to Norway and other parts of Europe and Asia, including Japan, Indonesia and Bangladesh. The participants often see their singing as a means of spiritual growth and worship, as well as, eventually, a route to evangelism. The 80 Soul Children choirs that have started in Norway since

2001 have achieved national prominence and sponsorship by the Lutheran Church. Their success in such an unchurched nation as Norway—far more than in the United States—may be that the choirs can participate in a secular culture in a way that the church cannot. (*Christianity Today*, July/August)

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(*Christianity Today*, July/August)

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