



INSIDE

Page 3:

◆ Coptic religious disagreements

Page 4:

◆ Evangelicals ease alcohol regulations

Page 5:

◆ Current Research

Page 6:

◆ Creationist activism growing in Europe

Page 7:

◆ Growing Hindu presence in Europe

Page 8:

◆ Division in Ukrainian religious environment

Page 9:

◆ Ethiopian control of Islam

Page 10:

◆ Findings & Footnotes

Page 12:

◆ On/File



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.
© 2014 RW

2013 religion marked by new and lowered expectations of change

We are happy to re-introduce our annual review of religion — a feature **RW** suspended after we went bi-monthly in 2008. As is our custom, we look at the events and developments of 2013 that are likely to have long-range impact in the years ahead. We cite the issue of **RW** after each item in cases where we reported more in-depth on these trends; some developments, however, are treated for the first time in this overview.

O1 It is still too early to know how Pope Francis will impact global Catholicism. There is something to be said for conservative Catholic theologian George Weigel's comment that the papacy of Francis is serving as a huge Rorschach test for Catholics, with each camp in the church projecting its desires for change in the church on to the new

pope. But Francis' tone of moderation and reconciliation has given liberals and moderates renewed confidence about the prospects of incremental church reform — if not women's ordination, then maybe women deacons; if not liberation theology, then at least a reassertion of Catholic social teachings more critical of global capitalism. Francis' apostolic letter, *Evangelii Gaudium*, at least as it was interpreted by the media, seemed to affirm the latter hope for many church liberals. All of this has created disquiet among Catholic conservatives, who fear a loss of influence after more than 30 years of papal favor and consultation. For now at least, Francis has also generated enough good will among the secular

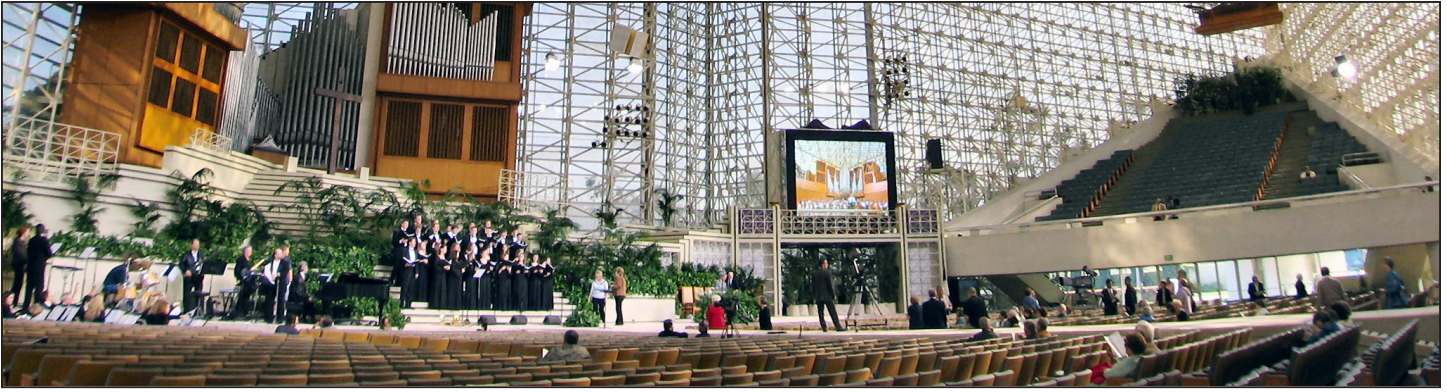
▶ Cont. on page 3

Megachurches remake themselves in the face of new challenges

Megachurches have been seen as a pocket of vitality in an otherwise sluggish religious environment, but even these congregations — both in the U.S. and abroad — are facing challenges and in some cases decline, according to several reports. In the *American Scholar* (December), Jim Hinch, religion correspondent for the *Orange County Register*, portrays the fall of the Crystal Cathedral as the first rumblings of decline facing the whole megachurch phenomenon. The Garden Grove, Calif. based church collapsed financially in recent years and by 2013

was sold to Orange County's Catholic diocese to be remade into Christ Cathedral. Founded by Robert Schuller, the church grew explosively along with its suburban surroundings in the 1950s, creating its famed 60,000 foot glass cathedral in 1980. Hinch traces the cathedral's demise to its failure to keep pace with demographic changes in the county, which is now mainly non-white and immigrant, and he argues that it reflects the situation of suburban megachurches in general that

▶ Cont. on page 2



The Crystal Cathedral at Garden Grove, Calif., in 2005. // SOURCE: Nepenthes via Wikimedia Commons

Megachurch transformation (cont. from p. 1)

are failing to reach young adults with their popularized and consumer-based offerings.

Hinch looks briefly at other well-known megachurches in Orange County, including Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, Mariners Church, and the First Evangelical Free Church, and finds that none of them are growing rapidly anymore. Instead, it is the Catholic parishes, storefront Pentecostal churches, mosques and Buddhist temples that are the fastest growing. Churches set up as alternatives to megachurches are showing some success; he cites Newsong Church, once a largely Asian megachurch that revamped its ministry to focus on low-income neighborhoods as well as providing a haven for artists. *Christianity Today* (December) reports on how another megachurch, Colorado Spring's New Life Church, remade itself after its founding pastor Ted Haggard resigned in 2006 after a sexual scandal. While retaining most of its Pentecostal practices, New Life has taken a liturgical turn. Communion is held every Sunday and the Nicene Creed is now recited along with the usual praise songs; one of its pastors is exploring Anglican ordination. The church has established a stronger social presence in low-income neighborhoods. Instead of the senior pastor determining the church's ideology, New Life's pastors now enroll Fuller Seminary, where courses draw on the theologies of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, N.T. Wright and Eugene Peterson.

Australia has also seen the growth of megachurch-

es in the last two decades but there are signs that their expansion has peaked. Megachurches in Australia share several characteristics with their counterparts in the U.S. — they tend to have grown under the influence of a charismatic preacher and are “neo-Pentecostal” in orientation. A recent study of the phenomenon, reported in *Pointers* (December), the newsletter of the Australian-based Christian Research Association, finds that Australian megachurches have spawned new denominations, including the Christian Outreach Centre, the Christian Life Centre, the Full Gospel Churches, and the Christian City Church. While there are only 21 Australian churches that qualify as megachurches (having more than 2,000 attenders on a Sunday), they account for five percent of all people going to church in Australia, according to the study's author Sam Hey. He also found that

//////////////////////////////////////
**In these churches
 there has been a move
 away from emotional
 worship to more
 orderly practices and
 a declining emphasis
 on healings, speaking
 in tongues, and
 end-times teachings.**
 //////////////////////////////////////

in these churches there has been a move away from emotional worship to more orderly practices and a declining emphasis on healings, speaking in tongues and end-times teachings. These changes have contributed to a plateauing of growth in these churches. In response to this problem, some of the megachurches have diversified, running schools, media organizations and social welfare initiatives.

(*American Scholar*, <http://goo.gl/hfoYvt>;
Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188; *Pointers*, 13A Market Street, Nunawading, VIC 3131 Australia). ■

Annual review of religion: 2013 *(cont. from p. 1)*

and non-Catholic public that even such a hot-button issue as the sexual abuse crisis has faded quietly into the background (September/October **RW**).

02 The Pew survey on American Jewish identity released in 2013 confirmed trends of disaffiliation from liberal Jewish groups and the growth of Orthodoxy that have been visible for over a decade. But the survey, which was the first one carried out by a non-Jewish organization, seemed to put these issues on the front burner for Jewish organizations to grapple with and debate for years to come (November **RW**).

03 Last year's revolt in Egypt after only a year of rule by President Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood and the growing wariness among Westerners about supporting a revolution in Syria by Muslim rebels against authoritarian rule has taken the sheen off of the Arab Spring. Although surveys continually show strong democratic sentiments among Muslims, it is another question whether Islamist groups that jockey for power in post-revolutionary societies share their constituents' concerns. It was evident early on that the revolutions would have different outcomes in differ-

ent nations; Tunisia's longer democratic traditions seemed to bode well for greater religious freedom and stability, but even in this case there has been a reemergence of influential radical Islamic groups. Last year also brought signs of a new nationalism developing between Muslims and Christians in Egypt who are opposed to the rise of Islamism (May/June, July/August, November).

04 A more recent conflict in Turkey between its President Recep Erdogan and the Islamic Gulen community could have repercussions for the future of the Muslim democratic project. The Gulen movement is a pro-Western and free market form of Islam that appealed to Erdogan, especially as he sought to strengthen ties to Europe and gain the support of the Muslim business sector. *Jadaliyya.com* (Dec. 22), an e-zine of the Arab Studies Institute, reports that much of the conflict is over Erdogan's growing tendency to embrace Islamist ideas, including the prospect of an Islamic state. The subsequent political infighting and divisions between Gulen and Erdogan could destabilize an already fragile Muslim democratic front. ■

Copts at home and in US at odds on Islam, religious freedom

The growing numbers of Coptic Orthodox Christians in the U.S. and the ongoing pressures against their faith in Egypt has strengthened a brand of activism stressing anti-Islamic polemics, according to Yvonne Haddad and Joshua Donovan writing in the journal *Studies in World Christianity* (No. 3, 2013). They write that "Coptic organizations in diaspora see themselves not as members of a united Egypt, but rather as members of a heavily persecuted minority class. They now lobby Western governments to pay attention to their plight and even encourage Western intervention on their behalf — an idea that is wholly anathema to many Copts living in Egypt." Haddad and Donovan note that the growing number of Coptic Christians in the United States, now numbering between

200,000 to 700,000, are diverse, with varying views of the situation of Copts in Egypt and their relations with the Muslim majority. But several organizations have emerged, such as the National American Coptic Assembly and the U.S. Copts Association, which have embraced anti-Islamic activism and aligned themselves with the likes of Terry Jones (the Florida pastor known for publicly burning the Koran), Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller in targeting Islam.

Such activism fits into a broader pattern of seeking American political support and intervention for the plight of Copts in Egypt, evident in the intense lobbying efforts in New Jersey, where there

► **Cont. on page 4**



St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Bellaire, Texas. // SOURCE: *WhisperToMe* via *Wikimedia Commons*

Coptic religious disagreements (cont. from p. 3)

is a fairly large Coptic immigrant population. Such activism has received sharp condemnation from many Coptic Christians in Egypt (and church leaders in the U.S.), who claim that outside intervention only makes their situation worse. Haddad and Donovan write that Egypt's Copts tend to employ a narrative of citizenship, where they seek to promote greater equality through civil discourse, opposing foreign intervention, and seeking to foster positive relations with Muslims, even as they acknowledge Muslims. In contrast, American Coptic activists follow a narrative of Islamic persecution. The authors argue that both narratives

have functioned in Egypt for decades and have their uses, especially as discrimination and violence against Christians have intensified since the Egyptian revolution of 2011. But the fixation on the latter narrative by American activists can have dangerous repercussions — most clearly seen in the anti-Islamic video, produced by a California Coptic lawyer, that went viral in the Islamic world and was a leading factor in the terrorist attacks on the American Consulate in Benghazi in 2012.

(*Studies in World Christianity*, <http://www.eupublishing.com/journal/swc>). ■

Evangelicals rethinking alcohol prohibition

Evangelical attitudes toward alcohol have become considerably more tolerant in recent years, judging by the trend of evangelical educational institutions lifting their long-time bans on drinking, reports *Christianity Today* magazine (December). Last summer, Moody Bible Institute, a leading center for training evangelical leaders, lifted its restriction on drinking for its employees, following similar moves by Wheaton College, Huntington University and Asbury Seminary. Some evan-

gelicals have moved beyond toleration to actually advocating alcohol as a gift to be enjoyed. Reclamation Brewing Co. in Butler, Penn., was founded by evangelicals who see making craft beer as an art. While the climate has changed, a segment of evangelicals are not likely to accept drinking anytime soon. The article cites Paige Patterson, president of Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary, who says that the school will not be lifting its alcohol ban — a prohibition still in force among most Southern Baptist pastors. ■

WHAT THE

CURRENT
RESEARCH

REVEALS ABOUT TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

01 **Businesses based in more religious areas are less likely to experience stock price crashes resulting from not divulging bad financial news, according to a study by Jeffrey Callen of the University of Toronto and Xiaohua Fang of Georgia State University.** The study, to be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis*, compares county-level data on church membership and the number of congregations with information about stock returns and accounting restatements for U.S. companies, including where the firms were headquartered. The researchers found a strong correlation between religiosity and a low risk of stock price crash due to bad news “hoarding,” particularly among companies with weak governance. In cases where there is weak corporate governance, religion can act as a substitute for it.

Callen noted that the social norm need not be religious to play

this function. It also did not matter if those at the top of these companies were religious or not; just being in towns where social norms are influenced by religious codes of behavior was enough to rub off on the companies operating there. Previous research has found that religious managers are less likely to manipulate the flow of information and that a religious setting encourages more whistleblowers within a company.

02 **American Catholic bishops tend to have different trajectories in leadership than their counterparts in the corporate world, with diocesan performance decreasing upon their appointments, according to a paper by economist Charles Zech of Villanova University.** The paper was presented at the conference of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Boston in November, which *RW* attended. The research is based on bishops leading dioceses in 2011 and the number of dioce-

san seminarians and the number of individuals converting to Catholicism through completion of RCIA (Catholic initiation) courses. Studies of management have found that organizational performance tends to increase upon the appointment of a new CEO, but ultimately decreases. For bishops newly appointed to a diocese, the relationship was negative between tenure and performance on both measures.

This may mean that matching a bishop to the needs of a diocese was ineffective at the time of appointment and such bishops are unlikely to improve their performance over time, at least based on the trajectory of secular corporations. There was, however, a positive correlation between those bishops with more experience leading a diocese and organizational performance.

On the congregational level, transitions in leadership are no less fraught, though such changes do not have a long-term effect on congregations, according to a new study in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Decem-

ber). In an analysis of the National Congregations Study (2006-2007), Erica Dollhopf and Christopher Scheitle examine whether leadership transitions are associated with membership decline and congregational conflict. As for membership declines, the researchers find that even if such losses occur during the period of leader transition, they tend to be short term and isolated to very recent transitions. Female-headed congregations reported less growth than male-headed ones, and conservative and moderate/liberal Protestant congregations reported more growth than Catholic parishes. Contrary to expectations, a leader coming from within the congregation tended to dampen growth than was the case of selecting an outsider. This may be because the outside leader is an unknown factor and may have a less polarizing effect on the congregation.

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

03 For the first time since the Gallup polls began tracking public respect for clergy in 1977,

fewer than half of respondents now say these religious professionals have “high” or “very high” morals. In a Gallup poll conducted in early December, only 47 percent of respondents gave clergy “high” or “very high” ratings — a sharp drop from the peak year of 1985, when 67 percent described clergy this way. The trend started sloping downward in 2001, which Gallup pollsters attributed to the negative influence of the clerical abuse scandals. This year, clergy trailed behind nurses, pharmacists, grade school teachers, medical doctors, military officers and the police.

04 “Fresh expressions” a movement of unconventional church plants in the Church of England are something of a success story. They are growing fast and spreading throughout England, even if they are attracting fewer of the “unchurched” than was hoped for. *FutureFirst* newsletter (December), a publication digesting research on religion in the UK, notes that a Fresh Expression congregation can include anything from pub cafés to what is called “church without

walls.” The Church of England’s Church Army Research Unit evaluated six dioceses, which has seen 360 Fresh Expressions start-ups between 1992 and 2012. Of these, only 10 percent failed within two years of starting — a much lower percentage than for church plants generally, according to the newsletter. The Fresh Expression’s congregations show a four-fold increase of members since starting. Since three-quarters of these congregations were started between 2006 and 2012, such growth in five years time is considered a very rapid rate of increase. It was expected that over half (53 percent) of those who came to Fresh Expressions would be unchurched; in reality, only 42 percent are unchurched, with more Christians and “de-churched” (those who have left their churches) attending. A reported 13 percent of Fresh Expressions churches meet in city centers and other urban areas, 13 percent in suburban areas, 16 percent in towns, 30 percent in rural areas and 28 percent are on council or estate property.

(*FutureFirst*, The Old Post Office, 1 Thorpe Avenue, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 UK). ■

Creationist activism on the increase in Europe

Although creationism is viewed as primarily an American phenomenon, there are surprisingly active creationist networks in Europe, and not all are U.S. imports, writes Stefaan Blancke, Johan Braeckman (both at Ghent University, Belgium), Hans Henrik Hjermitsev (University College South Denmark) and Peter C. Kjærgaard (Aarhus University, Denmark) in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (December). In contrast with research on U.S. creationism, historical studies of European creationism are largely missing,

making it difficult to trace the genealogy of local creationist trends. Instances of contemporary creationism in Europe several decades ago failed to attract scholarly or media attention. They affected public debates only recently, with an October 2007 resolution by the Council of Europe warning against “the dangers of creationism for education” as well as isolated cases of schools reportedly teaching creationism.

► Cont. on page 7

Rise of European creationist activism (cont. from p. 6)

The article reveals that not only evangelical types of creationism are found in Europe: there are also instances of Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim and even Vedic forms of creationism. Acceptance of biological evolution is much higher in all European countries (and Japan) than in the United States, with the exception of (partly European) Turkey, where belief in evolution is significantly lower than in the United States. But often overlooked is the fact that in most European countries, at least 20 percent of the population rejects evolutionist teachings. Organized creationism is relatively recent in Europe; in Scandinavia, it did not emerge before the 1980s. While the authors admit that a number of recent developments in the field of creationism in Europe started as the result of proselytization by large U.S. young-earth organizations, there have also been local efforts and, moreover, U.S. creationism is adopted without significant local adjustments. One example of an adaptation to local and social environments is in Turkey, where Christian references were removed in translated American creationist literature. If such teachings are associated with American origins, creationism can only be perceived of as an alien belief phenomenon with limited influence.



The Creation of Adam, a fresco painting by Michelangelo, decorates the interior of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. // SOURCE: 1a2b3c? via Wikimedia Commons

In Turkey, the military rulers of the 1980s had contracted with U.S. young-earth creationists for educational material and had purged biology textbooks. The materials were revised in the 1990s under a social-democratic government, with creationist views as an alternative theory. Author Adnan Oktar (more

widely known under his pen name of Harun Yahya), "has managed to reframe the Protestant creationist content as an attractively modern version of Islamic creationism." His organization, the Scientific Research Foundation, has translated creationist materials into many European and non-European languages. These are widely found in Muslim bookshops across Europe

and attract many young Muslims living in European cities. In more secularized countries, such as Belgium or Denmark, both local and imported creationism finds little resonance. While a percentage of teachers with creationist beliefs work in countries where religion is stronger, practically none teach in places such as France or Estonia. Generally, it is difficult for creationists in Europe to promote their views through media or in public schools.

(*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 825 Houston Mill Road, Suite 300, Atlanta, GA 30329; <http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/>). ■

Hinduism establishes itself in Continental Europe

The Hindu diaspora is adding a new element to Europe's unprecedented religious diversity, with temples now open in several countries, according to *Hinduism Today* (January/March). Still, Hindu temples on the European mainland resemble mandirs in North America 30 years ago: while beautiful, purpose-built edifices with traditional architecture are now being built across the continent, most European temples remain located in cellars or converted industrial halls and warehouses. While no statistics are provided, the magazine reports that the largest Hin-

du population in Continental Europe is now found in France, where 300,000-400,000 Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka have reportedly settled. Netherlands may come in second, with some 200,000 Hindus, half of them from Suriname (South America), a former Dutch colony where they had originally been imported as laborers. In Italy, there are more than 100,000 Hindus today. Professor Martin Baumann (University of

► Cont. on page 8

Growing Hindu presence in Europe (cont. from p. 7)

Lucerne, Switzerland), estimates the Hindu population in Germany at some 100,000, with nearly half of them being Sri Lankan Tamils and three-quarters of them German citizens.

What is most striking is the diversity of the Hindu population in Europe: beside Hindus from India and Sri Lanka, there are organized communities of Hindus from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Mauritius, Bali (Indonesia), and even Gujarati communities from Mozambique (a former Portuguese colony) in Portugal. In the Czech Republic, in contrast with other European countries, a majority of Hindus are said to be native people who have embraced Hinduism, with only a tiny percentage of immigrants, according to the article. Beside those who arrived in Europe as refugees, many immigrants planned to stay in Europe for a limited time before returning home, but finally settled there.

////////////////////
The largest Hindu population in Continental Europe is now found in France.
 //////////////////////

Like other immigrant religious groups, Hindus in Europe are facing typical challenges of integration and changes coming with second and subsequent generations. At least one temple in Germany has started to host interfaith marriages. In the Netherlands, where the level of education among Hindus is high, most

Hindu families have at least one "interracial marriage." While Hindus are free to worship in all European countries, legal recognition has been introduced in several countries; the Italian Hindu Union enjoys full legal recognition since February 2013, with Hindu marriages recognized by law and Hindu employees granted Diwali as a paid holiday. In several

cases, achieving such status requires some level of organization across individual Hindu groups in pressing for such rights.

(*Hinduism Today*, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304 – <http://www.hindu.org>). ■

Ukraine crisis finds Orthodox churches divided between east and west

The pluralistic and divided religious situation in Ukraine has led its various churches to stand with the people protesting the government's current crisis. Ukraine's dilemma over whether to choose Russia or the European Union as its main economic partner has shaken the country, leading to massive protests in the streets. In a blog for *American Interest* magazine (Dec. 11), political scientist Walter Russell Mead writes that in the Ukraine, "Catholics, Uniates and Orthodox often disagree, and there is a history of bad feeling. But with the country shaken to its foundations...the churches all seem to be standing with the protesters and against the government. As the Orthodox church is the strongest in the Russian-speaking east, this could be significant."

In Russia, the Putin government has increasingly seen the Orthodox church as instrumental in helping it maintain its grip on civic life as well as supporting its blend of nationalism, Russia exceptionalism and

anti-Western populism. In contrast, the Ukrainian church "doesn't appear to be longing for a closer relationship with Moscow. This drastically undercuts the potential strength of pro-Russian forces in the east and substantially enhances the chances that, in the end, Ukraine will look west," Mead writes. In the blog of the *American Conservative* magazine (Dec. 11), Daniel Larison cautions that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Mead refers to (known as the Kyivan Patriarchate) is in schism from the Moscow Patriarchate and therefore is no indicator of the strength of "pro-Russian forces." He concludes that to the "extent that religious divisions line up with political ones, there is reason to assume that the Kyivan Patriarchate's support for the protests would make those in communion in Moscow even less likely to sympathize with the protesters."

(*American Interest*, <http://blogs.the-american-interest.com>; *American Conservative*, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/larison/>). ■

Ethiopia seeks to exercise control over Islam

Since 2011 the Ethiopian government, concerned about regional developments and eager to prevent activist forms of Islam destabilizing the country, has been promoting the Islamic Supreme Council as sole representative of Ethiopian Muslims. The government is now also cooperating with the Lebanese-based al-Ahbash organization for the purpose of imposing a government-sanctioned, "moderate" Islam, writes Terje Østebo (University of Florida) in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (December). Ethiopia is often presented as a Christian island in Africa, and Ethiopian Christians themselves associate "Ethiopianess" with Christianity, but Muslims have been present since the early times of Islam on Ethiopian territory. Peaceful coexistence was mixed with suspicions toward Muslims, seen as a potential fifth column, and based on an asymmetric relationship between Christians and Muslims, since the latter were not included in the Christian notion of nationhood.

After the end of communist rule in Ethiopia in 1991, restrictions upon Muslims were lifted, including the ban on imports of religious literature, which led to a number of reformist Muslim movements also entering Ethiopia, among them Salafi groups. This contributed to the fragmentation of the Muslim community, although initiatives of intra-Muslim dialogue were also launched. Following violent incidents from the mid-1990s, fears of Islamic radicalization started to appear. The rise of Islamist militant groups in neighboring Somalia and the 9/11 events reinforced those concerns among Ethiopian Christians: the mushrooming of mosques across the country seemed to confirm them.

This has led the regime to take a more proactive role in the field of religion, according to Østebo. It would like to promote traditional, local Islam (seen as pragmatic, flexible and apolitical) for counteracting Salafism (perceived as foreign and intolerant).

Government officials have been increasingly monitoring (and pressuring) the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC). The government also has given support to "moderate" Muslims in Somalia and to traditional Muslim shrines in Ethiopia. More recently, the government has facilitated the introduction to Ethiopia of the al-Ahbash organization, officially known as the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (AICP). Its headquarters are in Beirut, Lebanon, but its longtime spiritual leader was an Ethiopian Muslim scholar, Shaikh Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Harari (1910-2008), who had fled to Lebanon in the 1950s. Al-Ahbash is today a transnational Islamic movement with a presence in a number of countries. It is very hostile to Salafism as well as to groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Al-Ahbash has maintained a small office in the Ethiopian capital, but it wasn't until 2011 that the group was given an opportunity to present itself as a face of "moderate islam." Subsequently, training sessions for Muslim ulama and students were organized all over the country with the participation of

Lebanese al-Ahbash representatives. At such occasions, government officials made clear that Muslims not accepting the role of the EIASC as representative of Ethiopian Muslims would be considered as extremists. According to Østebo, the current tense situation in Ethiopia, despite relative restraint on the Muslim side, along with a worsening of Christian-Muslim relations, runs the risk of further radicalizing parts of the Islamic community. Moreover, the active involvement of the Ethiopian government within the Muslim community is leading to a promotion of "governmental Islam," with other forms of Islam defined as illegitimate.

(*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 825 Houston Mill Road, Suite 300, Atlanta, GA 30329 - <http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/>). ■



A home in Harar, Ethiopia, with Islamic calligraphy below the niche. // SOURCE: *Elitre* via *Wikimedia Commons*

EXPLORE THIS ISSUE'S

FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

01 Nancy Ammerman's new book *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes* (Oxford, 29.95) employs innovative methods to make the argument that the everyday dimensions of religion have not been adequately appreciated in the study of American religion. Ammerman and her research team not only interviewed 95 Americans on their spiritual and religious lives but asked them to keep oral diaries and take pictures of places that are meaningful to them. While there is a tendency to divorce spirituality and religion, Ammerman argues that the two are often merged, as people apply their religion to everyday life. Interestingly, the book finds that those who make a sharp distinction between being religious and being spiritual tend to be neither, and are actually engaging in "boundary maintaining discourse to distance themselves from forms of religion they reject." It is by participating in "spiritual tribes"—which are often congregations but can be any religious group—that people learn spiritual discourse and then apply it to everyday activities.

From the diaries and photos taken by subjects, Ammerman and

her team found signs of everyday religion that are hidden from conventional survey questions that focus on how many times one prays or reads the Bible in a week—from wearing tattoos to having sacred images in one's home to keeping a journal. Ammerman argues that people develop "extra-theistic" and "ethical" spiritualities that are not necessarily tied to a deity (though often are) allowing them to recognize a "more than ordinary" dimension in life. It is especially in work, care-giving (such as to elderly parents), health and wellness, and voluntary charitable action where these forms of spirituality are present; somewhat surprisingly, political action was rarely the subject of religious and spiritual reflections.

02 In the last few years a circle of sociologists have argued that research on religion in the U.S. has focused on its positive dimensions and has overlooked its more negative aspects. Sociologist Ryan Cragun's *What You Don't Know About Religion (But Should)* (Pitchstone Publishing, \$24.95) is one such example of revisionism, arguing that religious institutions, beliefs and practices have as much

negative as positive effects on individuals and society. The book seeks to show the dark or at least gray side of American religion through extensive use of survey data. In cases where religion appears to have clear positive effects, such as on volunteering, alleviating crime and promoting marriage, Cragun tends to cite unintended and non-religious factors that are actually at work. For instance, Cragun says religious people are more likely to volunteer because they have greater access to social networks.

But in areas where religion is reputed to be detrimental to society, such as gender inequality and environmentalism, he traces the effects to "fundamentalism." It is here that the measures Cragun employs differ from many other studies. For instance, he cites "misogyny" as the underlying cause for a church not ordaining women, thus establishing a detrimental social effect at least to a certain type of religion. Cragun allows that the religious influence of moderates and liberals is "benign," though that is mainly because they have learned the lessons of secularism and science. The book is written in a humorous and irreverent vein, providing many interesting anecdotes about Cra-

gun's journey from Mormonism to secular humanism.

03 The emergence of Neopagan and indigenous religious movements in Eastern and Central Europe since the fall of communism has caught Western practitioners of these faiths somewhat by surprise. They have found that the egalitarian and countercultural dimensions of Neopaganism in the West stands in sharp contrast to the more traditionalist and nationalist (in some cases, far-right) aspects to its counterparts in the east — a reality richly documented in the book *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (Acumen, \$99.95), edited by Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson. The book brings together insightful contributions on indigenous and Neopagan movements and groups in most countries in these regions (going as far east as Armenia), with several chapters on Russia. Although these movements became visible in the post-communist era, there were active pagan movements in diaspora communities (from Ukraine and Lithuania, for instance) in the U.S. earlier in the 20th century and they can be traced back to 19th century romanticism, even if such retrievals of their pre-Christian pasts are selective.

Several contributors note that it is too simple to divide Neopaganism into eastern and western camps; these movements share, to varying degrees, a rejection of Christianity (Judaism and Islam); a desire to get back to one's origins; and a strong environmentalist thrust. There are also some interesting cases of pagans blending their practices with Christianity; in the largely pagan

Mari El Republic in the former Soviet Union, indigenous believers may also be nominal members of the Russian Orthodox Church. But there is clearly a tone of concern in several of the chapters on the blending of far-right activism and paganism—there are growing incidences of violence and even terrorism by far-right groups with pagan orientations (most notably in Russia) against churches and mosques; talk of “social justice” in some of these groups means justice for one's own ethnic group without the moderating virtue of mercy taught by establishment religions. Other noteworthy chapters include an examination of Czech Neopagan groups and how they are growing in a strongly secular country while divided between Western and Eastern strains, and a look at how pagan groups use the Internet for recruitment and teaching in Romania.

04 *Rural Life and Rural Church* (Equinox, \$39.95), edited by Leslie J. Francis and Mandy Robbins, is the result of a long-term research project examining how churches minister in rural Britain. The anthology is a mix of sociology, theology and church history, but on the whole it provides an empirical examination of the changing dynamics of the rural church. In the midst of declining congregations and fewer clergy, rural churches are also seeing a new interest from visitors who value these historic structures for ascetic and spiritual reasons. Several chapters look into the interaction between these visitors and congregational life, using such innovative methods as the content analysis of prayer cards and visitors' books. The studies seem to

confirm that these visitors are not strictly secular tourists as they value the special nature of these sacred places (providing peace and a place for prayer), but they do not show much religious interest beyond such experiences. Other chapters include a look at the puzzle of why confirmation rates in rural churches have declined more than in urban churches and research showing rural churches tend to draw personalities oriented toward emotion and the need for continuity.

05 As its title implies, *Testing Pluralism* (Brill, \$133), edited by Giuseppe Giordan and William H. Swatos, looks at the way globalization has resulted in a “de-territorialization” of religion and a new pluralism in many nations. The contributors show that due to the globalizing forces of immigration and communications, it is increasingly difficult to associate only one particular religion with a given territory or nation (aside from Muslim nations). The editor argues that it is this new pluralism rather than secularization that is the overriding reality in the world today. As a chapter on Australian Catholics suggests, the decline in church participation by native Australians is seen as secularization — yet the vibrant faith of immigrant Indian and Filipino Catholics presents a different reality. Other chapters include: an examination of the growth of Eastern Orthodoxy and Sikhism in Italy; the growth and competition between non-theistic groups in Norway; and an examination of how internal pluralism can change into external pluralism in the case of the conservative schisms within American Anglicanism. ■

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

JANUARY, 2014

Volume 29, No. 3

© 2014 Religion Watch

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

Sweaty Sheep is one of a wave of new congregations that embrace physical exercise in their ministries. The Louisville, Ky.-based church seeks to compete with running clubs and other exercise programs that may distract people from Sunday worship. While exercise programs have become widespread in congregations in recent years, Sweaty Sheep sees running and the community it creates as spiritual practice. The church meets in the outdoor areas near run-

ning trails. The church also has a “Spin Church” liturgy, where spinners work out on stationary bikes while listening to songs such as U2, Kings of Leon, and Mumford and Sons, punctuating them with Bible verses, questions, and discussions. The founding pastor Ryan Althaus has also written a series of Bible studies that are read and then reflected upon during a group run, which other churches are also now using. (Source: *Christian Century*, Dec. 25). ■

About Religion Watch

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



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.