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For more than two decades Religion Watch has covered religions around the world, particularly looking at the unofficial dimensions of religious belief and behavior.

This is produced by Religion News and the Center on Religion and the Professions, in cooperation with Religioscope Institute.

A liberationist and charismatic pope?

The election of Pope Francis and his subsequent writings and statements to the media have led some observers to speculate that more liberal forms of Catholicism, namely liberation theology, may be revived under his papacy. *The Tablet* (September 21), a British Catholic magazine, editorializes that under Pope Francis, “liberation theology is experiencing something of a revival,” tracing its rehabilitation back to Pope Benedict XVI’s appointment of Archbishop Gerhard Müller to head the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). Müller is a close friend of Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of liberation theology, and has declared his theology as being sound—“which is more than Pope Benedict ever managed to do.” While Pope Francis was said to be cool to liberation theology when he was elected, he has since appeared increasingly friendly

to it. He is now in regular contact with Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian theologian who was disciplined for his liberationist writings under the previous pope when he was head of the CDF.

The Tablet’s editorial continues that as the more Marxist elements of liberation theology “have fallen away” in recent years, it is easier for church officials such as Francis to be friendlier to the theology.

However, liberation theology’s claim that the poor “have spiritual insights into the Gospel message that others may lack” is bound to make middle-class Catholics uncomfortable. The most recent reports of rapprochement between the Vatican and proponents of liberation

... As the more Marxist elements of liberation theology “have fallen away” in recent years, it is easier for church officials such as Francis to be friendlier to the theology.

theology have been triggered by an expected meeting between Gutierrez and the pope, as well as an expected move

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Mexican-American folk healing now attracting a multiethnic clientele

The willingness of New Agers and members of the alternative healing community—heavily overlapping—to appropriate and refashion Native American and Asian traditions is well known. Now, however, the American metaphysical milieu is a channel for the spread of Mexican-American folk and religious healing to new groups, writes Brett Hendrickson (Lafayette College, Easton, PA) in the *Journal of the Amer-*

ican Academy of Religion (September). At the same time, healers are amending their practices and discourses according to their new popularity. Called *curanderismo*, Mexican-American healing practices are the result of the colonial encounter between the Spanish and indigenous inhabitants of what is now Mexico and the American Southwest.

► Continued on page 2



Two women depetal roses on a cloth surface. Roses have a long history of use in alternative medicine.
SOURCE: Mehta.ankit via Wikimedia Commons

Mexican-American folk healing (cont. from p. 1)

There were later inputs of spiritualism, devotion to folk saints, and biomedical knowledge. Herbal remedies, ritual prescriptions, massage and sometimes spirit channeling are part of the healing practices for physical and other problems. There has always been some interaction with white patients in the border region; but Mexican-American healing practices have now begun to find a place in the services offered by both white and Mexican-American metaphysical healers.

Hendrickson traces the roots of such an approach to the romanticization of Indian and Mexican-American spirituality, seeing their religious views as close to unadulterated wisdom.

The fascination for shamanism has paved the way for an opening to Mexican-American healing practices. Summarizing the biography of prominent Mexican-American healer Elena Avila, Hendrick-

son shows how she emphasized the “Aztec” identity of her teachers, thus endowing her message with the authenticity of a native tradition carrying prequest knowledge (and downplaying—but not ignoring—the Spanish contribution to *curanderismo*), and also answering the spiritual demand of white people for Native American wisdom.

Yet, conversations with Mexican and other Latin American healers indicate *curanderismo* has taken on new features in recent decades, notes Hendrickson.

Going one step further, vocabulary familiar in New Age circles, such as *chakras*, is now commonly used by Mexican-American healing practitioners for explaining how their system

works. Thus has *curanderismo* become one more product available in the American spiritual marketplace. Some offer it on the Internet (including “distant spiritual cleansing” for payment), beside other techniques, and prices are rising. Courses and workshops are offered for people of non-Mexican-American

backgrounds, although some Mexican-Americans resent the fact of losing such a cultural marker. Moreover, not all healers have adjusted to the needs of a multiethnic, metaphysical clientele.

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(*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, www.aarweb.org/publications/journal-american-academy-religion.) ■

A liberationist pope *(cont. from p. 1)*

toward sainthood for Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was assassinated by the military regime in 1980 and already a patron saint of the Catholic left.

In an article in the *Huffington Post* (Sept. 24), historian Andrew Chesnut acknowledges that Pope Francis has adopted “liberationist discourse.” These statements include decrying an exploitative global economic system that worships “the God of money” and reverting to Vatican II terminology calling the church the “people of God.” But the media is missing the equally strong charismatic dimension of the pope’s program. He regularly praises the Catholic charismatic movement (although he was once a critic of the movement) and recently spoke of the importance of such “gifts of

the spirit” as discernment—a word he used 21 times in his much-cited recent interview with the magazine *America*.

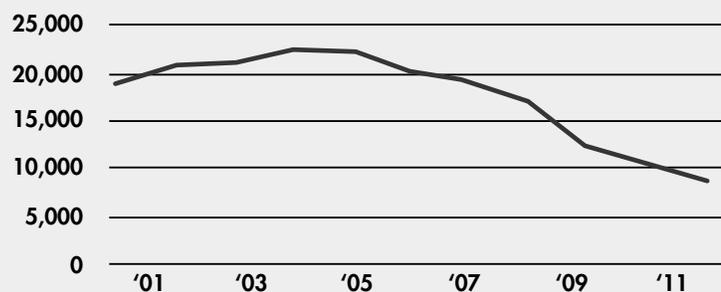
Francis’ frequent call for evangelization and his call for the church to be a “field hospital after battle” are adopted from charismatics and Protestant Pentecostals “who go so far in some churches in Latin America as to have ushers dressed in white nurses uniforms and pastors in doctors’ smocks!” Chesnut concludes in his *Huffington Post* article that the pope is “developing a powerful synthesis of what has been the two competing theological tendencies in Latin America.”

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

American evangelicals’ investment in foreign adoptions a factor in child trafficking?

The heavy involvement in foreign adoptions by American evangelicals, many of whom have developed a “theology of orphans,” may be a factor in increasing cases of abuse and corruption among some adoption agencies and the countries of adoptees, according to recent reports. Journalist Kathryn Joyce has been among those reporting on how “some evangelicals have fueled the global adoption frenzy” and how this has had unintended consequences in the growth of trafficked children, according to an interview in *Sojourners* magazine (September/October). Joyce says “adoption has become a powerful metaphor in many evangelical churches studying and preaching what has become known as adoption or orphan theology. Many leaders within the movement teach that earthly adoption is a perfect mirror of Christian adoption by God, and it’s a way “Christians can put their faith into action in a very personal way.”

International-to-U.S. adoption rates



SOURCE: Graphic by T.J. Thomson | Data from Mother Jones, *Orphan Fever: The Evangelical Movement’s Adoption Obsession*, May/June 2013 issue

► Continued on **page 4**

Foreign adoptions *(cont. from p. 3)*

Leaders from the Southern Baptist Convention churches and Saddleback Church's Rick Warren have urged Christians to consider adopting children from developing countries, and many of the largest adoption agencies are Christian. Joyce adds that evangelical families often enter the international adoption process without realizing the potential for corruption in agencies and impoverished countries, where children might be coerced from poor but intact families.

In the evangelical magazine *Books & Culture* (August 26), writer Jonathan Merritt acknowledges that the evangelical partnership on adoption, found in such a group as the Christian Alliance for Orphans, seemed a "perfect match...Evangelicals, who routinely affirm the authority of Scripture, were confronted with unambiguous biblical admonitions to care for the 'least of these' and to 'look after orphans and widows in distress.' Additionally, the new emphasis on adoption tapped into

the group's opposition to abortion." Merritt also noted that the huge swell of evangelical adoptions in many countries during the early 2000s was rife with misinformation (such as exaggerating the actual numbers of orphans) and corruption in "sending-countries."

But Merritt argues that Joyce's reporting of the evangelical adoption movement paints with too wide of a brush. Her portrayal of fringe groups and large home-schooling families, such as those in the conservative "Quiverfull movement" is misleading. It actually represents a small and unrepresentative percentage of evangelicals involved in the issue. He charges that Joyce's recent book on the subject ignores the work of the evangelical Bethany Christian Services, the largest adoption agency in the U.S., which has addressed many of Joyce's concerns, including safeguarding against child trafficking.

(*Sojourners*, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200. Washington DC 20010; *Books & Culture*, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188.) ■

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Catholic philanthropists retool and save Catholic schools vitality, conservatism

While Catholic schools still close regularly, philanthropy plus innovation within independent parochial schools are reviving Catholic education, particularly in inner cities, writes Michael Sean Winters in *The Tablet* (Sept. 21). In the past decade, some 2,000 U.S. Catholic schools have closed, often in areas serving low-income students. In cities, such as Atlanta, Dallas and Phoenix, where Catholic populations are growing, the demand for Catholic schooling is strong, so the church has found a way—often through scholar-

ship programs—to establish new schools. Another sign of hope for Catholic schools is the "growing attention they are receiving from Catholic philanthropists," Winters adds.

The group Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities (FADICA), has a working group of philanthropists from across the country who support innovations to ensure the sustainability of Catholic schools. One network drawing donors' funding is the Cristo Rey Jesuit schools,

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St. Thomas High School is a Roman Catholic, all-male preparatory school in Texas.

SOURCE: *WhisperToMe* via *Wikimedia Commons*

Catholic school retooling *(cont. from p. 4)*

which has programs giving students jobs in the business world, with their earnings used to offset tuition costs. Close to 100 percent of the graduates from the 26-school network go on to college. Another independent Catholic network

receiving philanthropic support is the NativityMiguel schools, aimed at middle school students. Their distinguishing mark is a longer school year and days than public schools plus their high graduation rates (85-90 percent). Such schools are described as a

“breakthrough” because they are filling the gap of serving poor students—the same populations facing the closing of Catholic schools, says Stephen Schneck of Catholic University of America’s Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies. ■

Lutheran schisms slowing down after 2009 gay ordination decision

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America experienced a total loss of more than 700 out of its 9,533 congregations resulting from its 2009 decision to ordain gays and lesbians, with the local environment being a significant factor in determining which churches leave or stay with the denomination. Wayne Thompson of Carthage College presented the most up-to-date figures on churches departing the denomination in a paper presented at the August meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) in New York, which **RW** attended. Thompson said that since the 1970s, Lutherans had become more tolerant—and at a faster rate—of homosexuality than Americans as a whole. Thompson found that the “conservative moral ecology” of the region in which a congregation is located and clergy social networks (if their contacts existed outside of the ELCA or not) made a difference in decisions to leave the ELCA.

In addition, isolated Lutheran clergy that exist

in regions such as southwest Texas and Montana was a factor in clergy and congregations leaving the ELCA. The influence of regional bishops also made a difference in whether a congregation departed—some local bishops have made it easier to leave and supported congregational decisions.

Most of the congregations that left have joined the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, a decentralized association of churches often of Scandinavian background, (with 300,000 members) or the North American Lutheran Church, a more hierarchical body that has drawn many German members in Pennsylvania and Ohio (with 120,000-150,000 members). Aside from

recent departures over the 2013 election of a gay bishop, Thompson concludes that the new Lutheran denominations are unlikely to grow much larger, leaving the ELCA with a membership of about 4.5 million. ■

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Lutherans had become more tolerant—and at a faster rate—of homosexuality than Americans as a whole.

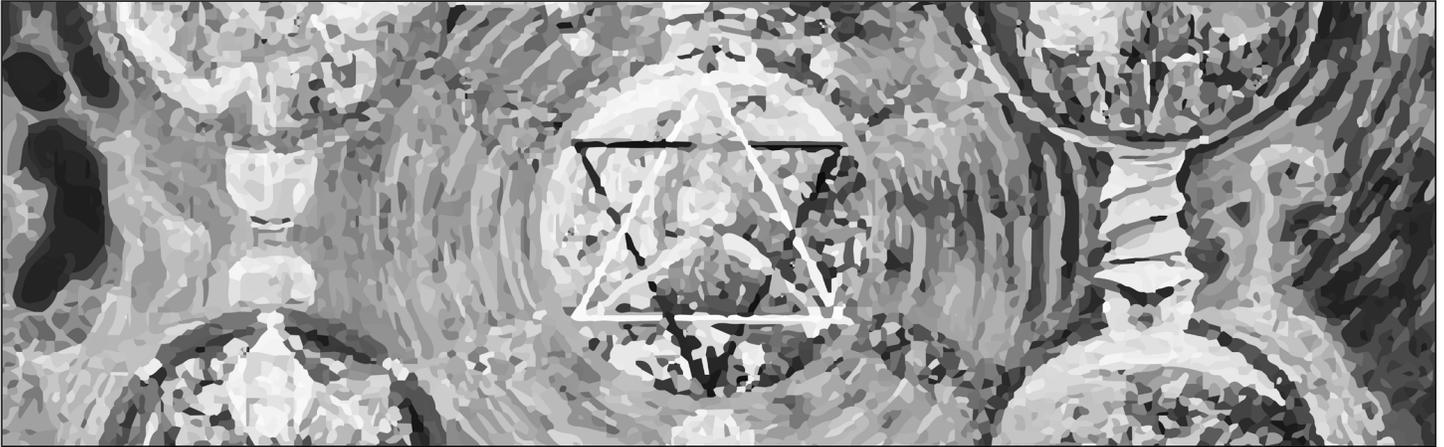
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Kabbalah use diversifies for Jewish and spiritual marketplace

While the name “Kabbalah” may seem to be evocative of one, specific spiritual tradition, recent research shows that there is a considerable diversity of what that name is labeled with, writes Gemma Kwantes (University of Amsterdam) in the latest issue of *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* (Vol. 13, No. 2, 2013). The academic study of present-day Kab-

balah has developed since 2002. It has increasingly questioned the supposed opposition between Kabbalah and modernity. Some authors even claim that Kabbalah has actually been used to introduce modern ways of thinking (individualistic cultural values, eclecticism)

► Continued on page 7



Detail of *The Kabbalah Tree* (1985), oil on canvas by the Italian artist Davide Tonato.

SOURCE: *Rodrigotebani* via *Wikimedia Commons*

Kabbalah use diversifies *(cont. from p. 6)*

in sectors of Orthodox Judaism.

Kabbalistic concepts and symbols are found today in various kinds of conventional Judaism as well as in emerging religious movements. It can be used by Zionist and non-Zionist, Orthodox and more liberal Jews—but as well by non-Jewish spiritual seekers who see it as universal wisdom. Most people teaching Kabbalah have a Jewish background, but they cover an amazingly varied spectrum, from traditional to people uncomfortable with institution-

al religion. Interestingly, specific examples show that Kabbalah can function both as a mechanism to remove one from the strict barriers of orthodoxy, as well as a mechanism for reintroducing people to it. Many proponents of Kabbalah claim that it can be understood as science, a perspective that makes it more acceptable to modern audiences.

Boundaries are varied: some authors suggest that everyone can benefit from Kabbalah, while others feel it is first intended for Jews

who have proper grounding in Talmud and Torah. Some authors advocate a concept of religion in which Kabbalah is seen as corresponding to the “inner content” of each religion. While Kabbalah often used to be associated with secrecy, it is now transmitted across all possible channels and media, with lessons being broadcast on the Internet. “Surprisingly, such modern media are used by the secular as well as the most orthodox,” Kwantes says.

(Aries <http://www.esswe.org>.) ■

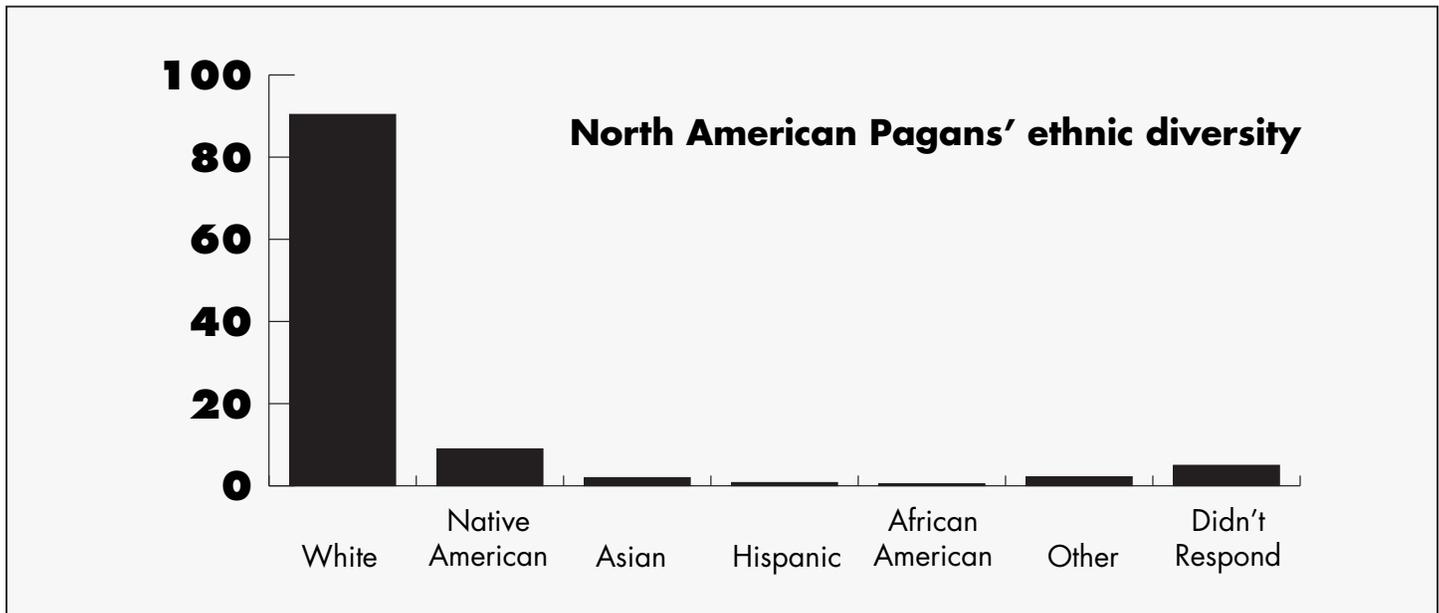
Jewish literary vitality is more than a memory

While Christians may be complaining that there is an absence of Christianity in today’s fiction, American Jewish literature is undergoing something of a revival, writes Dara Horn in the *New York Times Book Review* (Sept. 1). Last year a cover story in the book review argued that Christian themes are sorely lacking in today’s fiction, but Horn writes that “there doesn’t seem to be any corresponding dry spell among con-

temporary Jewish fiction writers.” She cites such recent novels as *Witz* by Joshua Cohen, “which features an apocalyptic scenario where the main character, born as a fully grown and bearded man, becomes the world’s last Jew, and *The Frozen Rabbi*, by Simon Rich, in which a Jewish teenager in Memphis discovers a 19th century Hasidic rabbi in his family’s basement.

Horn argues that the Jewish literary resurgence may be because

“in Judiam, faith in itself is largely built on preserving memory... Commanded by God dozens of times in the Hebrew Bible to remember their past, Jews historically obeyed not by recording events but by ritually re-enacting them, by understanding the present through the lens of the past.” This tendency to seek out historical patterns and memory comes naturally to writers, many of whom are nontraditional or even secular Jewish writers. ■



SOURCE: Graphic by T.J. Thomson | Data by Helen Berger via *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States*.

Neopagans find interfaith acceptance while experiencing internal conflicts

Neopaganism has experienced considerable success in gaining acceptance in interfaith circles. However, at the same time has been drawn into increasing controversy over the diverse racial tendencies in its East European expressions, according to a prominent scholar in the field. At the New York meeting of the Association for the Society of Religion, Michael York, a specialist in Neopagan religion at Bath Spa College in the UK, outlined salient developments in Neopagan religions throughout the world and found growing acceptance. This is most obvious in newer interfaith initiatives, such as the Assembly of the World Religions. After years of interfaith dialogue, the Scottish Pagan Federation has been officially recognized as a member of the Scottish Interfaith Council. There has also been progress in Neopagan chaplains gaining acceptance in prisons, according to York. Much of the acceptance of Pagan clergy has been facilitated though the establishment of Cherry Hill Seminary, the first Neopagan theological seminary, based in Columbia, SC.

York also reported that there is some resistance to giving Neopagans equal privileges with other religions, especially in the UK under the British Charity Commission. Another challenge is the growth of Neopagans in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, who have a strong racial and anti-Semitic orientation. Pagan groups in Poland, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Russia have strong nationalist tendencies, often linking racial identity with paganism. York notes that while Western Neopaganism is often liberal, with its roots in the 1960s counterculture, promoting feminist and sexual liberationist causes, “blending easily into subcultures such as sci-fi conventions and heavily involved with the occult...the Eastern type of Neopaganism is often right-wing and conservative. Interest in ecology is often linked to preserving ‘natural’ folk heritage.” Eastern Neopaganism is often academically inclined and is suspicious of occultism. Sexual ethics are most frequently conservative, “emphasizing family values, which in some extreme groups can even become misogyny and homophobia,” according to York. ■

WHAT THE

CURRENT RESEARCH

REVEALS ABOUT TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

01 Young women, Baptists and other seekers who have had personal contact with Anabaptist life are most likely to join the Amish and other “plain Mennonite” groups, according to a recent study by Corey Anderson of Ohio State University.

In the ARDA blog, *Ahead of the Trend* (Aug. 28), David Briggs reports that the study shows that the simple lifestyle of these groups, as depicted in the media and romance novels, are especially appealing to young adults “who appear to be seeking a genuine alternative to a modern world that glorifies technology.” Anderson surveyed nearly 1,000 people interested in Anabaptist communities. Anderson estimates there are only 1,200 to 1,300 convert or first-generation members among the approximately 500,000 members of such communities in the U.S., but that number has been growing in

recent years.

By surveying people who visited his Anabaptist website seeking information about “plain” churches in their area, Anderson found younger adults and women had the strongest interest. It was not until ages 54 and older that the percentage of people who inquired was underrepresented relative to the general population. About six in 10 inquiries were by women. Evangelicals were two-and-a-half times more likely than mainline Protestants to be inquirers.

(*Ahead of the Trend*, <http://www.thearda.com>.)

02 U.S. Senate prayers have gradually de-emphasized Christian references in the last two decades, even if some sign of Christian concepts are still present, according to a study by Brandeis University sociologist Wendy Cadge.

In a paper presented at the New York meeting of the American Sociological Association in August, Cadge examined the prayers led by the Senate chaplains between 1990 and 2010. The 135 prayers that were studied mostly consisted of categories Cadge classified as bearing witness and petition. The decline in biblical references prayers was the most dramatic—97 percent of the prayers said by Chaplain Richard Halvorson during his term in the 1990s contained biblical verses while none of the prayers of current chaplain Barry Black, a Seventh Day Adventist pastor, had such references. Most of Halvorson’s prayers ended with “in Jesus’ name,” while his predecessor Lloyd Ogilvie ended his prayers with “Lord and savior.” Black typically ends his prayers with “in your holy name” or “in your sacred name.” Cadge concludes that while the use of the Bible and references to Jesus have declined, there is still the use of Christian concepts.

03 A recent study finds that the prevalence of evangelical Christians in a given area of the U.S. predicts the establishment of a secularist organization.

The preliminary study, by Alfredo Garcia of Princeton University and Joseph Blankholm of Columbia University, was presented at the Association for the Sociology of Religion meeting in New York. Garcia and Blankholm found a total of 1,390 “disbelief” organizations—which includes atheist and the various humanist groups—in 48 states in the U.S. Although the states in the Mid-Atlantic, New England and Western U.S. contain the highest number of these groups, likely reflecting their demographics, there were “higher densities of these groups by county in unexpected places” — such as Texas, Virginia, Nebraska and Minnesota.

By examining county-level census and religious data and the “organizational ecology” of these areas, including bookstores, universities, museums and bars, the researchers found that, more than any of these institutions, it was the presence of evangelicals that predicted the presence of a disbelief group. Even the presence of “nones”—those unaffiliated with religious bodies—did not have that positive predictive value. Garcia and Blankholm speculate that a high percentage of evangelicals may compel atheists to organize as a means of support and resistance to such religious influence.

04 Religious practices such as prayer vigils tend to be associated with greater racial and ethnic diversity in faith-based community organizing coalitions, according to a paper presented at the Association for the Sociology of Religion meeting in New York. Researchers Richard Wood, Ruth Braunstein, and Brad Fulton presented findings from a national study of faith-based community organizing coalitions (FBCOs), which have grown significantly in recent years and numbered as high as 189 in 2011. The researchers found that in prominent FBCOs, such as the Pica National Network, prayer vigils and other common prayers bridge the differences in ethnicity, race and economics. The result is greater unity. The study controlled for the presence of black clergy, who often organize prayer vigils as a means of protest. But the researcher found that prayer practices were positively associated with ethnic and economic diversity in membership.

05 The first-ever survey of Buddhist organizations in Canada finds “tremendous growth” in the midst of considerable change. Although new groups start, some then disband after a relatively short time. The survey, conducted by John H. Negru of the University of Toronto and published in the online *Journal of Global Buddhism* (Vol. 14, 2013), found Buddhist congregations

growing from just a handful in 1950 to 483 in 2012. Negru compiled the list of congregations from surveys and online directories, with 21 percent of the organizations providing more details about their structure, leadership and activities.

Without strong institutional support and often founded by charismatic leaders who may have died or were discredited, Canadian Buddhist congregations showed a significant degree of ferment. Even Jodo Shinshu churches, with a long history of support from the Buddhist Churches of Canada, have closed due to demographic changes. Most of the congregations are located in metropolitan areas and show strong levels of leadership by laity and priests rather than monastics, as is the case in Asia.

Men outnumber women in leadership, although there are more women in most Buddhist congregations. The result is more unity. Most congregations portrayed themselves as autonomous and not accountable to any other authority beyond themselves, according to Negru. As in the U.S., meditation-based Buddhist congregations are the most prevalent, although there are a diversity of spiritual practices. Although some scholars have found foreign-born Buddhists as vastly outnumbering Canadian-born ones, Negru found both groups present in his study. However, Negru allows the possibility that responses may have been skewed along cultural lines (such as among English-speakers). In contrast to the U.S., there is a much smaller presence of “engaged Buddhists”—congregations or individuals engaging in social action — or participating in interfaith activities in Canada.

(*Journal of Global Buddhism*, <http://globalbuddhism.org/>.) ■



The “Black Flag of Jihad” features the *shahada*, an Islamic creed, rendered in white.

SOURCE: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Foreign jihadists meet resistance from Syria’s Muslims

While foreign Islamic volunteers in Syria are sometimes well-equipped and fierce fighters, organizations under their control are smaller and seen as foreign elements by most Syrians, who envision the future of their country in terms other than a global struggle, according to Laurent Vinatier (Thomas More Institute, Paris, and Small Arms Survey, Geneva). Vinatier recently presented a lecture at the French Institute of Anatolian Studies in Istanbul, which **RW** attended. Vinatier’s research has focused on jihadist volunteers coming from the Caucasus (his main area of research). There are currently between 600 and 1,000 jihadists — many Chechens — but others hail from other countries of the Caucasus. Beside them, there are a number of Libyan fighters, as well as jihadists from Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Yemen

and Saudi Arabia. Some of them join local groups, while other ones have their own units.

Foreign jihadists have several motivations for fighting in Syria. All of them cite a *hadith* (saying) attributed to Muhammad, according to which, on the day where there will be fighting in Yemen, Iraq and Shams (i.e. the Levant, including today’s Syria), fighters will gather there and the caliphate will be (re)established. The jihadists often cite the call to correct injustices suffered by Muslim women and children as a reason for coming there. Moreover, Vinatier also found that fighting in Syria can be viewed as a continuation of a struggle in the jihadists’ home countries. For instance, for Chechens, fighting in Syria is also another way to fight against Russia.

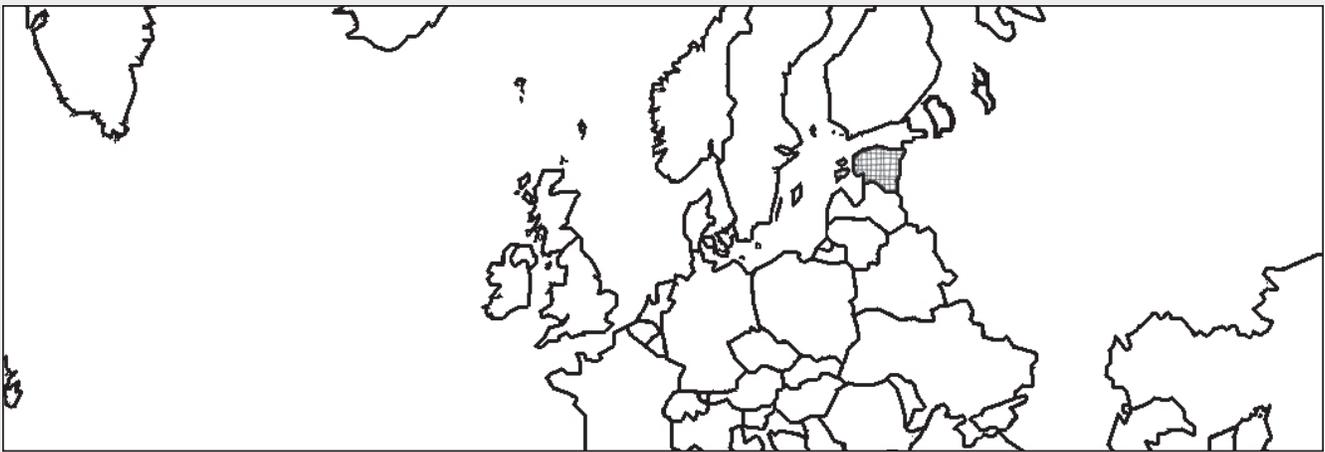
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Foreign jihadists meet resistance *(cont. from p. 11)*

The most important Syrian jihadist group is Ahrar al-Shams. Among foreign jihadist groups, the one that is most often quoted is the Islamic State of Irak and Shams, an Al Qaeda-connected group of Iraqi origin, which has extended its operations to neighboring Syria and includes a num-

ber of volunteers with Saudi and Yemeni backgrounds. It includes Syrian fighters, but all commanders are foreigners, which means it is perceived as foreign by the Syrian population. Moreover, the brutality of those foreign fighters and their harsh understanding of sharia (Islamic law) do not

always go well along with the feelings of the local (Muslim) population. Thus there is a lack of legitimacy at this point. In addition, while anti-Shiite feelings are widespread among Syrian Sunnis, their goal is to liberate Syria, not to start a war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, Vinatier concludes. ■



Map of Northern Europe with Estonia shaded. SOURCE: Yoel Natan via www.yoel.info

Political religion finds a place in secular Estonia

Estonia is reported to be among the most atheistic of countries, but a study of the Baltic country's last elections showed that religion is playing a new role in its national identity and politics. An article in the journal *Religion, State & Society* (September) by political scientist Alar Kilp argues that the 2011 parliamentary elections showed a trend toward "desecularization" in the country as church buildings became symbols of ethnic and political loyalty and the predominant

Lutheran and Russian Orthodox churches reinforced ethnic identity. He notes that desecularization does not necessarily mean an increase in affiliation and religious belief, but it does indicate only that religious objects, buildings and symbols are connected to cultural identity.

During the elections, politicians from the ruling party took part in the opening of St. John's Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg, Russia, and declared that the church was the center of Estonian culture and its aspirations toward freedom and indepen-

dence. At about the same time, opposition party leaders took part in ceremonies at a prominent Orthodox church for the country's Russian population in the capital city of Tallinn. Politicians also publicized their donations to these and other churches during the campaign. While these events "predict the persistence" of political religion in Estonia, such activity is unlikely to spill over into increased religious devotion and affiliation, Kilp concludes.

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

////// EXPLORE THIS ISSUE'S ////

FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

01 *Social Compass*, an international journal on the sociology of religion, devotes most of its September issue to the state of Italian Catholicism. The Catholic Church in Italy has long been considered something of an exception from the rest of secular Western Europe in commanding a fair level of devotion and identity among its adherents. In one article, sociologist Marco Marzano of the University of Bergamo argues that the Italian church is institutionally weaker than many have claimed; like the U.S., church attendance rates are often inflated (with Italians saying in surveys they attend more often than actually is the case), and the pool of priests is aging and declining.

Marzano acknowledges that areas of Catholic vitality include the public presence of the church leadership (especially in the media) and the involvement of younger Catholics in various Catholic movements, such as Community and Liberation and the Neocatechumenals. But he concludes that such trends promote a “sectarian church” at odds with the Catholicism of ordinary parish life. Another article by Franco Garelli maintains that the Catholic sense of belonging among the population is still strong at least at the parish level, which has

encouraged the new public assertiveness of Catholic leaders. For more information on this issue, visit: *Social Compass*, <http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200920>.

02 A new journal called the *Sociology of Islam* recently published its first issue. While there is no shortage of publications on Islam and Muslims, they are often published or written by Muslims themselves or are highly partisan.

The journal seeks to publish more disinterested empirical research in this contested field than has usually been the case.

Introducing the journal, sociologist Bryan Turner writes that the “first prerequisite of the *Sociology of Islam* would be to struggle to disconnect the field from partisan politics and overt ideology...[moving] beyond the proliferation of descriptive studies of Islamophobia that have become repetitive and predictable...” The first issue features studies on the Muslim Brotherhood, Islam and democracy, and the nationalizing of Islam in Tunisia. For a preview of the first issue, visit: http://www.brill.com/sites/default/files/ftp/downloads/35734-Preview_SOI.pdf.

03 The new journal, *Critical Research on Religion*, has a long pedigree in the often uneasy

relationship that has existed between religion and the social sciences.

The journal seeks to revive the debates and research interests about religion issued throughout the decades by “critical” theorists including Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, the Frankfurt School of neo-Marxists, feminist, post-colonialist and gay liberationist theorists. The journal also takes the term “critical” literally, arguing that too much sociological research on religion has stressed its positive effects.

Whether or not this is the case, the two first issues of the journal have covered wide territory — from (not necessarily negative) articles on the state of sociology in North America to religion in China to the future of secularism. For more information on this publication, visit: <http://crr.sagepub.com/content/1/2/123.full.pdf+html>.

04 The growth and growing influence of Christianity in the global South has received the most attention in evangelical and Catholic circles (mainly because their churches are predominant in these regions), but the new book *From Times Square to Timbuktu* (Eerdmans, \$20), by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, approaches this trend from the perspective of the mainline and

ecumenical protestant churches and organizations. Granberg-Michaelson, the former General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America, analyzes the shift from northern and Western church influence to Christianity in the global South (and East) without much bias. But the biggest contribution of the book is in showing how these changes are impacting “establishment” institutions such as the World Council of Churches in Europe and other ecumenical and mainline bodies in U.S.

The author seems uncertain and pessimistic about the long-term future of the WCC and related ecumenical organizations because of their declining resources and memberships but also because their interests (and obviously headquarters) remain removed from the burgeoning regions of Christian growth south of Geneva, Washington and New York. The author sees more hope in the Global Christian Forum, which was founded in 1998, as it gathers together not only the traditional ecumenical and mainline churches but also evangelicals, Catholics, and especially the newer indigenous Pentecostal churches. But he notes that the forum’s bare structure—it has just one staffer—and minimal budget only allows it a small presence on the world Christian scene.

Other repercussions of the new global configuration for the West include:

- forming an immigrant African diaspora made up largely of Pentecostal and African indigenous churches, as well as continuing reshaping of churches and ministries with the continuing growth of Latino Christianity;
- targeting the West for evangelization by a major, non-Western missionary movement (with many

of them being planted both through “reverse missions” and immigration);

- importing a resulting global collection of South Christian music and art;

- growing church activism (and accommodation) for immigrants and other areas of social justice;

- meeting the challenges of multi-racial churches (which are at present mostly evangelical and Pentecostal);

- and confronting a “theological clash of cultures,” which includes global South Christians’ conservatism on doctrine and sexuality but also the tendency to connect evangelism and worship with social ministry to meet the needs of the whole person.

Granberg-Michaelson acknowledges the church fractures and friction over gay rights between churches in the south and north, but advocates for a new ecumenism that does not put these controversies front-and-center.

05 Much has been written on fundamentalism over the past three decades, especially as such contentious and diffuse religious movements have taken on political significance in much of the Middle East. But the new book *Religious Fundamentalism in the Middle East* (Brill, \$141) is unique in that it uses survey research methods to explore this phenomenon, thus allowing it to go beyond previous studies of fundamentalism that tend to focus on its leaders and key intellectuals. The book, by Mansoor Moaddel and Stuart Krabenick, is based on published statistics (such as from the *World Values Survey*) and surveys the authors conducted in Egypt, Lebanon, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The authors identify fundamentalists as

holding to: a literal interpretation of sacred texts, an image of God as a disciplinarian, a belief in one’s own religion as superior, and an intolerance of other faiths. They find that the attitudes and behaviors generally found among fundamentalist leaders tend to apply to followers of the various fundamentalist groups.

The study found that:

- The presence of religious pluralism dampened the growth of fundamentalism.

- Fundamentalism was lowest in Lebanon, followed by Iran, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

- Lebanese Christians on average were less fundamentalist than Muslims.

- Among Muslim sects, the Druze in Lebanon were less fundamentalist than either the Shiites or Sunnis, and the Iranian Kurds were less fundamentalist than the other ethnic groups in their country.

Some of the findings were more unexpected:

- Gender differences in fundamentalism were country specific, with males in Iran tending to be less fundamentalist than females, while in Egypt it was the opposite.

- In Lebanon and Saudi Arabia there were no gender differences in holding fundamentalist attitudes.

- The use of the Internet and Satellite TV was inversely related to fundamentalist attitudes and beliefs. The authors argue against viewing fundamentalism as a sign of either inevitable secularization or religious revival; rather, there is a back-and-forth movement between “secular spirituality” and fundamentalism in these societies. The Arab spring was a move toward reconciling these two tendencies, although they acknowledge that if Islamic groups push forward the idea of the Islamicization

of society, there will be renewed conflict and discord in these countries, especially Egypt.

06 In his new book *Jews, Confucians, and Protestants* (Rowman and Littlefield, \$35.99), Lawrence Harrison takes over from where the late Samuel Huntington left off with his controversial “clash of civilizations” thesis. Actually, Harrison raises the ante as he sees culture and religion as the predominant factors in why different ethnic groups and nations thrive economically and politically. Many social scientists will take issue with Harrison’s “culture matters” perspective and the way he applies this formula to disparate places and groups, though he does argue that politics and policies can change culture and accelerate social change. The book is engagingly written in the first person and Harrison provides interesting accounts of how various religious groups harness social and cultural capital—not only the three groups cited in his title but also Mormons, Basque Catholics, Jains, Sikhs and Ismaili Muslims (a small Islamic offshoot led by the Aga Khan).

The most interesting parts of the book show how these religious practices may translate into democratic tendencies and business acumen, including the radical equality teachings of the Sikhs, the anti-hierarchical attitudes of Basque Catholics, and the time-saving practices and

punctuality of the Ismalis. These groups embrace “Universal Progress Culture,” which is marked by believing that people can influence their destinies and by promoting the Golden Rule (which in turn support a wide set of values, including a strong work ethic, trust, frugality and risk propensity). Harrison sets this against “progress-resistant cultures,” which are shaped by religion such as Eastern Orthodoxy, Voodoo, much of Latin American Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. In fact, Harrison hangs much of his hopes for progress in impoverished and undemocratic nations via reform movements in these religions.

07 *German Jihad* (Columbia University Press, \$37.50), by Guido Steinberg, pinpoints the leading edge of Muslim extremism in Europe to Germany, finding that its network of jihadists have fanned out to countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Chechnya and Afghanistan to export terrorism. Steinberg identifies Turkey as an important way station in German jihadism, especially since there is a large base of immigrant Turks who have become radicalized in recent years. The infamous Hamburg Cell, an Al Qaeda network of terrorists that included 9/11 perpetrator Mohammad Atta, demonstrated how such groups repeatedly drew disaffected European born or based young Muslims into their ranks. Since 2001, these networks in Germany have expanded, even creating

another Hamburg cell, and generally falling into three camps: those that belong to the established jihadist organizations, such as Al Qaeda; the independent or “lone wolf” jihadists; and the “new internationalists,” mainly young Turks, Kurds and German converts who fight for the jihadist cause in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Most of the jihadists have come from the radical wing of the Salafist movement (purist and orthodox Islam) in Germany—which itself has grown from a few hundred followers in 2001 to between 5,000-10,000 in 2012. Germany is increasingly both a target and a base of jihadism; many observers erroneously thought that the country would be spared terrorist attacks since it did not participate in the war on Iraq (though its involvement in Afghanistan has been widely condemned by jihadists). Steinberg notes that increasingly, the three above approaches are being combined: Al Qaeda is supporting lone jihadists and new internationalists in carrying out small-scale attacks in Europe after facing too many obstacles in attempting to attack the U.S. again after 9/11. Steinberg concludes that due to internal problems and strict political and legal safeguards, German intelligence and security services “have had significant problems identifying and monitoring the radicalization processes in Salafist circles in recent years.” ■

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

The **Congregation of the Oratory**, a conservative liturgical and theological order founded by St. Phillip Neri in 1575, is finding a following among young Catholics in England at

a time when other parts of the church are in decline. The Oratorians came to England under the leadership of

► **Continued on page 16**

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Correction:

The volume number for the July and August 2013 edition of Religion Watch was incorrectly labeled. It is Vol. 28, No. 5.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER, 2013

Volume 28, number 6

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NOTICE: RELIGION WATCH WILL BEGIN PUBLISHING MONTHLY STARTING IN NOVEMBER 2013.

Congregation of the Oratory *(cont. from p. 15)*

John Henry Newman in the 19th century and since then have spread to five cities (London, Oxford, Birmingham, Manchester, and York). The oratories operate both as parishes and communities, with secular priests living together although they don't take vows as they do in religious orders. Recently the Oxford Oratory took over a parish in York, becoming the third oratory

to be established in England in a decade and the second one this year. Members and those pursuing a religious vocation (a comparatively large number compared to other orders and diocese in the UK) value the doctrinal conservatism and liturgical "stability"—with several Latin masses offered regularly. (Source: *The Tablet*, August 3.) ■

About Religion Watch

Religion Watch looks beyond the walls of churches, synagogues and denominational officialdom to examine how religion really affects, and is affected by, the wider society. For this reason, the newsletter has been praised by professors, researchers, church leaders, journalists and interested lay people as a unique resource for keeping track of contemporary religion. It is through monitoring new books and approximately 1,000 U.S. and foreign periodicals (including newspapers, newsletters, magazines, online content and scholarly journals), and by first-hand reporting, that Religion Watch has tracked hundreds of trends on the whole spectrum of contemporary religion. Published every two months, the 16-page newsletter is unique because it focuses on long-range developments that lead to, and result from, world current events.

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