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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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How sustainable is the Evangelicals' urban turn?

There is a "big change on the horizon that is taking place in cities" as evangelicals increasingly focus their attention on urban ministry, according to *Common Place*, (March 26-27), an urban affairs blog published by the University of Virginia's Institute for the Advanced Studies in Culture. Both figuratively and literally, American evangelicals "are coming back to the city... Some have even moved out of the suburbs and into areas of the city where they would not have imagined them-

selves living just a few years ago. Much of the urban turn among evangelicals started in Portland, Ore., a few years ago with a program known as Season of Service, where evangelical congregations fanned out across the city to provide a wide range of social services, with a "no-strings" attached approach that downplayed proselytism. The Season of Service was so well-received in Portland that it has been replicated in Anchorage,

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Schism or gridlock for United Methodists?

The increasing division in the United Methodist Church (UMC) over gay rights and marriage may be the harbinger of a major schism in the church body, writes Amy Frykholm in the *Christian Century* magazine (April 16). Observers, including **RW**, have viewed the United Methodists as an exception to the trend of mainline Protestant denominations liberalizing their policies on ordination of gays and lesbians and the approval of same-sex unions and marriages. This is mainly because the church body has an international membership with conservative memberships that could block such changes. But Frykholm reports that a

growing number of UMC clergy are performing same-sex wedding ceremonies in open defiance of church rules prohibiting such practices, prompting a series of church trials "which has bitterly divided the church." But so far, actual cases of clergy discipline over the issue have been few.

Some bishops have been conducting gay marriages while others have declined to prosecute clergy even when there have been charges brought up against them; only

conservative bishops have urged the denomination to hold such trials. Rules against the ordination of practicing

... a growing number of UMC clergy are performing same-sex wedding ceremonies in open defiance of church rules prohibiting such practices."

▶ Cont. on page 3



Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, in 1950. // Creative Commons image via UCLA Library.

Alternative versions of Scientology flourish in the 'Free Zone'

Although the Church of Scientology has tried to sue schismatic groups out of existence, a steady stream of defectors have resulted in a large but loosely-organized and Internet-driven community of people who still consider themselves Scientologists known as the "Free Zone," writes James Lewis in the current issue of the Finnish journal *Temenos* (Vol. 49, No. 2). There have been "tens of thousands" who have left the Church of Scientology's fold since the early 1980s, with a recent wave of defections adding to the diversity of the Free Zone, including the 2012 schism of an entire Scientology center in Haifa, Israel. The more recent defectors (starting around 2005) tend to call themselves Independent Scientology to differentiate themselves from other Free Zone groups started earlier, such as Ron's Org, which claims that L. Ron Hubbard channeled additional teachings to them after his death in 1986. But movement between all these groups is relatively common, with people not directly affiliated with Ron's Org nevertheless seeking auditing (the Scientology method for becoming "clear" of past traumatic experiences) or training at a Ron's Org center. Founded in 1984, Ron's Org is a federation of independent centers and is currently headquartered in Switzerland, with active centers

in Germany, Switzerland, Russia and some of the Commonwealth of Independent States' nations.

The Church of Scientology also licenses independent auditors who are trained to deliver the church's form of "therapy" outside of the physical boundaries of Scientology centers. Lewis writes that "such independent field auditors are, in effect, single person Scientology franchises." A number of these independent auditors have left the church through the years and become part of the Free Zone-listing their independent auditing services online. In between the larger groups, such as Ron's Org and independent auditors, "one can also find small groups consisting of [non-Church of Scientology] Scientologists who meet together informally and continue their study of Scientology." As might be expected, the Internet has been a boon to the Free Zone. "It has not only provided Freezoners with a forum for airing grievances, but the Internet has also provided more recent ex-members with points of contact for becoming affiliated with Free Zone organizations and for availing themselves of Scientology services and trainings that had formerly only been available through the Church," Lewis adds.

(*Temenos*, <http://ojs.tsv.fi/index.php/temenos/index>.) ■

Evangelical urbanization *(cont. from p. 1)*

Little Rock, Phoenix, San Diego, Sacramento and even in the state of New Jersey.

Another sign of the shift toward cities among evangelicals is "Movement Day," an event which started in 2010 and has since become an annual gathering of leaders to catalyze evangelical movements in their cities. At the forefront of this effort has been New York's Redeemer Presbyterian Church. Andrew Sharp writes that "the Season of Service and Movement Day are just a couple among numerous examples that signal a shift, at least among a segment of evangelical Christianity, away from the kind of engagement with society epitomized by the Christian Right and similar movements toward the end of last century through the past decade." The new urban focus has led some evangelicals, such as Joy Allmond of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, to speak of the next "Great Awakening."

The recent book *The Fundamentalist City? Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space*, edited by Nezar AlSayyad and Mejian Massoumi, suggests that "fundamentalist" strands within many of today's world religions have also

shown new interest in engaging urban life. Whether or not evangelicals will have an impact on American cities will hinge on whether they can partner with other Christians—such as Catholics and other Protestants—who, unlike evangelicals, stayed in the inner city and consistently maintained ministries to the

urban poor. A larger question will be whether religious groups will be "taken seriously as a force for positive, lasting change in cities." A study by Cardus, a think tank in Canada, has recently shown that the key to success in dealing with a city's problems is to "improve structural engagement" between "faith-based organizations and city planning departments."

Sharp concludes by asking, "will city leaders in the U.S. be willing to take faith-based organizations seriously? Will religious leaders among Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others be willing to together to share common goals for their city and speak

with one voice if city leaders give them a seat at the planning table?"

(*Common Place*, http://iasc-culture.org/THR/channels/Common_Place/.) ■



The 2013 Movement Day logo, courtesy of movementday.com.

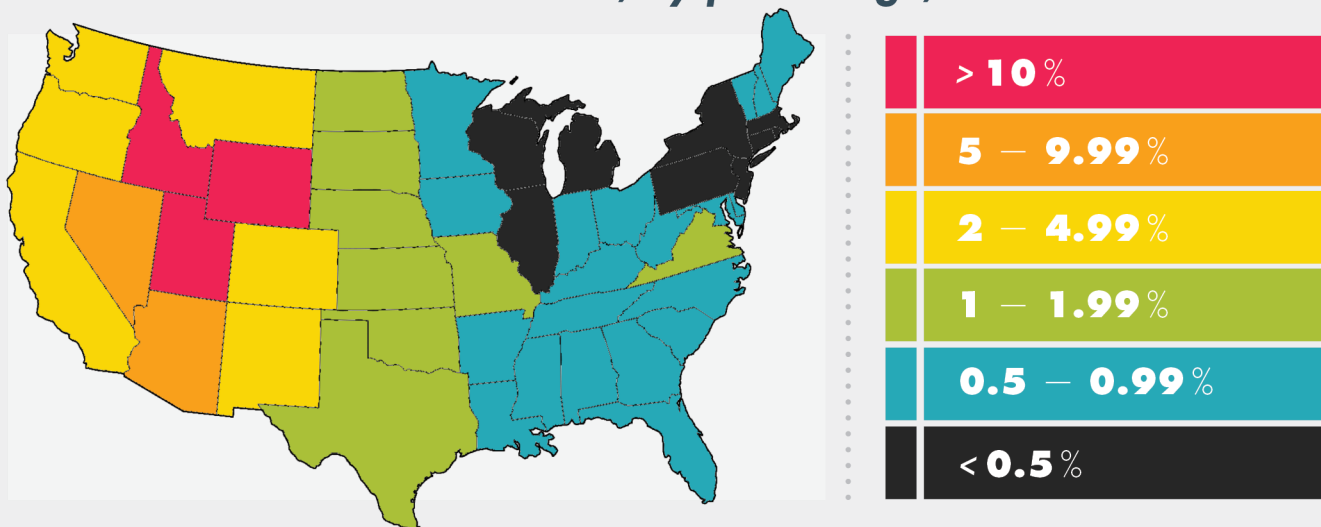
Gay rights division among United Methodists *(cont. from p. 1)*

homosexuals and gay unions were reinforced by the General Conference of the church in 2004 by making violations a chargeable offense. Since then, the defacto rule has been "don't ask, don't tell," with only the public nature of same-sex unions making the issue visible. The gay advocacy group, Reconciling Ministries Network, has grown in number and commitment, with some clergy members performing same-sex unions as a way of challenging the system. If there is a schism emerging, it will be more complicated

than the Episcopal, Lutheran, or Presbyterian cases. Some liberals are pressing for the denomination to give its U.S. jurisdictions more autonomy—a measure that has exempted some clergy in Africa from educational requirements. But such "big tent" United Methodism would mean that conservatives and liberals would have to put up with practices they find either unjust or unbiblical, providing another possibility of schism.

(*Christian Century*, 104 Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago, IL 60603.) ■

Concentration of LDS adherents, by percentage, in the United States



SOURCE: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the U.S. Census Bureau // Graphic design by T.J. Thomson, © 2014 ReligionWatch

The Mormon dilemma—burgeoning missionaries and saturated mission fields

Missions are flourishing in Mormonism in the year-and-a-half since the church lowered the minimum age for full-time missionary service, but it might not be helping to jumpstart the slow growth the church is experiencing, according to the *Salt Lake Tribune* (April 26). The faith has seen its proselytizing force grow from 58,500 to more than 83,000 (a 42 percent rise), while the number of convert baptisms last year grew to 282,945, up from 272,330 in 2012 (a increase of fewer than four percent). The main dilemma is that the new missionaries were largely assigned to areas such as the United States and Latin America, where the Latter Day Saints are well-established and the "market" for the religion might be saturated, according to researcher Matt Martinich. "Most of the surplus in missionary manpower was allocated to less-productive areas, where the church has more developed infrastructure that could accommodate such a sudden, massive increase in missionaries serving," he says. "In U.S. missions outside of the Intermountain West, every congregation had a companionship [pair of missionaries]. It was hard to keep even one busy. Now they have two or three [pairs]." The LDS Church has added 58 missions (totaling 405 around the world) after the missionary ages fell to 18, down from 19, for young men, and to 19,

down from 21, for young women (see March **RW** for more on that subject).

The Mormon missionary system is built on a "centers of strength" strategy, starting usually in big cities with a single congregation and then dividing as it grows larger. This strategy ensures slow yet steady growth. At a recent conference in Los Angeles, an LDS mission president instructed his missionaries not to "tract" (go door to door) or contact potential converts on their own, but to rely exclusively on "referrals" from members. To deal with retention problems, missionary-minded members also are seen as vital players in helping converts maintain their new faith. But if missionaries fail to engage in independent finding efforts, increasing their ranks will not appreciably increase convert baptisms, according to another researcher. LDS leaders have been experimenting with new missionary approaches, such as doing humanitarian work as well as tracting. In parts of Africa, LDS officials have begun to break with the "centers of strength" policy by creating "member groups," made up of a single member or a missionary companionship, meeting somewhat informally before there are enough members for a "branch." These groups typically turn into branches, which are smaller congregations than LDS wards, more quickly than traditional models. ■

WHAT THE

CURRENT
RESEARCH

REVEALS ABOUT TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

01 A survey from the American Bible Society finds that the percentage of those who are "Bible skeptical" is now equal to those Americans who are "Bible engaged"—both at 19 percent. Since the survey began in 2011, the Bible skeptics have risen from 10 percent to 19 percent of respondents. The survey, conducted by the Barna Group, categorizes the Bible engaged, who have remained at the same percentage, as those who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and who study it at least four times per week. But those in the "Bible friendly" camp—those who hold to biblical inerrancy but who read it less than four times per week—have dropped from 45 percent to 37 percent. Those considered "neutral" toward the Bible—believing that it might be inspired but is not inerrant or that it is not inspired and based on the writers' views of God—have also held steady at 26 percent. The growth in Bible skeptics, holding the most negative view of the Bible and viewing it as just a collection of stories and advice, are driven by the

Millennial generation; 19 percent of Millennials believe no literature is sacred compared to 13 percent of all adults.

02 Postcommunist countries with Protestant and Catholic heritages are more likely to enact policies and practices of transitional justice in the move to democracy than those nations with Muslim and Orthodox backgrounds, according to a study in the *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* (Spring). Peter Rozik analyzed 34 postcommunist countries and their policies and laws limiting the political participation of former authoritarian leaders and other officials (a process known as lustration) from 1990 to 20012. The postcommunist countries that inherited the legacies of Protestantism and Catholicism not only lead in enacting such laws of transitional justice but have on average also increased the intensity of their lustration practices.

Rozik notes that the "opposite is true of countries with mainly Muslim legacies, as they have received low and decreasing scores

on the lustration index. The countries inheriting Orthodox legacies also score low on the lustration index; their lustration scores have remained relatively even over the last two decades." The researcher controlled for other factors that may cause this pattern, such as the type, duration and the degree of bureaucratization of the communist regimes, but finds that the role of the religious legacies remains significant. He concludes that the church-state postures of these various traditions and the degree of actual complicity between religious officials with communist regimes may be factors driving these different outcomes.

(*Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, <http://jsri.ro/ojs/index.php/jsri/index>)

03 Nations in the Asia-Pacific region have the highest levels of religious diversity in the world, according to a report by the Pew Research Center.

► Cont. on page 6

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

Six of the world's 12 nations and territories with a "very high degree" of religious diversity can be found in the Asia-Pacific region—led by Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, China, and Hong Kong. Sub-Saharan Africa was the second leading region in diversity, including the countries of Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Ivory Coast, Benin and Mozambique. Suriname was the only country in the Americas to be included in the top 12 most religiously diverse nations. The U.S. has a moderate level of religious diversity, ranking 68th among 232 countries and territories that were studied.

04 While online religious involvement might compete with, and sometimes overtake, real-life participation in faith communities, a study of British Sikhs show that this need not be the case. The study, conducted at the University of Leeds, finds that the influence of the Internet in shaping religiosity depended on the level of offline engagement in the tradition the young Sikhs had. If the young Internet user is already affiliated with a specific Sikh group, online activity tends to reinforce existing ideas about religious tradition and authority; if there is less of an institutional affiliation, the user is more likely to explore tradition on their own terms, with the Internet affording a "safe space" for such explo-

ration, according to researcher Jasjit Singh writing in the journal *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (December).

The general tendency, however, was for many Sikhs to "check" information on the religion online, including discussing "taboo subjects," but still continue to cite offline elders and authorities. But the Internet does appear to affect some traditional structures of Sikhism. For instance, the practice of Kundalini yoga, which was previously not very well-known in Sikh circles, has gained some new influence because of its high profile on the Internet. Singh also finds that the Internet may affect how young Sikhs read religious texts, because online translation software allows them to engage with texts on a level that was not available to their parents. (*Contemporary Southeast Asia*, <https://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg/journal-details/cs.>)

05 Although Pentecostals have been implicated in the long-standing Muslim-Christian conflict in northern Nigeria, they are no more prone to violent attitudes than other Christians, according to a study published in current issue of *Pneuma* (36: 2014), a journal of Pentecostal studies. The view that Pentecostals have engaged in the violent conflict with Muslims was partly perpetuated by Pentecostal leaders

themselves as they issued statements in recent years saying that they had to defend themselves from attacks by militant Muslims represented by such a group as Boko Haram. The use of spiritual warfare rhetoric by some Pentecostal leaders has also been seen as stoking the conflict with Muslims.

Researchers Danny McCain, Musa Gaiya, and Katrina Korb conducted a survey of 139 church leaders consisting of Pentecostals from northern Nigeria, mainline Protestants from Northern Nigeria, and Pentecostals from southern Nigeria (who have not experienced Muslim-Christian violence) about their attitudes toward Muslims and the use of violence. They find that northern Pentecostals had significantly better attitudes toward Muslims than northern mainliners, and there was no significant difference between northern and Southern Pentecostals.

Northern Pentecostals did have more favorable attitudes toward violence than southern Pentecostals but there was no significant differences in their attitudes from those of northern mainline Protestants. Northern Pentecostals were also more likely to believe that harmonious co-existence with Muslims was possible than northern mainliners. (*Pneuma*, <http://www.brill.com/pneuma.>) ■

The success of the burkini and its meaning for Muslims—and non-Muslims

The success of female Islamic beachwear, called the "burkini," should be seen as part of a growing market for so-called "halal products" in a variety of niches. This beachwear also allows some Muslims to use it as one more mark of religious and cultural identity, said Diletta Guidi (University of Fribourg) at a recent conference. The conference took place in early May at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), was attended by **RW**, and focused on Women and Islam. In a commercially astute way, the "burkini" combines the words "burka" (integral veiling, Afghan style) and "bikini", although it is neither of them: in contrast with a burka, the face is not covered (neither are the hands and feet); in contrast with a bikini, most of the body is covered. The neologism "burkini" puts an emphasis on the syncretic and innovative nature of such a piece of swimwear, aiming to allow Muslim women to swim "in line with Islamic values."

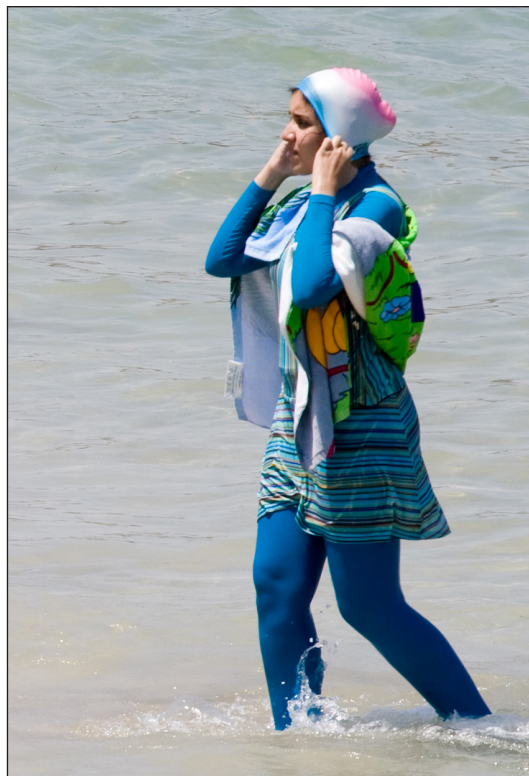
"Burkini" is a registered trademark. It was launched in 2003 by Lebanese-born Australian fashion designer Aheda Zanetti. According to her, the idea was born out of her personal experience as a young Muslim growing up in Australia and feeling constrained due to her religious beliefs. After watching her niece playing basketball while wearing an Islamic headscarf, the idea came to her to design convenient, Islamic-friendly beachwear and sportswear, produced and distributed by a firm she has founded for that purpose, Ahiida Pty Ltd. But several competitors have entered the market.

According to Diletta Guidi, the success and rapid spread of the burkini around the world can be explained by several factors. First, its price is affordable (most types cost less than \$100). Secondly, it can be found not only in hundreds of stores, but also on the

Internet, with the anonymity thus provided for ordering. Third, at least since the mid-2000s, a market for "halal" beach holidays has developed (e.g. "100 percent" Islamic holiday resorts in Turkey or Egypt). This halal market also exists for fashion products: there are "Islamic Fashion Weeks" in places such as the United Arab Emirates, and the burkini is part of that

trend. Several Muslim religious authorities or preachers have approved the burkini.

What the designers of the burkini had not foreseen was the interest of non-Muslim women for that type of beachwear. According to the marketing director of a British brand, some 15 percent of customers are non-Muslims (for various reasons). Among non-Muslims, however, the burkini has become another topic of controversy regarding Islam and women. While a minority of Western feminists have welcomed the burkini as a way of providing more freedom to Mus-



A woman in Egypt wears a burkini swimsuit on a beach. // Creative Commons image by Giorgio Montersino.

lim women, others see it as one more way of perpetuating alleged submission of women, and to pressure those Muslim women who do not want to wear it and prefer Western beachwear. Across Europe, decisions regarding the use of the burkini in public swimming pools have been diverse: in some places, authorities have banned the burkini (for hygiene reasons, or due to its religious connection in France), while others have accepted it as a way of promoting the integration of Muslim women in local society. ■

Overview of Christians in the Middle East finds new and varying crises and responses

While Christian minorities are currently facing severe challenges in several countries of the Middle East, as evidenced by the situation in Syria, there is no set pattern to these conflicts, according to the April issue of *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (April), which is devoted to country-by-country analyses. In Egypt (84 million inhabitants), Christians make close to 10 percent of the population, with 7 to 9 million Coptic Orthodox, more than 600,000 Protestants, and 200,000 to 300,000 Coptic Catholics. The Coptic Orthodox Church has been led since 2012 by Patriarch Tawadros II, who took the helm of the Church at a time violence against Christians was increasing, and while the Morsi-led government was hardly taking measures to counter such attacks. Christians welcomed the overthrow of President Morsi by the military, but instances of violence continue to be reported, with inefficient or very late police reaction. Still, Christians nourish hopes that there will be improvements under the soon-to-be-elected president. The new Constitution adopted in January 2014 keeps Islam as the religion of the State and guarantees no quota for Christians in Parliament, but the religious rights of Jews and Christians are clearly recognized (though not those of the 2,000 Bahais in the country).

At this point, all options (both positive and negative) for the future remain open, writes Michaela Köger, an expert on developments in Egyptian Christianity. Despite economic hardships, most Egyptian Christians would like to stay in their country. In Syria, Thomas Prieto Peral describes the situation of Christians as "more than complicated." Before the uprising of 2011 and the subsequent civil war, Christians made up 10 percent of the population, but they were spread across the country, with no homogeneous majority Christian areas. Faced with the current threat of de facto divi-

sions in the country across religious lines, with few places for Christians, there are renewed visions of a Christian homeland, as cultivated in Christian circles since the 19th century. But such dreams appear to offer little promises in terms of a lasting or realistic solution and seems unlikely that Christians could call one area their own and rule it. Moreover, there are strong internal divisions and political rivalries among Christians, exacerbated in a growing Christian diaspora with competing views and identities.

Christians are already the main losers of the war, adds Wolfgang Schwaigert. Christians face the violence of the war like all Syrian citizens, but they are also targeted with hostility from radical Islamists, including the desecration of their churches, and more than one-quarter of the Christian population has already fled the country. Entire areas are now

"Christian-free" while all churches in such areas have been razed to the ground. The situation in Lebanon is different, but cannot be separated from developments in neighboring countries, writes Fadi Daou (Adyan Foundation). Considering conflicts surrounding them, the main challenge is to reinforce unity among the 13 different Churches recognized in the Lebanese Constitution. While the Middle East Council of Churches is headquartered in Beirut, there is no permanent ecumenical structure associating all Churches in Lebanon itself. Finally, only a small Christian population is left today in Turkey, despite its historical significance for Christianity and the presence of the

Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul—a total of some 150,000 Christians in the entire country. New Christian players are coming in the form of small, dynamic Evangelical groups, but their missionary work risks creating new divisions and controversy for Christians, writes Claudio Monge.

(*Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland – www.g2w.eu.) ■

"Christians face the violence of the war like all Syrian citizens, but they are also targeted with hostility from radical Islamists, including the desecration of their churches . . ."

EXPLORE THIS ISSUE'S



FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

01 If the study of religion(s) "opens itself to calls for direct 'societal relevance' to a greater extent, advocacy will gain greater prominence," writes Michael Stausberg (University of Bergen, Norway) in introducing a thematic issue on the topic of advocacy in the study of religion(s) in the journal *Religion* (April). Advocacy research is conducted to promote the goals or interests of a community or group. Often, as it happens in other fields, the fact that a group seems to be treated unfairly will play a role in a scholar turning to advocacy. The articles in this issue make it clear how relationships contribute to the emergence of advocacy. Researchers come to care about the people they encounter in their work. Sometimes they are directly asked to help a group, which might also allow a researcher to gain deeper access to information. While practical assistance cannot always be equated with advocacy, it easily translates into it, starting when a scholar is asked by a group to write a letter of support. One well-known (and sometimes controversial) case of advocacy is that of scholars who have

intervened on behalf of new and marginal religious groups: for instance, in court cases where their expertise was directly relevant to issues under consideration.

Sometimes, such groups have actively attempted to use the expertise of scholars for gaining legitimacy, Stausberg notes, citing the example of Scientology and its request to scholars to write statements authenticating the religious nature of the movement—something that goes beyond mere academic debate, since it may have some consequences for legal decisions as well. In some cases, advocacy becomes linked to the identity of a scholar: either because their research is intimately linked to their own causes, or because deepening relationships make it increasingly difficult to remain "value-neutral" (with some non Western societies making it more difficult to remain neutral). Still, most scholars seem to avoid engaging into advocacy, as it seems to put into question the required critical distance. It takes time and hardly helps an academic career.

For more information on this issue, write: *Religion*, Taylor & Francis Inc., 325 Chesnut Street,

8th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19106
- <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rrel20#>.

02 *Young Catholic America* (Oxford University Press, \$29.95) builds on previous works based on the longitudinal National Survey of Religion and Youth but narrows the focus to look at the steep challenges to and changes in belief and behavior of Catholic young adults, particularly those in the 18-23 age range. The book, co-authored by Christian Smith, Kyle Longest, Jonathan Hill, and Kari Christoffersen and also based on interviews with Catholics and ex-Catholics, traces much of the dramatic loss of belief and practice they find among the young—aside from general trends present in the wider population—to a large-scale failure of parents to transmit their faith to the next generation. Closely related to this is the case that the Catholic entry into the mainstream of American society came at the same time that unsettling revolutions in the culture—the 60s—and the church—Vatican II—were taking place,

► Cont. on page 10

Findings & footnotes *(cont. from p. 9)*

setting off a chain of unintended consequences, including a population (born from the mid-1950s to 1960s) who were loosely attached to their faith and less willing and able to hand it down to their children.

The researchers find that young Catholics are not much different than their parents on many religious and moral issues—and, in fact, are more likely to believe in the afterlife—but they attend church far less (in 1970, more than one-third of young adults 18-25 attended Mass while by the 1990s and 2000s it was down to one-fifth). Much of this loss of Catholic practice is generational rather than due to life cycle changes, as is the case with younger Protestants, which means that these Catholics are less likely to return to church as they get older. Those young Catholics who do remain attached to the church tend to have had strong associations with devout Catholic adults, helping them make the faith their own during their teen years. Other interesting findings from the book include: a narrowing gap between Latino and white young Catholics, with the former (with some exceptions) moving toward less practice and belief; the diversity of ways that young people define their Catholic identity (raising new methodological issues in studying them), which suggests that they are closer to Jewish younger adults in this regard than Protestants; and the waning effect of Catholic schooling in encouraging, particularly as these young adults move into their twenties.

03 The sharp rise of the non-affiliated or "nones" in the U.S. (as elsewhere) continues to generate debate among researchers and religious leaders. Are these unaffiliated, often younger, Americans headed in the direction of greater secularism, or are they just drifting from religious institutions but still spiritually engaged, as is suggested by the popular—but equally confusing—self-designation of "spiritual but not religious"? *In Belief without Borders* (Oxford University Press, \$29.95), author Linda Mercadante argues that quantitative studies can take one only so far in determining the religious/spiritual status of a large segment of the nones who are not atheists and agnostics. She instead employs in-depth interviews (of 100 individuals) that allows the spiritual but not religious (SBNR)

to describe their own motivations and distinctions in their belief and behavior. Mercadante, a Presbyterian theologian, maintains that the SBNR really occupy a new middle ground in American society—critical of both religious dogma and institutions and secularism. The book accepts its respondents' broad definitions of "spiritual"—

sometimes just a vague sense of connection to the earth or a secular practice of yoga.

Mercadante parses and categorizing the different ways in which Americans consider themselves SBNR, finding subsets of: "dis-senters," those who stay away from and may have specific theological issues with religion; "casuals," who use religion and spirituality in practical and functional

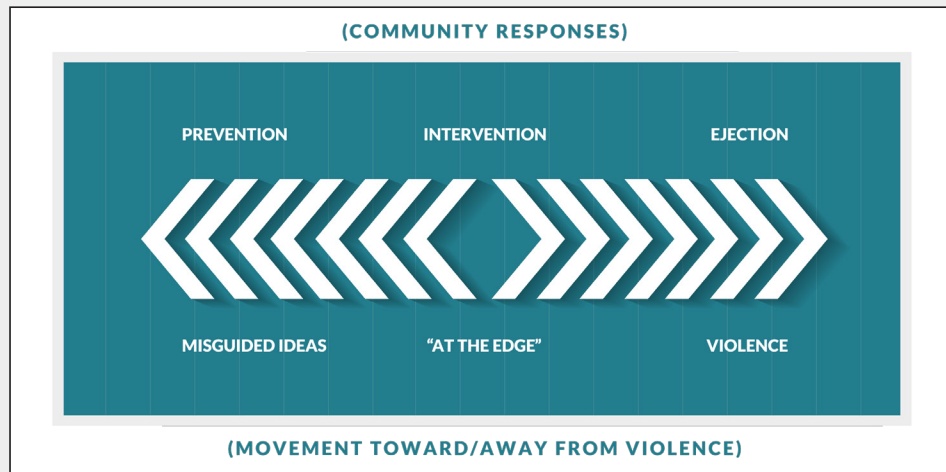
ways; explorers, who move through religions and traditions like "spiritual tourists," which is differentiated from "seekers," who are searching for a spiritual home. Lastly, Mercadante creates the category of "immigrants," for those who have found a new spiritual home. Yet the common themes of holding a "post-Christian spirituality" (most reject the New Age label), stressing a rejection of external authority and identifying the

sacred with oneself and personal well-being, rejection of exclusivism, and the belief in a mystical core of all religions, marks many of the SBNR. Mercadante concludes that the SBNR seek a sense of community and social activism but their lack of structures may not be enough to give such efforts much longevity. ■

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The "PIE" model, developed by the Muslim Public Affairs Council, encourages communities to use prevention, intervention, and ejection, to lessen the risk of violent behavior. // SOURCE: *The Muslim Public Affairs Council's Safe Spaces Initiative toolkit.*

ON / FILE

A CONTINUING SURVEY OF NEW GROUPS, MOVEMENTS, EVENTS AND PEOPLE IMPACTING RELIGION

01 A program known as the **Safe Spaces Initiative** aims to assist U.S. mosques in identifying potential extremists in their midst has been started by a Muslim advocacy group. The initiative was prompted by the Boston Marathon bombings and was created by the Muslim Public Affairs Council. The program is voluntary but represents a departure from the long-held strategy by the American Muslim community to distance itself from Islamic extremism. While some mosques offer counseling services and try to address radical arguments, many Muslim leaders have stated that such attacks as those by the Tsarnaev brothers in the Boston Marathon bombing had nothing to do with Islam, even. The plan's creators say that while the majority of American Muslims have no connection to extremism, the entire Muslim community is affected by the rare instances of radical violence, such as the Boston bombings, and should address extremist voices. The mosque that one of brothers attended in Boston had warned him about disruptive behavior during prayer services.

The initiatives' founders compare the approach to intervention programs established at schools to prevent mass shootings or gang violence. The program encourages mosque leaders to promote "healthy outlets" for "hot topic" issues such as politics, gender relations and drug abuse. The second step involves direct engagement with a person who appears to be veering toward extremism. If that intervention fails, the final step is expelling the person from the mosque and alerting law enforcement. MPAC officials have just begun briefing law enforcement authorities, including the Los Angeles Police Department and U.S. Department of Homeland Security, on the plan. They also have started contacting some mosques. (Source: *Wall Street Journal*, April 13.)

02 A Korean new religious movement known as **Salvation** (or "Guwon" in Korean) has gained some notoriety after the ferry boat named SeWol (which means "going beyond this world" in Korean) carrying 476 passengers

► Cont. on **page 12**

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On/File *(cont. from p. 11)*

sunk in April. When government authorities began to investigate the causes of the disaster, it was revealed that the owner of the ferry boat was a founding member of Salvation, which is considered a cult group by mainstream Christian group in Korea. The "salvation" church was inspired by an American missionary and originated in 1962 by Korean minister, Kwon Shin Chan and his son-in-law Yu Byung Un, the owner of the ferry boat. The major theological distinction between "salvation" church and other groups is its emphasis on guaranteed salvation and a de-emphasis on the church and the role of prayer. In particular, church members are alleged to believe that Yu Byung Un is engaged in God's holy work by running his businesses in the secular world.

Critics charge that for this reason, Yu Byung Un has been able to exploit his employees by paying them one-tenth of the market rate, making his business thrive. Furthermore, the government is now investigating any political connections of Yu with high government officials and politicians, with some alleging that he established a slush fund for lobbying them. Yu is reported to have 50 business groups ranging from pharmaceutical companies to collective farms worth more than 100 million dollars in Korea and abroad. For example, he owns farms in California and Korea and purchased an old village in France several years ago. (Source: *Yonhap* daily newspaper, May 4.) ■

— Written and translated by K.T. Chun, a New Jersey-based writer and researcher.

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