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Religion Watch is a newsletter monitoring trends in contemporary religion. For more than two decades we have covered the whole range of religions around the world, particularly looking at the unofficial dimensions of religious belief and behavior.

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The Obama strategy dividing and conquering American Catholics?

The increased outreach of the Democrats to Catholics has paid off, with a new breed of liberal Catholic activists and politicians gaining a place in the Obama administration. The *National Catholic Reporter* (June 26) notes that “Catholics are visibly more active in the Obama administration than in any other Democratic administration in recent memory.” These Catholics represent the key chunks of the American Catholic population that moved from the Republican to the Democratic Party in the last election. Other liberal Catholics who felt alienated by the Republican resurgence in the last three decades are among the leaders now on the inside track. One-third of the Obama cabinet is now Catholic, including such leaders as Vice-President Joseph Biden, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. President Obama has also made overtures to the Hispanic Catholic community with the nomination of Judge Sonia Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court and Latino theologian Miguel Diaz as US ambassador to the Holy See.

In fact, some non-Catholic leftists are struggling with the “leverage” that liberal, though often pro-life, Catholics are having on the administration. *The Tablet* magazine (June 6) provides more details about the new kind of Catholic Democrats in Washington: “Their curricula vitae are likely to include experience as an activist or community organizer. They are younger and they

plug into their constituencies through blogs and e-mails, rather than visits to the union hall,” writes Michael Sean Winters. Representing these Catholics are new organizations such as the Catholics in Alliance, Catholics United, and the interfaith, but sympathetic, Faith in Public Life.

Such progressives argue that the Obama administration has been cooperative in working on such issues as reducing abortions, even while eschewing most of the pro-life agenda. But conservative critics charge that Obama has tried to intervene in Catholic matters and sidestep the church’s leadership by such actions as speaking at the University of Notre Dame commencement and seeking agreement on various issues with the pope. By going over the heads of the bishops, who opposed his speaking engagement, Obama is deploying a strategy of “disintermediating” the church leaders—cutting out the middlemen between the faithful at home and the hierarchy in Rome, writes Joseph Feuerherd in the *National Catholic Reporter* (May 29). He notes that the same strategy was used by Ronald Reagan, who was opposed by the more liberal U.S. bishops of the 1980s, but found a hearing among the “Reagan Democrats” and the Vatican.

(*National Catholic Reporter*, 115 E. Armour Blvd., Kansas City, MO 64111; *The Tablet*, 1 King Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0QZ UK)

Religions face questions of “netiquette” in using new social media

Congregations are feeling their way through the “social media,” such as Facebook and Twitter, and are finding they need to develop new forms of etiquette to adapt such innovations to their ministries. The *National Catholic Reporter* (May 29) notes that the cell phone texting network known as Twitter is the “newest technology arriving in contemporary church services ... church leaders are inviting worshippers to tweet and text their way through services as a way to share their prayers and reflections with neighbors in the pew” or with their families and friends who may not be attending services. In some churches, pastors pose questions to worshippers, asking them to text responses, which are displayed on a screen. The other type of twittering is more informal, as parishioners “tweet” their

reflections to the service, much as they might take notes. The *New York Times* (July 5) notes that while evangelicals pioneered the use of the social media for their churches, today “religious groups from Episcopalians to Orthodox Jews have signed up” for such networks.

The article continues: “In online debates and private discussions, leaders of all faiths have been weighing pros and cons and diagramming the boundaries of acceptable interactions: Should the congregation have a Facebook page, or should it be the imam's or the priest's? Should there be limited access? Censoring? Is it appropriate for a clergy member to ‘friend’ a minor?” A central question is whether these forms of media sidestep traditional authority and means of control. When

worshippers can intersperse their own comments with the liturgy and sermon, such interactions are a particular challenge to centralized and hierarchical institutions, such as the Catholic Church, that have a standardized form of worship. Another effect of these networks is that they create varying levels of “community” within a congregation. For instance, Trinity Church on Wall Street in New York has attracted a small, but growing community of followers from as far afield as Europe and California, as well as those nearby. A church employee transmits snippets of the service, with participants following on Twitter. These “slender” connections to the church are sometimes interspersed with actual visits to a service.

Defections from Scientology raise questions of leadership abuse, church decline

Several high-level defections from the Church of Scientology have led to new accusations of abuse by the leadership in the controversial organization, as well as allegations that the church is struggling with a loss of membership. A special 35-page report in the *St. Petersburg Times* newspaper (June 21–22) is based on the accounts of top executives from the Church of Scientology who left the church in the last few years and are speaking out

about alleged abuses involving its long-time leader, David Miscavage. The ex-members, who include former spokesperson Marty Rathburn; the former head of Scientology headquarters, Tom DeVocht; and Amy Scobie, who helped create the church's celebrity network, allege that physical violence permeates the organization's management. Miscavage is said to have beaten many church staffers over minor infractions and for challenging

his leadership. Church officials deny these accusations and charge that the defectors are trying to stage a coup and seize control of the church.

Another issue that the defectors are bringing up is the case of Lisa McPherson, a member who died while in church custody. While the church was cleared on charges of wrongful death, a defector such as Rathburn, who handled the case for the church,

alleges that abuse and neglect surrounded the event. The defectors also claim that Miscavage's leadership has stifled church growth. These former leaders claim that they

had access to internal data reports that show a gradual decline of key statistics, including the "value of church services delivered" and the number of auditing hours and courses

completed. Rathburn said that to pump up revenue, the church has repackaged its old books as new writings to sell back to members at high prices—a charge the church denies.

Internet plays key role in spreading Noahide interest

A movement of Gentiles observing some aspects of Jewish law and teachings [see **RW**, Nov. 2006] and usually coming from Christian or Messianic Jewish backgrounds, the Noahides are reported to be experiencing growth, as the Internet allows such believers to find information, interact and make their ideas known much more easily, reports Ben Harris of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (June 22). In the past decades, Noahide individuals and groups existed, but it was not always easy for non-Jews interested in the Seven Laws of Noah to find like-minded people or Orthodox

rabbis willing to help them. The Internet has changed all that: not only are a variety of books and websites available, but the Internet "also has helped foster a sense of community for Noahides," who can much more easily locate groups around the world and participate in discussion groups. There is even a WikiNoha and a Noahide Online Association of Homeschoolers.

However, the need is felt to go beyond the Internet as a primary means of connection. There have recently been several conferences of Noahides, the last one near

Dallas in early June. The efforts should now be focused on building communities, according to Harris, with rituals and ways to pass the teachings on to children, but there are limitations here, since Noahides are prohibited from creating a separate religion and must follow rabbinic instructions. Harris' article also mentions another difficult issue for a relatively small and scattered group with unique beliefs: finding spouses who share the same views.

(*Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, <http://www.jta.org>)

Gay synagogues drawing straight Jewish seekers

Gay Jewish synagogues are finding a growing number of heterosexual Jews in attendance and even playing leadership roles, mostly due to the welcoming and experimental nature of these congregations, reports the website *Forward.com* (June 4). In some cases, synagogues established originally for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and trans-sexual Jews now even have a majority of straight members. Jay Michaelson writes that gay synagogues have been in the

forefront of creating rituals, structures and language that welcome outsiders to the Jewish community and establishment. Especially in areas outside such centers of Jewish activity and populations as New York, less-affiliated Jews have felt excluded from synagogue life (for instance, for not knowing enough Hebrew). What such unaffiliated Jews "find at most gay synagogues is a community that welcomes them warmly and effectively, with fewer

judgements, raised eyebrows or grumbles about political correctness," Michaelson writes.

The gay synagogues specialize in reinventing tradition—from creating new rituals to celebrating a gender change or writing a new liturgy for becoming an adoptive "co-parent"—and are attractive to liberal Jews seeking to change the tradition. Michaelson adds that today gay synagogues are at a crossroads: many are becoming

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“irrelevant” as mainstream synagogues become more accepting of gay rights, while others have lost their gay identity

as more straights have joined. But such leading gay synagogues as Beth Simchat Torah in New York and San Francisco’s

Congregation Sha’ar Zahav have written new prayer books and have become leading political actors in the gay marriage battle.

Indigo children representing the next stage of the New Age?

“Indigo children” have become a popular phenomenon in alternative spiritual and New Age circles, blending millennial concepts and psychic beliefs with child-rearing concerns. The *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine (July/August) reports that the phenomenon of children who are said to be the next stage in evolution and possessing a spiritual energy has found a hearing among parents who believe their children are special beings living in troubled times. The concept of the Indigo child was established in the early 1970s in the writings of Nancy Tappe, who claimed that she could intuitively see people’s life mission by their indigo-colored auras (indigo being the color of spiritual energy). But the movement did not take off until 1999, when Carroll and Jan Tober wrote the book *The Indigo*

Children: The New Kids Have Arrived. Since then, the Indigo movement has been featured in books, spiritual workshops and even a feature film. Writer Benjamin Witts notes that new categories have recently been created to designate other types of special and creative children, such as Crystal and Rainbow children.

Parents are instructed that they can find out if their children are Indigo by their display of such qualities as independence, creativity and experiencing difficulty with fitting into school life. In *Nova Religio* (February), a journal on new religious movements, Sarah Whedon notes that Indigo children are viewed as harbingers of a new age where the old institutions of oppression will be overturned. These children help parents and adults

get in touch with their inner child and heal the self by manipulating their auras. But Whedon argues that the movement is rooted in fears over child violence and the excessive medication of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Much of the Indigo children literature deals with children with ADHD and how they have been misunderstood and misdiagnosed: “Instead of being seen as sick, Indigo children are seen as special children who will bring about the New Age. For those who believe in the Indigo children, the problem has become the solution,” Whedon writes.

(*Skeptical Inquirer*, P.O. Box 703, Amherst, NY 14226; *Nova Religio*, Univ. of California Press, 2000 Center St., Ste. 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223)

CURRENT RESEARCH

► **American professors are more likely to be religious than non-religious, according to a recent study by Neil Gross and Solon Simmons in the journal *Sociology of Religion* (Summer).** In analyzing data from their new Politics of the

American Professoriate survey (of 1,417 professors), Gross and Simmons find that academics were three times more likely than the American public to be considered “religious skeptics” (atheists and agnostics). Yet such skepticism was not the most common stance, since just over a fifth are atheists and agnostics, while 51.5 percent believe in God. As found in previous studies, those in the social sciences were most likely to be atheists, while professors in the physical and biological

sciences were more likely to be agnostics. The highest percentage of non-believers tended to be in elite schools in the north-east of the U.S. and among the research professors who have less contact with undergraduates than other professors, although 31.3 percent of such research-oriented faculty are nonetheless believers. The health disciplines had the most religious believers. Of those claiming religious beliefs, “traditionalists” comprised 19 percent of the professors, while

“moderates” represented 42.4 percent and “progressives” 38.6 percent. Gross and Simmons conclude that the popular stereotype of academic secularists needs to be revised in favor of a more complex model that allows for considerable religious variation according to institution, faculty, position and region of the country. (*Sociology of Religion*, Oxford University Press, 2001 Evans Rd., Cary NC 27513)

▶ **Religious Americans are three to four times more likely to be involved in their communities than non-believers, although the difference is more about community ties than actual religious beliefs, according to political scientist Robert Putnam.** In a book to be released next year, Putnam and University of Notre Dame scholar David Campbell find that believers are more likely to work on community projects, belong to voluntary organizations, vote in local elections, and donate time and money to secular causes than non-believers. The effect is causal, according to Putnam and Campbell, since people who hadn't attended church became more active in the community after they started to do so. But it was not religious beliefs, such as fear of damnation, as much as the friendship ties developed in congregations that generated community involvement among believers. The *Christian Century* (June 16) notes that it was especially what Putnam calls “supercharged friends” in congregations who encourage others in their “moral community” to get involved in community affairs. Those who may attend services, but don't have these friendships within the congregation, tend to look more like non-believers in their level of community involvement. Putnam and Campbell note that the congregational effect on community involvement may be waning, since young adults are far less likely to regularly attend religious services

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

▶ **While physical healing is an important part of the Pentecostal tradition and message, a significant minority of Pentecostals have neither experienced such a form of healing nor been an agent in bringing about such experiences to others, according to a study by sociologist Margaret Paloma.** In surveying 1,827 adherents from 21 Assemblies of God congregations, Paloma found that 30 percent said they had never experienced a physical healing and 33 percent said they had never been used as an agent of healing for someone else. Writing in the Pentecostal journal *Pneuma* (Vol. 31, No. 1), Paloma notes that those more likely to have claimed a healing or to have played a role in a healing were older church members and non-whites. But the leading predictor of either experience was engaging in “prophetic prayer,” the practice of allegedly receiving a revelation or message from God. The respondents were far more likely to report an emotional or “inner” healing, with this figure reaching 93 percent. (*Pneuma*, Vanguard University, 55 Fair Dr., Costa Mesa, CA 92626)

▶ **Unwed teens and those in their 20s who have attended religious schools are more likely to have abortions than their counterparts who went to public schools, according to a study in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* (June).** Sociologist Amy Adamczyk analyzed data showing the pregnancy decisions of 1,504 women aged 26 and younger, 25 percent of whom had had abortions. Adamczyk found no significant link between a young women's personal religiosity (defined by attendance, prayer frequency and the personal importance of faith) and their abortion decisions. She found that conservative

evangelicals were the least likely to report having an abortion. One factor in the effect of religious schooling on abortion decisions is that while students may not necessarily be religious, the strong social ties these schools generate may create shame among students who become pregnant through sexual relations outside marriage.

▶ **After a long period of growth, Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist memberships show signs of decline, according to the 2009 edition of the *Yearbook of the American & Canadian Churches*.** The percentages of these losses were small (with the Catholics losing 0.59 percent and the Southern Baptists 0.24 percent of their memberships), but in the case of the SBC, the membership statistics have shown stagnation for several years, with baptisms falling for the third straight year. “Many churches are feeling the impact of the lifestyles of younger generations of church-goers—the ‘Gen X’ers’ or ‘Millennials’ in their 20s and 30s who attend and support local congregations but resist joining them,” writes Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner, editor of the yearbook. Other denominations reporting membership losses include: United Church of Christ (down 6.01 percent); African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (down 3.01 percent); Presbyterian Church (USA) (down 2.79 percent); Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (down 1.44 percent); Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (down 1.35 percent); and American Baptist Churches USA (down 0.94 percent).

▶ **When Jehovah's Witnesses evangelize, fewer hours need to be invested per convert in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa than in other parts of the world, reports French historian and long-time observer of religious movements**

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Bernard Blandre in *Mouvements Religieux* (January-February). For instance, twice as many hours on average are needed per convert in the U.S. compared to Zambia. Thus, it is not surprising that the Witnesses are developing more rapidly in the above-mentioned areas. The Witnesses release detailed statistical data in their yearbooks, and Blandre has analyzed these figures yearly since 1983. For each baptism, whatever the country, several thousand hours are spent—obviously not on one individual, but on many uninterested people, with

very few of them finally converting. Worldwide, Jehovah's Witnesses have grown by 2.1 percent from 2007 to 2008. North America and Western Europe are below average.

In all Western countries, many more hours are needed per conversion today than was the case in 1980. For instance, in the U.S., 2,915 hours of preaching were required for making one convert in 1980; in 2008, not less than 6,120 hours had to be spent for achieving the same result of one convert. In the UK, the number of hours has jumped from 3,511 in 1980 to 7,074 in 2008, in Italy from

2,540 to 10,121, and in Canada from 3,342 to 9,082. This means that the average population seems to be much more resistant to Witnesses' proselytism than used to be the case less than 30 years ago. Blandre remarks that it is difficult to assess the reasons behind such a development. Among possible factors, he mentions criticism of Witnesses, growing competition, or maybe lesser enthusiasm among Witnesses for knocking on door after door. (*Mouvements Religieux*, B.P. 70733, 57207 Sarreguemines Cedex, France)

Messianic Judaism finding new followers in Germany

While the Messianic Jewish movement—i.e. Jews converted to Christianity while keeping their Jewish identity and some Jewish practices—has only existed in Germany since 1995, it numbers now some 40 groups with about 1,000 members, reports Stefanie Pfister in the German monthly *Materialdienst der EZW* (July). The appearance of Messianic Judaism is linked to the revival of Jewish life in Germany following the immigration of Russian Jews. More than 198,000 of them migrated to Germany between 1993 and 2006, but a number of them actually had Jewish descent only from their fathers' side, which does not make them Jews from a traditional Jewish viewpoint, thus making their integration into Jewish religious life difficult. This and other reasons explain why only half of the "Jewish" immigrants actually belong to a Jewish congregation.

The first Messianic Jewish groups in Germany were established by people who had already become Messianic believers in the former Soviet Union (FSU) in the early 1990s after interacting with evangelicals. Fifty-five to 75 percent of those attending Messianic services are of Jewish descent, and other immigrants from the FSU make a significant percentage of the rest, reports Pfister, who in 2008 published a doctoral thesis on the movement (in German). These services take place on Shabbat and have a strong Jewish flavor (including *menorah*, Israeli flags, *shofar*, *kippa* and *tallit*). Most services are celebrated in Russian, but leaders of the movement see this as a transitory stage, before moving to German and expanding—something that will be needed even more due to the slowing down of Jewish immigration from Russia to Germany. The movement is not homogeneous: some of the groups are independent, while others are connected to various Jewish or Israel-oriented evangelical

groups. (*Materialdienst der Evangelischen Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen*, Auguststrasse 80, 10117 Berlin, Germany, <http://www.ezw-berlin.de>)

African Christianity a sleeping giant in Francophone world

While English-speaking African churches have often been viewed as representing global South Christianity and influencing the North, Francophone African nations, especially the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), are playing a role in religion far beyond their borders. Philip Jenkins writes in the *Christian Century* (June 16) that the DRC could be placed alongside the evangelical powerhouses of Nigeria and Uganda (with their impact on global Anglicanism) because of its numbers alone: it claims 33 million Catholics, 14 million Protestants and several million indigenous Christians. With one of the world's highest fertility rates, the DRC's population and the percentage of Chris-

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tians will expand to among the world's largest.

Just as Nigeria has become a prominent diasporic community throughout the English-speaking world, the Congolese now play a large role in Francophone countries. Jenkins concludes that in both "France and Belgium, the Catholic priesthood maintains its depleted ranks by drawing on recruits from the global South—from Vietnam, but also from the Congo and Cameroon ... Congolese-founded Protestant and Pentecostal churches abound in Paris, London and Brussels, and these are some of Europe's largest and most fervent megachurches."

New spirituality drives emerging Jewish communities in Israel

A new phenomenon in Israel has been the rise of spiritual communities fusing their Israeli and Jewish identities, and thus producing a new type of loosely organized, "post-denominational" Judaism, without predefined rules and rituals, writes Eetta Prince Gibson in the *Jerusalem Report* (June 22). While there are some genealogical links with Reform or Conservative Judaism, and some people involved now train to become Reform rabbis, these groups are not a North American import, and only a minority of people active in the emerging communities are immigrants (and mostly from the former Soviet Union). Thus, the communities can be described as a "search for

an Israeli indigenously-inspired form of Judaism."

These groups vary in their practices, but tend to create their own rituals and may creatively mix elements from traditional Jewish prayers with new rituals, insights from Eastern tradition or guided meditation. Communal singing also plays a role, sometimes accompanied by drums and guitars. The pluralism and the absence of hierarchical structures are appealing to secular Jews—who find in such groups adequate opportunities for expressing their connection to their Jewish roots. The emerging communities also attract people who were raised in religious homes, but no longer feel comfortable with standard religious ways. For many in the emerging communities, the traditional boundaries between "religious" and "secular" no longer make sense. Those groups clearly perceive themselves as Jewish, while finding new ways for living a Jewish spirituality and acknowledging the principle of individual choice in a post-modern environment. They feel that they are creating ways for the perpetuation of Judaism, while Orthodox Jews are reluctant to view these groups as reflecting authentic Judaism.

While people active in the Israeli emerging communities see little connection to the Jewish Renewal Movement in North America, some observers nevertheless see parallels between both expressions in terms of a "generational phenomenon." Recently, contacts between these move-

ments have been made. According to the *Jerusalem Report* article, there are some 50 such groups in Israel, and 17 of them have formed the Israeli Network of Non-denominational Spiritual Communities, with a few more considering whether to join. They are not planning to become a registered entity at this stage, but feel that networking may help in sharing experiences. (*The Jerusalem Report*, P.O. Box 1805, Jerusalem 91017, Israel, <http://www.jrep.com>)

Shiites unlikely to rise up in Saudi Arabia, report finds

Despite discrimination experienced in Saudi Arabia, the Shiite minority is unlikely to engage again in actions such as the bloody street protests of the 1970s and 1980s. This is especially the case since "Saudi Shiites are strongly aware of their limited political options" and prefer to seize options offered by the political system and to ally themselves with people intent on changing the Saudi Kingdom through reforms, writes Dutch scholar Leo Kwarten in a monograph published in June by the Conflicts Forum and available online. Questions about the prospect of an uprising were raised after clashes between Shiite pilgrims and religious police in Medina last February, something that caused resentment in the (oil-rich) Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, where Shiites form a majority in some places, while they make up 10–15 percent of the total Saudi population. The

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fact that Shiites have been oppressed and discriminated against in various ways for a long time does not help.

“

Most Shiite leaders in Saudi Arabia are dreaming about reforms, not about revolution.

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Despite some angry calls for secession after the Medina events, most Shiite leaders were eager to reconfirm their loyalty to the government. Doing field research, Kwartan discovered that most Shiite leaders—whom most Western journalists rarely interview—are not dreaming about revolution, but rather about reforms in Saudi Arabia, in order to overcome discrimination against them. They realize that Wahhabis do not make up the majority of the population, despite their strong links with the government, and that followers of other schools of Islam are more numerous. Thus, Shiite leaders whom Kwartan met feel that supporting reformist politics may bring the desired results and lead to religious and political pluralism over time. Contacts and meetings with liberal Sunni intellectuals have become increasingly frequent. This allows Shiites to make their demands part of a national agenda rather than a sectarian one, a much safer approach, especially considering the developments that have taken place in Iraq in recent years. (Leo Kwartan, “Why the Saudi Shiites won't rise up easily,” June 2009,

[http://conflictsforum.org/2009/why-the-saudi-shiites-won't-rise-up-easily/](http://conflictsforum.org/2009/why-the-saudi-shiites-won-t-rise-up-easily/))

Counter-jihadist model faces problems in being exported

Although it has not been successful with all who went through it—some re-emerged later as jihadist fighters—Saudi Arabia's rehabilitation program for former militants has been praised as a success [see also **RW**, March-April]. But it cannot easily be exported to other Muslim countries, writes Kamran Bokhari in Stratfor's *Global Security and Intelligence Report* (May 14). Aside from the financial resources available to Saudis, a powerful religious establishment and the specific tribal structure of Saudi Arabia “enable Saudi Arabia to make considerable progress on the homefront.” Much more than exporting this culture-specific program, the Saudis could be more effective by using the ideological proximity of Wahhabism (the major form of Islam in Saudi Arabia) to Islamist currents to help undermine Islamist radicalism, Bokhari concludes. (<http://www.stratfor.com>)

Calvinism for China's new elites?

Calvinism may have a brighter future than Pentecostalism in China, writes Andrew Brown in his blog on the *Guardian* website (May 27). As China has liberalized its policy on religion, seeking an ideology and ethic for its elite classes, observers have specu-

lated on potential candidates that may play this role [see May/June **RW** on the Catholic Church and China]. Brown writes that for Chinese elites, Pentecostalism and its unbridled emotions are not very attractive. In contrast, Calvinism is reported to spread fastest at the elite universities, especially among intellectuals studying literature, philosophy and languages, but outside of the control of officially recognized churches. Brown sees a possible parallel between the developments in China and the situation in South Korea, where the largest Presbyterian churches in the world can be found.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/andrewbrown>)

FM channels compete in Pakistan's Islamic propaganda war

In recent years, a number of pirate radio stations have sprung up in Pakistan's tribal areas, reports Mukhtar A. Khan in the Jamestown Foundation's *Terrorism Monitor* (May 26). It started with the establishment of an extremist Sunni radio station in 2003. Infuriated by the views spread on this station, a Sufi group then launched its own channel. The war of words resulted in bloody fighting on the ground. More FM channels opened propagating a variety of sectarian views. Radio has even been used for recruiting and organizing fighters, and its contribution to the radicalization of Pashtun society should not be overlooked, Mukhtar explains. Both FM channels and FM radio sets are cheap locally, compared

with other types of radio. Attempts have been made to launch counter-propaganda channels, but they seem to be successful only insofar as there is a local ownership.

(<http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/terrorismmonitorgta/>)

Al Qaeda's funding becoming sparse?

Al Qaeda is in trouble, as a dwindling number of Muslim

scholars are willing to approve its views and actions, but the terrorist organization might also be facing a more practical challenge besides an ideological one: a shortage of cash.

According to Reuters' William Maclean, not for the first time, Al Qaeda is in financial trouble, experiencing tighter curbs on financing sources, associated concerns about the legal consequences for potential

donors, the current recession and a probable drop in support. All this presents a serious problem and may lead the group to depend more on local affiliates. Donations are now being encouraged as another way of fighting, and a recent study reports that volunteers for the jihad from the West are being asked to pay for their training. (<http://blogs.reuters.com/william-maclean/>)

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

The new password for access to the RW archives, at www.religionwatch.com, is: *Seventhangel*.

■ The journal *Religion, State and Society* devotes its March/June issue to religion and the role it plays in the European Union (EU). While a good deal of philosophical and theological attention has been given to the foundations and purposes of European integration and expansion, the articles in this issue cover the social and political roles of religious institutions in relation to this process. The introduction discusses how religious groups have gradually gained a hearing in EU negotiations and dialogue after a period of being excluded from these areas (even though religion-based groups such as the Christian Democrats were the architects of European unity). There is still religious resistance to the EU and its potential for secularization, although this is no longer a Protestant phenomenon—Polish Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Muslims are more likely to be leading the resistance. Other articles include a look

at religious expressions that fall outside the EU, such as the Catholic nationalist Radio Maria in Poland and the controversy over the book *The Da Vinci Code*; an examination of how the “Islamic threat” brought questions of religion back into EU discourse and deliberations; and a noteworthy study of how new religious groups have joined the lobbying effort in the EU, hoping to gain recognition (something they may lack in their own countries), even as the EU (and its legal arm, the European Commission) gains legitimacy in dealing with religious issues. For more information on this issue, visit: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713444726>

■ Challenging the widespread view of the Christian Right as an anti-democratic force in U.S. politics, Jon A. Shields makes a case in his new book for the need to re-evaluate the Right—and American democracy itself—on a more empirical basis. In *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right* (Princeton University Press, \$29.95), Shields argues that the Christian Right has, on the one hand, strengthened the participatory aspect of American democracy, mobilizing a once politically alienated constituency of conservative evangelicals and the wider U.S. citizenry around contentious yet animating moral questions, and, on

the other, promoted the deliberative norms of civility, dialogue and rational (non-theological) justification among Christian activists for both doctrinal and pragmatic reasons. His perhaps surprising finding that such deliberative norms were encouraged for religious as well as practical reasons came out of interviews he conducted with leaders in 30 different Christian Right organizations, while his findings about the actual behavior of rank-and-file activists in the public square were based on ethnographic observation of hundreds of activists in six cities. To make his argument about the Christian Right's effect on democratic participation, Shields used National Election Studies data to chart the gradual assimilation of Christian conservatives into American politics since 1972.

Shields concedes that the deliberative norm of openness to alternative moral positions is neither encouraged by movement leaders nor practiced by activists, and that leaders use polemical exhortations to mobilize activists; but rather than being peculiar to any particular movement, he argues that these anti-deliberative characteristics stem from the actual exigencies of democratic politics, i.e. the fact that social movements of whatever orientation must be driven by deep convictions rather than rationally chosen, provi-

sionally held truths. He thus calls into question theories that posit such an ideal of exclusively rational participation and fail to take account of the tension between participation and deliberation that exists in actual democratic practice. Shields also explains the existence of militant right-wing Christian groups in terms of normal democratic processes, as a particular manifestation of a more general phenomenon of anti-moderate reaction that has affected secular and leftist as well as religious and rightist movements throughout U.S. history.

He argues that it is a grave error to equate these militant Christian groups (such as Operation Rescue) with the Christian Right as a whole, since they often formed precisely in reaction to the very deliberative moderation practiced by most Christian Right organizations and are broadly unpopular among conservative Christians and today practically without any members. The tendency to so misrepresent the entire movement again derives from the deep-seated theoretical premise that individual self-interest is or should be the basis of political participation, that participation oriented to goals transcending self-interest is therefore somehow deranged. Shields' investigation of the Christian Right is important, then, not only as an effort to begin to gain more systematic knowledge of this movement's organizational practices and influence on American political life, but as an empirical critique of the economic prejudices that have surrounded it and political and social life more generally. - Reviewed by Brian Bartholomew, a doctoral student in Sociology at the New School for Social Research

■ The new book **Scientology** (Oxford University Press, \$35) is bound not to please everyone. Critics of Scientology will be displeased by

the way the edited volume considers the church to be a conventional religion and focuses less on its abuses than on its organization and teachings, while members and leaders will target the book's candid and sociological approach to controversial issues. Editor James Lewis asserts that Scientology is experiencing healthy growth, with controversy even helping its expansion; while William Sims Bainbridge's intriguing chapter suggests that the church grows in hi-tech (as well as unchurched) regions.

In contrast, a chapter on Scientology in Denmark finds a decrease in new people joining, with a core group of Scientologists remaining relatively constant for the last 20 years. An examination of the ceremonies of the church likewise finds a low rate of participation (compared to the popular practice of auditing). Meanwhile, the theological dimension of Scientology is downplayed even by its leadership, according to Mikael Rothstein. In analyzing the church's foundational yet esoteric "Xenu" myth (meant only for advanced members, though now made public thanks to the Internet)—an account of humanity's extraterrestrial origins penned by founder L. Ron Hubbard—Rothstein finds a blending of original, Theosophic and UFO themes that provide theological underpinning to Scientology's more practical and "scientific" self-image.

■ A lively contribution to the rapidly growing literature on Satanism is found in Chris Mathews' **Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture** (Praeger, \$49.95). Mathews attempts to provide both a historical and philosophical introduction, as well as a trenchant critique of contemporary Satanism. He surveys the pre-modern origins of "one of our most evocative cultural icons," as well as the modern cultural, literary and philosophical tra-

ditions that inform contemporary Satanism, showing how it selectively draws on a number of secular thinkers and subjects, including the philosophy of Nietzsche, the novels of Ayn Rand, social Darwinism and the occultism of Crowley. The book critically examines the biography of Anton LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan (CoS), as well as the genesis of *The Satanic Bible* and the doctrines of the church. The fifth chapter discusses the schism between LaVey and Michael Aquino, the founding of the Temple of Set, the proliferation of various groups, the impact of the Internet, and the appointment of Peter Gilmore to the position of high priest of the CoS following LaVey's death.

Scholars may be interested in Mathews' critical assessment of what he considers the less-than-critical research by some sociologists. Mathews concludes that the existence of an inegalitarian subculture like Satanism is, ironically, only possible in a democratic or *egalitarian* society. It is obvious that Mathews is absolutely opposed to the anti-democratic tendencies in contemporary Satanic thought. His study is squarely aimed at refuting such a discourse as "intellectually, scientifically, and morally bankrupt." And while Mathews' commitment to the ideals of egalitarianism is to be applauded, he neglects investigating more social democratically oriented factions within the Satanic fold such as the Satanic Reds.

Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology, (Ashgate, \$99.95), edited by Jesper Aagaard Petersen, further contributes to understanding modern Satanism in contemporary social life. In Part I, the authors conceptually clarify and situate the various Satanist groups. Kennet Granholm looks at three Left-Hand Path occult groups and questions the identification of such

groups as Satanic. The issue of legitimacy is especially relevant, given the CoS's ongoing campaign to dismiss all other groups as pseudo-Satanists or devil worshippers. Part II concerns regional variations, with focus given to cultural and context-specific Satanism as well as emphasizing the tension between "globalized Satanism and more locally founded adaptations." One chapter, for example, discusses the dominance of social democratic politics in Scandinavian countries and its importance for understanding Scandinavian Satanists' rejection of ideas and practices considered American.

Some of the other topics include online communities and Norwegian Black Metal. The third and final part of this collection is made up of a selection of primary sources from different countries and perspectives, useful for scholars looking to get it straight from the goat's mouth. Pieces by the Danish Satanist Ole Wolf and the American Satanist Nathan Wardinski are noteworthy, with the former arguing that the kernel of what is truly Satanic has to be parsed out from what it merely American culture, concluding that Satanism is inevitably culture specific. Wardinski looks at the prospects for the emergence of a Satanic political front in the U.S. - *Reviewed by Christopher Smith, a New York-based freelance writer and researcher*

■ **Secularism, Women and the State: The Mediterranean World in the 21st Century (published by the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society)**, edited by Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, argues that the vast region stretching from Israel to France and representing different faiths maintains a distinctive posture toward religion, secularism and democracy. In the introduction, Kosmin and Keysar write that Mediterranean states have generally

experienced less multiculturalism than in northern Europe, and consequently there has been less pressure for these countries to organize society and the state to deal with religious diversity. The region has generally followed one of two paths: the increasing secularism of political life (France, and to a lesser degree Italy and Spain) or a co-option of religious institutions in "purview of the state" (Egypt, Greece, Israel).

The subsequent chapters add complexity to that theme, covering issues such as selective secularization in Greece, the Islamic-secular divide in Turkey, secularization in Spain, and confessionism and the crisis of democracy in Lebanon. Many of the authors lean toward a position of strict church-separation in their analyses. Kosmin's comparative analysis of public opinion in France, Spain and Italy finds the three countries growing closer in political secularism (there is no longer a distinct Catholic political voice in these countries, with public opinion opting for the complete separation of church and state). But Italy and France are far apart on questions of personal religiosity and the importance of religion (with Spain in the middle), while younger Italians are more religious than older ones. The second part of the book focuses on women and how they are affected by these dynamics, beginning with a study finding that women's health issues and rising socio-economic status in Mediterranean countries are correlated with political and personal secularism. The chapters of this book can be downloaded at: <http://prog.trincoll.edu/ISSSC/SecularismWomenState/Chapters.asp>

■ **Charisma and Compassion** (Harvard University Press, \$49.95) by C. Julia Huang is a groundbreaking study of the Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation (Tzu Chi), an international Buddhist relief organization

founded in 1966 and based in Hualian, Taiwan, with millions of members in Taiwan and overseas. Tzu Chi is indeed the largest social group in Taiwan today, and there are more than 300 Tzu Chi offices in 40 countries. Unusual among Buddhist organizations, Tzu Chi defines social service rather than religion as its primary goal, a change that dates back to the late 1960s. The book is the first English work to fully document the history, organization and operation of Tzu Chi. The core focus of Huang's book is an examination of the charismatic characteristics of the organization's religious leader, Master Cheng Yen, and her relationship with the followers of this lay Buddhist organization.

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Unusual among Buddhist organizations, Tzu Chi defines social service rather than religion as its primary goal.

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Huang's book examines three geographical organizational operations—local, national and global—of the movement. Her analysis of the popular phenomenon of weeping among Tzu Chi followers reflects the concern to capture the "ethnoscape" of a Tzu Chi emotional community on the local, national and global levels. Huang's book also seeks to investigate the forms and content of the movement's globalism and the structure of Tzu Chi's expansion worldwide through its missions and missionaries. Her study finds, firstly, that the creation of the movement was a synthesis of external and indigenous sources; and, secondly, that the global vision of its mission

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was an adaptation to the role of religion within the processes of intensified global communications and increasing Chinese/Taiwanese transnationalism. – Reviewed by

Weishan Huang, a doctoral student in Sociology at the New School for Social Research

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