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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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A pope of the new evangelization

While much remains to be seen regarding the leadership style and priorities of Pope Francis, the themes of the challenge of secularization and evangelization figure prominently in many analyses and forecasts of the new papacy. The shifting distribution of world Catholicism formed the context of most of the coverage of Pope Francis's election. The facts are familiar: two-thirds of Catholics used to live in Europe a century ago: there are only 25 percent today, and this figure should be down to 20 percent by 2050, although the special role of Europe

should continue, if only for historical reasons and due to the location of the Holy See there. But more than 40 percent of the entire Catholic population resides in Latin America. Growth over the past century has been the fastest in Africa. For the future, observers look toward Asia, with a big question mark about the potential for growth in China. A pope from Europe is necessarily and acutely aware of the challenge of secularization.

▶ Continued on page two

Virtual classrooms gain ground among American seminaries, with evangelicals leading the way

The shift from "bricks and mortar" campuses to virtual classrooms is being actively pursued by a large segment of American theological seminaries, reports the *Christian Century* (February 20). As with radio and TV broadcasting, it seems that evangelical seminaries are the most heavily invested in the new learning technology, which could range from a few courses being offered online to new distance learning programs aiming for an international following. One leader in offering online courses is evangelical Gordon-Conwell Seminary, which started a program that allows students to take up to a third of their degree requirements in "self-paced courses." Fuller Seminary has expanded its international reach, offering online courses to students in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. In response to the fast growth of online programs in seminaries, the Association of Theological Schools will decide this summer whether to accredit Masters of Divinity programs in which more than two-thirds of their courses are presented online. The evan-

gelical Association for Biblical Higher Education already does so, writes Lawrence Wood.

In one sense, the importance of fostering community in seminaries, where prayer and learning together is a priority, might be a mitigating factor in adopting virtual classrooms. Yet seminaries have long offered distant learning in one form or another for part-time students. Leading mainline liberal seminaries have been resistant to the trend. Union, Yale, Harvard and Duke offer no or few online courses, which may pose difficulties, since they have the highest tuitions (Union costs \$44,000 per year). Wood concludes that "Perhaps the next step for seminaries is to deliver academic resources directly to congregations." Luther Seminary, for instance, already offers several long-form webinars for congregational leaders that resemble degree programs.

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

► Continued from page one

Writing in the *Christian Science Monitor* (March 14), G. Jeffrey MacDonald notes that most observers expect the new pope to vigorously champion the “new evangelization,” which involves bringing lapsed and inactive Catholics (and new converts) back into church life. Pope Francis’s election comes at a time when Catholics in the U.S. and abroad are searching for ways to reverse the sharp dropout rate in the church, particularly among young people. In an article on the *First Things* website (March 25), neo-conservative Catholic theologian George Weigel reports that the new pope “played a significant role in shaping the Latin American bishops’ 2007 ‘Aparecida Document,’ which embraced the New Evangelization and put it at the center of the church’s life.” Weigel adds that in conversations with the future pope last year, the latter stressed that the idea of a “kept church—kept in the sense of legal establishment, cultural habit or both—had no future in the twenty-first-century West, given the acids of secularism.”

Secularization is not absent in Latin America (see article on **Secularization and culture wars gain currency in Latin America**, below), but the level of religious practice is significantly higher and a pope coming from that continent is likely to look at things in a different way, as has already become obvious (no doubt also for reasons linked to the personal style and sensitivities of Pope Francis). While liberation theology is no longer what it used to be, it has left an impact on Latin American Catholicism. Even sectors of Catholicism hostile to Liberation Theology (this would include Fr. Bergoglio at the time he was head of the Jesuits in Argentina) tend to have an acute awareness of social problems such as poverty. While some evangelicals were initially wary about a South American pope, due to the strong competition with Catholics in that part of the world, the approach of Pope Francis, his simplicity and his emphasis on basic Biblical teachings seem to have dissipated initial questions. While sometimes faced with secularist politicians, the Catholic Church had long enjoyed a quasi monopoly in South America. The rapid growth of evangelical groups (both imported

and, subsequently, increasingly indigenous ones) has changed the situation: in four Latin American countries, more than 30 percent of the population is now Protestant: the figure is 25 percent in Brazil, 9 percent in Argentina.

However, although this created a kind of panic among leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, there have also been dynamic Catholic responses, including the charismatic renewal, which spread during the 1970s, with a varied impact from one country to another. Today, more than 16 percent of Latin American Catholics identify themselves as charismatics, according to Rodney Stark and Buster G. Smith in an article in *Latin American Politics and Society* (summer 2012). This has encouraged a strong involvement of lay people in the church. Moreover, Latin American charismatics often develop a concern for social issues as well, and not only for evangelization and faith renewal, writes Henri Gooren in the journal *Pneuma* (34/2).

(*First Things*, <http://www.firstthings.com>; *Latin American Politics and Society*, <http://www.as.miami.edu/clas/publications/laps>; *Pneuma*, <http://www.brill.com/pneuma>)

Cable television cashing in on religion and its controversies

Cable television has been featuring religious themed shows for a while, but the long-standing concern among producers that religion is too controversial is giving way to a recognition that viewers enjoy learning about the history and role of faith in peoples’ lives. *The Hollywood Reporter* (March 22) notes several series on cable television that are drawing high

ratings, particularly the miniseries, “The Bible” on the History Channel and Lifetime’s reality show “Preachers’ Daughters,” which showed a 13 percent increase in viewers (1.7 million) from the first to the second episodes, not to mention the several popular shows on the Amish and Mennonite lifestyle. Some producers see such programming as

inspirational in nature, while others recognize the value of controversy in their productions. Such is the case with Showtime’s upcoming thriller series, “The Vatican,” which “incorporates spirituality, power and politics ... set against the modern-day political machinations within the Catholic Church,” writes Kimberly Nordyke.

There was a concern that such shows might generate too much controversy among the faithful, but “what people are discovering is that viewers can distinguish entertainment from real life. Religion is of great interest to everyone, and a key driver of political and personal life worldwide. Maybe the curse came off it somehow

that people would stay away” from religious-themed programming, says Paul Attanasio, the writer of “The Vatican.” It isn’t only reality and scripted programming that are using religious themes. GSN network scored a hit with its game show “The American Bible Challenge,” which tests contestants’ biblical knowledge

and even spawned an online Bible study program by the network. Along with the greater willingness to broach controversial topics is a concern about not offending the faith groups that are portrayed or covered in these series, making fact checking, research and the use of consultants necessary.

Evangelicals recycle mainline churches while keeping their “authenticity”

Historic mainline Protestant and Catholic churches are being recycled by evangelical congregations, even as many of their features are being retained by church planters who see their heritage and “authenticity” as a draw to younger members, reports *Christianity Today* (March). Recent acquisitions of buildings by prominent evangelical congregations have tended to be historic mainline churches, such as Seattle’s Mars Hill megachurch obtaining

the downtown First United Methodist. These acquisitions may signal a cultural shift in thinking about worship and finances, according to Gary Nicholson, director of Lifeway Architecture.

He adds that congregations that renovate old buildings or lease office or warehouse space are part of the same trend of “leveraging facilities more wisely by acquiring rather than constructing.” The trend is consistent with recent data

from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis showing a nearly \$5 billion drop in monthly construction spending on religious institutions. One pastor says that the 19th-century pews and vintage fixtures of the vacated Presbyterian church it bought appeal to young worshippers, who may have a subconscious feeling that “This is what it’s supposed to be like.”

(*Christianity Today*, 364 Gundersen, Carol Stream, IL 60188)

Orthodox outreach creating new bridge between American Judaism’s conflicting camps?

While much has been written about growing conflict and distance between Orthodox and more liberal expressions of Judaism, there is actually more contact between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews today because of the former’s practice of outreach to those outside the fold, writes Jack Wertheimer in *Commentary* magazine (April). Orthodox outreach, or “*kiruv*,” began in the U.S. after World War II, but especially intensified with the Hasidic Chabad movement in the 1990s. The movement runs everything ranging from early childhood programs to Hebrew schools, campus organizations and the largest adult

education system on Jewish topics in the world, most of which seek to reach out to Jews of all stripes. There has also been an explosion of *kiruv* work from non-Hasidic “ultra-Orthodox” or “*heredi*” *yeshivas*, such as with the Aish HaTorah. This organization runs seminars on leading a Jewish life with locations in 20 cities and many college campuses. Haredi rabbis usually devote their work both to their own continuing education and to leading study groups for Jewish residents in their communities.

Wertheimer estimates that there are as many as 3,000–7,000 men

and women working full-time in outreach to non-Orthodox Jews. While many *kiruv* workers aim to turn non-practicing and non-Orthodox Jews into observant and Orthodox ones, many take a more pragmatic approach, finding that increasing Jewish knowledge and some form of practice are the more realistic outcomes of their work. These more modest goals are partly a result of the shrinking pool of potential converts to Orthodoxy: conservative Jews have been the most likely to convert to Orthodox Judaism, but since the 1990s this movement has shrunk demographically. Today’s complex Jewish situation of mixed

families from interfaith marriages (having non-Jewish mothers) has also made conversion to Orthodox more difficult. While *kiruv* workers receive criticism from mainstream Jewish groups for sheep stealing and from Orthodox quarters for too close contact with

the “heterodox,” Wertheimer sees outreach as expanding the menu of Jewish learning in most communities, as well as making possible some rapprochement between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox sectors of American Judaism. “Individuals who have little contact

with organized Jewish life are turned on to Judaism by kiruv workers and in many cases find their way into non-Orthodox synagogues and secular organizations.”

(*Commentary*, 561 7th Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10018)

Christians borrow bar mitzvahs as new rite-of-passage

Evangelicals are holding Christian versions of bar mitzvahs as part of a larger trend of increasing identification with Jews and Israel. The *New York Times Magazine* (March 24) reports that the concept of the Christian bar mitzvah is carried out regardless of ethnicity and is seen as a Christ-centered coming of age ceremony. The boys are

prepared for the ceremony by learning Hebrew and the scriptures, often under the guidance of a Messianic Jewish leader. The rabbis interviewed are divided on the practice, with some taking a tolerant attitude toward such borrowing, especially as it is accompanied by support for Israel, and others viewing it as poaching on

the Jewish religion. The article notes that for the past two decades, evangelicals have borrowed traditions and trappings of Judaism—from holding *seders* to being married under *chuppahs* and wearing prayer shawls over their clothes.

Straight Edge punks adopt ascetic, non-institutional spirituality

The Straight Edge movement, a subset of punk rock that stresses abstinence from drugs, alcohol and casual sex, may appear decidedly secular with an antagonistic view towards organized religion, but religious symbols and, on a lesser level, ideas “have remained rife within the subculture,” writes Francis Stewart in the journal *Implicit Religion* (Volume 15, Number 3). The spiritual interest in the Straight Edge subculture can be seen in the songs and album covers of such bands as Throwdown, Good Clean Fun, and Stretch Arm Band, as well as in graffiti and tattoos. When interviewing 83 Straight Edge punks in the U.S. and UK, Stewart found numerous arguments and discussions about religion and spirituality. He notes that religion has become more pronounced since the 1990s with the influx of Christianity and Hare

Krishna bands and ideology into Straight Edge circles, with some adherents mixing and matching different teachings.

Only two of the respondents from Stewart’s interviews identified as atheist, and five belonged to a traditional religion. Almost 30 percent of participants were involved in explicit religious practices, often including Dharma Punx, Krishnacore (variants of Buddhism and Hare Krishna), while a similar group of Straight Edgers embrace Taqwacore, which blends Islam with a punk rock sensibility. Krishnacore, founded by Straight Edge band leader Ray Cappo, was appealing because of its ascetic demands (especially for those accepting vegetarianism and veganism)—which became so popular that many worried that Hare Krishna was proselytizing Straight Edgers. While Krishnacore’s ap-

peal has waned in recent years, Dharma Punx, founded in the early 2000s by Noah Levine, has gained a following and tends to mix various strands of Buddhism with aspects of Hinduism, Sufism, paganism and liberal Christianity. Dharma Punx groups exist in a number of states, running meditation sessions and retreats. Others see Straight Edge itself as an implicit religion or spiritual path that might include going to concerts and the devotion of fans to their favorite bands, and the commitment to a self-denying lifestyle (once they “break edge” and leave the lifestyle, they are never accepted back).

(*Implicit Religion*, <http://www.equinoxpub.com>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

▶ **The overall numbers of American Catholics often cited by church officials and activists might be inflated, with even those doing the counting expressing dissatisfaction and uncertainty about the methods used in arriving at these figures, according to an exploratory study by J. Patrick Hornbeck II of Fordham University.** Writing in the current issue of the journal *American Catholic Studies* (Volume 123, Number 4), Hornbeck notes that across the ideological spectrum of the Catholic Church in the U.S., church leaders and activists often cite Catholic numbers for political and ideological purposes. He interviewed 12 staff members from a pooled sample of dioceses in western (seven interviews) and eastern states (five interviews) about their methods of counting Catholics. While not representative, the qualitative study does shed light on how “insiders” view the reliability of the counting procedures of the church in the U.S.

More than half of those surveyed believed the statistics their dioceses provide are inaccurate. They identified common problems that limited the accuracy of such figures: some of those counted as Catholics by parishes and dioceses no longer identify as Catholics, even though the church considers them as such; others may be inactive, or are “snowbirds,” who move south for the winter and may be counted twice. Another common counting technique that raised concern is based on estimates of those who attend Mass but have never registered with a

parish (a common pattern with undocumented immigrants), which in this case can result in under-counting Catholics.

(*American Catholic Studies*, <http://amchs.org/publications/index.html>)

▶ **After a long period of steady increases, the percentage of Utah residents belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) may now be lower than at any time in the state’s history, according to sociologists Rick Phillips and Ryan Cragun writing in *Nova Religio* (February), the journal of new religious movements.** Mormons in what is called the Mormon Culture Region (MCR), consisting of Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico, and Nevada, have historically had higher rates of religious attendance and other LDS practices (such as tithing and serving in missions) than in other regions considered “mission” territory. Recently, church-based and other sources note that since 1989, membership statistics in Utah have shown some decline. Phillips and Cragun examine data from the General Social Survey (GSS) and find that the apostasy rates of those in the MCR were traditionally low compared to other areas, but have grown since 1989 to the extent that there is little difference between regions. GSS data shows that for every person who converts to Mormonism in the MCR, another leaves the religion. The researchers conclude that this change in the Mormon heartland could adversely affect the overall vitality of Mormonism.

(*Nova Religio*, 2000 Center St., Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 9474)

▶ **The assumption that converts to new religions join primarily through preexisting social networks is called into question by James R. Lewis (University of Tromsø, Norway) in the latest issue of the *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* (November).** Based on a survey administered over the years to samples of followers of five different types of new religious movements (Satanism, Neo-Paganism, Hare Krishna, Adidam and Order of Christ Sophia), Lewis observes not only that the recruitment through parents, friends or co-workers varies from one movement to another, but also and more importantly, that patterns of recruitment for the same movement change over years: in the case of Adidam, a small esoteric group based on the teachings of the charismatic leader “Da Free John,” the role of friends and relatives as initial points of contact with the movement has increased, while in the Order of Christ Sophia, it has decreased. The importance of social network conversions fluctuates. While researchers working on NRMs have always been aware that movements are not static, they seem often to have unconsciously assumed that generalizations could be made on the basis of a relatively limited set of case studies: continuous observation of specific movements over an extended time period is needed in order to gain a better and more differentiated understanding. Moreover, the role played by the Internet (including the emergent phenomenon of religious beliefs based to a large extent on the Internet, such as solitary practitioners of Satanism or – to a lesser extent – Paganism) makes

clear the weakness of generalizations about recruitment primarily through social networks, concludes Lewis.

(*International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, Equinox Publishing, Unit S3, Kelham House, 3 Lancaster Street, Sheffield S3 8AF, UK - <https://www.equinoxpub.com/journals/index.php/IJSNR>)

▶ **According to the results of the 2011 census, slightly more than 20 percent of the Czech people describe themselves as believers, reports the head of the Czech Agency of Statistics, Iva Ritzelova in *Religion & Gesellschaft* (February).** While 44 percent of the population did not answer the question about religious affiliation (in contrast with the previous census in 2001, when

only 8 percent refrained), the census also included a new option for people describing themselves as “believers without religious affiliation.” This option was selected by nearly 7 percent, which leaves 14 percent for affiliated believers. Also striking is the drop in members of the historical churches, especially if the results are compared with those of the 1950 census (the question on religion was then removed until the end of the Communist period): it bears witness to the depth of secularization achieved during the years of Communism and to the continuation of this process after the regime change.

The Czechoslovak Hussite Church included 10.6 percent of the popu-

lation in 1950, 1.7 in 1991, 1.0 percent in 2001 and now only 0.4 percent. The Roman Catholic Church dropped from 76.4 percent in 1950 to 39 percent in 1991, 26.8 percent in 2001 and finally 10.4 percent in 2011. However, interestingly, observes Petr Slouk in another article in the same issue, the level of attendance at Roman Catholic religious services has not changed during the past ten years: this means that a number of non-practicing Catholics still described themselves as church members, but have now given up that identification entirely.

(*Religion & Gesellschaft*, Postfach 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland, <http://www.g2w.eu>)

Secularization and culture wars gain currency in Latin America

Religion in Latin America appears to be taking on some aspects of European secularity and U.S. culture wars, according to two reports. In the *Christian Century* (March 12), historian Phillip Jenkins writes that increasingly several countries in Latin America show a drift in religious affiliation and values that bear some similarity to the U.S. and even Europe. Jenkins acknowledges that there are conflicting signs about the vitality of religion in most Latin American countries. A country such as Brazil has experienced a Pentecostal upsurge, but at the same time there is a growth of the non-affiliated (up to nine percent), with the percentage of “nones” being highest among those under 20. Jenkins writes that several Latin American countries’ liberalizing family patterns, seen in their falling fertility rates to below re-

placement levels (including Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and in the near future Argentina), mirror this trend in secular Europe.

Likewise, the advance of gay marriage (already legal in Argentina and likely to be accepted soon in Uruguay and Brazil) and pro-choice policies on abortion (although this is a more mixed picture) suggests that churches may soon be engaging “rear-guard actions” to fight such liberal reforms. Jenkins adds that countries such as Colombia and Brazil are a long way from European secularization, but “we can foresee the emergence of a triangular political setup involving Pentecostals, Catholics and secularists and a constantly shifting balance of coalitions and alliances.” The issues surrounding gay marriage and abortion in Brazil have increasingly taken on the tone of American-style “culture wars”—both among the secular left and the evangelical right. *Public Eye* (Winter), a left-of-center newslet-

ter that monitors the religious and political right, reports that the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) has recently opened a Brazilian branch after opening offices in Eastern Europe and Africa.

Along with supporting human rights and religious freedom, the ACLJ has sought to defend the rights of Christians in terms of pro-life and anti-gay rights activism. The opening of the center takes place at a time when the Brazilian gay rights movement has taken the offensive in promoting a bill that would make “homophobia,” or discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, an aggravating factor in hate crimes, assaults, and hate speech. While many Latin American evangelicals lean left, even on issues like gay rights (compared to U.S. evangelicals), they have viewed the anti-discrimination movement as a threat to their freedom of expression and religious freedom in

preaching on homosexuality and other controversial issues—one reason why the ACLJ branch has been formed. Writer Jandira Queiroz notes that both sides of the conflict over gay rights in Brazil accuse each other of undue U.S. influence.

(*Public Eye*, 1310 Broadway, Suite 201, Somerville, MA 02144)

Religion and values still related in Europe

Several articles in the latest issue of the French journal of future studies *Futuribles* (March) deal with the social and political impact of religions; three of them focus on the European situation. Pierre Bréchon (Institute for Political Studies, Grenoble) notes how Europe remains strongly divided among different historical forms of Christianity. Despite obvious changes, there is little mobility across religious affiliations: most people remain (more or less strongly) linked to inherited religious traditions (with odd cases, especially the Czech Republic, with low religious belonging). There are people who profess atheism and reject religion entirely, but they are a minority (around 9 percent in Western Europe; up to 18 percent in France). The results of the European Values Study (2008), which covered 46 countries, show the impact of religious affiliation and religiosity on values. For instance, Muslims and Orthodox are much more attached to traditional moral and family values.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are people who no longer identify with a religion (27 percent at the European level, in strong progression) and tend to be quite liberal, with a profile close to European Protestants in some

aspects. However, if one considers not only religious affiliation, but the intensity of religious beliefs, it appears that different religions have similar effects on their members: strong believers of all religious traditions tend on average to support more strongly traditional values than people with less intense beliefs. Thus it appears that both the religious culture of a country and the level of religiosity are the most important factors for predicting social and political attitudes. Regarding church–state relations in Europe, Philippe Portier (Paris-Sorbonne University) notes that three different models can be observed in different countries across Europe: some give a privileged status to one or two religious groups; others have a flexible model of church–state separation; and some have introduced strict church–state separation.

According to Portier, however, legal developments pertaining to different aspects of religion may lead to more similar approaches across European countries, despite different national legacies. In the long-run the result may be somewhere in the middle. On the one hand, writes Portier, in countries where a privileged status is given to one (or more) religion, a process of secularization seems bound to lead to more separation between the political and religious spheres, as well as to create openings for other religious groups: state religion is unlikely to be the way of the future. On the other hand, in countries with a strict church–state separation, such as France, despite an emphasis on issues such as the ban on religious symbols at schools, less visible steps have paved the way for “re-association:” for instance, financial support for some Catholic

(and later also Jewish and Muslim) schools, or indirect subsidies through tax deductions for renovating places of worship. It remains to be seen how this can really create a common ground. (The potential impact of legal decisions at the European level for creating converging approaches, e.g. rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, is not considered in the article.)

Regarding Islam in Western Europe, Franck Fregosi (Institute for Political Studies, Aix-en-Provence) reminds that the religion currently represents 4.5 percent of the population and should reach 7.1 percent in 2030. He remarks that identity-based reactions against Islam are widespread in Europe. Islam is, however, a fragmented reality showing ethnic, national and linguistic cleavages, but also generational and ideological divisions: the whole range of options is present. But with more and more Muslims holding European citizenships (nearly half of the 4.7 million Muslims in France are now French citizens), Islam is bound to become “indigenous.” According to Fregosi, this will go along with more and more Muslims in Europe climbing up the social ladder and becoming better educated.

(*Futuribles*, 47 rue de Babylone, 75007 Paris, France, <http://www.futuribles.com>)

Poland: still a high level of religious practice, but shows a more affirmative secular camp

In comparison with other European countries, Poland still exhibits a high level of religious beliefs and attendance at religious serv-

ices; but while criticism of the Catholic Church was associated with Communism in the 1990s, it is no longer the case with the younger generation. This is especially true for those linked to the new left, which associates church criticism with wider social and political discussions, writes Cezary Koscielniak in *Religion & Gesellschaft* (February). Until he passed away in 2005, Pope John Paul II had a special meaning for most Poles: they tended to see him as their leader; even the party of the former Communists had enthusiastically welcomed him during his 1999 visit to the Polish Parliament. The signing of a Concordat between the state and the Holy See in 1993 seemed to be self-evident, allowing for wide control of the church in matters of confessional religious teachings and theological departments at state universities. Only today, 20 years later, does the political opposition question its provisions. In the political sphere, two secular-oriented movements are active: firstly, the party of the former Communists (27 seats), although it has avoided letting frictions within the Catholic Church lead to open confrontation.

Secondly, the Palikot movement obtained 40 seats in the 2011 elections: one of its main goals is to put an end to the special position of the Roman Catholic Church (including banning religious teaching at state schools). Palikot members are aggressively anti-clerical, staging, for instance, demonstrations supporting “de-baptization.” Interestingly, its leader used to be an active Catholic (and even the publisher of a Catholic weekly) a few years earlier. Yet recent surveys indicate that the Palikot movement would

probably no longer manage to gain seats in Parliament if elections were held today. According to Koscielniak, for most Polish citizens, religious questions do not take a central place, especially at a time of economic difficulties. On the one hand, despite full churches, it is difficult for the Catholic Church to convince Poles to follow its moral rules. But, on the other hand, there is a network of charitable and educational Catholic institutions that are valued even by non-believers: few would want to put an end to those services. A current of “national Catholicism,” mixing religion and politics, remains strong in Poland. But today most people would not accept a priest in political office, and political statements from bishops have little real impact. Christianity is alive and well in Poland, but the progress of political secularization cannot be denied.

Meanwhile, a study by sociologist Lukasz Kutyllo suggests that the steady decline in participation in the Catholic Church in Poland may be more because of dissatisfaction with the church and its political role than a loss of religious belief or secularization. In an article in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Religious Research* (Volume 9, Article 2), Kutyllo writes that there is a growing gap between the percentage of Poles who believe in God and the percentage who take part in religious services. He finds that the percentage of Poles who believe in God in both Polish surveys and the European Values Survey has changed little; in 1997, 61 percent said they believe in God without any doubts; in 2009 this percentage was only one point lower. Kutyllo finds that parish offerings (such as

pilgrimages and youth activities) became less attractive to churchgoers between 2005 and 2008, and argues that the church is increasingly perceived as a bureaucratic institution and less as a community that unites its members.

(*Interdisciplinary Journal of Religious Research*,
<http://www.religjournal.com>)

Representing or monopolizing Poland's Jewish community?

There is increasing division between Orthodox and progressive Jews in Poland over the matter of who will represent the Jewish community in the country, according to the *Jerusalem Report* (February 25). The magazine reports that there is an “internecine battle for power and prestige—and the vast control of funds” between the Polish Orthodox community represented by Twarda (named for the street the organization is located on in Warsaw) and Beit Polska of the progressive Jewish community, writes Nissan Tzur. In 2008 Beit Polska requested and received from the Polish Interior Ministry recognition as the umbrella organization of progressive Jews. In response, the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, which was until then the only Jewish community recognized by the Polish government, appealed to have the decision overturned, claiming that by law it had the monopoly as the umbrella organization for all Jewish groups in Poland. Twarda claimed that the union also represented the progressive stream of Judaism and demanded to be a part of the Beit Polska's registration.

For its part, Beit Polska and its founder Severyn Ashkenazy charge that Twarda's leaders are

concerned about having to share the government subsidies it receives with the progressive community. Ashkenazy adds that the Orthodox community has been selling off assets from abandoned Jewish properties that have been transferred to the Jewish community by the government and there is little transparency about where this money has gone. To complicate the situation even more, Twarda recently formed a new progressive congregation to show that both streams of Judaism can co-exist. Beit Polska claims that the move is merely a façade and that the real issue is Twarda's opposition to Jewish pluralism and its desire to maintain its monopoly. There have been attempts to settle the dispute by outside Jewish leaders, but little progress has been made.

(*Jerusalem Report*, <http://thejerusalemreport.wordpress.com/>)

'Off the books' secularization in Israel?

Israel is experiencing a "secularization below the radar," according to Guy Ben-Porat, a political scientist at Ben-Gurion University at a March seminar at Columbia University in New York attended by **RW**. Ben-Porat, whose presentation was based on his new book, *Between State and Synagogue* (Cambridge University Press), said that even though Israel may

not separate church and state and many Israelis may retain their strong religious attachments, religious and rabbinical authority is declining in Israel because of demographic and consumerist changes. In this process, secular and non-orthodox Israelis are finding novel ways to skirt laws and observances involving the Sabbath, kosher food, and marriage. Ben-Porat added that many of these changes are "not on the books or official" and are not related to promoting a secular ideology or engaging in politics. In the 1980s and 1990s many secular Israelis reacted to the growing influence of Orthodox Jewish political parties with a political strategy or by appealing to the liberal Supreme Court. Yet such efforts were largely unsuccessful in challenging Orthodox influence, according to Ben-Porat.

Secular and non-Orthodox Israelis have done better by creating their own "comfort zone" in a religious state through an entrepreneurial approach, with some help from broader demographic changes. The influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) during the last two decades has added to Israel's secular climate, since many of these newcomers are defined as non-Jewish by the Orthodox (largely because of having non-Jewish mothers). Since their marriages cannot be certified by

Orthodox authorities, many of these FSU Israelis citizens go to Cyprus to have their wedding ceremonies. "Secular entrepreneurs"—those who use the available resources to circumvent religious regulations—open businesses on the Sabbath by using the loophole of that allows non-Jewish merchants to work and thus keep their shops open.

The expansion of shopping malls outside cities that are outside of the religious regulations regarding the Sabbath and kosher food is also encouraged by the consumer lifestyle of secular Israelis. This lifestyle may be spreading, as Ben-Porat cited research showing that as much as 40 percent of Israelis who define themselves as "traditional" also admit to shopping on the Sabbath. In the same way, non-kosher food can be produced and sold if the producer or vendor is non-Jewish, thus allowing for an alternative secular market. The bending of the rules and the other ways in which secular Israelis get around religious authority tend to "take away the political energy for fighting." There is also a "disinclination for the orthodox party to fight beyond their own turf," thus decreasing the chances of a major "culture war" between the religious and seculars in Israel, according to Ben-Porat.

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

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

■ **RW** readers can receive a discount of half the cover price on the

book ***Lutherans Today*** (Eerdmans), edited by **RW**'s editor. The book consists of 12 chapters looking at the diversity of American Lutheranism as well as examining a wide range of issues facing this religious tradition in the 21st century. For a copy, send \$12 (made out to Religion Watch, postage paid) to: **RW**, P.O. Box 652, North Bellmore, NY 11710.

■ Last issue's review of Kim Hansen's book ***Military Chaplains and Religious Diversity*** incorrectly stated that the interviews were based on a representative sample of chaplains. The sample was not meant to be representative of chaplains, but rather was designed to highlight the issues facing the chaplaincy and the diverse religious

makeup of the chaplains.

■ The current issue of ***Sikh Formations*** (Volume 8, Number 3), the British journal on research on Sikhism, is partly devoted to the history, current state, and future prospects of the 3HO branch of the religion. 3HO and its sister organization, Sikh Dharma International, was started by Yogi Bhajan in the late 1960s and brought together Sikh practices with yoga and Eastern teachings. The movement, which drew a large Western following, has been subject to sharp criticism and even exclusion by Indian Sikh leaders. The charismatic authority of Yogi Bhajan and the movement's integration of Hindu-based practices stood in tension with Sikh traditions. But the articles in this issue suggest a significant rapprochement between Indian Sikhs and the 3HO movement.

Shanti Kaur Khalsa writes that 3HO yoga is no longer as controversial to many Sikhs now that yoga has gone mainstream, and for their part, the Western Sikhs have moved closer to Indian Sikh traditions. As the younger generations of Sikhs become Westernized and in danger of discarding their religion, the 3HO Sikhs are serving as models of how to remain committed to the religion while living in Western culture. The 3HO Sikhs run summer camps and educational institutions that have helped keep young Sikhs committed to the faith. Another article notes that the 3HOs' entrepreneurial activities, ranging from running the Golden Temple health food brand to the \$3.5 billion Akal Security firm (controversially contracted to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security), shows evidence of a "Sikh ethic of capitalism," as they see wealth as a sign of God's blessing.

For more on this issue of *Sikh Formations*, contact:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rsf020/current>.

■ In one way, the new book ***Paging God*** (University of Chicago Press, \$25) by sociologist Wendy Cadge covers familiar territory, as the role of religion and spirituality in health and medicine has become a popular field, but the book also pioneers in providing rare in-depth observations about how hospitals actually address religious and spiritual concerns. Cadge conducted ethnographic studies of chaplains, personnel, and patients in 17 (secular) hospitals, as well as investigating the history of hospital chaplaincy in the U.S. A central irony running through Cadge's study is that a concern with more explicit forms of religion, involving specific traditions and beliefs, was more evident among the staff in the intensive care and neonatal units of these hospitals; they tried to make room for the various faiths of their patients and their families and sometimes drew on their own religious beliefs (especially in praying for patients).

Hospital staff, especially doctors, did tend to draw the line on tolerance and acceptance of religion when beliefs and practices interfered with their work and what they believe is best for the patients' health. In contrast, the chaplains were more likely to discard tradition-specific religious language in favor of a seemingly neutral, generic approach to spirituality. Rather than trying to be multi-faith, e.g. by including numerous religious symbols in their chapels, the chaplains downplay the images, symbols, and rituals used to transmit religion. Because of these different approaches, chaplains and hospital staff have problems understanding each other on matters of religion and spirituality and forming a coordinated response to patients' needs. Cadge concludes that "managing"

religious diversity and the messy interaction of spirituality and traditional religion will be the main challenge even as the "formal secularization" of hospitals continues, with many dismantling their religious foundations and sponsorship.

■ Religious historian Callum Brown has produced interesting studies on the decline of religion in Britain since the 1960s, and in his new book, ***Religion and the Demographic Revolution*** (Boydell Press, \$95), the author extends his analysis to the U.S., Ireland and Canada as well as the UK. He argues that all of these societies have experienced or are experiencing the same secularizing dynamics due to demographic changes, although in different time periods and at different levels of intensity. But Brown makes it clear that the demographic effect, particularly the lowering of fertility rates due to contraception and the rise and acceptance of divorce and cohabitation, are not inevitable parts of a universal or even Western secularizing trajectory associated with modernity. The strongly religious cases of Northern Ireland and the U.S. suggest that a steady path toward secularization is not inevitable. But in one way or another these societies tend to take a similar route of first loosening church membership and then affiliation (the rise of the "nones" is evident everywhere but in Northern Ireland), and finally a rejection of Christian beliefs (it should be noted, however, that Brown focuses on the decline of Christianity and rarely discusses other religions or the persistence of a generic spirituality).

Brown argues that it is the intentional choices of women (and many men) to embrace feminist changes and new conceptions of womanhood and gender, involving controlling fertility and engaging in pre-marital sexual relations, that drives

secularization. These changes in sexual behavior loosen the grip of traditional Christian moral constraints, which leads to declines in women's religious involvement. The "second wave feminism" prominent in the 1960s and '70s provided an ideological framework to directly challenge Christian teachings (with "third wave" feminists being largely secular by 2011). All of this reverses the old dictum that secularization is men-led and that women encourage religious vitality. Brown writes that particularly in special circumstances of rapid church decline, as in Britain and Canada, "it is women who leave the church faster and show lower inclination to be recruited."

■ Founded by Herbert W. Armstrong (1892–1986), the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) had already experienced a few minor schisms while its founder was alive. But after Armstrong passed away and the new leadership revised the WCG doctrines radically, many members left over the years and, while a proportion did not reaffiliate with other groups, a majority joined offshoots of the original movement, aiming to preserve part or all of the original message. At its highest point in 1988 the WCG probably had around 130,000 members: according to best estimates, there are currently up to 400 groups with roots in the WCG, reports David V. Barrett in his new book, ***The Fragmentation of a Sect: Schism in the Worldwide Church of God*** (Oxford University Press, \$55). In comparison with the original number of members, there has probably been no contemporary religious movement matching this level of schismatic activities.

The total number does not only include direct breaks from the WCG: a number of these groups experienced divisions among themselves. Some have already disappeared, but others continue to be born, although the rate of new creations is decreas-

ing, since all compete basically for the same pool of potential members. Now rechristened Grace Communion International, the WCG itself gathers today between 40,000 and 50,000 members. The largest of the schismatic groups is reported to have around 12,000 faithful, while the others number from a few thousands to a handful. Obviously, many of them won't survive in the long run. There would probably not have been such an amazing level of dissent if it hadn't been for the doctrinal orientations introduced by the new leadership under Joseph Tkach Sr. (now succeeded by his son) during the 1990s. Ten years after Armstrong passed away, nearly all his distinctive doctrines had been discarded, to the extent that the WCG, until then branded a heretical cult, was accepted as a member of the National Association of Evangelicals. This left many believers with the feeling that their church (not seen merely as one denomination, but as the true church restoring original Christianity) had been hijacked by its leaders themselves: instead of converting to mainstream evangelicalism, they took the church with them.

The result of many years of research and a useful contribution to the under-researched field of the sociology of schism, Barrett's book will be of interest primarily to specialists on contemporary religious movements and to members or former members of the WCG; other readers would probably soon feel overwhelmed and lost in the profusion of groups and subgroups, sometimes with confusingly similar names. But a number of topics covered in the book are relevant for wider issues as well: for instance, the status of written material no longer deemed acceptable by a religious organization that retains the copyright, but still considered as valuable by offshoots; in the case of the WCG, after litiga-

tion due to unauthorized reprints, the Philadelphia Church of God finally bought the copyright for 19 books and booklets from the WCG.

Interesting issues of authority and its role are also relevant for the WCG (Tkach used the powers invested in him by a centralized structure in order to transform it into something else), but also for the offshoots (as a source of legitimacy). Doctrinal concerns seem to have played an important role for those leaving the WCG (or dissenting groups) and joining new ones: according to a survey conducted by Barrett, few members of the offshoots have all their close relatives in the same church and nearly half of the sample has no relative at all in the same group. This tends also to indicate that once the doors to dissent opened, it started a process conducive to religious mobility: a significant number of members of the "schismatic" groups have switched affiliation again after leaving the original WCG.

■ ***The Gospel after Christendom*** (Baker Academic, \$29.99), edited by Ryan K. Bolger, is probably the most comprehensive books to date on "emerging" and postmodern churches throughout the world. The book brings together scholars and practitioners who look at these "missional" congregations existing in a wide range of traditions and national contexts, including America, Canada, Latin America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. While the diversity of these expressions stands out, they seem to follow, especially in secular or "post-Christian" societies, two patterns: low-intensity, seeker-friendly fellowships that downplay the traditional rubrics of church life—sermons, hymn-singing—in favor of an approach stressing the arts and creativity; and more intense forms of belonging that often have a social

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

action thrust, most vividly seen in the new monasticism.

The formation of small groups appears to be a trait of both styles of postmodern experiments; for instance, the Brie Church in a village outside Paris is based in small groups meeting in homes throughout the week and then members joining together for a joint worship service. The role that established churches play in such new expressions is the most debated issue in the book, with several observers venturing that a "mixed economy" church (featuring both emerging and traditional services and con-

gregations) is the most likely outcome. The second half of the book covers issues that are engaging these emerging congregations—from environmentalism to the growth of dispersed congregations that have several different locations. Although not explicitly addressed, the divide between more conservative—usually evangelical—and liberal and mainline postmodern congregations that are more open to using "indigenous" spiritual expressions (such as New Age and non-Christian religions) is likely to remain a point of conflict in the near future.

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

Cornerstone Church in San Diego has become one of the most prominent second-generation Hispanic megachurches. The congregation seeks to minister to those from "hood to the highrise," with its members ranging from successful lawyers to ex-cons. Pastor Sergio De La Mora founded the church with seven others in 1998 and since

then Cornerstone has attracted a multi-ethnic mix. De La Mora attributes the church's success among second-generation Latinos to its willingness to address family dysfunctions and relational issues that are not attended to by "traditional religion." The congregation follows a three-pyramid formula based on compelling music, reflecting the sound of the top radio stations in its community, complete with multimedia effects; a system that follows up on attendees "from curb to conversion;" and strong small group ministry. **(Source: Leadership Network Advance, March 12).**

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