

## INSIDE

### Page 1:

- ◆ Religion and politics
- ◆ 'None' uprising

### Page 2:

- ◆ Rise in unpaid clergy

### Page 4:

- ◆ Witchcraft's growing appeal to teenage girls

### Page 5:

- ◆ Current Research

### Page 6:

- ◆ Religiosity in Turkey

### Page 8:

- ◆ Nigerian influence on global religion
- ◆ Yezidis in Caucasus

### Page 9:

- ◆ Nationalism in Egypt
- ◆ Rise in secular religiosity among Chinese

### Page 10

- ◆ Findings & Footnotes

### Page 11

- ◆ On/File

## RELIGIONWATCH

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

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

© 2013 RW

# Scholars, evangelical leaders agree on link between religious politics, 'nones'

The sharp rise of non-affiliated Americans (or “nones”) in the past two decades has become a key concern of church leaders, and the tendency to mix conservative politics and religion may be a significant factor in this trend, according to a new study by political scientists David Campbell, Geoffrey Layman, and John Green. In a lecture at New York’s Columbia University in mid-October, which **RW** attended, Campbell presented findings from the Secular American Survey suggesting that the rise in non-affiliation began at the same period that the religious right was at its height of influence. This association has been made by other scholars, but Campbell and his colleagues say they have new evidence that even the perception of mixing faith and poli-

tics may actually cause people to veer toward identification with the “nones.” The telephone survey was conducted between 2010 and 2012, among 2,635 (first wave) and 1412 (second wave) respondents.

Campbell reported that an exposure to religious politics in campaigns made respondents, especially Democrats, more likely to say they were “nones” embracing as truth “secular beliefs,” such as science and facts about the natural. The researchers created an experiment to see if such exposure actually has a causative effect in moving people toward non-affiliation or secularism. When the respondents were shown (fictitious) articles on candidates, one of which included refer-

.....  
**... an exposure to religious politics in campaigns made respondents, especially Democrats, more likely to say they were 'nones' and hold 'secular beliefs'**  
 .....

▶ Cont. on page 3

## 'None' uprising leading to new approaches, innovations in seminaries

Seminaries are struggling with the swelling number of religiously unaffiliated young Americans, with some of them retooling their programs to cater to this population. *In Trust* (Autumn), a magazine on seminary education, reports that reactions of seminary leaders to the polls showing the rising tide of “nones” has run the gamut from “I told you so,” to a “call to arms.” Albert Mohler of the Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary says that the data serves as a “great clarification” that the “nones” and loosely affiliated Americans are non-believers and comprise the mission field that the church should be serving. “In general, most seminaries either have not responded to the growing number of “nones” or have renewed their commitment to train

▶ Cont. on page 2

# Unpaid, bi-vocational clergy gaining traction among mainline Protestants

A “growing breed of mainline Protestant clergy” are serving congregations in exchange for little or no compensation, reports *Christian Century* magazine (Oct. 18). Although evangelical churches have most commonly used unpaid and part-time clergy, that is changing as many mainline Protestant clergy can no longer afford full-time or nearly full-time pastors. Scott Thumma, a Hartford Seminary sociologist of religion, sees more bi-vocational ministers—clergy cutting back to half-time or

quarter-time ministries while working second jobs.

The unpaid cleric model is gaining ground among Episcopalians. For instance, in the mid-1990s, the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming had few if any unpaid clergy serving its 49 congregations. Now, 20 priests in Wyoming—more than one-third—are unpaid. The number of unpaid clergy—who are usually fully-ordained—is expected to reach 35, according to Lori Modesitt of the Wyoming diocese. She sees this model as “the future of the church”—since it

empowers laity to join the priesthood even if they can’t leave other careers. This approach also enlivens congregations as it prevents people from viewing the ministry as just a job. The article notes that the unpaid trend also includes urban and suburban areas. In the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, which includes Houston, about 25 priests serve without pay after having gone through a part-time training at the nine-year-old Iona School for Ministry in Houston.

(*Christian Century*, <http://go.gl/dX1GHR>) ■

## ‘None’ uprising prompts seminary changes (cont. from p. 1)

ministers to re-affiliate the non-affiliated,” writes Heidi Schlumpf. She adds that neither approach recognizes the cultural shifts that have caused the growth of “nones” and have caused them to challenge conventional religious institutions and authorities.

The article focuses on the interdenominational Seattle School of Theology and Psychology as a model of innovation in engaging the non-affiliated in seminary education. Located in the “geographic Ground Zero” of the non-affiliated population, the school reports that half of its students check the “none” box on demographic informational forms. The Seattle school has reached out to the unaffiliated with curriculum changes that draw connections between spirituality and everyday life. “Their former master’s in Christian lead-

ership is now a master’s in theology and culture and a recently added certificate program is called ‘Leadership in the New Parish,’ reports Schlumpf. The concept of the “new parish” is based on the church being inclusive and hospitable to non-affiliated. The school has embraced the idea that seminary education is not only about training masters of divinity students for the institutional church, but also those who don’t feel a formal religious vocation. Across town, the School of Theology and Ministry at the Jesuit Seattle University has made similar curriculum shifts to attract the unaffiliated,

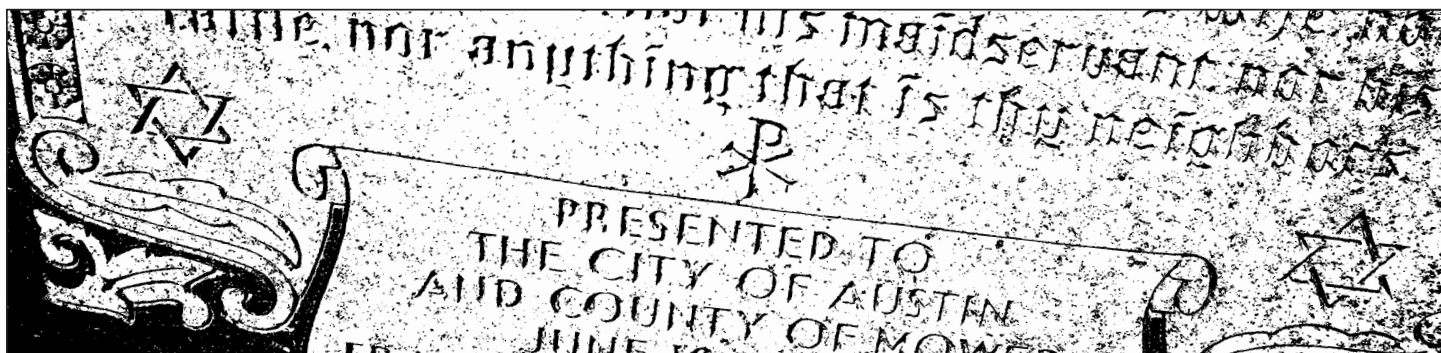
including programs in “transforming spirituality” and “transformational leadership.”

(*In Trust*, <http://www.intrust.org/Magazine/Latest-Issue>) ■

////////////////////

**The school has embraced the idea that seminary education is not only about training masters of divinity students for the institutional church, but also those who don’t feel a formal religious vocation.**

////////////////////



Ten Commandments monument at the Mower County Courthouse in Austin, Minn., as it appeared in 2006. SOURCE: *Jonathunder via Wikimedia Commons*

## Religious politics, growth of 'nones' linked *(cont. from p. 1)*

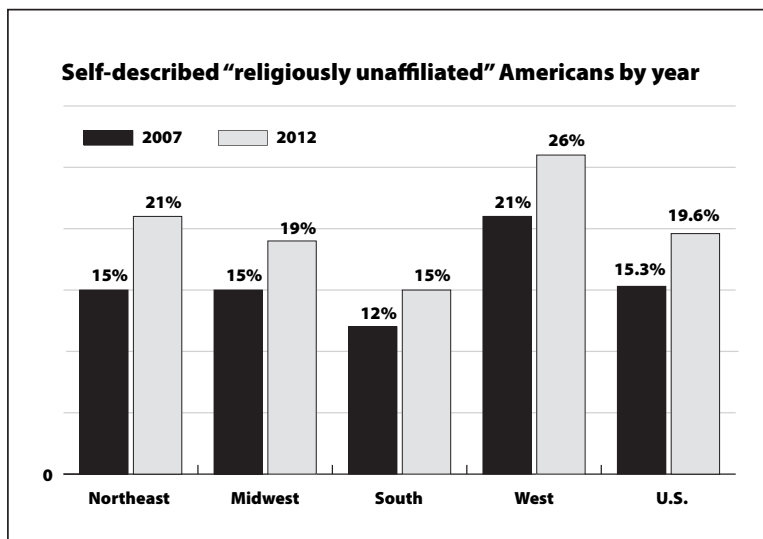
ences to a candidate's evangelical beliefs and how it influences their politics, the researchers observed the subjects, again particularly the Democrats, shifting from a religious to a non-affiliated label in describing their faith. Campbell said while this exposure moved respondents toward identification with the "nones," it did not lead them to a secular identity to espouse secular beliefs. Campbell said that the study should serve to warn church leaders to be cautious in engaging in religious politics.

Religious leaders appear to be taking Campbell's advice, with some of the most fervent culture warriors reconsidering the role of political activism in their ministries. *The Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 22) reports that the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is one such major player in conservative-religious politics now rethinking its public role in the face of significant membership loss. Russell Moore, who heads the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, says "it's time to tone down the rhetoric and pull back from the political fray, given what he calls a 'visceral recoil' among younger evangelicals to the culture wars," reports Neil King Jr. Baptists are reported to be leaving the

church of their childhood faster than any other Protestant group, according to data gathered by Pew Research.

While still voting Republican, younger evangelicals are leaving the SBC and "other big denominational churches for more loosely organized assemblies that

oppose abortion but are less likely to hew to other Republican causes," King writes. The commission, under the previous leadership of Richard Land, was among the most outspoken and activist denominational agencies on religious right issues, especially pro-abortion to anti-gay rights concerns. But today the SBC and much of the rest of the religious right are "undergoing a generational shift as



America's religiously non-affiliated have been growing in number since 2007. SOURCE: *Pew Research Center* // Graphic by *T.J. Thomson* © 2013 RW

Moore and his allies are recalibrating their methods and aims." In his e-newsletter *Sightings* (October 26), Martin Marty reports that similar rethinking is taking place across the evangelical blogosphere. But Marty notes that this is not so much a "secularization" of the Christian right as much as a "de-churchification." While churches are "pulling back from the extreme right wing connections, religious rhetoric and appeals do remain strong on the right." ■



"Witches," by Hans Baldung. Woodcut, 1508. // SOURCE: R. Decker via Wikimedia Commons

## ***Witchcraft appealing to new generation of teenage girls***

**T**he interest in witchcraft among teenage girls in the 1990s, was reflected in such shows and movies as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The Craft*. Now it seems to have carried over to a new generation of youths, reports *The Guardian* (Oct. 26). "In the young-adult section of bookshops, shelves that recently groaned under the weight of tales of tormented vampires and lovelorn werewolves, are now stuffed with stories of witchcraft and magic, from Ruth Warburton's much-praised *Winter Trilogy* to Jessica Spotswood's *Cahill Witch Chronicles*," writes Sarah Hughes. The interest is even evident among the younger age set; last month the most recent in Jill Murphy's long-running *Worst Witch* series was published, while "among the predictions for this

Christmas's bestselling toys are the *Bratz* spinoff, *House of Witchez*."

For adults, next year will mark the climax of Deborah Harkness's *All Souls Trilogy*, centering on the relationship between a vampire and an American witch. The trend is clearly once again present on television with the FX channel's *American Horror Story* featuring a tale of voodoo queens and teenage witches this season, while Lifetime is showing *The Witches of East End*, adapted from a novel by Melissa de la Cruz and featuring a family of spellcasters led by Julia Ormond. *Vampire Diaries* spinoff *The Originals* (on the Syfy channel) has a central storyline about witchcraft and in Universal's *Sleepy Hollow*, Ichabod Crane deals with feuding covens in present-day America. ■

## WHAT THE

# CURRENT RESEARCH

## REVEALS ABOUT TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

**01** U.S. college students show an almost equal division between three distinct worldviews: religious, secular and spiritual, according to the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) series from Trinity College in Hartford, CT.

The study, done in conjunction with the secular humanist Center for Inquiry (CFI), found that 32 percent identified their worldview as religious; 32 percent as spiritual; and 28 percent as secular. The online survey of 1,800 students was conducted in April and May. Researchers contacted students using e-mail address directories from 38 colleges and universities nationwide. Within each group, there was a high level of cohesion on answers to questions covering a wide array of issues, including political alignment. Researchers Barry Kosmin and Ayiela Keysar note that “almost two-thirds of the students who self identified

as “nones” [non-affiliated] in the sample preferred the secular worldview and the remainder chose the spiritual. Hardly any chose the religious option... This finding is a challenge to the notion that the “nones” are just ‘religiously unaffiliated’ or religious searchers who have not yet found a religious home.”

(The study can be downloaded from: <http://goo.gl/SA8nte>)

**02** The first-ever independent survey of American Jews finds a huge generational shift in identity and practice.

The study, conducted by the Pew Research Center, was based on contacts with 70,000 people in all 50 states and on interviews with 3,500 Jews—the largest such study in more than a decade and the first one to be done outside of the American Jewish community. *Forward.com* (October 1) cites the study as showing that young Jews are increasingly likely to say they

have no religion, despite saying they are Jewish. “In doing so, they are rewriting the norms of behavior of American Jews, the survey reports... These ‘Jews of no religion’ are far less likely to marry other Jews, raise their children Jewish, give to Jewish charities, belong to Jewish organizations, feel connected to the Jewish community or care about Israel.”

**03** The Pacific Northwest, comprising Oregon and Washington, has been considered one of the most secular regions of the U.S., but a new survey of Oregonians suggests that at least this state shows a persistent interest in religion and spirituality.

The survey of 2,971 residents of Oregon, conducted for Oregon Public Broadcasting, found that religion plays some role in 61 percent of Oregonians’ lives. Although just 18 percent consider themselves “very religious,” another 39 percent of Orego-

nians say they are “moderately” religious; four percent overall say they are “spiritual,” although that number is said to be rising from previous years. The long-time divide between conservative eastern Oregon and the more liberal western part of the state extends to religion—75 percent of respondents from the east said they were either moderately or very religious.

**04** **Canadians are growing more wary about non-Christian religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism, reports a new survey by pollster Angus Reid.**

The survey, conducted among 2,025 Canadians, finds that the acceptance of all religions outside of Judaism and Christianity has declined from recent years. The results from the last of three

comprehensive national surveys about religion, religious freedom and values show 69 per cent of Quebecers hold an unfavorable view of the Muslim religion, while about as many (66 percent) view Christianity favorably. More than half of the rest of Canadians (54%) view Islam unfavorably, while almost three quarters (73 percent) hold a favorable opinion of Christianity. While 24 percent of Canadians found intermarriage of their children to Muslims to be unacceptable in 2009, that rate has increased to 32 percent in the recent survey.

(The study can be downloaded from: <http://goo.gl/amvWvJ>)

**05** **While disaffiliation from organized religion continues, most people in the UK still hold beliefs in the power of spiritual forces, according**

**to a study conducted by the Christian think tank Theos.**

*BBC News* (October 17) reports that the survey found that 77 percent of the British believe in some things that could not be explained by science or any other means. The polling firm ComRes surveyed just over 2,000 people and found that only a quarter of those questioned thought spiritual forces had no influence on Earth. Almost two-thirds of those who identified themselves as Christians thought such spiritual forces could influence people's thoughts or the natural world. More than a third of the non-religious shared that belief. Among the other findings, eight percent said they or someone they knew had experienced a miracle, while one in four expressed a belief in angels. ■

## *Special Report: New forms of religiosity take root in Turkey*

**R**eligious diversification is also taking place in countries with a majority Muslim background, such as Turkey, where a variety of new religious movements are active, reported several researchers at a workshop held in Istanbul on October 25-26, which **RW** attended. This was the third workshop of the research project “The Yogi and the Dervish: New Religious Movements in Turkey.” Led by Alexandre Toumarkine of the Orient-Institut Istanbul, the project brings together 26 scholars who look at the historical and contemporary aspects of “alternative” religious scenes in

Turkey. The original impulse for the project was set in 2007, with plans to cover both Turkey and Iran, eventually settling on the latter country. Both Christian and non-Christian religious movements are considered, as well as groups on the fringe of Islam. While research has primarily been conducted in Istanbul, the largest city in the country, there are possible plans to include other places across Turkey in the future.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a

► **Cont. on page 7**

## New forms of religiosity in Turkey *(cont. from p. 6)*

wave of translated Western books in Turkey dealing with alternative beliefs and theories, Toumarkine observed. From the 1980s, there has been a growing popularity of Eastern philosophies and practices in Turkey, explained Till Luge. But it is not only a matter of reading

books: Aysuda Kölemen reported on the spread of yoga in Istanbul, which she associates with a wider trend of developing ties between Turkey and India. Yoga has exploded over the past ten years. There are today over 70 yoga schools and several hundred yoga teachers in Istanbul, some of

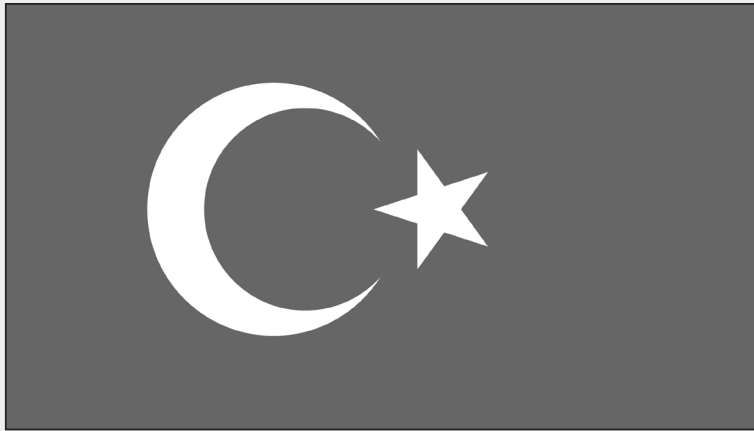
them with a biography in experiences with various spiritual movements. Among people attending yoga courses, practicing Muslims and headscarf-wearing women can be found too. But such practitioners tend not to place Islam above other religions and believe that all religions lead to the same goal, in contrast with most of their fellow believers.

An interesting development is the success of self-help books in Turkey, such as those written by Mohammed Bozdağ (b. 1967), analyzed by Martin Reixinger. With a personal background in Muslim groups, Bozdağ adapts self-help literature to a Muslim context. He believes in the unimaginable potential of individuals and advocates a holistic view ("the universe is one big all"), supposedly supported by modern physics, but rejecting any pantheism. He refers to concept such as chakras and aura, but warns readers against indulging in such practices and tells them that (Muslim) prayer can help one to get relief from stress. His books are selling very well: one of them has already been reprinted 140

times.

Not only Muslims are attracted to new movements, but members of minorities as well. A paper presented by Yoann Morvan presented the activities of the Kabbalah Centre (founded by Philip Berg,

1927-2013) in Turkey. It is a small group in Istanbul, but its existence in itself is worth noticing. More than 60 percent of the participants in Istanbul have a Jewish background, with about half of them attending services at local synagogues. The teachings of the Kabbalah Centre is said to bring to them answers to a spiritual thirst that



The flag of Turkey features a white crescent moon and star on a red background.

SOURCE: David Benbennick via Wikimedia Commons

is not satisfied at local mainstream Jewish institutions. Berg's Kabbalah benefits from the lack of other spiritual offers in the local Jewish milieu.

Evangelical churches are also present in Istanbul. Some of them have developed work among migrants in Turkey, according to Fabio Salomoni. Even preachers of African background can be encountered in Istanbul, such as Nigerian Joe Nwokoye (Zion Praise Centre), who has also recently traveled to Germany in order to preach to Turkish audiences there. However, according to Dorothea Nold, Turkish converts to Christianity seem currently rather belong to more classical church groups, while some modern evangelical congregations mostly attract expats: she expects nevertheless the impact of evangelical charismatic groups among Turks to increase in the coming years. Moreover, several evangelical movements consider Istanbul as a strategic location for further expansion, which means more are likely to be arriving there.

*(Orient-Institut Istanbul, <http://www.oiist.org>) ■*

# Nigerian dynamic reverberates throughout global Christianity

Nigeria, home to the largest Pentecostal movements in the world, is also increasingly at the forefront of broad changes that are impacting Christianity in both the global

South and the West, writes Allan

Effa in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October). Nigerian Christians are reshaping global Christianity through their growing voice in mainline churches, involvement in worldwide missions, particularly to Muslim nations, and the development of Nigerian-led church planting movements in Europe and North America. Nigeria is exerting its influence in world Anglicanism, with more Anglicans worshipping in Nigeria than in all western churches combined. As Nigerians have immigrated to Britain their influence is being felt in the Church of England; the influx of such immigrants is the primary reason behind the recent rebound in British church attendance. The dispersal of Nigerian priests throughout much of the Catholic Church, including Ireland and the U.S. is also extending their influence in the West, according to Effa.

But it is the missionary and church-planting move-

ments where the Nigerian factor shows its greatest strength. Nigerian mission agencies deploy 5,200 missionaries in 56 countries. In 2005, the Nigerian Evangelical Missions Association pledged to mobilize

50,000 missionaries to North African Muslim countries, and already church-planting teams have been deployed in 14 of the 31 nations envisioned in this mission plan.

Nigerian “reverse missions” to the West are conducted through two approaches: creating branches of Nigerian denominations abroad, such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (now with 600 churches in the U.S and Canada), and starting independent congregations, mostly in Europe. The latter have become the largest congregations in Europe,

including London’s Kingsway International Christian Centre and the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Kiev, Ukraine. These independent megachurches in turn start their own branches; the Kiev church claims it now has 700 branch churches in 35 nations.

(*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 490 Prospect St., New Haven, CT 06511) ■

////////////////////  
**Nigeria is exerting its influence in world Anglicanism, with more Anglicans worshipping in Nigeria than in the churches in the West combined.**  
 //////////////////////

## New self-image emerging among Yezidis in the Caucasus

Despite being ethnic Kurds, a growing number of young Yezidis in the Caucasus now emphasize a specific Yezidi identity instead of the Kurdish one, reports Allan Kaval in *Rûdaw* (October 14), an independent online newspaper, based in Iraqi Kurdistan. Kaval recently traveled to Georgia and Armenia for researching developments within Yezidism, an ancient, syncretic religion found among Kurds, primarily in Iraq, but also with smaller numbers in the Caucasus and in Syria, and more recently showing a growing diaspora in Germany.

Of course, there are Yezidis who continue to identify

with Kurdish nationalism. But a segment of the Yezidis from the Caucasus do no longer want to be perceived as Kurds—to the extent of insisting to be referred to as a “Yezidi folk group” and not a Kurdish one, at a recent cultural event in Georgian capital Tbilissi. A movement called Ezdiki has thus appeared among Yezidis in Armenia and Georgia, as well as among diaspora Yezidis, aspiring to create a Yezidi ethnic identity as a substitute for the Kurdish one. A few advocate for a Yezidi country, Ezidistan, on online social networks, according to Kaval.

(*Rûdaw* - <http://rudaw.net/english>) ■



## Nationalism emerges among Egypt's Christians and Muslims as alternative to Islamism

Both Egyptian Christians and Muslim are embracing nationalism to counteract the growing Islamist sentiment in the country, reports the *Washington Post* (October 3). The “swell of nationalism” the country is experiencing started during the revolution of 2011 and intensified when citizens took to the streets last summer to demand the removal of President Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, writes Monique El-Faizy. The tendency of Egyptian Christians to live a more cloistered existence in Egypt began

in the 1970s but signs of interreligious cooperation began to develop since 2011. The recent opposition to Morsi was fueled both by religious minorities fear of discrimination and many moderate Muslims’ concern about a total Islamization of society.

Important to early nationalist protests against British rule in the early 20th century was the idea that both Christians and Muslims formed the elements of Egyptian society—a tendency that is appearing again under the threat of dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood,

El-Faizy writes. Unlike pan-Arab nationalist movements in the region that tended to exclude Christians, the current protests are appealing to the strong patriotic sentiments of Coptic Christians. But such nationalist sentiment is concentrated among the upper and upper-middle classes, while the lower classes are more conservative and are dominated by Islamists. The mood of unity also may not last; it still remains to be seen how the constitution will be rewritten and who will gain power in parliamentary and presidential elections. ■

## Newly mobile Chinese embrace secular religiosity

While recent research shows that the Chinese are demonstrating high rates of religious practice, a recent Gallup poll finds that almost half of China’s people—47 percent—are “convinced atheists.” In the blog *The Imminent Frame* (posted October 10), sociologist Richard Madsen notes that surveys have found that as much as 85 percent of China’s population carry out such rituals as venerating their ancestors, seeking healing, and accumulating merit for a good afterlife. In explaining the conundrum of Chinese atheism and increasing religious practice, Madsen argues that Chinese religion is more about community and “belonging than believing.”

Despite Communist Party misgivings, these folk religious practices have long existed among peasants,

but what is happening now is that more Chinese have become mobile workers spending their time in cities doing industrial labor. At the same time, under the restrictive household registry system, these workers cannot become urban residents and have to maintain connections to their local communities and natal families.

Madsen writes that in this situation, practicing elaborate rituals during weddings and funerals becomes a way of families competing and trying “to outdo one another... It is the same with the rebuilding of local temples. As the Party

has lost control over much of local life, the public spaces in front of the local Party headquarters no longer mean as much. Deity temples once provided public spaces for community discussion, commerce, and entertainment and they are doing so once again. With increasing affluence, communities are now vying with one another to build bigger and better temples,” which also serve as a means for those with disposable incomes

to honor their ancestors, Madsen concludes. (<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2013/10/10/secular-belief-religious-belonging/>) ■



Altar to Zhuge Liang inside an ancestral temple in his hometown Yinan, Shandong. SOURCE: Kanegen via Wikimedia Commons

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

# FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

**01** The current issue of the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* (September) is devoted to religion and comedy, going beyond the usual somber philosophical and theological reflections on humor. Several articles look at the interactions between comedians and satirists and institutional religion, including the faceoff between the creators of the animated series *South Park* and the Catholic League for Civil Rights and the rise of “parody religions,” such as Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster and the Church of the Subgenius. These spoof religions are said to number up to 1,500 (increasing by over 1,000 since 2002) and they are not created strictly for amusement and satire. They often have a political agenda challenging the legal privileges of traditional religions and the accepted definition of religion itself.

Douglas Cowan provides an interesting article on the rise of atheist comedy as performed by many standup artists-- Billy Connolly, Bill Maher, Eddie Izzard, Ricky Gervais, Louis CK, David Cross, and Julia Sweeney, to name just a few. These “new atheist” comedi-

ans use sharp invective as much as satire and sarcasm against religion delivered to often receptive audiences. Cowan argues that the new atheist comedians, along with other celebrities, have “joined the cultural pool of ‘conversational’ experts... reinforcing our beliefs when we agree with them, forcing us to shore up our beliefs when we don’t.” For more information on this issue, visit: <http://www.equinoxpub.com/blog/2013/11/why-atheism-matters/>

**02** The current issue of the evangelical journal *Transformation* (Volume 30, No. 4) is devoted to the formation and development of the Global Christian Forum, an organization some see as a more inclusive alternative to the establishment ecumenism represented by the World Council of Churches. Most of the articles discuss the work of the GCF, especially its 2007 and 2012 gathering in Kenya and Indonesia, respectively, in the context of the various theological traditions and perspectives represented, but the lead article by Sarah Rowland Jones, a researcher and Anglican representative of the forum, discusses its present and

future prospects.

She notes that evangelicals and Pentecostals have increasingly participated and gained a sense of ownership in the GCF, even running the risk of outnumbering the historic mainline churches. The Catholic Church is also showing growing support for the forum. The inclusiveness is likely to be tested as the forum now starts to address more controversial theological concerns such as interreligious relations and Christian persecution. Although the GCF’s light institutional structure may make it, as described by one church leader, the “best value-for-money ecumenism anywhere in the world, the organization needs a firmer financial footing and greater publicity to survive and thrive, she concludes. For more information on this issue, contact: <http://trn.sagepub.com>.

**03** *Decoding Al-Queda’s Strategy* (Columbia University Press, \$37.50) painstakingly examines the work of well-known and more obscure theologians

## Findings & Footnotes *(cont. from p. 10)*

and theoreticians of the jihadist terrorist group and arrives at the conclusion that its strategies and worldviews owe more to revolutionary politics than Islam. Author Michael W.S. Ryan, a fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, looks particularly at the writings of Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, two military strategists,

and finds that much of their (often failed) game plan of Al-Qaeda was taken from Mao, Che Guevara and Vietnam War “mastermind” General Gap. While extremist religious groups may often borrow secular strategies, Ryan argues that these strategies are at the heart of Al-Qaeda’s philosophy; Islamic concerns over morality and adher-

ence to the Koran are pushed aside in favor of following “universal laws” of human reason. For this reason, the book counsels that Al-Qaeda’s appeal among Muslims is limited and that anti-terrorism strategies need to cultivate, rather than alienate, the diverse, prosperous and integrated Muslim community in the U.S. ■

# ON / FILE

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

**01** The Sunday Assembly is the most recent effort to form an atheist “church,” providing a sense of community and secular spirituality for non-religious people. The assembly, founded by British stand-up comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, started as a series of services in London where preaching and testimonies were put to the service of sustaining and promoting atheism, appealing to an increasingly unaffiliated British population. Jones and Evans take issue with the cerebral approach of most atheist and humanist groups and argue that secularist gatherings can have the same emotional and experiential appeal as religious congregations. Those attending the services will hear about the importance of celebrating life and sing along to “hymns” from the Beatles and Fleetwood Mack.

The Sunday Assembly’s attendance in London has grown to over 600 since last spring

and has led to several offshoot groups, such as a book club and a discussion group. Sanderson and Evans have sought to export the gatherings to the rest of the UK as well as the U.S., Canada, and Australia. There is already an assembly in New York, with close to 200 attending, and in October the duo engaged in a “40 Dates and 40 Nights” tour to expand Sunday Assembly churches across the globe. The assemblies plan to conduct such rites of passage as weddings and funerals. (Source : *World Religion and Spirituality Project*, <http://www.has.vcu.edu/wrs/profiles/SundayAssembly.htm>)

**02** Although recent reports have suggested a new surge of activism and sympathy among American evangelicals for liberal reform of immigration, the

► **Cont. on page 12**

# STAFF/ CONTACT

**Editor:**

Richard P. Cimino

**E-mail:**

relwatch1@msn.com

**Associate Editor:**

Jean-Francois Mayer

**Designer:**

T.J. Thomson

**Website:**

www.religionwatch.com

**Publisher:**

Debra L. Mason  
(573) 882-9257

**Business Office:**

Religion Watch,  
30 Neff Annex  
Columbia, MO 65211

**E-mail:**

subs@religionwatch.com

NOVEMBER, 2013

Volume 29, No. 1

© 2013 Religion Watch

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

recent formation of the Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration suggest they are divided on the issue. The group, led by Kelly Kullberg, argues that taking care of one's own citizens should take precedence over liberal acceptance of immigrants. The organization has sought to counter the U.S. Senate immigration bill that passed the upper chamber in late June, viewing it as granting blanket amnesty to illegal immigrants. Kullberg wrote in a letter to Congress expressing

the group's aims, which was signed by more than 1,000 evangelicals. In September, Kullberg sent another letter to members of the House of Representatives, outlining that a biblical approach to immigration reform would mean considering Americans first, securing the borders to keep out criminals, and making sure unemployed Americans have access to job opportunities by mandating use of E-verify. (Source: *Time*, Oct. 22) ■

## About Religion Watch

*Religion Watch looks beyond the walls of churches, synagogues and denominational officialdom to examine how religion really affects, and is affected by, the wider society. For this reason, the newsletter has been praised by professors, researchers, church leaders, journalists and interested lay people as a unique resource for keeping track of contemporary religion. It is through monitoring new books and approximately 1,000 U.S. and foreign periodicals (including newspapers, newsletters, magazines, online content and scholarly journals), and by first-hand reporting, that Religion Watch has tracked hundreds of trends on the whole spectrum of contemporary religion. Published every month, the 12-page newsletter is unique because it focuses on long-range developments that lead to, and result from, world current events.*



### Subscribe

Please clip and mail to 30 Neff Annex, Columbia, MO 65211-1200, U.S.A.

- \$33/new U.S. subscription
- \$33/U.S. subscription renewal
- \$36/new U.S. library subscription
- \$20 for electronic subscription (PDF, via email)
- \$45/international subscription

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment (payments in U.S. dollars):**

-U.S. check made out to Religion News LLC.

-or **pay online via Paypal** – you can use your credit card with Paypal, it is simple and safe, visit our website: <http://www.religionwatch.com/subs.htm>

Mail payments to our business and circulation office: Religion Watch, 30 Neff Annex, Columbia, MO 65211-1200, U.S.A.