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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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New wave of psychedelic drug research shows spiritual connections

Psychedelic drugs, never really out of fashion among a segment of alternative health and spiritual practitioners, are “coming out of the drug counterculture and back into the mainstream laboratories of some of the world’s leading universities and medical centers,” according to *Utne Reader* (May/June). Don Lattin writes that new research programs at Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Purdue University, and the University of California are probing the “mind-altering mysteries and healing powers” of substances such as ecstasy, LSD, and psilocybin. Leading the way in seeking to legitimize these drugs is the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, which has sought to make Ecstasy available for people suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Studies conducted with

this drug have shown dramatically better results than the prescription drugs that are usually used, with few of the harmful effects that have been reported in the past. Proponents of such treatment envision that it will be administered by therapists in a controlled environment.

But another byproduct of these drugs’ growing interest and acceptance in the medical and scientific community is exploration of “consciousness,” according to Lattin. He cites a Johns Hopkins study of psilocybin for patients with anxiety about their cancer, finding that two-thirds of subjects rated the sessions where they took this drug as being “among the five most spiritually significant experiences of their lives.” But

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A Note to Readers

*With the July/August issue of **Religion Watch**, readers will receive a newsletter that is different in some aspects yet familiar. The most important change is that as of July 1, **RW** will be published by Religion Newswriters Association, the leading organization of journalists covering religion. RNA already publishes *Religion News Service* and we are honored to come under its sponsorship and work with new publisher Debra Mason. Although **RW** will no longer be a publication of Religoscope Institute, we are glad to note that the newsletter will be published in collaboration with *Religoscope* and that director Jean-Francois Mayer will stay on as associate editor. We thank Jean-Francois for taking on **RW** back in 2008 and making considerable improvements both in its style and content. The same gratitude goes to Pavlina Majorosova for her ex-*

cellent work as circulation director and to Alex Potter for his copy editing expertise.

*The “new” **RW** will remain bi-monthly until November when we will return to a monthly publishing schedule (some subscribers have commented that they have missed receiving **RW** monthly). Subscriptions and renewals for the month of June should be sent to: Religion Watch, c/o Sheila Holder, 30 Neff Annex, Columbia, MO 65211-1200. For questions, call: 573-882-9257. All checks/payments should be made out to Religion News LLC. Subscribers will be contacted in July by the new publisher with more information on this change. We are excited about this new development and thank you for your support so far and in the future.—Richard Cimino, Editor.*

► Continued from page one

other researchers are troubled that the “new wave of psychedelic research is blurring the lines between spiritual experience and the hard science of medicine.” This resistance is not going unchallenged: a “new generation of psychedelic drug researchers has emerged on university campuses across the nation.” William Richards, a pioneer of psychedelic research at Johns Hopkins, acknowledged that the new interest in these drugs and their effect on

spirituality may be met by a backlash of scientists “who resist the idea that scholars should seriously study something as slippery as spirituality.”

The therapy trials using psilocybin that have been conducted so far do have a religious component, even if it is an Eastern and Native American mode, according to a report in the *NYU Alumni Magazine* (Spring). The subjects receive their dose of the drug in a ceramic chalice in an “act nodding to indigenous cultures,” writes Jennifer

Bleyer. After taking the medication they are told to “stay connected to the experience with meditation and mindfulness exercises. Participants claim that psilocybin helped them, in one researcher’s words, experience “infinite consciousness” and often laid the foundation for other spiritual experiences.

(*Utne Reader*, 1503 SW 42nd St, Topeka, KS 66609;; *NYU Alumni Magazine*, 25 W. 4th St., 4th Fl., New York, NY 10012-1119)

Millennial generation’s music draws on doubting faith

The millennial generation is embracing “crypto-Christian artists who claim no particular affiliation and actually seem uncomfortable with institutionalized Christianity. And yet, somehow, their imaginations, instincts and language are deeply informed by Scripture and the person of Jesus,” writes Bill McGarvey in the Jesuit magazine *America* (May 6). Although surveys continue to show a low rate of religious affiliation and a disenchantment with the marriage of religion and “Republican Party values” among young people, the charts are showing the popularity

of musical artists who take faith—and also doubt—seriously, according to McGarvey. He cites the UK’s Mumford & Sons’ album *Babel*, which was this year’s Grammy winner for Best Album and posted the best single-week sales for 2012.

The album is “one of the most God-haunted collection of songs you’re likely to find by a major musical act,” featuring lyrics such as “But I’ll still believe though there’s cracks you’ll see/ When I’m on my knees I’ll still believe.” Their music represents the “first

commercial fruits of a generation of young adults raised in non-denominational Christian churches,” McGarvey writes. Lead singer/songwriter Marcus Mumford’s parents founded the evangelical Vineyard Churches in the UK. Mumford & Sons are not alone, with the roster of crypto-Christian artists including Sufjan Stevens, Kings of Leon, and David Bazan (from Pedro the Lion).

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

‘Power map’ shows men and militants lead among influential religious leaders

Of the 500 most powerful people in the world selected by the magazine *Foreign Policy* (May/June), only 24 were religious leaders. The listing compiled by the editors remains heavily populated by Americans and men; in fact, none of the religious figures was a

woman. The magazine’s “power map” included several leaders of global religions organizations, including Pope Francis; Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby; Bartholomew I, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople; the Dalai Lama; Muslim educator Fethullah

Gulen; Li Hongzhi of Falun Gong, George Wood of the Assemblies of God; and Hindu leaders Baba Ramdev and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Two megachurch leaders were included: Rick Warren of the Saddleback Church in California and William Kumuyi of Deeper

Christian Life Ministry in Lagos, Nigeria, which is reported to be the largest such congregation in the world, with a weekly attendance of 75,000. There also were several leaders of religious relief organizations, such as

Richard Stearns of World Vision. Most of the remaining religious leaders were considered powerful through their association with militant and, in some cases, extremist Muslim groups, including Al-Qaeda (four leaders),

Hezbollah, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard in Iran.

(*Foreign Policy*, 11 Dupont Circle NW, Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20036)

CURRENT RESEARCH

► **While Christians continue to make up the largest share of legal immigrants to the U.S., a new analysis by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life estimates that there has been a decline of Christian new legal permanent residents from 68 percent in 1992 to 61 percent in 2012.** During this same period the percentage of green card recipients who belong to religious minorities increased from 19 percent to 25 percent. The religious groups increasing among immigrants include Muslims (increasing from five to ten percent), and Hindus (from three to seven percent), while Buddhists decreased from seven to six percent. The percentage of immigrants who are secular or unaffiliated remained the same at about 14 percent per year. Illegal or unauthorized immigrants remain largely Christian (at 83 percent), coming from Latin America and the Caribbean—a share that is slightly higher than the percentage of Christians in the U.S. population on the whole (about 80 percent as of 2010).

► **Blaming the secularization of Sunday for the decline of a congregation misses more important issues and alleviates the**

need to consider changes to make the congregation more relevant to its social environment, writes Steve MacMullin (Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, Canada) in the *Review of Religious Research* (March). MacMullin's research is based on a survey of 16 mainline and conservative Protestant congregations in decline in Canada and the United States, plus two (rapidly growing) comparison congregations. Decline had started in most cases in the mid-sixties and had steadily continued. MacMullin was surprised to discover that, contrary to what he had expected, the most frequent reason mentioned for the congregations' decline was the secularization of Sunday (the repeal of so-called "blue laws," creating opportunities for retail shopping and Sunday work, sports activities, etc.). Competing Sunday activities seemed more important to respondents than internal factors for explaining the situation.

But, despite facing the same social environment, not all churches are declining. MacMullin acknowledges that organized sports activities on Sunday affect attendance, especially of families with children involved in sports. However, growing congregations find ways to navigate such busy Sunday schedules and respond in a positive way, offering options to find a balance and thus not losing families of these children. On the other

hand, declining congregations seem often to lack the flexibility needed to face such a changed situation. Moreover, other studies quoted in the article show that religiously active teens in Canada and the United States tend on average to be more involved in other (sports and non-sports) activities. While not dismissing the impact of secular activities on Sunday morning for church attendance, this cannot explain the extent of the decline of the congregations in MacMullin's sample. Blaming secularized Sundays allows those congregations not to identify internal factors that are contributing to their decline. Moreover, "since change is perceived to be the cause of the problem, it leads to an even greater resistance to change," such a resistance being a source of comfort for remaining members, while cultivating the nostalgic memories of long-gone days when pews used to be full.

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

► **Contemporary believers in the imminent end of the world appear to be sincere enough to refuse monetary rewards if they conflict with their expectations, according to a recent study.** At the mid-April conference of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture (ASREC) in Washington, DC, which *RW* attended, economists Ned Augenblick (University of

California), Jesse Cunha (Naval Postgraduate School and University of California), Ernesto Dal Bo (University of California), and Justin Rao (Microsoft Research) presented a case study of radio broadcaster Harold Camping of the evangelical Family Radio network, who predicted that the rapture would occur May 21, 2011 (with the final end of the world arriving on October 21 of that year) to see if his followers were willing to pay for their end-times beliefs before and after these dates. The researchers set up an experiment where they offered those attending a seminar on Camping's teaching the choice of receiving a payment of five dollars immediately or the chance of receiving a much larger payment payable by check in four weeks' time (a future date intentionally set post-May 21).

The researchers conducted the experiment among 23 Family Radio (FR) members and a control group of Seventh Day Adventists, who share a belief in the end times, although not Camping's version of it. All but one of the FR members were willing to forego larger payments in four weeks for receiving five dollars immediately in their belief that the rapture was imminent. This behavior was consistent with surveys where 100 percent of FR members said they were certain that the rapture would occur on May 21, 2011. When this event did not occur on that date, the researchers examined Internet message boards and found that followers of Camping tended to put forth alternate future dates for the rapture. Following the passing of each new predicted date, a new revision was immediately suggested and the group co-

lesced on that date. These revisions continued until Camping announced on May 23 that a "spiritual judgment" had indeed occurred. The paper concluded that the evidence indicates a sincere belief in the end of the world and future prophecy on the part of FR members, ruling out an "external profession of beliefs ... driven by exclusively social motives" or evidence-based beliefs.

► **Atheism is a strong component of the majority of philosophers' worldviews, according to a recent survey of professional philosophers conducted by David Bourget and David J. Chalmers.** In an article to be published in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Philosophical Studies*, Boeturg and Chalmers surveyed 931 professors of philosophy on a wide range of concepts and theories relating to the discipline. They found that 72.8 percent held to atheism, 14.6 percent to theism and 12.6 percent to "other" views. More held to the idea that zombies are "metaphysically possible" (23.3 percent) than to the existence of God. Specialists in various subfields of philosophy, such as the philosophy of religion, were more likely to embrace theism than generalists by a wide margin—only 20.87 percent of specialists embraced atheism, compared to 86.78 percent of non-specialists. Bourget and Chalmers found that there was a tendency among the majority to underestimate the popularity of their own views, but they conclude that atheism, along with such concepts as "scientific realism" and taking a cognitive approach to moral judgement, are among the few positions that tend toward a consensus among philosophers. Such

philosophical views tend to come in a "package" with other views and were affected by respondents' professional backgrounds, specializations, and intellectual orientations.

(Study cited in the website <http://www.PhilPapers.org/rec/Bouwdp>)

► **The religious ethical principles embodied in Protestantism tend to encourage entrepreneurship more than Roman Catholic ethics, according to a study by two Italian economists.** Luca Nunziata and Lorenzo Rocco of the University of Padua presented their paper at the ASREC conference, arguing that its findings confirm Max Weber's influential thesis on the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. The economists note that most research since the seminal Weber study has failed to confirm its thesis that there is an affinity between Protestantism and the development of modern capitalism. Nunziata and Rocco note that most of the difficulty in establishing this relationship has been because of limitations in the data; rates of religious affiliation and even basic beliefs and practices do not necessarily suggest that religious ethics would inform economic activity. For this reason, Nunziata and Rocco focus on Protestant and Catholic minorities in Europe, since they are more likely to be religious rather than nominally affiliated with a church and engage in more of a struggle to keep their religion in relation to a majority, and are thus the most likely to hold religious ethical principles.

By analyzing European Social Survey data from 2002 and 2008, as well as other relevant data, the

economists find that adherence to Protestant ethical principles increases the likelihood that one will become an entrepreneur by about 3.3 percent in respect to Catholics—a significant difference, since only about 13 percent of working individuals in Europe are self-employed. This result remains even when controlled for such variables as education, immigration (whether the minorities were first- or second-generation immigrants), economic development, and regional differences. The minority status was important since the researchers found being a Protestant in a region where this religion is the majority produced no such effect. The greater rate of devotion found among religious minorities that may result among Protestants in encouraging individual success and achievement, along with such factors as an entrepreneurial family background, were the most important factors in encouraging entrepreneurship.

► **Both secularized and religious countries are likely to feature high levels of anti-religious sentiment and activism, often depending on the level of education and age, according to a study by Dutch researchers in the journal *Politics and Religion* (No. 6,**

2013). There has been some debate among scholars about whether a strongly religious or a more secular society fosters anti-religious sentiment—as seen in the new atheist phenomenon. Researchers Egbert Ribberink, Peter Achterberg and Dick Houtman of Erasmus University analyzed data from the 2008 International Social Survey—which is the most extensive in asking people about their attitudes toward religion and religious people—and found evidence for both theories. Anti-religiousness is a reaction against religion and is evident in religious countries, especially among the highly educated and young. But anti-religious sentiment was also found to be strong on the opposite side of the spectrum—among the older and less educated in more secular nations. The authors venture that this tendency could be seen in the reaction against Islam in secular European countries by those who resent such newcomers and their faiths.

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

► **While there has not been more media coverage of religion in Scandinavia during the last 20 years, the treatment of this subject in the press and films has become more diverse and, in the case of Sweden and**

Denmark, more de-institutionalized from the established Lutheran churches, according to recent research. In the *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* (Vol. 26, No. 1), Kati Niemela reports on findings from the NOREL project, which studied the role of religion in the public sphere of the five Nordic countries, and finds that while there was an increase of religion coverage in the media between 1988 and 1998, there was an actual decline of this coverage compared to the period 1998–2008. The study, which was based on a content analysis of newspaper, magazine and film treatment of religion in Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, and Norway, did find that there was more religion in film between 2005 and 2008. But because the differences were small, the researchers did not find that there was a greater visibility of religion in the media. But the results also showed that institutional religion was being challenged. This could be seen in the increased coverage of Islam in Sweden and in Denmark (and also the paranormal in Denmark). In Finland and, especially, Iceland, more attention was paid to the established Lutheran churches, while Norway lay in between these four countries.

Ireland continues secularization amid signs of vitality

There are pockets of religious vitality in Ireland, but secularization continues to transform the country. In *America* magazine (May 20), Archbishop

of Dublin Diarmuid Martin writes that it is no longer the case of a “secularized, urban Ireland and a healthy, rural Ireland. The same cultural processes are at work across the country.” In focusing on Dublin, Martin notes that recent research based on the 2011 census figures, which were matched to parish and diocese

boundaries, found that the population of the diocese was increasing but the numbers of those registering as Catholic had remained at 1.2 million. About one-quarter of the diocese registered as something other than Catholic, well above the national average. “It is very clear that of the three quarters who ticked the

‘Catholic box’ on the census form, many would not be practicing or even in any real contact with the church. This gives a very different demographic picture than the one at times presented or presumed. There are already parishes in Dublin [which are referred to as defining geographical areas] where Catholics are in a minority, and it is clear that the cultural Catholicism that today still exists will not continue forever,” Martin writes.

In parish life, at least in Dublin, Martin finds that Mass attendance is highest in middle-class parishes, “where parishioners are middle-class economically and liberal middle-of-the-road on matters of church teaching.” Where there are any signs of youth participation in church life, “it is among more conservative young Catholics,” although these movements are small and make “few inroads into the lives of their peers.” The *New York Times* (April 3) reports that there is an “improbable revival of the Dominican order of preachers,” even as other orders close their doors. The Dominicans are growing in other countries as well, but its resurgence—drawing far more candidates than just the 12 men studying for the parish priesthood in the whole nation—is striking, since the order, like many others, has faced child abuse accusations.

The order’s revival has coincided with Ireland’s economic crisis, though officials claim that most of the potential candidates were already in prospering careers and “came to the order because of a yearning for greater spirituality.” Doreen Carvajal writes that it is partly the monastic garb

(contrasting with traditional clerical collars) and traditions, including communal lifestyles and prayer, while allowing members to work in the outside world. The Dominicans have also recruited through the Internet earlier than other orders.

Christian parties drawing on nationalist, anti-Islamic support in the Netherlands

Small conservative Christian political parties are finding new appeal in the Netherlands among those seeking to counter Islamic influence in the country, according to Dutch political scientist Hans J.P. Vollaard. In an article in the journal *Politics and Religion* (No. 6), Vollaard notes that such parties as the Christian Democratic Appeal were founded by conservative Calvinists as an attempt to fight secularism and reinsert religion into the public sphere, even trying to make common cause with Muslims. But in recent years concern about Muslims and Islamic influence in Dutch society has figured more highly in the discourse of these parties, including the highly Calvinistic Political Reformed Party, drawing more secular Dutch concerned with issues such as civil liberties.

These parties have attracted few Catholic or immigrant Christian voters (who are becoming a majority among Christians in the Netherlands), who often support secular, left-wing parties. But these parties’ stress on the Christian roots of the Netherlands has gained some traction even with secular parties. Today

references to the “Judeo-Christian” roots of the nation are heard in the secular and anti-Islamic Freedom Party of Geert Wilders, even if they are framed by concerns about individual freedom, tolerance, and the separation of church and state. Vollaard concludes that the Dutch case “illustrated how Christianity re-emerges in politics through the cultural defense mechanism, not only among Christian but also secular parties.” This trend is evident in other European countries where “the challenge of Islam also incentivized secular parties to start propagating the (Judeo)-Christian heritage of Europe and its nations.”

Orthodox churches show new missionary interest in Eastern Europe, Russia

Eastern Orthodox churches are engaging in new efforts at missionary work often adopting models from Orthodox and non-Orthodox sources, according to the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (April). Missionary work in Eastern Orthodox churches has largely been confined within national or other local boundaries in which an Orthodox presence already existed or was conducted in close collaboration with the state or emperor, writes Valentin Kozhuharov. Even after the collapse of communism, when missionary work of Western churches developed in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Orthodox churches largely did not launch any similar efforts. Even today there are no mission departments in Orthodox bodies and missiology is not taught in

Orthodox seminaries, with the exception of Russia and Romania. A number of parishes and dioceses have undertaken church initiatives, often called “*diakona*.” The Orthodox are more likely to see such activity as serving as a “presence” in society rather than active evangelism or involvement in people’s lives. A major exception of an Orthodox movement actively evangelizing the population is the Lord’s Army in Romania.

To develop the idea of connecting mission activity with witnessing to Christ, mission-minded Orthodox priests and laity have looked to Orthodox and non-Orthodox models of such activity. They have also participated in conferences and consultation on the missions with those from other churches. The Greek church has been organizing widespread church planting in many countries of the world, and missionary tendencies are manifesting themselves in Balkan countries. “Christian movements resembling mission movements have been organized in Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova,” Kozhuharov adds. The establishment of the Orthodox Mission Network in 2010, initiated by the Anglican Church Mission Society, is another example of the Eastern European Orthodox missionary movement. Still, there are obstacles between building a strong missionary movement and Orthodoxy. For instance, many missionaries may engage in charitable work and not at first tie it into church doctrine or rituals and teachings (such as baptisms) as Orthodox tradition might dictate.

(*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 490 Prospect St., New Haven, CT 06511)

Sufis under Salafi pressure in Tunisia

More than 40 tombs of Muslim saints have been destroyed or attacked in Tunisia since the January 2011 revolution, a sign of growing fierce, and sometimes militant, Salafi opposition to Sufi practices of piety, writes Annette Steinich in the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (April 12). In the only case in which culprits were arrested, the arsonists who had set fire to the tomb of a 12th century female mystic were found to be three radical Salfis. Since many of those tombs are also historical monuments, this has also led to the destruction of a valuable cultural legacy.

This is shocking to many people in Tunisia and elsewhere, especially since such practices had been accepted for centuries. The veneration of saints and respect for their tombs is not a fringe phenomenon in Islam. However, rigorist currents such as Wahhabism and now Salafism see such practices as superstitious and even blasphemous. Educated Sufis claim, however, that people coming to pray to the tombs are actually addressing their prayers to God.

Across the Muslim world Salafism has been critical of such traditional and popular piety. Such views are supported by propaganda spread from Saudi Arabia, where Wahhabism is the official expression of Islam. According to the director of the Institute of National Cultural Heritage, Adnan Louhichi, the attacks should not

be seen as isolated incidents, but as part of a strategy against “moderate” forms of Islam. Anti-Sufism thus becomes part of a wider concern about the growing activism of Salafi groups. Most of them do not support armed insurrection, although some groups are willing to engage in armed struggle: the others hope to influence society in their direction and hope to earn support through various activities, including charitable work. According to an interview by another Swiss daily, *Le Temps* (May 3), with a French expert on Salafism, Romain Caillet, some members of the leading Islamic political party, Ennahda, would like to see the government take a more determined stand against Salafism, but most Ennahda members prefer to favor the unity of the Islamic field; thus the government is willing to give free rein to Salafis as long as they do not advocate violence.

In the meantime Sufis have started cooperating in an attempt to present a united front: the main Sufi brotherhoods launched a Sufi Union in late 2011. They are willing to engage in discussion with all sectors of civil society, including political parties, but do not want to directly enter the political field themselves or to associate with a specific political party: Sufi centers should not be turned into political places, according to their spokesman.

Orthodox Jews show dramatic shift on sexuality in Israel

The teaching on sexuality in the Orthodox Jewish community in Israel has undergone a dramatic shift since the 1990s, writes Orit

Avishai (Fordham University) in an article published in the newest issue of *Fieldwork in Religion* (November 2012). While not unique to Orthodox Jews, sexual anxieties tend to be exacerbated in a community where modesty is an imperative, girls are not supposed to touch boys and the female body must be concealed. No form of premarital intimacy is allowed and sexuality is not supposed to be discussed in the community. The wedding makes sex transform overnight from "forbidden" to "permissible." There is a struggle in reconciling desire and pleasure with ideal images of masculinity and femininity within a community where the body tends to be erased. Obviously, this also depends of the level of exposure to secular Israeli culture.

Avishai has identified three types of strategies by bridal counselors that exist in an attempt to address these issues and facilitate a switch by reconciling carnality/desire with piety/religiosity. A traditionalist approach "sanctifies sexuality by removing it from the realm of the flesh. Marital relations are described as spiritual. Pure thoughts should remove carnality through rituals. However, this approach does not escape a contradiction: while describing repugnance toward all things sexual as 'Christian,' its description of sex as a spiritual commandment associated with prayers and 'pure thoughts' can actually engender a negative approach of sexuality," writes Avishai.

A pragmatic response affirms pleasure and desire while maintaining distance from secular,

hedonistic views. It attempts to normalize desire and to make young women familiar with their own bodies. While space is allowed for some erotic self-exploration, sanctioned sexuality remains restricted to marital relationships. Finally, there is a reformist approach, especially through Kolech, a feminist/progressive Orthodox women's organization. It is primarily associated with reformist and feminist causes, and its direct impact is limited. But "modern" approaches toward sexuality are also influencing more traditionalist women, according to Avishai's observations. The Orthodox Jewish community is "negotiating its sensibilities" in a search for answers to problems of the flesh. Avishai suggests that major shifts are taking place and that such attempts should not be judged by progressive yardsticks, as is often done: the regulation and affirmation of sexuality can also get along with each other.

(*Fieldwork in Religion*, Equinox Publishing, Unit S3, Kelham House, 3 Lancaster Street, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S3 8AF, UK).

Renewed controversies regarding Karaite identity in Israel

After years of relative quiet, rabbis working for Israel's Ministry of Religion have reopened an old controversy by claiming that Karaites are not truly Jewish, reports *The Economist* (May 18). For many centuries Karaites have lived a separate life: this ancient current of Judaism does not accept the Talmud (oral law) or rabbinical traditions, and its followers only

recognize the Torah (Hebrew Bible)—thus they have sometimes been dubbed as "Protestant Jews." While Karaites in Egypt and other areas of the Arab world always identified themselves as Jews, communities of Karaites living in the Russian Empire in the 19th century developed an understanding of themselves as a separate, Mosaic religion, distinct from Jews (which allowed them to be spared from Nazi persecutions in Russia during the Second World War). Whatever their self-understanding, mainstream Judaism considers Karaites to be heretical.

A declining group around the world, Karaites settled in Israel (primarily immigrants from Egypt) and seem to have enjoyed some sort of revival and growth in recent years: they are reported to number around 30,000 in the country and in 2010 inaugurated a new synagogue in Ashdod. While making up less than 1 percent of Israel's Jewish population, their presence once again raises the question of Jewish identity. *The Economist* reports that rabbis working for the state have started to deem Karaite marriages to be invalid and have requested in some cases the conversion of Karaite women wanting to marry Orthodox Jews. Karaite butchers have also been fined for labeling their meat as kosher. But Israel's Supreme Court has forced the rabbis to legitimize Karaite marriages again.

However, Karaites do not merely ask for their rights: they are also considering setting up their own institutions in reaction to rabbis who refuse to recognize them as Jews. At a recent seminar a

representative of the Karaite community "asked the Israeli state to recognise his *Bet Din*, or religious court, so that he could license marriages and be paid a salary." In a different way, beside the definition of Jewish identity, the predicament of the Karaites is similar to some issues faced in Israel by non-Orthodox sections of Judaism and once again raises the question of the role of Israel's Chief Rabbinate on such issues.

Tithing, fasting pays dividends to India's Dalit Christians

Tithing and fasting may be a factor in raising the standard of living for poor Dalit Indians, according to a study by Rebecca Shah of Georgetown University. The preliminary study, presented at the

ASREC conference, studied the financial outcomes of Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and mixed-faith families of Dalits, or "untouchables", in three slums in Bangalore, India. Shah interviewed 300 female clients of a microfinance company and found that they engaged in different kinds of financial planning.

In studying the different kinds of loans that were taken out by these clients, Shah found that those families that tithed to their churches on a weekly or monthly basis were more likely to use loans to send their children to private schools. They were also more likely to use their loans to invest in business and in care for their children. Most of these Christians were Pentecostals who were more likely to fast than Muslims and

fellow Christians. Shah noted that those who regularly tithed were not more financially well off than the others in the study; in fact, they earned less and were less educated than their Hindu and non-tithing Christian counterparts.

Shah argues that tithing and fasting are "future-oriented" practices that induce the poor to start saving their money rather than spending it on immediate gratification with the idea that "one must spend today because there will be little to spend in the future Seeing all of one's money as a loan from God fosters self-restraint and limits over consumption Tithing means that there is hope in the future and that it is in God's hands." Shah concludes that both practices exercise "voluntary self-control" that results in improved family

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

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

Alternatives.

■ The current issue of the journal **Culture and Religion** (Vol. 14, No. 1) looks at "spaces of renewal," meaning places of religious pilgrimage that allow for a break from everyday life. The articles range from an examination of how visitors to such traditional pilgrimage sites as Santiago de Compostela have replaced recreation with religion by undertaking healing practices at Lourdes and Irish holy wells. While not exactly a pilgrimage site, there is also an interesting article on the Catholic community and university

of Ave Maria in Florida. Authors Brad Huff and J. Anthony Stallins note that the planned community is intent on creating a conservative Catholic oasis in a secular landscape, although financial interests due to the housing crisis tend to blur the lines between residents and outsiders. Intersecting the Ave Maria community is a senior "lifestyle community" that markets to potential residents along more secular lines. For more information on this issue visit: *Culture and Religion*, <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles>

■ Demographic researcher Mary Eberstadt argues in her new book **How the West Really Lost God** (Templeton Press, \$19.96) that not only does religious commitment lead to larger families, but that family life itself generates religious devotion. The book thus provides a twist to the standard secularization theory,

arguing that the family decline and birth dearth in places like Europe is the engine driving of religious decline rather than weak religion causing demographic decline. Eberstadt writes that the "natural family" mediates religious experience for individuals and when such disruptive factors as widespread contraception, divorce, legal abortion, and single parenthood become the norm in societies, religious faith is severely undercut. She writes that if it is true that religious faith propels family growth, "then we would not expect to see religious people having larger numbers of children than do nonreligious people, even when their religion allows them the option of contraception. Yet we do see that connection repeatedly across different Christian denominations in different places and times." It is also the case that leading secular

societies such as France tended to show family decline well before widespread membership losses in the churches.

As to why family life has such a strong effect on religion, Eberstadt relies more on speculation than available research (few studies have been done on this relationship). She argues that aside from the obvious reason of families reproducing potential church members, the family is the arena where adults experience self-sacrificial behavior and a sense of transcendence (such as through the experience of childbirth) that can lead to a religious faith. Children also drive parents to find a community and like-minded people in order to inculcate and pass on moral values. Grasping the basics of Christianity, such as the fatherhood of God, requires experience with a real father in a family, according to Eberstadt. The growth of single-parent and other unconventional families makes it more difficult to those involved to understand Christian teachings, even generating resentment against Christianity for condemning their relationships. Thus Eberstadt sees secularization increasing in most of the West where these family changes are most prevalent; yet the decline of the welfare state in Europe may inadvertently revive traditional families for the forms of social the support they offer, actually leading to renewed religious vitality.

■ Naomi Schaefer Riley's *'Til Faith Do Us Part* (Oxford University Press, 24.95) is a compelling account of interfaith marriage that shows both the benefits and difficulties of such relationships. Somewhat uniquely for a journalistic treatment, Riley commissioned a poll of 2,450 Americans on the subject of interfaith marriage and finds varying levels of acceptance of and adaptation

to these partnerships. As previous studies have shown, same-faith marriages show somewhat higher levels of satisfaction than do interfaith ones (8.4 versus 7.9, on a scale of 10); mainline Protestant and Catholics are more satisfied in these marriages than are evangelicals. Riley integrates the survey's findings into her interview accounts with interfaith couples and clergy (with an interesting section on the clergy specializing in providing interfaith ceremonies).

She notes that interfaith dating and marriage are highly accepted by Americans (the most taking place in the far western states), leaving Mormons (the least likely to be intermarried), evangelicals and Orthodox Jews as the sole dissenters against the practice. Riley offers an interesting chapter on how Jews—who have the highest interfaith marriage rates—can learn from Mormons, although the Jewish leadership seems disinclined to take Mormon advice, such as encouraging young marriages. Riley points out that interfaith marriage may have benefits for society, increasing tolerance of religious difference and lowering prejudice, but admits that the practice just as often challenges religious identities and traditions. She concludes that challenging the silence most dating couples experience about interfaith relationships will be difficult, since most religious institutions do not speak with their young adults about its costs and difficulties.

■ Corwin E. Smidt's *American Evangelicals Today* (Rowman & Littlefield, \$38) is based on an analysis of the 2007 Pew Religious Landscape Survey, which included a large sample of evangelicals (9,000), and more recent studies, providing a unique portrait of the social, religious, and political characteristics of

this unwieldy movement—or tradition, as Smidt argues. He finds that evangelicals make up the largest religious tradition in America, representing 26.3 percent of the population, although their growth has leveled off over the past decade or two. Overall, considerable doctrinal unity remains in evangelicalism, despite growing ethnic diversity. Generational differences, such as between the millennial generation and baby boomers, are present, but not always in the expected directions of the former holding more liberal views and following more liberal practices; for instance, millennial evangelicals are actually more likely to claim their religion as the one true faith, even if they go to church less than older evangelicals (which may be a life-cycle effect).

While much has been made of younger evangelicals holding to more liberal political views than older ones, Smidt finds that the differences in “social theology” and politics are stronger between various ethnic groups (such as black evangelicals) and especially “traditionalists” versus non-traditionalist. Older and younger evangelicals may differ on issues such as the Republican Party and homosexuality, yet the differences with the millennial generations of different traditions are greater than those of different generations within the evangelical camp. Smidt forecasts that evangelicals will likely remain about the same size while showing loosening denominational attachments, divisions between traditionalists and “reformists,” and weakened political cohesiveness.

■ Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) is a rapidly growing industry that enables average people to immerse themselves in a fantasy world where they are the antagonist. In his new

book **eGods** (Oxford University Press, \$24.95), William Sims Bainbridge explores the possibility that online gaming, while not necessarily being completely at fault for the growing lack of religious faith, may be an underlying factor in the process of a faithless society. This is partially due to fantasy providing more imaginative and therefore more beneficial outlets for the individual in the sense that it gives them the freedom to create and achieve goals that are unrelated to reality, while not stimulating their religious needs or beliefs. Bainbridge believes this is due to the amount of diverse culture that is inadvertently displayed in online video games, i.e. the presence of gods, magic and mythology in gameplay that reaches a broad audience of all ages.

The book takes a deeper look into the role that both fantasy and faith play in life, which is especially prevalent in online gaming. Spending countless hours socializing and becoming thoroughly involved in gaming communities, Bainbridge traversed through the virtual universes of the world's leading MMORPGs to the standard online games on a quest of his own, discovering and taking note of the benefits (or lack thereof) that separated each. His research shows reduced favoritism among games that were more faith-based and required elaborate rituals, while the more popular MMORPGs were focused on the individual's race and ability, with faith-based characters (clerics, priests, etc.) acting as their aids in battle. He reports that such individual avatars, played by human beings, appeared to be gods themselves in the gaming world. Their attributes and skills, coupled with their devotion to completing quests and receiving awards, transcended them through levels, making them more powerful and better respected in

the fictional realm that surrounds them.

Bainbridge provides remarkable insight into the sociological view on faith and fantasy, and also poses new theories on the human need and desire to achieve. Online gaming, while in itself a very powerful and often misunderstood and highly criticized market, has shown through its popularity that people crave not only fantasy, but the ability to gain respect through their actions and devotion that can be seen and not simply promised, as is often the case with faith. While religion is prominent in gameplay, it is not forced or often even available for the players to engage in, more commonly remaining a part of a story that is usually restricted to all except the non-player characters who serve only to sell items or hand out quests. So it is not the lack of religion in gameplay that Bainbridge believes plays a vital role in the secularization of the player, but the denied admission that is a crucial part of his study.—*Reviewed by Caitlin Maddox, an Oklahoma-based writer and researcher.*

■ Attacks against sacred spaces are growing around the world and are often aimed at maximizing violence, according to the new book **Protecting the Sacred, Creating Peace in Asia Pacific** (Transaction, \$39.95). Edited by Chiwat Satha-Anand and Olivier Urbain, the book brings together six scholars and activists to address the global trend of violence against religious symbols, buildings, and practitioners, focusing especially on Southeast Asia (and Thailand, Israel-Palestine, and India more specifically). The incidents profiled in 2012 alone range from grenade attacks on a Buddhist temple in Thailand, to ultraorthodox Jews causing serious damage to a fourth-century synagogue in Jerusalem, to Chinese police demolishing a

mosque in the Ningxia region. In the introduction Satha-Anand writes that violence against sacred space is sometimes strategically used in ethnoreligious conflicts to maximize effect: in the “zero-sum game dynamics of ethnic conflicts, violence against sacred space may serve different types of perpetrators’ emotional needs: fear, rage, revenge and the thirst for justice.”

While extremist Muslim groups are often behind many of these attacks on sacred places, mosques and other Islamic sacred sites are found to be targeted more than other religious symbols and structures. The concluding chapter reports on the progress of a campaign to protect sacred places launched by the International Movement for a Just World in 2002. Contributor Chandra Muzaffar finds that while a widely supported declaration was issued, an attempt to get a UN resolution on the issue did not succeed, partly because of poor media coverage.

■ The new book **Assertive Religion: Religious Intolerance in a Multicultural World** (Transaction, \$39.95) by Dutch anthropologist Emanuel de Kadt seems like one of many works critiquing “fundamentalist” groups of many faiths throughout the world. But the book also reflects the growing public disenchantment regarding multicultural policies in Europe, especially in their recognition of Islamic groups and identities. While de Kadt disassociates himself from new rightist movements and leaders, such as Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, who attack multiculturalism for permitting religious minorities to undermine national identity, he also lays the blame for much of the discord on Islam—both in its mainstream and more militant expressions. De Kadt argues that too few Muslim leaders or groups are truly

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“progressive” or tolerant, a problem which he traces to an underlying authoritarian foundation of the religion itself. He tends to see these elements in all revelation-based religions, also looking at cases of Jewish and Christian forms of fundamentalism, although such faiths have generated more influential reformist or progressive movements.

■ In his new book ***Disrupting Dark Networks*** (Cambridge University Press, \$46.99), Sean Everton applies social network theory in the counterinsurgency attempts to thwart terrorist and criminal networks. Just where the religious factor figures in Everton’s complex and quantitative study is suggested in the concept of “dark networks.” The sociologist defines these networks as operating through secrecy and invisibility from authorities—not always to bad ends, as seen in networks resisting Nazism. But in today’s world the concept is most applicable to “global salafi

jihadi” networks, such as Al-Qaeda and groups carrying out suicide attacks. Social network theory seeks to understand the connections and interactions between members and their leaderships, as well as with other groups and even states.

Everton writes that new techniques used to detect changes in the makeup of networks were actually able to trace—unfortunately in hindsight—how Al-Qaeda became more unified at a certain point and could carry out the attacks against the U.S. He argues that the attempt to integrate dark networks into civil society may be slower than more aggressive efforts to target key players in counterinsurgency, but could be more effective. He provides the example of analysts being able to “identify central jihadi schools and build alternative schools nearby, ones that promote moderate forms of Islam and instruct students in subjects other than the memorization of the Qur’an.”

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