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

RELIGIOSCOPE

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The Hispanic evangelical moment arrives, but how it will play at the polls?

Just as Hispanic charismatics and Pentecostals are being hailed as the future of American evangelicalism, they are also seen as having the political potential that may have a significant impact on the 2012 presidential elections. But does the growing evangelical clout of Latinos translate into political activism in the way it has for white evangelicals? An article in *Charisma* magazine (May) by influential Latino evangelical leader Samuel Rodriguez forecasts that “Hispanic Spirit-empowered believers ... stand poised to become the narrators of this century’s American faith experience The measureable impact of this already exists in three of the most prominent historic Pentecostal denominations—the Church of God, the Assemblies of God and The Four Square Church—where Hispanics represent not just a growing constituency but, in many respects, the *only* measureable growth metric.” Rodriguez adds that “one could argue that the future of American evan-

gelicalism as a whole lies with the Hispanic Spirit-empowered church.”

Hispanic evangelicals are not only predominantly Pentecostal and charismatic, but are increasingly “bicultural, independent, megachurch-influenced and multifaceted in the spiritual tangibles they deliver,” Rodriguez writes. The number of Hispanic megachurches has grown from a handful of ministries to dozens. He writes that Hispanic churches have always had strong social ministries, but predicts that “Next-generation Hispanic Spirit-leaders will emerge out of both pulpits and pews to lead in the ecclesiastical and public spheres.” Rodriguez does not specify how Latino evangelicals will express their faith in the public sphere; there is a widely held view that minority groups work from a different political context than their counterparts in the mainstream and majority (white evangelicals).

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Mainline churches break some taboos in new church-planting push

Mainline denominations and seminaries are borrowing from evangelicals and streamlining their structures to allow for more church-planting efforts led by experienced laypeople in the field, writes Jesse James DeConto in the *Christian Century* (April 4). Mainline denominations have tended to restrict new church start-ups to trained and ordained clergy, but growing concern over church decline, especially among young adults, has forced them to take a new approach. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has recently lifted its requirement that church planters serve three

years in an established congregation, allowing new seminary graduates to launch into church planting. “Some denominations have even dropped the requirement that missionaries be ordained before they serve and are supporting entrepreneurs who are building congregations among immigrants or young urban adults,” DeConto writes.

Most of the start-ups profiled in the article appear to be “post-modern” or “emerging” plants, using ancient traditions and rites accompanied by “progres-

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sive” or liberal perspectives—such as a group holding an “agape” feast in Brooklyn and a ministry opened in a tattoo parlor in Pittsburgh, while others are based in intentional communities associated with the New Monasticism movement. Many seminaries have updated their curricula to focus on church

planting, although church-planting specialists find that a seminary education is rarely one of the characteristics of those who are effective in the field. For instance, in the United Methodist Church, “more and more laypeople are starting Methodist churches and bypassing the usual ordination track.” These moves stem from institutional fear of terminal decline, sparking a renewed

interest in evangelism. As one Presbyterian official said, “We’re not doing anything prophetic. We’re doing what the Pentecostals [and] the Baptists ... have been doing for the last 20 or 100 years. I’m afraid that most of the seminaries are not catching up.”

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

Converts and culture wars remake Eastern Orthodox churches?

Scandals and divisions plaguing the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) have been almost ignored by the media, yet the turmoil surrounding this small denomination has highlighted changes in identity affecting Eastern Orthodoxy, suggests Andrew Walsh writing in the magazine *Religion in the News* (Spring). The OCA was once hailed as the leader in creating a non-ethnic and unified Orthodox Church in the U.S., but the ethnic membership of the denomination (based mostly in Pennsylvania and the Great Lakes region) has been dissolving rapidly, while its “vision of ethno-Orthodox union hasn’t gained traction,” writes Walsh. At the same time, the denomination (along with other Orthodox bodies) has attracted a large and growing number of converts seeking its liturgical, moral and theological traditionalism. But other OCA clergy and lay activists have a different vision of the church, working for a more modern, “conciliar” and democratic structure.

All these developments add up to a divided and smaller, yet more

far-flung religious body, “now consisting mostly of convert clergy and convert congregations ... and arguably ... thriving more in the Sunbelt (due to church plants) than in the Rust Belt,” Walsh adds. Modernists and traditionalists are battling over the direction of the church, particularly since financial and leadership scandals have recently hit the denomination. The most recent battle is over the leadership of head bishop Metropolitan Jonah (who is a convert himself), who was accused of acting unilaterally in making church decisions, such as forming new ties to other conservative groups, such as conservative Anglicans, and distancing the church from mainline and ecumenical partners, such as the Episcopal Church and the National Council of Churches.

The resulting battle pitted culture warriors, such as Rod Dreher, a recent convert and prominent conservative writer, and a conservative group, OCATruth.com, against a more liberal camp (also largely made up of converts) represented by another new online group, ocanews.org. Eventually,

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The dominance of converts in America’s smaller Orthodox churches has made this tradition particularly susceptible to culture war conflict.

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Metropolitan Jonah went on temporary leave and the new pressure groups dissolved, although the divisions remain. Walsh concludes that the culture wars are “now a pervasive presence inside even insular groups like the OCA. Indeed, the dominance of converts in America’s smaller Orthodox churches has made this tradition particularly susceptible to culture war conflict, and perhaps a window on the American religious future The case of the OCA shows what happens when the inheritors of a tradition have become inconsequential, leaving the ‘choosers’ to fight to the bitter end for their competing visions of what the church should be.”

(*Religion in the News*, <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl>)

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But there is also evidence that evangelicalism, in compared to secularism and Catholicism, “is the most potent worldview force in conservatizing Latino political attitudes,” write Troy Gibson and Christopher Hare in the journal *Politics and Religion* (Issue 5). In

analyzing data from a 2007 Pew survey of Hispanic adults, the authors found that on issues of abortion, gay marriage and other ideology, Catholics and seculars “placed themselves in the orthodox and progressive camps of the so-called culture war, although this rightward effect is far more substantial for

evangelical than committed Catholic Latinos.” Gibson and Hare conclude that the “Latino vote” is far from cohesive, with fractures likely existing “along religious lines.”

(*Charisma*, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746; *Politics and Religion*, <http://journals.cambridge.org>)

The Family discards communal living, moves in evangelical directions

The Family International (TFI), formerly the Children of God, continues to transform itself from a countercultural, quasi-evangelical movement to one much closer to the evangelical mainstream, judging by a new report in *Christianity Today* magazine (April). TFI started out as a movement on the radical edge of the Jesus movement of the late 1960s and early '70s, living communally and practicing free love, and using sexual favors for proselytism (called “flirty fishing”) under the leadership of

David “Moses” Berg. By the 1980s, however, these controversial practices had ceased (particularly under charges of sexual abuse), although open marriage and communal living were maintained.

But since 2010, when TFI leaders Peter and Maria issued a manifesto calling for more individuality in the movement, the changes have come hard and fast. A spokesperson said TFI’s recent “reboot” has meant dismantling the group’s worldwide structure

and communal living. Changes in doctrine and practice include a stronger emphasis on biblical authority, thus minimizing Peter and Maria as sources of revelation, and a more conservative sexuality. This drastic shift has met resistance from some members, who view it as a response to dwindling membership and the desire of Peter and Maria to retire with the group’s money.

(*Christianity Today*, 465 Gundersen, Carol Stream, IL 60188)

Modern dating techniques support Hindu traditions on marriage

Even though marriage and dating practices are in flux among Indian-Americans, “Hindu tradition still holds sway through mixers, matrimony websites and matchmakers,” reports the *Huffington Post* (April 23). While matchmaking and arranged marriages endure in many Indian villages, such arrangements tend to be informal, making use of “extensive kinship networks,” said Connecticut College religion professor Lindsey Harlan. But increasingly, matrimony websites,

such as Bharatmatrimony.com, are being used by parents in both India and the U.S. to match up their children. It is estimated that 10 percent of the clients are immigrants to the U.S. or American-born Indians. Applicants specify religion and caste to the site, which has more than 20 million profiles.

Using matchmakers is another popular method, but today such services stress consultation with the singles as much as their

parents and stress the role of choice in religion. One matchmaker asks clients what being a Hindu means for them — “going to the temple each week? Simply being spiritual?” Other American innovations, such as mixers, are more risky, leaving more room for choice and going against arranged marriage traditions. Yet 90 percent of Hindus in America do end up marrying within the faith, according to a recent Pew survey.

CURRENT RESEARCH

► **A new analysis of belief in God worldwide finds that the percentage of people saying they were atheists increased in 15 of the 18 nations studied from 1991 to 2008.**

The study, conducted by Tom Smith of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, was based on the International Social Survey. Atheism ranged from 52 percent of people in the former East Germany to less than one percent in the Philippines. Countries with high rates of atheism tended to be former communist countries or those located in north-western Europe (with the exception of Japan), while those with the most believers tended to be Catholic societies in the developing world, with the exception of Orthodox Cyprus, Israel and the U.S. Belief in God in the U.S. remains high, but has slowly eroded from the 1950s to the present.

(The NORC report can be downloaded from: http://www.domradio.de/comet/pdf/beliefs_about_god_report.pdf)

► **Less than one-fifth of reporters call themselves “very knowledgeable” about religion, even though a quarter of the American public is very interested in the coverage of this subject, according to survey conducted among consumers and producers of news by the Universities of Southern California and Akron.** The survey, conducted among 800 reporters and 2,300 American adults, sought to assess religion coverage by the public and reporters, as well as the characteristics of “consumers” and “producers” of religion news. In assessing religion coverage, both the public and reporters rank TV news lowest in the quality of its relig-

ion reportage compared to other media (with reporters more likely to rate online sources higher than the public). For the public, the top three areas of interest in religion coverage are spirituality, religion and American politics, and local church and denomination news. Reporters rated the top two areas of interest as being religion, and American and international politics.

One-half of the reporters say the biggest challenge to covering religion is a lack of knowledge about the subject. Of the one-quarter of the public very interested in religion coverage, evangelicals and minority Christians were the most represented. Non-consumers of religion news are markedly less religious and more likely to be non-affiliated. One-sixth of reporters say religion coverage is central to their jobs and one-fifth say the topic comes up frequently in their work. What the study calls “focused producers,” usually religion reporters, tend to be highly religious and the most diverse in terms of religious affiliation (although white evangelicals are under-represented in this and other producer groups). Focused producers of religion coverage are most likely to view religion as a force for good, to be critical of religion coverage, and to be interested in covering spirituality.

(The report can be downloaded from: <http://uscmidiareligion.org>)

► **A new survey finds that almost half (44 percent) of American adults who go online are using the Internet for religious purposes.** The survey, conducted by Grey Matter Research among a representative sample of 1,011 Americans who used the Internet, finds that religious Internet use is especially common among young adults, with 57 percent of such users under the age of 35. Most of the use is based around one’s congregation’s website (19 percent), followed by visiting the website of a

place of worship that respondents do not attend (17 percent). Other uses of the Internet for religious purposes that ranked high include visiting websites for religious instruction (19 percent) and reading religion-oriented blogs (17 percent). The survey also found that 14 percent have a religious leader or pastor as a “friend” on Facebook. Only about four percent follow either a church or religious leader on Twitter. While it may not be unexpected for religious believers to use the Internet for religious purposes, the survey also found that 27 percent who don’t attend religious services still use the Web for religious purposes; 23 percent of atheists and agnostics and 19 percent of unaffiliated online users visit religious sites, although not necessarily for spiritual purposes.

► **While the Catholic sex abuse crisis has led to a rise in religious non-affiliation, it has also led to an increase in participation in non-Catholic religious traditions, according to a paper by Notre Dame University economist Daniel Hungerman.** In a preliminary research paper he presented at the meeting of the Association of Religion, Economics and Culture in April, Hungerman found that the “shock” of the crisis on the Catholic system led to a decline of two million members, or about three percent of all Catholics in the U.S. But he calculated that donations to non-Catholic religious groups increased by \$3 billion or more in the half-decade following the scandal. The most unexpected finding was that the exodus of Catholics from the church following the scandal often moved in the direction of very non-Catholic groups. Highly non-Catholic alternatives, such as Baptist churches, gained the most members from the scandal, compared to traditions and groups that are thought to have more affinity with Catholicism, such as the Episcopal Church.

► **There has been some debate surrounding the nature of Republican candidate Mitt Romney's high amount of charitable giving, with critics charging that such donations are confined to Mormon institutions rather than directed at broader social needs.** But a recent study by University of Pennsylvania social work scholar Ram A. Cnaan found that along with devoting more time to volunteer activities than other Americans do, Mormons annually give about \$1,200 to "social causes outside the church." Even Mormons who have relatively low household incomes both tithe and give more of their income to assist non-Mormons in need than other Americans do. The study, which was administered by Cnaan and researchers to Mormon congregants in four different regions of the country after their usual three-hour worship service, found that even subtracting from the Mormon totals the work of young, full-time Mormon missionaries, Mormons dedicate nine times as many hours per month (nearly 36 hours) to volunteering than do other Americans. Writing in *America* magazine (April 9), political scientist John DiIulio notes that such a high giving pattern is "what a religion does to induce intrafaith friendships and transcend Sunday-only ties, [as well] as foster widespread participation in faith motivated, civic good works for people in need."

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

► **An effort by the Church of Latter Day Saints to make online search results relating to the topic**

of Mormonism more "church-friendly" rather than critical of the faith has proven to be effective, according to a recent study cited in the *Wilson Quarterly* (Spring). The More Good Foundation, launched by David Neelman, founder of Jet Blue Airways, and James Engrebretsen of Brigham Young University in 2005, created networks of pro-Mormon sites; search engines evaluate a Web site's importance based partly on how many other sites link to it. Thus, the top-ranked results of Mormon-related searches increasingly reflect the church's official perspective. In comparing the top 20 results of various Google searches in 2005 and 2011, researcher Chiung Hwang Chen found that a search for "beliefs of Mormonism" led to five pro-Mormonism sites in 2005 and 11 in 2011. A search for "Mormonism" went from zero to eight positive sites, while a search for "Mormon underwear" (the garments Mormons wear during temple ceremonies) jumped from one to eight positive sites.

(*Wilson Quarterly*, <http://www.wilsonquarterly.com>)

► **A new poll shows a decline of Catholic identity in its former heartland of Portugal along with a rise in Protestantism and non-affiliation.** *The Tablet* magazine (April 28) reports on a survey of 4,000 adults commissioned by Portugal's bishops' conference which shows that the number of Catholics in the nation has fallen by seven percent in 12 years, while the number of Protestants has increased nine-fold and the number of the non-affiliated

has risen to almost one in seven. In 1999, 87 percent of Portuguese self-identified as Catholic, compared to 80 percent today. The growth of Protestantism, from 0.3 percent in 1999 to 2.9 percent, is mainly linked to evangelical growth in poor neighborhoods, particularly among Brazilian immigrants.

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

► **Even with the political uncertainty in Egypt after the democratic revolution, most Egyptians want Islam to play a major role in society and for the Quran to shape the country's laws—a prospect that is also making religious minorities increasingly wary, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center.** The survey, based on face-to-face interviews with 1,000 Egyptian adults in early spring, found a general mood of optimism in the country on the role of religion in society. When asked whether Saudi Arabia or Turkey is the better model for the role of religion in government, 61 percent chose the former. Seven in ten respondents express a favorable view of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is slightly lower than a year ago. A majority (56 percent) also have a favorable view of the Brotherhood-related Freedom and Justice Party. The survey also finds that most Egyptians endorse such democratic rights as freedom of the press, freedom of speech and equal rights for women.

(*The report can be downloaded from:* <http://www.pewglobal.org>)

Tunisia's religious freedom furthering democratic revolution

The fate of the Arab Spring and its implications for Islamic democracy are far from certain, but Tu-

nisia and its revolution have made substantial progress in ensuring religious freedom and tolerance in the country's political structure, writes political scientist Alfred Stepan in the *Journal of Democracy* (April). In comparison to

Egypt, the revolution in Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began, has taken greater strides toward establishing an autonomous and democratic political society. This is because Tunisia, through a process of negotiation between religious

and secular actors, was able to incorporate what Stepan calls the “twin tolerations”—non-interference by the government in religion and religious parties, while religious groups and parties refrain from asserting special claims based on access to the divine—much earlier than Egypt.

Embracing these twin tolerations is a “move that is friendly toward liberal democracy because the embrace involves a rejection not only of theocracy, but also the illiberalism that is inseparable from aggressive, ‘top-down,’ religion-controlling versions of secularism such as Turkish Kemalism or the religion-unfriendly laicite associated with the Third French Republic”, Stepan adds. Tunisia is also different from Egypt in that it has drawn on a “useable past,” including early constitutions that made religion distinct from political power and a more recent declaration (2005) stating that “there is no compulsion in religion. This includes the right to adopt a religion or doctrine of not.” Stepan concludes that since Tunisia is the only Arab country to enact the requirements of a democratic transition, “analysts and activists alike should pay it more attention, especially for its example of how secular and religious actors can negotiate new rules and form coalitions.”

(*Journal of Democracy*, 1025 F Street, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20004)

Sunni concerns grow over Shiite conversions spreading to Algeria

In various places across the Muslim world over the past ten years, Sunni circles have expressed misgivings about the preaching of

Shiite beliefs and the conversion of Sunni Muslims to Shiite Islam. Among recent reports, in Indonesia, Muslim leaders from West Java have issued a declaration alerting the faithful about Shiite teachings and their spread (*Jakarta Post*, May 2). In Nigeria, the Shiite movement that appeared after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 has been rapidly increasing its membership and is actively translating material into the Hausa language and distributing it, with hopes of reaching beyond Nigeria—but it is seen as a threat by some other Muslims in the country (*BBC News*, May 8). Often, however, it is quite difficult to sort out facts from rumors on such an issue.

Relioscope Institute has just published a report in French on conversions to Shiite Islam in the North African country of Algeria. The report is based on field research conducted by Algerian scholar Abdelhafidh Ghersallah (University of Oran), who interviewed some 40 Algerian converts. According to Ghersallah’s estimates, there might currently be between 25,000 and 30,000 converts to Shiite Islam in Algeria. Such conversions should be put in a context that has seen trends toward growing religious diversity, including the rise of Salafism and a significant current of conversions to Christianity, especially in ethnic Berber (Kabyle) areas. Conversions to Shiite Islam have been taking place over the past 30 years, following the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

There are a number of reasons behind such conversions. Fascination with the Iranian religious and political model originally played a significant role. Moreover, faced

with the rise of Salafism and its literalist understanding of normative Islam, converts find in Shiite doctrines philosophical depth and mystical religiosity. Among Algerians belonging to Kabyle and Amazigh minorities, Shiite affiliation allows them to reinforce a separate identity, linked to the (Shiite) Fatimid legacy of North Africa in the 10th century. According to Ghersallah’s observations, the appeal of a political model and of a religious faith tend to be intertwined in the motivations of converts, who usually express a loyalty toward Iran, seen as the country of the only successful Islamic revolution: the Iranian Embassy plays an important role, providing books, information and invitations to Iran (e.g. for studies). There tends also to be a clear intellectual dimension, involving a comparison between Sunni and Shiite beliefs and dogmas. Originally, Shiites in Algeria tended to be a group of intellectuals fascinated with the Islamic Revolution. Today, this has evolved into a religious community with some nascent institutions (associations, libraries, training centers, etc.).

(*The report in French by Abdelhafidh Ghersallah can be downloaded from Relioscope website (PDF, 455 Ko): http://www.religion.info/pdf/2012_05_Ghersallah.pdf*)

German Muslim scholar analyzes the rise of radical views and ways to contain them

Extremist trends have often defined the perception of Islam by outsiders and even by Muslims, states the Islamic German monthly *Islamische Zeitung* (May) in introducing an interview with

researcher Muhammad Sameer Murtaza, himself a practicing Muslim, who works with the Global Ethic Foundation. Murtaza traces the roots of these problems to the influence of (Saudi-funded) Wahhabi doctrines and derived currents. Murtaza disagrees with the common view that radical Muslims engaging in terrorism or other extremist activities are not “true Muslims.” Such people are not eager to make Islam instrumental for other purposes, but come from a Muslim background and really believe that what they are doing should be done in the name of Islam. Rather than challenging their Islamic identity, Murtaza states that it is more fruitful to research from which kind of Islamic ideological background radicals have derived their views, i.e. Wahhabi influences.

Such groups tend to see themselves as the only real Muslims, going back to the purity of pristine Islam. This does not necessarily lead to violence: some follow the way of missionary work, spreading their version of Islam (including distributing huge numbers of copies of the Quran in the streets of German cities, a recent activity that has given rise to polemical debates). Murtaza feels that local Muslim leaders in Germany have not always managed to react appropriately to extremist calls, because they were not highly qualified and moreover felt overwhelmed with a variety of challenges; however, there are now signs of an increasing professionalism.

Radical trends have managed to remain relatively unopposed for years in Germany in particular due to the poor quality of available

Islamic literature and teachings, and consequently an ignorance that led many Muslims to misread any kind of criticism of specific currents of Islam as an attack against Islam itself. Moreover, Saudi-funded Wahhabi organizations widely spread literature claiming to present “just Islam,” but actually promoting their own views, a phenomenon that has continued with the Internet. Murtaza states that such teachings have become popular, but the way to counteract their influence would be to develop Islamic religious teaching for young people and adequate training for converts to Islam, who are often left to their own ways after being welcomed into the community. Intellectual openness is required, but Murtaza warns that, even if it will bring some people from the fringe to mainstream Islam, the presence of such groups will remain a lasting phenomenon.

(Islamische Zeitung, Beilsteiner Str. 121, 12681 Berlin, Germany – www.islamische-zeitung.de)

Palestine Salafis hesitantly wading into political waters

While many Salafi Muslims in the Gaza Strip remain opposed to politics, some have recently been discussing the foundation of a political party, following developments in Egypt, writes Andreas Hackl in the *Jerusalem Report* (May 21). With their purist Islamic practice, aspiring to follow the pattern of the original Muslim community, Palestinian Salafis—like their fellow believers everywhere—have mostly been limiting themselves to Islamic preaching and education. Recently, however,

some of them have become impressed by developments among Salafis in Egypt and the rise of the al-Nour party, which now holds 111 seats out of 498 in the Egyptian parliament.

Since many Salafis from Gaza travel to Egypt for their studies, Palestinian and Egyptian Salafis are familiar with each other. In discussions about the possibility of launching a political party and fielding possible candidates, a local Salafi leader estimates that they might get 15 percent of the votes in such a scenario. However, they are aware that it is unlikely that both Israel and the Palestinian Authority would allow free rein to such a political movement. In the Gaza Strip, Hamas would most likely oppose Salafi political efforts. Still, a small number of Salafis have come to the conclusion that nothing in their faith prevents them from establishing a political party. But a real challenge for them would be to convince the majority of Salafis to renounce their non-political stand, remarks Nathan Thrall (International Crisis Group). Hackl’s article also mentions the militant fringe of the Salafi movement. While jihadist Salafis are estimated to range from a few hundred to a few thousand activists in the Gaza Strip, there have been several instances of clashes between Hamas and such groups. The most recent one, in August 2009, was the crushing of the followers of Jund Ansar Allah, whose leader had attempted to declare Gaza an Islamic state.

(The Jerusalem Report, P.O. Box 1805, Jerusalem 91017, Israel)

The Saudi textbook reforms on religious tolerance that never happened?

For more than a decade since 9/11, Saudi Arabia has remained resistant to educational reform, judging by the persistent extremist Islamic themes in Saudi textbooks, reports the magazine *Foreign Policy* (May/June). Despite periodic reforms, textbooks in the nation's schools "remain stubbornly impervious to change. Even in the past two years, they have instructed first graders not to greet infidels and warned 10th graders of the West's threat to Islam," writes Eman Al Nafjan. When 15 of the 19 hijackers from 9/11 were revealed to be Saudis, the nation's educational system came under harsh scrutiny. The issue became especially pressing when the human rights watchdog group Freedom House undertook a study in which 12 Islamic-studies textbooks were analyzed and concluded that the Saudi public school curriculum "continues to propagate an ideology of hate toward the 'unbeliever,' most egregiously in a 12th grade text that instructed students to wage

violent jihad against infidels to 'spread the faith.'"

The Education Ministry responded to the report by relegating 2,000 teachers it deemed extremist to administrative roles far from the classroom. Yet textbooks remained untouched, with only the most explicitly extremist views removed. Just last year, new interpretations were introduced in the boys' 10th grade hadith, the book of the Prophet Mohammed's sayings and traditions, where such new subjects as globalization and human rights were included. But the fine print under the text's headings often express an anti-Western themes, such as the subjection of Muslims by Western nations, and warn students about the risk of losing one's faith by studying in the West. A new curriculum development project will be implemented in the coming year, but the Education Ministry's mission statement for the project has already drawn fire for calling for loyalty to Islam and the renunciation of anything that goes against the faith, and warning against "deviant sects and creeds."

(*Foreign Policy*, 1899 L Street NW, Suite 550, Washington, DC 20036)

Iran's homosexual prohibitions make sex-change option popular

The prohibition and punishment of homosexuality in Muslim societies have been given a new twist in Iran, with "sex-reassignment" surgery becoming a sanctioned means of dealing with the tendency. *Foreign Policy* magazine (May/June) reports that since 2008 Iran has carried out the second-highest number of sex-change operations of any country after Thailand. These operations have been legal in Iran for more than two decades, ever since Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwah authorizing them for "diagnosed transsexuals." But many of the procedures are now undergone by young gay men who fear imprisonment or death if they persist in seeking same-sex relationships. The official in charge of sex reassignments recently told the BBC that when it comes to homosexuality, "Islam has a cure for people suffering from this problem." While homosexuality goes against nature, a sex change is no more sinful than "changing wheat to flour to bread," he said.

FINDINGS/FOOTNOTES

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

■ **Religion & Politics** is the new online news journal of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. The site is more than the

usual opinion blog, as it publishes original articles by leading journalists and academics. The journal is concerned with the interactions between religion and politics both in the U.S. and abroad, and on both the national and local levels; a special section features writers reflecting on their respective states' political-religious dynamics and interplay. Topics covered in recent weeks include, as one might expect, the Romney campaign, a Christian ethicist's examination of Obama's new support of gay marriage, the

question of the existence of "Latter-Day Libertarians," and reflections on the religious dimensions of foreign policy. The coverage and editorial board lineup seems fairly balanced and non-partisan.

Visit: <http://www.religionandpolitics.org>.

■ The journal **Religion, State and Society** devotes its May issue to Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Latin America, and Russia and Eastern Europe. These

churches have grown to a much larger extent in Latin America, but the comparison between the two regions makes sense. Both regions are on the periphery of the West and latecomers to modernization, where Pentecostal and charismatic churches faced established, hegemonic churches—Catholicism in Latin America and Orthodoxy and, to a lesser extent, Catholicism in Eastern Europe and Russia. The differences also stand out—Catholicism in America has tended to be more accepting of the wave of pluralism that the Pentecostals helped to introduce in Latin America than is the case for Eastern Orthodoxy (which is more strongly tied to national cultures); syncretism has also been a fact of life in Latin America, which smoothed the way for Pentecostalism in these countries to a greater extent than in the East.

The articles on Latin American Pentecostalism (covering Chile, Argentina and Brazil) suggest that even as these churches are experiencing less rapid growth than 10 or 20 years ago, they are becoming more politically engaged. This trend is also evident in Russia and Eastern Europe, but the still-dominant role of Orthodoxy in establishing national identity serves as an obstacle to such involvement. Unlike Latin America, the slackening of Pentecostal/charismatic growth in Russia and Eastern Europe since the 1990s has been met with the expanding public role and nationalist influence of the Orthodox churches. This is not helped by the still-strong perception among Russians and Eastern Europeans that Pentecostalism is a foreign imported religion.

For more information on this issue, contact: *Religion, State and Society*, <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/carfax/09637494.html>.

■ The scientific study of prayer and healing is a subject drenched in controversy among both scientists and believers. In her new book, ***Testing Prayer*** (Harvard University Press, \$29.95), Candy Gunther Brown takes into account the whole panoply of protagonists and antagonists in this contested field—those who question the whole enterprise of scientifically investigating prayer and rituals, since they believe science disproves the supernatural; believers (both liberals and the more conservative) who oppose any empirical testing of matters based on faith; and a growing segment of scientists and believers who seek to subject prayer and other practices to scientific and medical scrutiny for their own reasons. The Pentecostal and charismatic groups she profiles are divided on the matter. After decades of accumulating medical records purporting to demonstrate proof of healings, many have taking a “post-modern” approach that spurns the need to prove anything scientifically; yet movements such as the Vineyard and offshoots of the Toronto Blessing movement are more likely to support the measurement of spiritual effects.

Even scientists supporting prayer research are at odds about results over intercessory prayer. Recent studies of “remote prayer”—using designated “pray-ers” who intercede at a distance for patients they don’t know—have shown negative results, but they are highly contested on methodological grounds (mainly in terms of the problems of having control groups). For this reason, Brown focuses on “proximal prayer”—where healing prayer is conducted through personal contact. With her research team, she studied Global Awakening and its charismatic healing ministry in Mozambique, Brazil and North America. Through observation, interviews and follow-up investigations, Brown

found that the “magnitude of measured effects,” especially in Brazil and Mozambique, exceeds that reported in previous studies of suggestion and hypnosis. Without taking a theological position on what is taking place in these cases or even if they constitute actual healings, Brown finds that these occurrences do have the “potential to exert lasting effects.” She concludes that the beneficial effects and “emotional energy” resulting from these experiences travel beyond the recipients to a wider network of fellow Pentecostal believers and others in need.

■ In the book ***Gothicka*** (Harvard University Press, \$27.95), Victoria Nelson traces how the gothick tradition of horror in America has been translated into a fan-based and alternative spirituality that is sustained by novels, films and other popular entertainment. What links all these cultural forms is that they seek to generate fright as a way of connecting with the “enchanted world” of belief. She shares the view of Philip K. Dick that when the “divine has been exiled from the table of serious art and intellectual discussion for well over a century, you have to look for it in what the elite culture thinks of as the trash.” The book uses the term “secondary believers” to refer to fans of the various authors and media who try to recreate and identify these alternative worlds (such as “trekkies”), as opposed to “primary believers,” meaning those who cross over to actual belief (such as joining a spaceship “cult”).

Nelson covers the broad territory of gothick in popular culture—from the Catholic-influenced horror and thriller books to movies (such as *The Da Vinci Code*), magic cults based on the writings of H. P. Lovecraft, Vampire fiction, the “new Christian Gothick,” represented by the popu-

lar novel *The Shack*, and the many imported horror films from Asia. In these examples of gothick art, entertainment and quasi-religions, Nelson finds older notions of subservience to a transcendent being and loyalty to an institution being eclipsed by an alternative spirituality based on superhuman gods and self-deification.

■ **Wild Religion** (University of California Press, \$26.95), by David Chidester, looks at the diversity of religion in South Africa and, as the title implies, the way it often acts as an untamed and “dangerous” force that takes part in everything from the World Cup soccer tournament to successive national government policies since the dismantling of apartheid in 1994. Chidester focuses on the non-institutional aspects of traditional African, Christian, and Islamic beliefs and how, if anything, they have become more politicized in post-apartheid South Africa. His account of the World Cup, held in South Africa in 2010, shows this interplay between traditional and Christian actors and movements: not only did churches compose prayers for the games, but the local organizers of cultural events prepared ritual sacrifices of animals in keeping with ancestral religion.

The new pluralism in post-apartheid South Africa has also spurred resistance movements; Chidester devotes a chapter to Islamic and Christian fundamentalism, viewing such a marginal movement as Christian Reconstructionism as representing a reactive nationalism seeking to restore a conservative Christian society. He tends to associate the influence of Reconstructionism with evangelicals, although he notes that the born-again Christians who emerged in 1970s apartheid South Africa were more socially and racially tolerant than South Africans in general. But the book really comes

into its own in the later chapters, as Chidester examines how traditional African religions have been “unleashed” in post-apartheid society. The educational curriculum has been reshaped to reflect “heritage” and the role that traditional religions play in society.

Meanwhile, the New Age and other alternative spiritual movements, including UFO devotees worldwide, have latched on to the neo-shamanism of the Zulu people. The most colorful chapter concerns the presidency of Jacob Zuma, which has encouraged a mixing of traditional religion and Christianity, especially through Matholethe Motshkgga, the African National Congress’s chief whip in parliament, who has actively sought to resurrect a theocracy based on indigenous and Egyptian hermetic mysticism (including theosophy) and rituals as a sort of new South African civil religion. The book concludes that the “wild” and hybrid nature of South African religion—and its increasing political expression—will endure even as it is targeted by those seeking to maintain the purity of religious traditions, which could include Christians worrying about non-Christian influence in education, as well as black shamans of traditional religions opposed to white initiates taking up these teachings.

■ The new book **Overseas Chinese Christian Entrepreneurs in Modern China** (Anthem Press, \$99), by Joy Tong, examines how Christian values and ethics are being imported into China by entrepreneurs in Shanghai. The book focuses our attention on the vital involvement of overseas Chinese entrepreneurs, especially Taiwanese businessmen, in the market economy in Shanghai after the opening up of China, as well as the influence of the Christian values of these professionals. Tong has collected accounts of 60 entre-

preneurs based on interviews and shows how powerful individuals utilize their business to realize their evangelical visions rather than for personal enhancement of for the sake of China. The contribution of this book centers on its examination of the relationship between faith communities and business development among these overseas Chinese in Shanghai. Churches in China have also served as a location for building business networks and personal trust, and exchanging social capital in a similar way as immigrant churches in the US.

One of the book’s flaws is that it is interview based, which means that the data is based on the claims of these entrepreneurs rather than observations. We don’t get the sense of boarder perspectives on organizational operations or strategies in everyday life based on interviewees’ selective responses. Tong does not claim that the Christian ethic is a causative force in the formation of China’s market economy at large or in companies’ growth. Yet her assumption that “for more and more people in modern China, economic success, hard work and Biblical values are societal components capable of existing together in harmony” is hard to prove, since we also witness many successful “secular” businessmen and Buddhist entrepreneurs in China. – *Reviewed by Weishan Huang, a researcher with the Max Planck Institute for Religious and Ethnic Diversity who is currently based in Shanghai.*

■ **Rethinking Religion and World Affairs** (Oxford University Press, \$29.95), edited by Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred Stepan and Monica Duffy Toft, reflects the renewed interest in religion in international relations, especially since 9/11. The emergence of religiously inspired terrorism set off warning bells in a discipline that had largely ignored

religious dynamics in world politics and foreign affairs since it was established, following the plot line of the secularization theory (which correlates a growth in modernization with a decline of religion). Since international relations is obviously concerned with the whole world and not just the presumably secular societies of the West, most of the contributors seek to explain the discipline's myopia.

In an insightful essay, J. Bryan Hehir traces the inattention to religion further back to the way the United Nations and even the Treaty of Westphalia (going back to the 17th cen-

tury) came to symbolize a secular world order for diplomats and scholars. It was only after the crises and revolutions inspired by various forms of religion—from Iran, to Poland, to Latin America, not to mention Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations" thesis—that international relations reconsidered the religious factor in world affairs. Other noteworthy contributions include a study of how the movements and organizations working for "transitional justice" based on the model of reconciliation (from Chile to South Africa) are informed by Christian teachings, but have been

accommodated by Islamic, Jewish and native sources; a chapter on how a secular-religious divide runs through much humanitarian work; and a unique section on the role of the media in religion's new role in world affairs, including an analysis of how Buddhist monks in Burma used the new media to mobilize diplomatic initiatives. Many of the chapters feature valuable annotative bibliographies and a chapter at the end profiles the different organizations dealing with international affairs and religion.

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

1) **Charlotte ONE** is an attempt to model a ministry to young adults, the least-churched age group, based on cooperation rather than competition or "sheep-stealing." The ministry, involving evangelical and main-line churches in the Charlotte, NC area, is based on the premise that pooling efforts to appeal to young adults will prevent the tendency of resource-rich "attractational" churches to weaken other churches that can't compete. Because it often takes charismatic speakers and quality contemporary music to attract the religiously unstable young adult crowd, Charlotte ONE provides these "bells and whistles" for all congregations without replacing church functions: baptisms, weddings, communion and Sunday worship in general are not performed by the ministry.

While there is a broad evangelical approach, controversial religious and political topics are avoided by Charlotte ONE. Critics charge that it is competition that leads to religious vitality, and question the reach and effectiveness of the cooperative approach. But an overwhelming majority (98 percent) of participants said in a survey that the ministry had enriched their faith, with 42 percent saying it had connected them to a local church. Other religious communities are seeking to reproduce the experience, with Phoenix ONE being launched this spring. **(Source: *Wall Street Journal*, May 4)**

2) Japan's **Happiness Realization Party**, the political arm of the new religious movement Happiness Science, is attempting to export the tea party movement and American-style conservatism to Japan. Happiness Science has been a fast-growing movement whose founder claims to be a reincarnation of the Buddha. Both the

party and Happiness Science envision a Japan that is more muscular on the world stage (thus eliminating the constitutional ban on waging war) "and more religious at home." The party's American political consultant, Bob Sparks, said that "The best analogy would be the Christian Coalition, Buddhist style." The party failed to win a seat in parliamentary elections that were held shortly after its founding in 2009, but it managed to field 337 candidates and win more than one million votes. The founding of the Tokyo Tea Party by party leaders comes at a time of economic decline and political upheaval, leading to greater populist sentiment in the country. The tea party movement expected over 10,000 participants at a recent rally. **(Source: *The Atlantic*, May)**

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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.

It is through monitoring new books and approximately 1000 U.S. and foreign periodicals (including newspapers from across the country, as well as newsletters, magazines and scholarly journals, as well as the Internet), and by first-hand reporting, that *Religion Watch* has tracked hundreds of trends on the whole spectrum of contemporary religion.

Published every two months, the twelve page newsletter is unique because it focuses on long-range developments that lead to, and result from, world current events.

Religion Watch does much more than just summarize articles. To provide you with solid background information on the trends presented, we also do research, reporting and analysis on many subjects. A special section in each issue keeps an eye on new books, special issues and articles of publications and new periodicals in religion. We also profile new organizations and prominent figures that are making an impact on the religious scene.

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