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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.

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Islamic extremism reviving through franchising, regrouping

Despite significant gains in dismantling the leadership of extremist Islamic terrorist groups, religiously based terrorism is on the upswing and more diversified than ever, according to two reports. *Foreign Policy* magazine (March/April) traces the genealogy of the name al-Qaida from its inception in 1988 (used by Osama bin Laden as a term for his training "base") up to the present day when the term has lost much of its meaning. President

Barack Obama has stated that al-Qaida's core leadership has been decimated under his leadership, but the problem is that the group is so decentralized today that "each new startup renders that victory less and less reassuring," writes Ty McCormick. Al-Qaida has discarded much of its hierarchical structure and it has "largely metastasized into a multina-

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African-Americans' new interest in roots causes new divisions among Yoruba faithful

In a quest for roots as well as authenticity, African-American followers of Santeria (aka Lukumi) and related religious groups with roots in the Yoruba tradition are traveling in increasing numbers to Africa. But their attempt to adjust practices to what they have seen in Nigeria has created friction among such practitioners in the U.S., reports David Ovalle in the *Miami Herald* (March 28).

Those looking for answers in Nigeria have been helped by the spread of the Internet to connect with like-minded people and to discuss their beliefs. They feel that a lot of knowledge was lost during the forced migration to

the American continent and subsequent times of slavery and meet Nigerian priests eager to share with them what is missing and how they can promote Yoruba culture. Such seekers often ask to be (re)initiated, either in Africa or in America.

Such returned devotees tend to engage into debates and challenge how other people are practicing this faith in America. In contrast, those who cling to practices as developed in America

feel that they are better adjusted to American environment and that it makes no sense to restore African Yoruba practices.

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"... their attempt to adjust practices to what they have seen in Nigeria has created friction among such practitioners in the U.S. ..."
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American Muslims creating 'third spaces' between mosque and society

The growth of Islamic community centers, Muslim sports teams and youth groups and religious discussion groups, are finding a following among younger Muslims who might find mosques confining and the wider society inhospitable to Islam, reports *The Christian Science Monitor Weekly* (Feb. 17). Many less-than-40 Muslims regard mosques "as little more than sites for weddings and convenient places to pray. When it comes to figuring out to knit together their Muslim and American identities, they do not always find mosque leadership and message relevant, and many women chafe when required to pray behind a petition or wall," writes Lee Lawrence. Islamic community centers, youth programs at mosques and alternative forums are filling the gap between strict observance and assimilating too completely to American mainstream society.

Lawrence cites the example of MakeSpace in Alexandria, Virginia as one such "third space" for Muslims,



MakeSpace logo, via imakespace.com

as it encourages dialogue and exploration to "put the unity back in community" as its website says. Friday prayers take place in a banquet hall of a local restaurant, and discussion groups, known as *halaqas*, convene in a borrowed office space. A women's halaqua is especially popular, drawing about 50 thirty- and twenty-something Muslims who span the range of observance and head covering styles. The unity emphasis is important, seeing such groups as moving beyond petty points of etiquette and sectarian divides in order to help Americans be better Muslims. Infringements on observances tend to be downplayed with participants assured they might not always be able to reach the ideal in practice. A model for these groups is the Islamic Center for Southern California, considered one of the country's most progressive mosques. On a more social level, organizations such as the National Muslim Basketball Tour aim to teach Muslim youths about their religion through sport. ■

New influx of women into church missions pointing to gender changes in Mormonism?

Women are playing an increasingly prominent role in Mormonism, especially with the burgeoning of women missionaries in the church after it lowered the age of admission to the mission field. *The New York Times* (March 2) reports that the "biggest gender change in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in memory" revolves around "waves of women" taking part in church missions and returning home with "unprecedented scriptural fluency, new confidence and new ideas about themselves." The lowering of the age of females to take part in the historic coming-of-age ritual of missions from 21 to 19 in 2012 tripled the total of women entering the mission field. Church leaders have been forced to reassess their views as Mormon women are "increasingly supporting households, marrying later and less frequently, and having fewer children," writes Jodi Kantor and Laurie Goodstein.

The shortage of eligible bachelors for those more

than 40, especially in the Mormon heartland of Utah, also creates new questions over the role of unmarried and often professional women in a church where marriage is still the most common coming-of-age ritual for young women. Kantor and Goodstein add that the church is already making small changes that some Mormon feminists see as opening the door to an enhanced leadership role for women. These include inviting women to have a greater say in local councils, introducing the first female leadership roles for female missionaries and instructing bishops and regional stake presidents to consult with leaders of the parallel women's organizations in their deliberations. While there are Mormon feminist groups and blogs, such as *Feminist Mormon Housewives*, pressing for broader changes, including allowing women in the priesthood, most of the women in missions that the reporters interviewed tended to think that such measures are going too far. ■

Revival of Islamic extremism *(cont. from p. 1)*

tional movement with franchise operations in at least 18 countries from Mali to Syria, Yemen to Nigeria. These so-called affiliates have largely replaced the Pakistan-based mothership—now known as ‘al-Qaida central’—as the driving force of global jihad.” Whether or not these franchises can equal the power and charisma of a centralized leadership, terrorism experts Peter Bergen and Jennifer Rowland report that, with recent gains in Syria and Iraq, al-Qaida and its affiliates “control more territory in the Arab world than...at any time in its history.”

Regardless of its various incarnations, jihadist terrorism tends to have a cyclical lifespan that allows it to frequently rise up from the ashes, writes Anthony Celso in the foreign affairs journal *Orbis* (Spring). Celso looks at the cases of Iraq and Algeria jihadist campaigns and finds that they go through four stages that most such movements undergo—mobilization, extremism, implosion and recreation. A common expectation of terrorist experts is that modern terror waves last for a generation but Celso argues that Jihadist movements...contravene logical convention...The

wave’s completion could never materialize because of modern jihadism’s irrational quest for a mythical ummah, or Islamic community.” Jihadist movements tend to implode because of popular revulsion of extremist violence, internal group fragmentation and local and external enemies mobilizing against them.

But these movements also tend to revive as jihadists regroup and rebrand themselves as they seek revenge against victorious apostate forces and continue their struggle to establish the ummah. This pattern can be seen in Iraq and Syria, where jihadist groups have rebounded after setbacks. In the case of Iraq, the withdrawal of U.S. military led to new sectarian strife which al-Qaida has capitalized on, re-engaging in suicide bombing and other violence. “Confessional violence and civil war in neighboring Syria has had synergistic effect on reviving al-Qaida’s regional fortunes,” making Syria the number one jihadist battleground in the world, Celso concludes.

(Foreign Policy, 11 Dupont Circle NW, Ste. 600, Washington, DC 20036; *Orbis*, 1528 Walnut St., Ste. 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102.) ■



Santería icons at an open place of worship in Havana. SOURCE: Creative Commons image via Zalewski Michal.

Divisions among Yoruba faithful *(cont. from p. 1)*

Scholars remark, on one hand, that Santería as it exists today is largely a product of the 19th and 20th centuries with African roots. On the other hand, there are no standard practices even in Africa. On their original continent, old tribal faiths

also feel the pressure of modernity and Evangelical dynamism. Some Nigerian high priests welcome the interest expressed by Yoruba groups of believers on the American continent and consider them as crucial for keeping the beliefs alive. ■

WHAT THE

CURRENT RESEARCH

REVEALS ABOUT TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

01 **Religious belief and involvement remain high for American Indians—whether in aboriginal traditions or Christian churches, and for both men and women, according to one of the largest surveys of religion among this native population.** The study, published in the current issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Vol. 53, No. 1), is based on a survey of more than 3,000 American Indians located in two tribes in the Southwest and the Northern Plains. Previous studies of small samples of American Indians found they were more likely than others to claim “no religion,” and to not give high importance to Christianity. But the new survey found that the great majority reported participating in at least one tradition at least “sometimes,” with about one-third to half of participants involved “often” in such activities. The small percentages who indicated they never participate in any spiritual or religious tradition was only 3-11 percent—far smaller than the 44 percent of unchurched Americans

shown by national polls. They also find that 97 to 99 percent reported that religio-spiritual beliefs were important to them.

About two-thirds of participants in both tribes reported participating in aboriginal traditions, which suggests that the “networks of participation associated with historic religio-spiritual traditions remain active in contemporary American Indian communities,” according to Boston College sociologist Eva Marie Garrouette and six other researchers. The most unexpected finding was that the odds of “frequent religio-spiritual participation was no different for women and men within any tradition examined”—a degree of religious equality not seen in most other religious traditions. Participation in the Native American Church, an American Indian group blending Christian and indigenous teachings and practices, particularly the use of peyote, was lower than for the other traditions, but about half of respondents in both tribes had sometimes participated in these rituals, especially in the Southwest. The authors

conclude that these results show an American Indian religious profile of “robust participation within aboriginal traditions while simultaneously arguing against nominal commitment to Christianity.”

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1468-5906](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1468-5906).)

02 **A new survey of more than 10,000 Americans (including scientists and evangelical Protestants) suggests that there might be more common ground between science and religion than is commonly believed.** The “Religious Understandings of Science” survey showed that only 27 percent of Americans feel that science and religion are in conflict, according to a report in the *Huffington Post* (March 17). In addition, it showed that nearly half of scientists and evangelicals believe that “science and religion can work together and support one another,” according to Elaine Howard Ecklund, the Rice University sociologist who conducted the survey. She adds that “This is a

hopeful message for science policy-makers and educators, because the two groups don't have to approach religion with an attitude of combat. Yet 60 percent of the Protestants surveyed—and 38 percent of all people surveyed—indicated a belief that scientists ‘should be open to considering miracles in their theories or explanations.’”

03 Much is being made of the “Francis effect” in the year since the new pope was elected, but surveys suggest that his influence in the West is far from uniform.

The web site *BRIN* (British Religion in Numbers) features a report (March 12) comparing Canadian, American and British Catholic differences in assessing the positive influence of Pope Francis. Citing an Angus Reid Global survey, the “Francis effect” is less prevalent in Britain than in other countries. While three-fifths of Americans and Canadians have a positive view of Pope Francis, the rate falls to 36 percent in Britain, with the majority being neutral (56 percent) or negative (nine percent). Although two-thirds of British Catholics welcomes Francis’ simple lifestyle and commitment to the poor, 70 percent of British said the pope has not changed their own views of the Catholic Church, with one-quarter acknowledging that he had improved them—compared to 37 percent in Canada and 44 percent in the U.S. Even among lapsed and non-practicing British Catholics, 77 percent say that Pope Francis’ record has not convinced them to strengthen their relationship with the church.

For Protestants, the “Francis effect” seems to be weak to non-existent, according to a report from the Barna poll (March 18). In

contrast to the high marks among most Catholics, just 45 percent of practicing Protestants express a very or somewhat favorable view of the pontiff. Among non-main-line Protestants, those expressing a favorable view dips down to 37 percent. Francis’ favorability rate closely matches generations in Protestantism as well as Catholicism, with the oldest generations the most favorable, although Barna reports that Millennial Catholics are the most likely to have changed their faith practice because of the pope in the last year—with a significant 13 percent increase in Mass attendance. The report concludes that “while much has been made by the media of Protestants’ approval of Pope Francis, our research shows the historic schism between Catholic and Protestant traditions is alive and well in America.”

(*BRIN*, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/>.)

04 A new Pew Research survey of global attitudes on religion finds that a high number of people around the world think a belief in God is vital to leading a moral life.

The *Huffington Post* (March 14) reports that a survey of people in 40 countries found that majorities in 22 countries believed that having God in one’s life was essential to being a moral person. Majorities in all five African countries surveyed, as well as every Middle Eastern country except Israel, believed belief in God is vital to a person’s morality. The reaction was more mixed in other parts of the world. While majorities in most countries in Latin America and in the Asia/Pacific region believed God was important for morality, no European country polled had a majority saying the same. The U.S.

showed a slight majority believing God was necessary to be a moral person, while Canada registered a strong majority in the opposite direction. Opinions broke down along largely economic lines. The higher a country’s GDP, the less likely its citizens were to believe God necessary for a moral life. The exceptions were the United States and China. “Americans are much more likely than their economic counterparts to say belief in God is essential to morality, while the Chinese are much less likely to do so,” the report says.

05 As Scotland approaches the referendum on independence from the United Kingdom later this year, the most recent Scottish census suggests that national identity is strongest among the non-religious, Catholics and, as might be expected, members of the Church of Scotland.

The web site *BRIN* (March 1) reports that the 2011 census results for Scotland, released at the end of February, show that two-thirds in each of the groups of Catholics, Church of Scotland, and those having no religion claimed an identity of Scottish only. The Scottish versus British debate is much less relevant to other Protestants and non-Christians in Scotland, with a majority (other Christians, Buddhists and Hindus) or a plurality (Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and other religions) declining to choose between these two competing identities or to select another identity combination.

The census also found that the majority of Scottish youth (56 percent) were reported as not stating

Current research *(cont. from p. 5)*

a religion or claiming “no faith.” The report notes that it is difficult to know if this means that respondents were admitting that youth (less than 16) in their households were being brought up without religion or if they were implicitly stating that this was matter they were leaving up to their children when they were old enough to do so. This finding might particularly impact the Church of Scotland and the Catholics who have similar proportions of adherents among children and adults. Finally, the census finds a much stronger showing of Islam among children than adults, thus “laying the foun-

ation for future expansion of Islam in Scotland.”

06 **Worldwide observance of the holy month of Ramadan tends to slow down the economies of Muslim dominated countries, but it also leads to greater happiness among those observing this fasting period, according to the magazine *Foreign Policy* (March/April).** Harvard University economists Filipe Campante and David Yanagizawa-Drott examined data from every Ramadan since 1950 in countries more than 75 percent Muslim and found that when people spend more time fasting

(especially when the observance falls on the long days of summer) it takes a bigger toll on economic growth. Increasing the average daily fast in a country from 12 to 13 hours, for instance, decreased GDP growth by 0.7 percentage points. The economic losses do not come from time taken away from economic productivity but rather from the different choices Muslims tend to make post-Ramadan, such as concerning which jobs to take and how to balance work and worship. These choices might slow down economic productivity, but the researchers find that they also lead to greater happiness. ■

Saudi Arabia reassessing jihadist challenge

While Saudi Arabia has used Salafism and jihadism to promote its foreign policy interests, it faces more and more of such groups challenging the Kingdom’s official clerics’ status as a source of authority for Salafism. This has led Saudi Arabia to declare recently two jihadist groups in Syria as terrorist organizations, writes Kamran Bokhari on the global intelligence web site *Stratfor* (March 20). The Muslim Brotherhood and the Saudi branch of Hezbollah have also met the same fate. The narrative stating that Saudi Arabia has played a key role in producing jihadist

groups is true, but dated, writes Bokhari. It is significant that Saudi Arabia, while supporting other groups fighting against Syria’s regime, has decided to declare two of them to be terrorist organizations. Efforts to combat jihadist groups already started in the 2000s.

Within its borders, the Saudi Kingdom mostly keeps an effective control on Salafism. Outside Saudi Arabia, however, other types of Salafi discourses compete with the Saudi official one. The attempt to use proxies is backfiring; some groups supported by Saudi Arabia pursue their own ambitions and finally turn against the Saudi regime,

seen as corrupt. Moreover, the Internet and social networks make it increasingly difficult to maintain control and cohesion: there is a multiplication of different viewpoints. “In essence, the core problem the kingdom faces is that Salafist and jihadist ideas have evolved well beyond the limits the Saudis prefer,” according to Bokhari. He also notes that, in contrast, Iran, as the main competitor to Saudi Arabia, manages to have Arab Shiite militant groups remaining more or less aligned with Iran, or least non confrontational.

(Stratfor — <http://www.stratfor.com>.) ■

Muslim converts to Christianity chart their own evangelical path

While counting and identifying Muslim converts to Christianity is difficult because such conversions are usually penalized in many Islamic societies, recent research suggests this group of Christians might be distinct both from the traditional churches of their own lands and from Western missionaries and their method of “contextualization,” or making Christianity relevant to a particular culture. In his research on Muslim converts or Christians of Muslim Background (CMB), Duane Alexander Miller of the University of Edinburgh conducted interviews with Muslim converts to Christianity both in Muslim majority societies and those in the U.K. and the U.S., as well as studying two congregations in a Muslim majority society for his dissertation in world Christianity. He finds that these Christians are not necessarily opposed to the idea of contextualizing the Christian message to their particular situation, but they tend

to mistrust the imposition of such a program on their churches from foreign missionaries while at the same time holding a strong evangelical faith that conflicts with the traditional Eastern churches (which tend to view Muslim converts as controversial).

Miller notes that missionaries have promoted “insider movements” which hold that one remains Islamic in culture even while believing in Jesus Christ; thus they are seen as becoming “Muslim Christians” or “Christian Muslims.” The CMB’s have strongly rejected this approach. This can be seen in the case of the Iranian CMB’s Miller interviewed as they identify more with a Persian or Iranian identity over against Arab and Islamic culture. They are

more likely to oppose the recent Western missionary idea that the convert can remain in the mosque and respect some of the teachings of Mohammad; the CMB’s

Miller encountered have little interest in such a project, believing that Christians should make a clean break with their Muslim past. Related to this is the strong importance CMB’s place on the role of the church (and the initiation of baptism) as a new family and source of support that is essential

in making the break from Islam, especially since such a decision can carry a high personal cost. One theological CMB emphasis different than that of the Western churches is that they view Christ’s atonement in term of God’s love rather than in terms of Christ being made to suffer for God’s punishment of sin. ■



"... Missionaries have promoted 'insider movements' which hold that one remains Islamic in culture even while believing in Jesus Christ."



Religious minorities' role in Ukraine conflict raises new tensions with Russia and Orthodoxy

The involvement of Protestant Christians as well as Greek Catholics in the recent political developments in Ukraine causes concern to Russians as well as to the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. Not

only is the new acting Ukrainian president, Aleksandr Turchinov, a Baptist, but there are a number of people belonging to other Protestant denominations playing a major role in the new government, writes Paul Goble, a longtime specialist

on ethnic and religious issues in Eurasia, in *The Interpreter* magazine (March 25). Among all former Soviet countries, Ukraine is reported to be the one where evangelicals

► **Cont. on page 9**

Mormon strategy brings church influence, if slow yet steady growth in China

The Mormons have adopted a strategy that is quite different than other churches in China, as Latter Day Saints leaders have negotiated a presence in the country under a tight system of restraints, according to an article in the current issue of the journal *China Perspectives* (No. 1, 2014). Author Pierre Vendassi notes that where other churches have operated and grown outside of the legal system in China, the LDS church has cultivated dialogues and negotiations with the Chinese government going back two decades to gain official authorization to conduct its religious activities. The church has accepted China's dictates forbidding any proselytism and instead has created a number of cultural initiatives, including educational exchanges between Brigham Young University and certain Chinese universities, LDS charities working in the least developed areas of China and a large number of English teachers working in prestigious schools. The acceptance of China's anti-proselytism laws has not meant that the LDS has refrained from spreading its gospel in more acceptable ways. According to Vendassi's sources, China now has several thousand practicing Mormons and congregations in every province.

While that number might seem low compared to the Christian movements operating in China since the 1980s, the centralized nature of the church makes it comparable in size to many evangelical denomi-

nations and networks in the country. "Furthermore the development of the movement may appear to be slow, but it seems to be constant," Vendassi adds. The largest congregations are in dynamic urban centers, such as Shanghai and Beijing, and they are organized along the lines of the standard Mormon organizational model. Much of the growth is through returned Chinese expatriates—often business middle managers—who were converted in other countries and are allowed to evangelize their families in China.

But the LDS strategy places some limits on the church; converts have to go to another country to be baptized, and there is a strict separation between foreign Mormon leaders and church headquarters and local converts. Yet the level of retention of converts after baptism might range from 50 to 70 percent, a rate considerably higher than the rest of the world. Because the Mormons are so diligent in being transparent and following Chinese religious regulations, converts tend to de-emphasize the particular markers of Mormon identity—something that is in sharp contrast to other Christian groups. Vendassi

concludes that "the constraints imposed by the state and the willingness of the LDS Church to bend to these constraints appears to be producing, when all is said and done, a slow rate of growth that could also help it take root at the local level."

(*China Perspectives*, <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org>.) ■



The Hong Kong China Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Creative Commons image by Ricardo630.

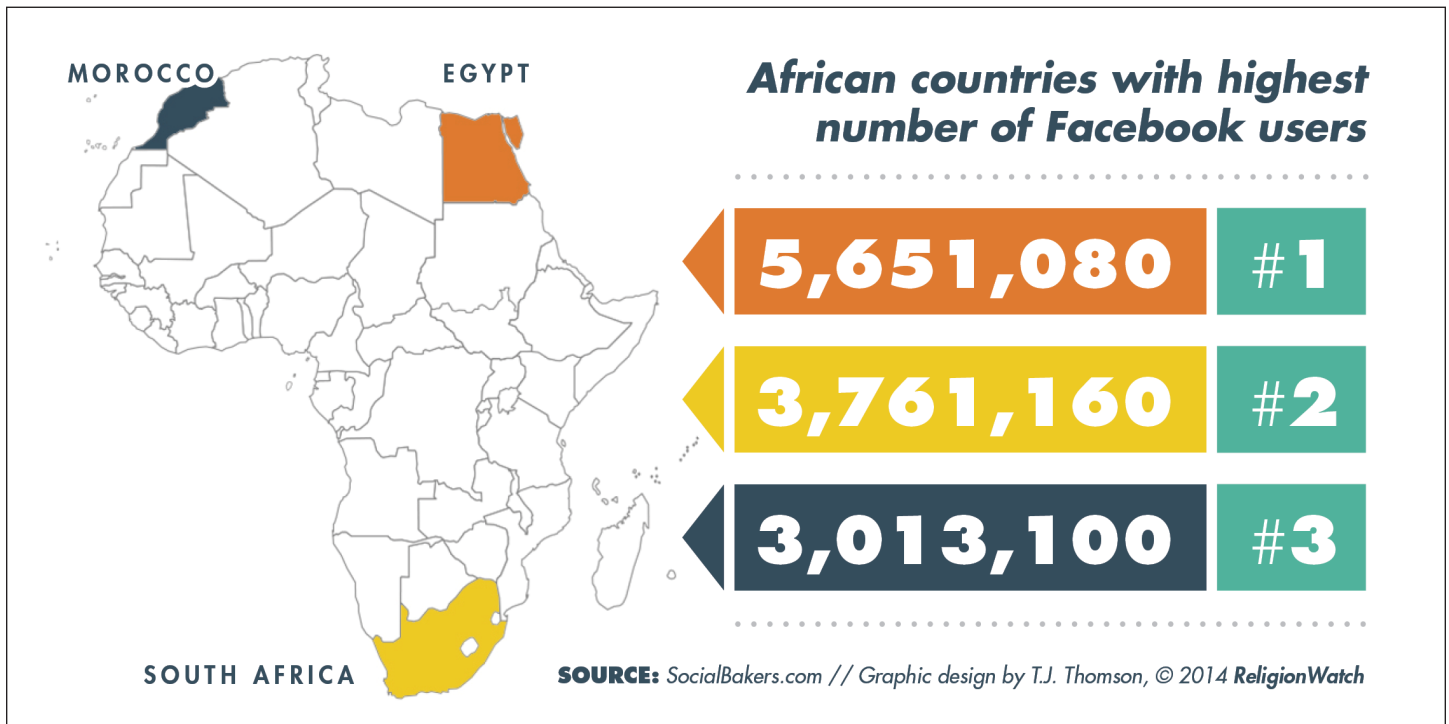
Ukrainian religious minorities *(cont. from p. 7)*

have been the most successful; it has sometimes even been described as the ‘Bible belt’ of the region, although there are fewer than 1 million Protestants out of 45 million inhabitants. Ukraine sends more evangelical missionaries abroad (starting with Russia) than other post-Soviet countries.

The perception that Ukrainian Protestants are growing and that they are allegedly encouraged from the United States makes Russians nervous. Many in Russia fear Prot-

estant influence on political changes, Goble adds, making it a potential enemy of both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian State. It remains to be seen how far such topics might be used by Russians for propaganda purposes against Ukraine. If this would be the case, it could also have a potential for a backlash against evangelicals in Russia itself. Another significant concern revolves around the role of Greek Catholics. Uniates have long been seen with much

suspicion by Orthodox Churches. The fact that pro-Western feelings are the strongest in those areas where Uniates are strong only confirms such fears. The head of the Department of External Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Hilarion, has accused their leaders of calling for the West to intrude into Ukrainian affairs, reports *Orthodoxie.com* (March 27). (*The Interpreter*, <http://www.interpretermag.com> – *Orthodoxie.com*, <http://www.orthodoxie.com>.) ■



Growth of social media creates religious conflict and dialogue in Africa

The growing access to social media in Africa can as easily promote religious conflict and violence as interfaith understanding and public education about religious difference, says religion scholar

Rosalind Hackett in an interview in the journal *Social Compass* (March). Hackett says that the impact of media deregulation in much of Africa is just beginning to be felt and can be seen in the mushrooming of radio

and television stations, internet cafes and mobile phone stores. Africa is still known as the “radio conti-

▶ Cont. on page 10

Growth of social media in Africa *(cont. from p. 9)*

ment” and the growth of small media—from mobile phones, video films, audio cassettes and DVDs continues. In fact, “radio and mobile phones tend to be more visible in situations of insecurity and conflict or migration and displacement, as during the 20-year conflict in northern Uganda involving the Lord’s Resistance Army,” Hackett adds.

Africa’s media—both large and small—can and do promote opportunities for civil religious debate and coverage, as is the case of the South African Broadcasting Company’s religious programming. But just “as a lot of the religious hate speech propagated by Christians and Muslims against each other used to be found in pamphlets and tracts that circulated easily in markets or places of work, as

in Nigeria, for example, now it can be sent via text messages at much lower cost,” Hackett says. The potential of social media to foment religious violence was borne out in the aftermath of a violent attack on a Catholic church in Arusha, Tanzania in 2013. This led to an announcement by the police that they would arrest those who spread religious hate speech via loudspeakers in churches and mosques, text messages from mobile phones, the Internet, or social networks. Hackett notes that in other African contexts, however, the conflict management capacity of social media platforms is being promoted, especially by the Catholic Church.

(Social Compass, <http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200920>.) ■

EXPLORE THIS ISSUE'S



FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

01 Several articles in the current issue of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January) are devoted to the complex and shifting interplay of technology and tradition in the Amish and other strict Anabaptist groups. Contrary to popular perceptions, the use of technology is not totally and uniformly forbidden to any of these groups; rather, it is a matter of selectively using and adapting technology to best suit a particular group’s internal cohesion and relation to other Amish groups. The opening article by anthropologist Karen Johnson-Weiner argues that Amish are keenly aware of the unanticipated consequences of the use of technology to their traditions and can move either toward more conservative or liberal practices to suit their communities’

needs. For instance, a new progressive Amish community in New York actually reverted back toward restricting work in the outside world and returning to farming when it realized a weakening of community life. Another article highlights how the Andy Weaver Amish group has created a middle way between the traditionalism of the Old Order Amish and the liberalization of the new orders, especially by their selective use of technology. The concluding article examines how the German Baptist Brethren group split over the use of the Internet and how the church has sought to reconcile the conflicting parties. For more information on this issue, write: *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Goshen College, 1700 Main St, Goshen, IN 46526.

02 Even as religions are increasingly operating as consumer brands, the fields of marketing and behavioral economics have been reluctant to incorporate religion as an influence in economic decision-making. The new book *Belief Systems, Religion, and Behavioral Economics* (Business Expert Press, \$43.95), by Elizabeth A. Minton and Lynn R. Kahle, looks at this curious inattention to the impact of religion in consumer behavior and find that this has serious repercussions in businesses ignoring or even offending the religious sensibilities of their customer base in their marketing efforts, such in advertising products that may be discouraged or forbidden during various holy days. The authors review the research that has been done on religion and consumer behavior and find a whole range of significant and mundane concerns that can inform marketers—from the tendency of Buddhists to prefer fair trade products to Muslim sensitivity over using sexual innuendo in advertising to the tendency of conservative Protestants to buy products on sale than other believers. In general, highly religious consumers are less likely to be store loyal and are more apt to voice complaints than less religious consumers. The authors conclude that the rise of “big data” and the presence of religions in social media are making it easy and potentially profitable to target religious niches in advertising, product development, and market strategy.

As if to answer and expand upon the concerns of Minton and Kahle, the anthology *Religion as Brands* (Ashgate, \$109.95), edited by Jean-Claude Usunier and Jorg Stolz, brings together a wealth of sociological and marketing research and theory and research on the way that religions are forced to market themselves in order to be attractive to consumers. The contributors view consumerization of religion as part of modernization but acknowledge that there is considerable debate what this process does to religious faith. Those holding to a secularization model see such consumerism and the pluralism that comes with it dissipating religious vitality or at least making religion more individualistic. Those scholars holding to the market theory see such a free marketplace as creating competition and greater vitality. While the book does not settle the debate, it illustrates the advantages and limits to branding.

The editors state in the introduction that many groups have successfully used their symbols, services and distinct styles to create a niche for themselves, but it is also the case that such marketing does not always equal growth. Religious branding can turn away prospective

members and divide and disenchant those who are already members of a congregation or denomination. The chapters are far-reaching, looking at both the “supply side”—the religious organizations doing the branding—and the “demand-side”—how individuals consume religion. Notable chapter include a study on how religions increasingly compete with secular institutions to capture the hearts and minds of consumers; how the “Hillsong Sound” of the megachurch network by that name has become a global Christian music brand; and how the “business model” of monopoly was pioneered by the Jerusalem Temple.

03 The new book *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance* (Eerdmans, \$36) introduces the reader to the burgeoning world of new Christian colleges and universities outside of North America. Along with the growth of churches and denominations in the global South and Asia and Eastern Europe, there has been an untold story of how these schools have grown rapidly in these regions, especially Africa. The contributors bring vital qualitative and quantitative data to bear on the phenomenon. In a worldwide survey conducted by the editor, 595 Christian universities were found outside of the U.S. and Canada by 2013, and more than 30 percent of these schools have started since 1980. Africa remains a hot spot, with 46 new Christian universities founded between 1990 and 2010, while 25 and 32 started, respectively, in Asia (including Australia) and Latin America. The founding of these schools are a “trend within a trend”—private higher education has expanded rapidly in much of the world as public universities have become overburdened with a new need for training technical workers and business professionals.

But the Christian universities often stand out from these new schools for their commitment to “nation-building”—especially pronounced in the book’s chapters on Nigeria and Kenya—and offer broader educations, including training in the helping professions and liberal arts studies. The contributors tend to see the trend of new Christian universities more as an outgrowth of church growth in a similar way to the institution-building that took place after revivals in 19th century America. And, as in the U.S. (and older educational institutions started by missionaries in parts of the global South), there is already concern that these newly created universities are facing the pressures of secularization. In fact, some of these new universities have secularized very rapidly, in only a generation’s time. ■

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

Seeking to enhance the political influence and civil rights of Islam in America, 10 Muslim groups have banded together in a new coalition called the **U.S. Council of Muslim Organizations**. The formation of the new organization is said to be a major step forward for unity among Muslims, as well as further integrating Islam into the fabric of American life. The council plans to advocate for issues of concern to American Muslims and to boost their voter registration. The organizations that have joined the council include some of the most prominent in American Islam, including the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Islamic Circle of North America and the Muslim American Society. Council members say their first priority is to conduct a census of American Muslims to get a better understanding about what issues they care about most. They hope to complete this census in time to help shape their agenda in the 2016 elections. (Source: *Washington Times*, March 12, 2014.)

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 month, the 12-page newsletter is unique in its focus on long-range developments that lead to, and result from, world current events.*



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