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

RELIGIOSCOPE

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Global megachurches thriving in cities

Although megachurches are portrayed as the quintessential suburban—or post-suburban—religious organization (*see book review on pages 10-11*), in other parts of the world they are flourishing in the “relatively recent dense urban areas, often with a new and/or rapidly growing Christian population,” according to Scott Thumma and Warren Bird. These researchers presented a survey of global megachurches at the November conference of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) in Phoenix, which **Religion Watch** attended. They find urban megachurches are most prevalent in South Korea (17 percent of all churches), Nigeria (8 percent), China (6 percent) and Brazil (5 percent). They cluster into two dominant models: very large single-site churches on a small plot of land or that of many smaller churches linked together as a single multisite congregation. Based on information that Thumma and Bird obtained from one-third of the global megachurches, three-quarters had multiple site locations, but thought of themselves as a very large single church.

Similar to the U.S., the researchers also find a clear pattern of between the size of a religious structure and an area's population concentration. As the size of the community increases, the scale of all its institutions grows. There may be more similarities than differences between American and urban megachurches in the near future, since there is a growth in the global networks that connect these congregations. Thumma and Bird find that over 40 percent of non-U.S. megachurches for which they have information have a branch of their congregation in the U.S., “while quite a few American megachurches have church plants, television ministries and conference tours to spread their influence internationally.” They conclude that the “megachurch phenomenon can be seen as representing a new model of faith community for a contemporary megametropolitan social reality. This model of church provides the necessary characteristics, structures, programs and adaptability to address the challenges of a highly urbanized area for a population of dislocated and under-equipped migrants.”

Christian Zionism transforming into a new form of nationalism?

While Christian Zionism has long claimed a special link with the Jews and the state of Israel, the identification with Israel has crossed over into a form of “ethno-nationalism” among some evangelicals, according to Matt Westbrook of Drew University. Westbrook, who presented a paper at the SSSR conference, argued that “contemporary Christian Zionism seems to be moving very far from the rhetorical and emotional habitat of early 20th century Christian Zionism” in

that the former shows a new “sense of ownership of the land of Israel” and a concern for the “well-being of the Jewish people—to the point of sacrifice.” In studying Christian Zionist blogs and attending events sponsored by the International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem, Westbrook found a number of leaders and followers of the movement stating that they are ready and willing to die for

► Continued on page two

► **Continued from page one**

Israel before they would die for the U.S., particularly given what they believe to be the degenerate state of both American culture and the current political leadership.”

The fact that Christian Zionism has not only gained access to the Israeli government, but has recently found a place in its political structure through the Christian

Allies Caucus in the Knesset has brought the movement new acceptance among both politicians and Orthodox Jews, Westbrook adds. The move toward greater identification with Israel is led by Messianic Jews and Pentecostals, particularly those promoting a “One New Man” theology, which entails a mutual embrace of Jews and Christians as a stepping stone to Jewish conversion. All this inten-

sifies a quest for Christians to find their “Hebrew roots,” usually through onomastics (the study of surnames) and genetic testing. For instance, Messianic Jewish broadcaster Jonathan Bermis promotes “advanced genetic technology” to confirm the presence of Jewish genes, a process that in itself is seen as a sign of the end times as God gathers his chosen race to himself.

Anti-fracking movement drawing on eco-feminist spirituality

The protest movement against slick-water hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” to release natural gas from the earth draws on a range of symbols and concepts related to eco-feminist spirituality, according to Leah Schade (Lutheran Theological Seminary), who presented a paper on the subject at the SSSR conference in Phoenix. Eco-feminist spirituality links social justice and women’s rights issues to environmentalism along with a spirituality that views

the earth as a living organism. Schade looked at blogs, protest literature, signs, T-shirts, and records of public hearings against fracking and found that the imagery of “mother earth” as a living, conscious entity was prominent. The idea that mother earth is being “raped” by fracking and that protestors are called to save the planet spiritually was also evident among the protestors. Schade said that such use of eco-feminist spiritual concepts and terminology was

“successful in expressing grievances against fracking but it can also generate hostility among policy-makers, industry workers and leaders.” Yet she concluded that the connection made between women’s bodies and mother earth has “gained traction” not only among environmentalists, but also among religious groups, rural residents and others not usually involved in the protests.

Orthodoxy’s theological renaissance underwritten by converts

Eastern Orthodox theology is undergoing a renaissance, but it is largely taking place outside of Orthodox institutions and is propagated by converts to the faith, reports *First Things* magazine (December). An older renaissance of Orthodox theology in Europe was largely the province of émigré scholars arriving at newly established seminaries, such as Georges Florovsky, Alexander Schmemmann and George Meyendorff. But the

new revival is more American oriented and is actually being encouraged by non-Orthodox, often Catholic and Protestant universities and seminaries. There are twice as many theologians at non-Orthodox institutions as those teaching at Orthodox ones, writes Paul Gavriluk. Catholic Fordham University has established an Orthodox Christian Studies Center and will soon hold an endowed chair in Orthodox Theology and

Culture, while Protestant Union Seminary recently created an endowed chair in Late Antique and Byzantine Christian History for the Orthodox theologian John Anthony McGuckin. Catholics see Orthodoxy as offering a corrective to what they perceive as the limitations of “Latin” theology, while Protestants value the ancient traditions of Orthodoxy without having to deal with Reformation controversies.

The new Orthodox theologians are largely converts to the faith; for example, the ten Orthodox doctoral theology students at Fordham are all either converts or come from the families of converts. Gavriilyuk writes that the growing presence of converts will create “identity challenges” for the Orthodox. Already, the new

theologians are in close conversation with non-Orthodox theological currents, such as postmodernism. Such convert theologians as Richard Swinburne and his defense of the rationality of Christianity and David Hart’s postmodern theology are both viewed as inauthentic in some Orthodox quarters. Yet these and other new

Orthodox theologians are bringing a more pluralistic approach that challenges the predominant patristic model in Orthodoxy, which seeks to return to early church sources, concludes Gavriilyuk.

(*First Things*, 35 E. 21st St., 6th fl., New York, NY 10010)

Unificationism moves to more settled church model?

While there is the possibility that the Unification Church may face schisms after the death of founder Sun Myung Moon in September, it appears that the church is headed in the direction of a denominational church, write David Bromley and Alexa Bronner in *Nova Religio* (November), the journal of new religious movements. Since its founding, Unificationism has veered between an identity as a movement and a more established church. In 1996 Moon tried to revive the movement origins of Unificationism when he declared that the Unification Church era had ended and inaugurated the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU). While church functions would be retained for members, the thrust of Unificationism would thereafter be to promote family values and a

world spiritual community beyond race, ethnicity and creed. But this movement orientation ignored considerable problems emerging in the Unificationist organization: Moon’s economic conglomerate in Korea had collapsed, his flagship *Washington Times* continued to be a financial drain, and local and national church groups failed to become self-sustaining due partly to recruiting difficulties.

Meanwhile, there are skirmishes among Moon’s children about succession of leadership. His third son, Hyun-jin, assumed the vice-presidency of the FFPWU and oversaw the church’s financial enterprises. But as the organization underwent turmoil, Moon’s youngest son, Hyung-jin, was appointed head of the FFPWU and steered the group toward a more church-like type of model. This

son and his sister, In-jin Moon, have introduced several innovations, adding a more democratic and inclusive style to the church in Korea (including giving women ministerial roles), which has drawn new members. In the U.S., the church has adopted a megachurch style, using contemporary worship and stressing practical applications of Unificationist teachings. At the same time, Hyung-jin has begun teaching a controversial doctrine that more closely equates Moon with Christ’s redemptive work. But while divisions remain among the Moon siblings, Bromley and Bronner conclude that “Unificationism clearly appears headed in a more settled, accommodative direction.”

(*Nova Religio*, 2000 Center St., Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94720)

CURRENT RESEARCH

► **The diversifying of American religious landscape, especially consisting of minority Christians and the unaffiliated, provided fertile ground for the re-election of U.S. President Ba-**

rack Obama, according to the 2012 Post-Election American Values Survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI). Almost 80 percent of Romney voters were white Christians, half of whom were white evangelical Protestants. In contrast, only 35 percent of

Obama’s voters were white Christians. Less than half (48 percent) of white evangelicals said their vote was a vote for Romney, while more than four in ten characterized their choice as a vote against Obama. PRRI head Robert P. Jones commented that “This presidential election is the last in

which a white Christian strategy will be considered a plausible path to victory. The American religious and ethnic landscape is becoming increasingly diverse, and any campaigns relying on outdated maps are destined to lose their way.”

▶ **Catholics and Protestants differ in their risk-taking in investing, with the former being more adventurous in such enterprises, according to a study in the journal *Management Science* (October).** Authors Tao Shu, Johan Sulaeman and P. Eric Yeung looked at mutual fund investments over a 20-year period and studied correlations with the county-level concentrations of Protestants and Catholics in different areas. The mutual funds located in low-Protestant or high-Catholic areas showed significantly higher fund return volatilities. The investment strategies of Protestants were more conservative in taking financial risks than their Catholic counterparts. The authors note that their article is the first to show that local religious beliefs have a noticeable impact on mutual fund behaviors.

(*Management Science*, <http://mansci.journal.informs.org>)

▶ **Christian Intentional Communities (CIC) have grown sharply over the last decade and tend to be divided between communities espousing urban activism and renewal and those more concerned with individual spiritual growth, according to research conducted by Mark Killian of the University of Cincinnati.** Killian presented a paper on a survey of CICs at the SSSR conference, as well as sharing material from his dissertation on the topic with **RW**. His analysis of

data taken from the Fellowship of Intentional Communities’ online directory indicates a 70 percent increase in the number of CICs established between 2005 and 2009, compared to those started between 2000 and 2004. Moreover, there was a 291 percent increase in the number of CICs in formation between 2005 and 2009, compared to CICs in formation between 2000 and 2004. Killian’s census surveying characteristics of these communities was conducted among 51 CICs, capturing about 25 percent of such groups (totaling 207). Killian categorized the CICs into two groups, each representing about 50 percent of the total population, i.e. “free will individualists” and “expressive communalists.” Free will individualistic communities tend to be concerned with the spiritual growth of members and aligned with the charismatic movements, such as the Catholic charismatic renewal and the International House of Prayer in Kansas City; they are almost equally split among urban, suburban and rural locations. Expressive communities are more likely aligned with the principles of the New Monasticism, which stresses a commitment to living and serving in often-poorer urban neighborhoods. While 57.6 percent of the expressive communities’ members live together or on the same property, only 16.1 percent of free will individualists do so. Fifty percent of the free will individualist communities are associated with a denomination, whereas only 36 percent of the expressive communities are; 78 percent of the free will individualists hold their own worship services, compared to 61 percent of the expressive communities.

▶ **The change in the Roman Catholic Mass to a closer translation of Latin introduced last year in parishes meets with the general approval of U.S. Catholics, although their acceptance is tied to their degree of participation in parish life, according to a new study.** The study, conducted by Anthony Pogarelc of Catholic University of America with a sample 1,047 Catholics, was presented at the October SSSR conference in Phoenix. The survey found that 70 percent “agree” (50 percent) or “strongly agree” (20 percent) that the new translation is a good thing for the church. But when asked whether the new translation helps them understand the prayers, participate more in the Mass or feel closer to God, thus inspiring one to be a better Catholic, there is no significant difference between the earlier translation and the one adopted last year. Yet Catholics born before 1942, who had reported a high rate of understanding and appreciating the Mass in a 2011 survey, showed a significant drop in their responses in the recent study. Millennials—those born in 1982 or later—were least likely to register strong support for the new Mass.

▶ **Unitarian-Universalism continues on its growth curve at a time when many other church bodies are showing signs of decline.** The Unitarian-Universalists (UUs), the most liberal religious denomination in the U.S., grew nationally by 15.8 percent from 2000 to 2010, according to the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. Although based in New England, the denomination has grown more in the U.S. South than in other re-

gions. Observers say that the UUs fill a niche for liberal religion in particularly conservative areas, such as the South, reports the *Christian Century* (October 31).

► **American Buddhist congregations and temples function in a way that is similar to non-denominational churches in that they both depend on secular resources and borrow from co-religionists of other traditions, writes sociologist Buster Smith in the journal *Contemporary Buddhism* (November).** Smith analyzed the links that American Buddhist websites make to one another and found that the groups of each particular school of Buddhism link to those of other schools and showed no particular preference for the resources of their own particular tradition. Smith writes that “Due to the lack of an overarching denomination, each group must rely on similar resources as their co-religionists—both in terms of secular and religious virtual products. Furthermore, due the exotic nature of Buddhism within a Judeo-Christian landscape, any differences between schools are washed away in comparison to the differences between religions.” While this pattern is similar to non-denominational Christianity, the findings also suggest that “Buddhism in the United States is undergoing a similar mixing and mingling that took place among its entry to China and Korea, and not the route that took place in Japan.”

(*Contemporary Buddhism*, Routledge, Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer St., London W1T 3JH UK)

► **Government raids on religious groups have taken place most frequently in Western countries, but especially in**

France and the U.S. and in the two decades since the 1990s, reports sociologist Stuart Wright. In a paper he presented at the SSSR conference, Wright found that there have been 75 government raids on religious groups in the last five decades. Scientology and the Family have been the groups most raided, and these raids have most often taken place in the U.S., Western Europe, Australia, Japan and South America. There were only about four or five raids per decade up until the 1990s, when the rate increased by 72 percent. Wright traces much of this to millennial anxiety, leading to the violent episodes involving such groups as the Branch Davidians and the Solar Temple. But raids involving non-apocalyptic groups were still fairly high after the millennium. In fact, three-quarters of the raids have been on non-apocalyptic groups after the millennium.

There is also an uneven distribution of these raids among countries: France (26), the U.S. (14), Canada (8) and Belgium (6) top the list. Wright argues that, starting in North America, these countries all collaborated with anti-cult groups and their respective governments in the 1980s. This transnational movement of people and groups coalesced in the 1990s and those involved were “well-organized to take control of the situation,” with some able to work with states, most notably France, in cracking down on new religious movements.

► **A new study finds that more than one-quarter of British adults, including thousands of atheists, have visited a cathedral in the last year.** England’s Catholic magazine *The Tablet* (October

20) cites the study as finding that cathedrals are becoming an important forum in which “non-religious people experience the sacred.” The study, “Spiritual Capital: The Present and Future of English Cathedrals,” conducted by the Christian think-tank Theos and the Grubb Institute, was based on a national poll, interviews with 3,500 respondents and a survey of public opinion of six English cathedrals (Canterbury, Litchfield, Durham, Leicester, Wells and Manchester). It is estimated that 11.3 million people paid a visit to at least one of the historic buildings during the past 12 months, compared to 8.8 million in 2004. One in six of the atheists surveyed had visited a cathedral in the past year. The study found that 84 percent of visitors who said they did not follow a religion were said to have felt a “sense of the sacred” when inside the cathedrals. Increasingly, the cathedrals are observing Benedictine tradition and its monastic practice of a daily rhythm of prayer.

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

► **While the level of religious practice among Roman Catholics in Poland remains the highest in Europe, with 40 percent attending Mass every Sunday, it has been in continuous decline since 1989, decreasing by one-fifth, and even more markedly among young people.** On the other hand, the percentage of people taking communion and going to confession is reported to have grown. Sociologists observe that economic development has gone along with individualization and pluralization. Nevertheless, few Poles formally leave the Roman

Catholic Church: only 459 in 2011, according to church statistical data cited in *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (December).

► **The survey institute IFOP asked French Catholics about their religious practices 50 years after the Second Vatican Council and finds a situation of decline, but also a degree of stability.** The Catholic daily *La Croix* published the results (October 11), which show that the number of French who have been baptized in the Catholic Church has obviously decreased from 92 percent in 1961, but it remains surprisingly high at 80 percent. But the percentage will continue to erode: among baptized Catholics, 72 percent have had or intend to have their children baptized.

Seven percent of the baptized Catholics attend Mass at least once a week, 35 percent a few times a year and 58 percent never.

► **A large-scale public opinion survey of Muslims in Pakistan finds that neither religious practice nor support for political Islam is related to support for militant Islamic groups.** The study, published in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Winter), was based on a random sample of 6,000 Pakistani men and women; it also used a method called an "endorsement experiment" that seeks to assess attitudes toward specific groups without asking respondents about them directly, which is effective when respondents won't answer certain sensitive questions. Researchers C. Christine Fair, Neil Malhotra and Jacob Shapiro found

that a specific understanding of jihad as an external militarized struggle that can be waged by individuals made respondents more likely to support militant groups. Those who believed that jihad is an internal struggle for righteousness or that it should be led by states alone were significantly less likely to support militant groups. The authors conclude that doctrine and textual interpretation have not been analyzed before on these issues and that future efforts to deal with the potential for violence in Islamic political movements should focus on the content of religious doctrine.

(*Public Opinion Quarterly*, <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org>)

Deconstructing the myth of "esoteric Nazism"

Spreading since the 1960s, the idea that there was an esoteric National Socialism is actually a post-war invention without an historical foundation in the Third Reich, writes Julian Strube (University of Heidelberg, Germany) in an article in German published in the *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* (2012/2). If one is to believe a number of best-selling authors over the past 50 years, there was a hidden history of National Socialism and its leaders had allegedly belonged to secret orders. While those authors would present the Nazis as evil or "black magicians," a post-war neo-Nazi subculture has also adopted this theme, making the Nazi leaders into initiates who continued a perennial struggle against the forces of darkness. The "Black Sun" has

become a symbol of beliefs for members of an esoteric branch of the SS that continues operating clandestinely today. According to Strube, esoteric neo-Nazism should be considered as a part of a wider phenomenon of radical right esotericism, although one should be careful not to associate all forms of esotericism with such political views, as some authors have done.

Strube traces the origins of esoteric neo-Nazism to a circle of former SS members who started meeting in Vienna, Austria in the 1950s around Wilhelm Landig (1909-1997) and Rudolf Mund (1920-1985). A Swiss engineer and UFO enthusiast, Erich Halik, paved the ground for the publication of such theories in a magazine dealing with astrology and fringe sciences. In the 1970s a trilogy of novels by Landig

around the theme of the mythical northern land of Thule became the most influential work for the popularization of esoteric Nazism. In the 1990s the idea of esoteric Nazism spread further with various publications, especially the *Vril Project*, written by Norbert Jürgen-Ratthofer and Ralf Ettl, both members of a society self-described as Marcionite and Templar that is now dissolved. They mixed elements drawn from the esoteric literature of neo-Nazi circles with other theories about Nazi occultism spread by best-selling authors exploiting this vein, but hostile to Nazism, such as the famous work by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *The Morning of the Magicians*. Jürgen-Ratthofer and Ettl were actually in touch with the older Vienna circle, as well as with various radical right groups. Ettl equated "Satan El Shaddai" with the God of the

Jews, opposed to the true God, who sent Jesus on Earth: older theories about a "German Christ" were thus being reactivated.

The two authors also developed a "right-wing ufology," in the line of Halik. The popularity of UFO speculations at that time allowed them to spread their ideas through this channel. UFOs became associated with Nazi secret weapons, a theory that had already been promoted by a few neo-Nazi authors. The two younger authors would go one step further by suggesting the extraterrestrial origins of the Germans. The influence of this strange mixture of beliefs should not be underestimated, warns Strube. With the development of the Internet they have found still wider, uncritical audiences. In addition, other authors are publishing novels and other books on such themes, building on previous works and thus popularizing such ideas, making esoteric Nazism a flourishing field across politics, occult and fiction. Strube remarks that esoteric Nazism/Neo-Nazism allows one to create an identity that goes across centuries and incorporates other ancestors and holders of "suppressed knowledge" going from ancient times to the "esoteric SS through Gnostics, Cathars, Templars and other organizations. It confirms a sense of the German people's mission and promises ultimate salvation, despite the 1945 defeat (a new Reich will come, and here authors have apparently also absorbed some of the New Age beliefs of a coming Aquarian Era). It disconnects Nazism from history and creates a mythology with a strong religious flavor and an impact on popular culture."

(*Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, De Gruyter, Genthiner Strasse 13, 10785 Berlin, Germany, www.degruyter.com/zfr)

A post-secular Amsterdam in a secular Netherlands?

While Amsterdam has been considered a major secularized city, immigration—both Christian and Muslim—may move it toward more of a religious marketplace, according to a study by Martin van der Meulen (Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands) presented at the SSSR conference. Using figures from the bi-annual survey of the Amsterdam Statistics Bureau, Van der Meulen noted that the city has an immigrant population as high as 50 percent and that two-thirds of them are religious. Christianity still remains the largest religion in the city, while half of the Christian population consists of immigrants. Increasingly, the city is segregated along ethnic, religious and secularist lines. Van der Meulen said that secularism continues to win second-generation Muslims and that Amsterdam is still "post-Christian." But continuing migration will likely have a religious effect on the city and it may develop into an American kind of market situation. This pattern may be distinct in Amsterdam compared to the rest of the Netherlands, according to Van der Meulen.

In fact, there has been a recent shift toward a more assertive secularism in the Netherlands as a whole. In the *Journal of Religion in Europe* (5/3), researchers Cora Schuh, Marian Burchardt and Monica Wohlrab-Sahr review recent Dutch court cases and legislation and find a move toward "secular progressivism," where

religious freedom is increasingly being subordinated to "universalistic notions of civil liberties." Recent cases involving evangelical Protestants and Muslims on the issues of same-sex marriage, gender equality and ritual slaughter in particular are showing how the Dutch are moving away from the concern for pluralism and multiculturalism to protect religious minorities toward a more assertive version of secularism. Each of these cases (though still being contested in European courts) ruled in favor of "non-discrimination" (including the right to reduce animal suffering) rather than religious freedom and freedom of conscience. The authors note that this shift began during the debates about blasphemy after the killing of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Muslim in 2004 and continues under the influence of Dutch politician Geert Wilders. While Schuh, Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr are unsure if this is a "critical juncture" that will lead to the predominance of secular progressivism in the Netherlands, they note that this ideology has taken the lead in parliamentary debates.

(*Journal of Religion in Europe*, <http://www.brill.nl>)

The Internet's disenchanting effect on Europe's Mormons

Controversial information on their faith found on the Internet is reported to lead a number of European members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) to develop questions and doubts about the church, according to a letter sent by the Europe-area presidency of the church to LDS Church leaders

in Northern European countries and Germany, reports *Sunstone* magazine (September). An information packet recommends resources for struggling members, including books by LDS Church academic historians. Last year a LDS Church leader had acknowledged that information found on the Internet had driven members away from the church as never before (*Sunstone*, June). During the last decade there has apparently been little or no growth in the LDS Church in Europe, where missionary forces have been reduced.

Nigeria's Boko Haram targets state and church

Emerging in recent years as a serious security threat in Nigeria and increasingly reported in Western media for its attacks against state and Christian targets, the Islamic militant movement Boko Haram is a product of competition among Muslim movements in northern Nigeria, according to Roman Loimeier (University of Göttingen, Germany), writing in the latest issue of *Africa Spectrum* (47/2-3). The nickname Boko Haram means "Western education is prohibited" (for Muslims). Strangely, however, Boko Haram is born from a background of reformist (Salafi) movements that wanted to eradicate doctrinal "innovations," but also advocated an Islamization of modernity and a modern (Islamic) education. The largest reform movement in northern Nigeria, Yan Izala, was established in 1978. It fought against local customs (which were seen as un-Islamic) and was highly critical of Sufi brotherhoods. But it also established a network of Islamic

schools and supported both schooling and the political and religious mobilization of women.

Yan Izala trained a new generation of preachers who proved to be quite effective and competed with Sufi preachers. Attacks against Sufi orders, however, stopped in 1987, after Christian candidates (although Christians are a minority in the north) managed to win a high number of local government seats due to the split Muslim vote. Yan Izala itself experienced a number of splits for various reasons. Boko Haram's founder, Muhammad Yusuf (1970-2009), himself left one of those factions and launched his own organization in 2003. In contrast with his former teacher, Yusuf was critical of Western-style education (but not modern technology) and also of the Nigerian state, rejecting any cooperation with it. The group conducted attacks against police stations. Due to widespread corruption and arbitrariness in the police force, this won initial sympathy for Boko Haram among the local population. The death in police custody of Yusuf in 2009 provoked the movement to outright violence.

In 2011 and 2012 Boko Haram started to attack Christian churches. This allowed them to prevent criticism that they targeted fellow Muslims and, moreover, Christian churches (especially Pentecostal ones) are seen as a threat even by moderate Muslims. Boko Haram also started to expand its operations beyond its original areas. Moreover, the current leader of its 20-member leading council has cultivated the Internet, especially videos posted online, for reaching wider

audiences. According to Loimeier's assessment, Boko Haram mirrors the divisions among Muslims in Nigeria. In the long run it is likely that Nigerian security forces will defeat Boko Haram, which is also criticized by other radical groups. But as long as the social and economic context does not change, and some degree of social justice is not achieved in Nigeria, other militant movements will inevitably rise.

(*Africa Spectrum*, German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studie, Institute of African Affairs, Neuer Jungfernstieg 21, 20354 Hamburg, Germany, <http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/afsp/index>)

Evolving cooperation between secular and Islamic organizations in Turkey

Since the 1990s secular and religious rights organizations in Turkey have managed to cooperate, although issues such as gay rights pose new challenges to cross-cleavage partnerships, writes Melinda Negrón-Gonzales (University of New Hampshire) in *Turkish Studies* (September). While there has been much political polarization in Turkey between secular and Islamic forces, cooperation among human rights activists from opposing camps has served as a site of reconciliation. In 1991 Turkish Islamists created an organization called Mazlum Der. This marked a break with an attitude that eschewed human-rights language, seen as associated with Western worldviews. But Islamist activists were isolated from domestic and international rights networks. Thus they opened communication with the secular Human Rights

Association, although it was dominated by Kurdish nationalists and the far left. Mazlum Der activists explained that they wanted to address unmet needs, a reference to the lack of attention to the plight of Islamists suffering from human rights violations.

Over the years information exchange and cooperation developed across organizations, after slow initial steps. This helped all the organizations involved to reframe ideologically centered frameworks into terms of universal human rights. It also transformed former adversaries into allies with shared aims. The Turkish application for membership of the European Union (a process that has still not been achieved) also opened new opportunities, such as the possibility for Turkish citizens to petition the European Court of Human Rights. Initially reluctant to use this channel, Islamists started to consider these opportunities, which led to debates about inter-

national human rights legal texts within Islamist circles. A number of Islamist intellectuals legitimized the appropriation of human rights language and it has become more frequently used in Islamist circles. But it also led to changes of attitudes among secular activists on some issues, for instance an opposition in principle to the death penalty, not just when a person from the same political camp was sentenced to death. Cross-cleavage cooperation became a sign of authenticity in the engagement for human rights.

In 2005 several of the leading human rights organization (including Mazlum Der) created the Human Rights Joint Platform (IHOP). However, in 2009 new Mazlum Der leaders decided to leave IHOP, while continuing to cooperate. One of the reasons was discomfort with IHOP funding from external sources (primarily from Western countries). Another issue has been the emergence of

the issue of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) rights. There were LGBT organizations in Turkey before, notes Negrón-Gonzales, but they have grown partly through an increase of funding from the European Union. LGBT groups have forged ties to rights organizations, creating uneasiness among religious conservatives, although not all of them: many acknowledge that gays are discriminated against in Turkey, but working closely with them remains controversial, in the same way that working with headscarf activists presents a delicate issue for seculars. There is a risk of alienating supporters. Still, a culture of cooperation remains within the human rights milieu in Turkey. The challenge is to maintain the balance between commonalities and the various groups' respective constituencies.

(*Turkish Studies*, Taylor & Francis, 4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX1 4RN, UK)

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

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

■ **The Journal of Muslims in Europe**, a new quarterly publication, is an outgrowth of the annual *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, seeking to provide a more frequent forum for research on the burgeoning European Islamic movements and developments. The journal is interdisciplinary and especially interested in addressing the imbalance in research between Western and Eastern Europe. This is evident in

the first issue, which includes an interesting examination of the new Turkish presence in the Balkans, replacing the Wahhabi and Salafist missionaries who were active in the region since the early 2000s. The new Turkish involvement ranges from the governmental Presidency of Religious Affairs, which provides educational and religious services for Muslims in the Balkans, to more flexible faith-based social networks such as the Gülen schools, which are very active in Albania. For more information on this journal, visit: <http://www.brill.nl>

■ The December issue of **Zygon**, a journal of science and theology, devotes several articles to transhumanism, the movement seeking to

enhance and in some cases transcend humanity through technology. Contrary to most of its proponents, who are mainly atheists, the articles argue that the movement is a secular faith that endows technology with religious significance. Especially noteworthy is the article by Robert Geraci on video games and how they uniquely express transhumanist ideals and fantasies, given that so much else of transhumanist goals are unrealizable at present. Geraci writes that certain video games are explicitly transhumanist, such as *Deus Ex* and *Mass Effect*, with some leaders even seeing them as forms of "evangelism" for the movement. Another article by James J. Hughes looks at the political aspects of transhumanism, surveying its various

subsets. There is the mainstream Humanity+ (formerly the World Transhumanist Association); the "millennialist spinoff sect" known as Singularitarianism, most closely aligned with author and inventor Ray Kurzweil (who holds that a brain-machine synthesis will take place by 2050), but also conservative Christian transhumanist Peter Thiel; a technoprogressive and bioliberal movement that takes issue with the libertarian leanings of the Singularitarians; religious transhumanists, most notably a large Mormon contingent (seeing some aspects of its vision as a fulfillment of prophesy); and several opposition groups, some holding apocalyptic (even violent) scenarios of conflict with transhumanists. For more information on this issue, go to: <http://www.zygonjournal.org>.

■ "Strategies of advocacy for international religious freedom" is the topic of the Fall issue of the **Review of Faith & International Affairs**, starting with a contribution by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. He underlines that a debate about politics cannot "be seriously conducted in the 21st century without discussing religion", which is "a powerful, motivating, determining force shaping the world around us." Among the dozen respondents, Angela Wu Howard of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty stresses how legal analysis can reach a level of particularity that general rhetoric cannot. She takes the example of the debate on the notion of the "defamation of religion" that was introduced by Pakistan at the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1999, originally as the "defamation of Islam," and that was consistently opposed by countries with traditions of liberal free speech laws. Despite such opposition, the resolution passed by a landslide each time it was proposed, until a detailed legal

review was submitted in 2006 that pointed at legal problems and showed that it contradicted the foundations of human rights.

"Defamation" was shown to be a misnomer, since defamation laws should protect persons, good-faith speech or dissent. More generally, a focus on the technical details of a law and real-life repercussions can expose hidden agendas.

There are unique challenges to religious freedom advocacy, observes Ziya Meral of Cambridge University. "Religion" and "religious freedom" provoke strong feelings in Europe and North America, even more so due to the fact that the depth of religious freedom problems often remains ignored, as evidenced in some cases of the deportation of failed asylum seekers by Western countries, ignoring the fact that the privatized religion of the West is foreign to much of the world. Governments are often reluctant to engage with religious freedom issues. An issue with religious freedom advocacy groups themselves is that they are often focused on a particular faith tradition, resulting in limited impact on religious freedom around the world. To be effective, religious freedom advocates should appeal to international law rather than to theology and provide first-hand, carefully verified observation that will establish their credibility. Most effective is quiet diplomacy.

How did international religious freedom policy develop under the (first) Obama presidency? Formerly serving at the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF Office) (2007-2011), Judd Birsall describes efforts in shedding "a reputation for pro-Christian bias" and showing commitment to believers of all faiths. The IRF Office was positioned "as the government's in-house religion resource" and new initiatives were launched, such as the Interagency Working Group on Religion & Global Affairs in 2010. Training for diplomats on religious freedom issues was started. Birsall

observes that activists did not always understand the rather collaborative and diplomatic approach of recent years, with an image of advocacy going back to the early days of the IRF Office, where there was the idea of encouraging public pressure on governments in order to impose religious freedom. Although many activists seem to operate with 1990s assumptions, "that moment is gone."

Some assessments are much more critical, however. The first director of the IRF Office, Thomas F. Farr (Georgetown University), comes to the conclusion that there is a need to go beyond a humanitarian approach and that the American policy of advancing religious freedom that emerged from the International Religious Freedom Act "has not had a significant effect on the levels of religious persecution, or the levels of religious freedom, anywhere in the world." Farr concedes that institutional interests in religion and foreign policy have increased at the State Department, but suspects that the president and secretary of state actually do not see it as a priority. Chris Seiple of the Institute for Global Engagement notes that different strategies are available to promote religious freedom: advocating it, which tends toward a public process, or building it, which tends toward a private process. Both have advantages and inconveniences. Based on experiences summarized by Seiple, there is a need to be willing to understanding partners and their culture and create a politically acceptable space for government officials and religious leaders. For more information about this issue, write: *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, P.O. Box 12205, Arlington, VA 22219-2205.

■ **Sacred Subdivisions** (NYU Press, \$24) is the first full-length treatment of the American megachurch phenomenon by a geographer, providing a compelling analysis of how the fragmented "post-suburban" context shapes and challenges these grow-

ing congregations. Author Justin G. Wilford notes that of the largest 50 non-denominational (a characteristic that he sees as essential to these congregations) megachurches, all but six are situated on the residential fringe of metropolitan areas—a percentage that only increased in the last decade. Although looking at megachurches in general, Wilford largely focuses on Rick Warren's Saddleback Church and how it seeks to transform the secular space of post-suburbia into "sacred spaces."

He provides interesting examples of how megachurches organize space: Saddleback uses the home and the related values of family, intimacy and emotive caring as the center of church life, mirroring its decentralized environment. In a chapter on Saddleback's recent involvement in political issues, Wilford sees such events as Warren's open forums for political candidates as giving members a sense of the public good and civil society beyond the privatized spaces of post-suburbia. But he adds that the long-term effects of such efforts are interpreted by Warren and others more as evangelistic than political opportunities. The book concludes that the megachurch comes as close as any institution in uniting the fragmented strands of post-suburban life for its members, even as they mirror its fragmentation in approach and even doctrine. "By mobilizing the elements of one's mundane domestic life—the unruly teenage child, a loveless marriage, even mortgage debt—for religious action, one is performing and thereby underwriting the irreducible relevance of evangelical Christianity," Wilford writes.

■ Based on surveys and in-depth interviews, the new book *The Heart of Religion* (Oxford University Press, \$29.95), by Matthew Lee, Margaret Poloma and Stephen G. Post, makes the claim that a majority of Americans have experienced "divine love," which results in concrete acts of benevolence. The book is

part of a larger research project called the Flame of Love and sponsored by the Templeton Foundation. Through their random survey of 1,200 Americans, the authors find that eight out of ten Americans report that they have felt the love of God and engage in acts of benevolence; the authors spend the rest of the book fleshing out what both divine love and benevolence mean to a wide range of people.

Those respondents who reported being both spiritual and religious were more likely to score higher on experiencing divine love than others, and Pentecostals and charismatics were the highest scorers. The interviews confirm that such an experience is strongly emotional and evocative of Pentecostal fervor and involves a degree of suffering and turmoil. This experience of God's love is often accompanied by a sense of calling to follow God in "developing a life of benevolence," the authors write. But how respondents define benevolence is more complicated and sometimes confusing to the reader. The authors develop a typology of "changers" and "renewers" to explain how people view benevolence through various "social grids"—resulting in conservatives and radicals who see their conflicting worldviews and forms of activism as benevolent.

■ Sociologist Patricia Wittberg applies a wealth of data and theory to American Catholic parish life in her new book *Building Strong Church Communities* (Paulist Press, \$26.95). As the title implies, Wittberg is particularly concerned with the ways in which parishes foster a sense of community for American Catholics. Using research and theory on social networks and social capital, particularly drawing on the work of political scientist Robert Putnam, Wittberg sees older forms of Catholic community (for instance, the role of the parish in defining urban neighborhoods) as fading, giving way to a more fragmented sense of belong-

ing. Yet she complicates things, noting that some forms of community, such as small groups that tend toward exclusivity, might discourage parish growth.

In the chapters on religious communities existing outside the parish, Wittberg notes that as religious orders have modernized and removed boundaries between themselves and other Catholics, they have experienced rapid decline; even those orders that have revived traditions (such as wearing traditional habits) have shown far less growth and stability than was the case for orders in the 19th century. Growth and some stability are more likely to be found in mixed (in gender, and in terms of being lay and clerical) orders and in lay groups, such as Cursillo and Communion and Liberation, but even here there is a problem in drawing young adults (particularly women). The book is generally cautious in using research to recommend a particular agenda or course of action, although the final chapter provides pointers in building up community, including mentoring, renewing rites of passage and encouraging outreach.

■ *Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China*, edited by Fenggang Yang and Joseph B. Tamney (Brill, \$176), shows how Chinese elites began to direct their attention to their own traditions such as Confucianism as China became a major economic and political power in recent decades. According to contributor Kang Xiaoguang, the recent revival of Confucianism owes much to "the increased nationalistic feelings, a loss of faith in communism, and government support for a Confucian renaissance." Historically speaking, Confucianism was a dominant political, social and cultural ideology for more than 2,000 years. However, when the Confucian Qing dynasty collapsed in the early 20th century Chinese elites blamed Confucianism as one of the main causes of Chinese underdevelopment. In-

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terestingly, the positive view of Confucianism in modern society gained its currency in 1980s, when Professor Tu Wei Ming of Harvard coined the term “Confucian capitalism”, which analyzed the economic success of the Confucian tradition countries of South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Tu Wei Ming argues that the Confucian values of benevolence, civility and community can function as universal values in this age of the global village.

Several authors in this book deal with the relationship between Christianity and Confucianism in China. Daniel B Bays writes that “Christianity is flexible and adaptive, and quite experienced in crossing cultural divides.” However, the Chinese have also used their Confucian culture in a similar manner when they accepted Christianity from the West. There has been some controversy as to whether Confucianism can be both a culture and religion, but it is obvious that there are elements of religion in

Confucianism, such as the emphasis on the mandate of heaven and worshipping Confucius almost as a deity in the temple. Nowadays, Anna Sun argues, the veneration and worship of Confucius has been revived in modern China, including burning incense and offering prayers in Confucian temples. Furthermore, top Chinese Communist Party leaders have made visits to a Confucian temple to honor Confucius in recent years. However, even though most of the contributors are rather positive about it, the revival of Confucianism in China may not be so promising. The recent revelations about widespread corruption among top Chinese Communist Party officials may make the Communist leadership, the main initiator of the revival of Confucianism in China, feel morally vulnerable in advocating for the Confucian universal values of “liberty, due process of law, and the dignity of the individual.”—*By K.T. Chun, a New Jersey-based sociologist and writer*

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

The recent appointment of **Justin Welby** as Archbishop of Canterbury was an intentional attempt to smooth over the deep fissures that mark the world's Anglican communion over the issue of homosexuality. Welby lacks episcopal experience, having only been a bishop for a year, but he makes up for it by his experience as a peacemaker: he worked at Coventry Cathedral's Centre for Reconciliation,

and before that was an oil executive, risking his life settling disputes in Nigeria. The Cambridge-educated bishop has managed to win the trust of African churches (the most conservative quarter of the Anglican communion) and such liberal leaders as Katharine Schori, the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the U.S. Welby has promised to simultaneously listen to the concerns of the LGBTB community while opposing gay marriage. Welby's role as a peacemaker will be tested as he stands watch over the Church of England's decision of whether or not to ordain women as bishops, as well as the issuing of a sexuality document that will touch on same-sex partnerships. **(Source: *The Tablet*, November 17)**

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