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RELIGIONWATCH

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

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Revision more common than stasis in many new religious movements

Many critics of new religious movements (NRMs) have usually viewed these upstart faiths (or “cults”) as having an authoritarian nature under charismatic leaders, who brook few challenges to a fixed body of teachings and practices. But the case studies in the new book *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements* (Ashgate, \$35.96), edited by Eileen Barker, suggests that many NRMs are in a constant state of adaptation and even transformation in their theology and practices. As Barker explains in the introduction, many NRMs do start out with a number of “univocal statements,” not only about theology but also behaviors for followers, but in a short period of time they can start revising teachings and practices. As the contributors show, these changes are not only the expected shifts

that happen when a group becomes more institutionalized as the original charismatic founder passes from the scene, but also significant departures from foundational teachings — coming from followers as well as leaders — that can set a NRM on a radically different course.

The book covers both historical and contemporary cases of well known and obscure NRMs, as well as those that are offshoots of major traditions, such as the Hare Krishna and the radical Muslim Hizb ut Tahrir, and those that are free-standing, such as the Unification Church, Scientology and Falungong. The more dramatic cases of diversification and revisionism include: the group Hikari no Wa, which has tried to rehabilitate

▶ **Cont. on page 3**

New scholarly attention to Scientology and its struggle to define itself

While Scientology has consistently been a (frequently controversial) player in the field of “new religious movements” in the Western world since the 1960s, there has been comparatively little academic research conducted on the movement. That may be due in part to the Church of Scientology's inclination to keep control on knowledge produced about it, but also to its sometimes harsh reactions facing people considered as potential enemies. However, fresh research is starting to emerge by both veteran and young researchers, and a

sign of this new scholarly interest has been the first academic conference devoted entirely to Scientology, which **RW** attended. Organized by the European Observatory of Religion and Secularism, the gathering took place Jan. 24-25 at the Faculty for Comparative Studies of Religions (FVG) in Wilrijk (a suburb of Antwerpen, Belgium), with some 20 papers presented by European and North American academics. Papers covered a variety of topics, but several

▶ **Cont. on page 2**

Scientology grapples with its public image *(cont. from p. 1)*

dealt with the issue of Scientology and religion.

An instance of “rational religion,” Scientology is testing the boundaries of what religion is — something that emerged once again in the December 2013 decision of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom to recognize chapels of Scientology as “places of religious worship,” said Eileen Barker (London School of Economics / INFORM). However, such court decisions are unlikely to dispel the frequent perception that Scientology is a movement masquerading as religion for various reasons. German researcher Marco Frenschkowski managed to offer new insights by choosing another approach: what was Dianetics’ and Scientology’s founder L. Ron Hubbard’s (1911-1986) religious intentions? Hubbard had no personal religious background or a clear definition of religion, although he also held no positive view on atheism. His potential client base had little interest in joining a religious group. Still at the beginning of Scientology in 1954, Hubbard was fluctuating and reluctant to call it a religion. According to Frenschkowski’s astute observations, based on a reading of references to religion in Hubbard’s work, the founder of the movement did not intend to launch a religion, but rather discovered that what he was doing was one; in other words, Scientology didn’t become a religion overnight.

Donald Westbrook (Claremont Graduate University) has paid attention to the religious experience of Scientologists through conducting interviews. He argues that Scientology is not a religion of belief or faith, and is often presented

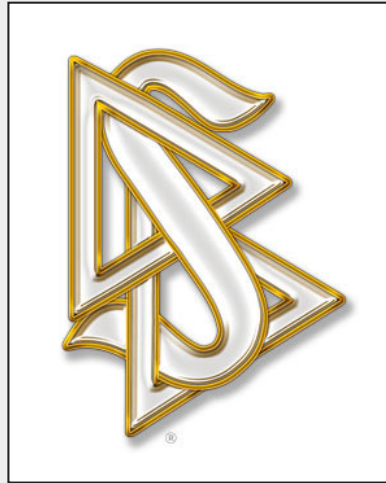
in non-religious terms—thus raising once more the issue of boundaries between religious and secular. Westbrook’s paper also has made clear how much research needs to be done on various unstudied aspects of Scientology. One is the spread of Dianetics among members of the Na-

tion of Islam (NOI). With Louis Farrakhan’s official blessing, some 600 NOI members have already been trained as auditors.

Scientology loses members too, either because they leave or due to internal purges. Some attempt to continue on the same path in different organizational settings. There seems to have been a recent increase in attempts to set up independent Scientology groups. The Dror Center, in Israel, which seceded from the main organization in 2012, is one of the most recent instances. However, until now, few seemed to survive for long, with some exceptions, such as Ron’s Org, a group founded in Germany during the 1980s. In

most cases, observed Kjersti Hellesøy (Tromsø University), the organization and the technology are so interlinked that it often proves difficult to remain a Scientologist while leaving the Church of Scientology. Legal controversies too often have tended to dictate the research agenda on Scientology, according to J. Gordon Melton (Baylor University). To some extent, this small conference may be part of a turning point: scholars are attempting to fulfill their role in taking Scientology as a serious research object, if only due to the significance attributed to it by thousands of active and former Scientologists.

(For more information on the European Observatory of Religion and Secularism, visit: <http://www.observatoire-religion.com>). ■



The Scientology symbol combines the ARC and KRC triangles with the letter "S." // SOURCE: *The Church of Scientology's website.*

New religious movements' adaptation *(cont. from p. 1)*

and revise the teachings of the Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo (infamous for the Tokyo subway attacks in 1995) by eliminating its prophecies and the need for a charismatic leader; the struggles in the family of the late Sun Myung Moon for successors in Unificationism; the break from Marian and apocalyptic Christianity and the adoption of the ancient Cathar religion by the Russian-based Orthodox Church of the Sovereign Mother of God; and even the anti-cult movement's shift away from a "cult-fighting" mentality to a more nuanced position and dialogue both with some NRMs and the researchers studying them.

But most striking is the rapid transformation of the Family International, formerly known as the Children of God, from a counter-cultural, communal and quasi-evangelical movement to one that stresses individualism, non-confrontational mission work, and re-joining and cooperating with the secular world and established churches.

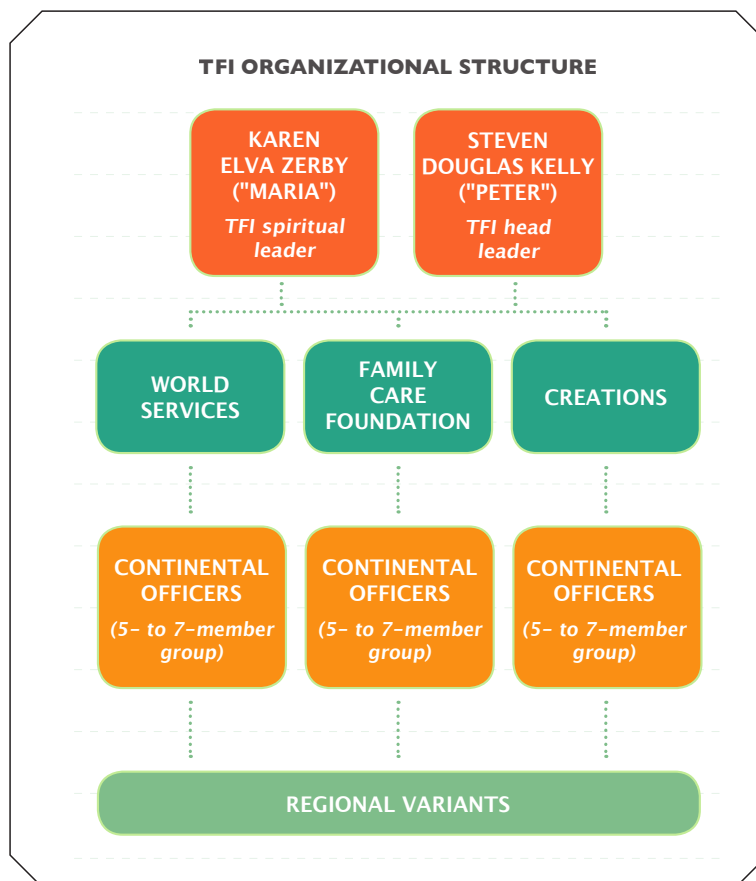
Writing in *Nova Religio* (November), the journal of alternative and new religions, Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd characterize the changes in TFI as so radical that it has left long-time members disoriented and bitter — threatening to push the movement to the "threshold of dissolution." In the early years of the new millennium, TFI already had made a shift from the authoritarian rule of founder David "Moses" Berg (who had died in 1994) that was marked by allegations of emotional and sexual abuse to a more democratic, if still regimented,

style of leadership by second-generation members. The leaders, known as Peter and Maria, made prophecy (based on what were considered revelations from Jesus and other supernatural entities) the mechanism for change, which was encouraged at all levels of the movement. It was in 2009 that Peter and Maria inaugurated a "reboot" of the movement that has changed

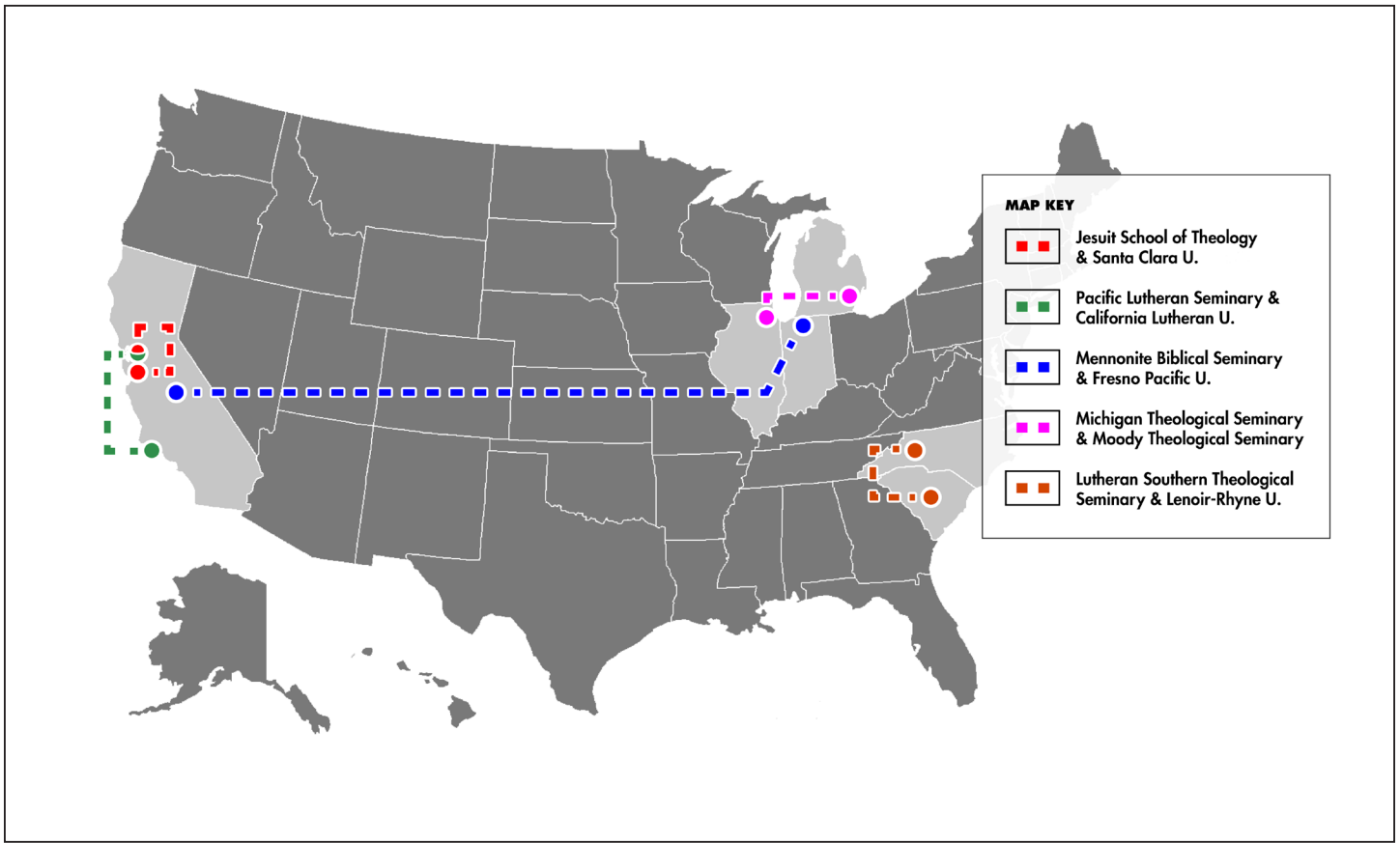
TFI beyond recognition. TFI communal homes were broken up, under the belief that they stifle creativity and turned off potential converts; the controversial practice of "sexual sharing" between couples, a source of allegations of sexual abuse, was sidelined; there has been a downsizing and disbanding of key organizational units; and a new encouragement of secular work and schooling. Some TFI members have joined churches in their local community, including some seeking to become pastors of small, independent churches. Beliefs have likewise been modified, such as Berg's position as the key prophet and the group's end-times

teachings. The alienation among long-time members from these changes has caused a "substantial loss of people who continue to identify as TFI members," dropping from 6,000 to about 3,500 in two years (with finances also decreasing), according to the authors. TFI is investing heavily in web-based technology for its evangelistic efforts and internal communications, but it remains to be seen whether such individualization can sustain the movement.

(*Nova Religio*, <http://goo.gl/UoS0Fv>). ■



TFI's organizational makeup is more structured at the top but is more flexible to regional variations at its lower levels. // Graphic by T.J. Thomson © 2014 Religion Watch



This map provides a geographic overview of several recent seminary and church-related-university mergers. SOURCE: Graphic by T.J. Thomson © 2014 Religion Watch

Seminaries and church-related universities getting back together

Declining enrollments in Protestant and Catholic seminaries are forcing some schools into new relationships. In some cases, it includes mergers with colleges and universities, reviving an educational model that was more common in earlier centuries, reports *Forum Letter* (January), an independent Lutheran newsletter. In the new model, seminaries are coming under the university's umbrella as its "theological school." In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), two of its seminaries have made this transformation. Southern Seminary merged with Lenoir-Rhyne

University last year, and Pacific Lutheran Seminary recently agreed to a merger with California Lutheran University. Mennonite Biblical Seminary has similarly merged with Fresno Pacific University; and the evangelical Michigan Theological Seminary has become part of Moody Theological Seminary (and thereby with Moody Bible Institute).

The trend also includes Catholics, seen in the merger of the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley with Santa Clara University. *Forum Letter* Editor Richard Johnson writes, "All of these mergers

may be pointing us back to a day when much theological education went on in conjunction with universities and colleges." Aside from the obvious financial advantages, these new arrangements may help pull some universities which had been church-related in name only back to a closer relationship with their Christian roots. But Johnson adds that "the influence could just as well go the other way, with the seminaries becoming more academic and less concerned about training pastors for the church." (*Forum Letter*, ALPB, P.O. Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753). ■

WHAT THE

CURRENT RESEARCH

REVEALS ABOUT TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

01 A new study finds that divorce is higher among religiously conservative Protestants and even drives up divorce rates for other

people living around them. University of Texas at Austin professor Jennifer Glass sought to explain why divorce rates would be higher in religious states like Arkansas and Ala-

bama — which boast the second and third highest divorce rates, respectively — but lower in more liberal

▶ **Cont. on pages 6 and 7**

Messianic Jews finding more acceptance in Jewish community

The recent Pew Research Center study on American Jews is still being mined for insights into changes among American Jewry, but one of the more overlooked findings is decreased opposition to Messianic Jews claiming a Jewish identity. The survey found that 34 percent of American Jews think that believing Jesus is the Messiah is compatible with being Jewish; 35 percent of ultra-Orthodox Jews agreed with this view. *Christianity Today* magazine (January/February) notes that this finding is supported by the observations and experiences of Messianic Jews who are seeing, if not acceptance, at least less of a tendency to write them out of the Jewish community. Russ Resnick of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations said that the markers for Jewish identity have shifted from religion to ethnicity. “The gatekeepers are still holding the line against us, but a lot of Jewish people in the larger community recognize we’re here to stay, that we’re part of the Jewish community, that we’re concerned about Jewish causes.”

Another pastor of a Messianic congregation says

that faithful Jewish living has worn down opposition to Messianic Jews more than evangelism has. He adds that “more Messianic Jews have participated in the mainstream Jewish community. Many of us see ourselves as fellow travelers on a journey with God with the rest of the Jewish community, and we take a posture of humility about the reasons we believe in Yeshua.” The article also reports that messianic Judaism as a whole is finding acceptance in the academy as well. The 16th World Congress of Jewish Studies include a first-time panel on messianic Jewish studies. Gershon Nerel, a historian of Jewish believers in Christ, said the reason organizers included the panel was not only because the topic reflects a social reality, but that it also represents a growing field of scholarly research. Although Jewish believers remain marginal (only 2 or 3 percent of Americans with a Jewish background say they are messianic), Nerel says they are also influential and difficult to ignore.

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

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

states like New Jersey and Massachusetts, and found the religious factor significant. The researchers trace the high rate of divorce in these states partly to young marriage, which they say occurs more often in conservative Protestant counties where “[p]harmacies might not give out emergency contraception” and “[s]chools might only teach abstinence education,” according to a report in the *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 21). W. Bradford Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project and editorial advisor for *The Family in America*, commented in the article that the findings were “surprising.” The results conflict with other research showing that young marriage, which the researchers blame for Protestants’ ills, is in fact in many cases a protector of mental health. Wilcox added that the study also showed that more “secularism” — people not adhering to any religious tradition — was also linked to higher rates of divorce.

02 **Korean-American churches continue to show significant growth, showing their greatest strength in New York, California and New Jersey, according to new data on these congregations reported in the newspaper *Korea Daily* (Jan. 14).** There was an increase of 123 Korean American churches from 4096 in the year of 2011 to 4,223 in 2012. According to the Census, 17,068,822 Korean Americans reside in the USA, as of 2012. Therefore, there are 403 churches per each Korean American living in the US. The most Korean American churches are located in California, as many as 1,329, which is 31 percent of the total number. It was followed

by 436 in New York, and 239 in New Jersey. This means that 47.3 percent of Korean American churches are in California, New York and New Jersey.

In more detail, between 2011 and 2012, there was an increase of 46 churches in California, 22 in Texas, 6 in Maryland, 8 in New Jersey, and 8 in Virginia. In particular, there was an increase of 16 churches in Seattle in 2012. Interestingly, there was a decrease of two churches in Arizona and one church in Alabama, Montana, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. There are mainly six Christian traditions which Korean American churches belonged to in 2012. They are: Presbyterian 40.5 percent, Baptist 17.9 percent, Methodist 12.9 percent, Ecumenical (which could mean non-denominational) 6.9 percent, Evangelical 6.7 percent, and Holiness 6.6 percent. There are also 420 Korean churches in Canada, 200 in Australia, 175 in Germany, 71 in England, 62 in Brazil, 53 in Argentina, and 25 both in France and Mexico.

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

03 **Biblical names for babies are finding renewed popularity among prospective parents. Experimentation with or creating new names is on the decline, reports the *National Catholic Register* (Jan. 8).** The baby-naming website, called Belly Ballot, allows prospective parents to share via social media the name choices of their soon-to-be-born baby with their friends and family, who then vote on their favorites.

Based on data gathered from

3,500 parents, along with 25,000 votes of their friends and families who use the website, Belly Ballot finds that biblical names are likely to surge more in 2014 than they have in previous years. While biblical names such as Noah and Ethan are already popular, parents are being drawn to less frequently used names from the Bible, such as Caleb, Naomi, Levi and Judith.

The concurrent decline of more experimental names fading in popularity with the rise of biblical names may show a desire to go back to “original values and traditions,” according to Lucie Wisco, editor the website.

04 **A new study by the Pew Research Center finds that the share of countries with a high or very high level of social hostilities toward religion reached a six-year peak in 2012.** One-third of the 198 countries and territories studied had high religious hostilities in 2012, increasing from 29 percent in 2011 and 20 percent as of mid-2007. Religious hostilities grew in every major region of the world except the Americas. The Middle East and North Africa showed the sharpest increase, still feeling the aftershocks of the Arab Spring. There also was a significant rise in religious hostilities in the Asia-Pacific region, where China entered into the “high” category for the first time. The study is based on two indices gauging government restrictions Index and unofficial “social hostilities.” Europe had the largest increase in the median level of government restrictions in 2012, followed closely by the Middle East and North Africa.

In characterizing the overall level

of restrictions — whether resulting from government policies or from social hostilities — the study finds that restrictions on religion are high or very high in 43 percent of countries, also a six-year high. As in the previous year, Pakistan had the highest level of social hostilities involving religion, and Egypt had the highest level of government restrictions on religion. During the latest year studied, there also was an increase in the level of harassment or intimidation of particular religious groups. Indeed, two of the seven major religious groups monitored by the study — Muslims and Jews — experienced six-year highs in the number of countries in which they were harassed by national, provincial or local governments, or by individuals or groups in society.

(For more information on the Pew study, visit: <http://goo.gl/REc3fK>).

05 A “dynamic relationship between the religious and the secular” rather than a pattern of the former being eclipsed by the latter seems to be emerging from recent research on youth and religion in the United Kingdom, writes Rebecca Catto (Coventry University) in the journal *Religion* (January).

Those findings are based on her analysis of a series of 21 research projects, all part of an ambitious, well-funded Religion and Society Program, based in Lancaster. The projects maintain a special focus on youth and religion. The variety of topics and disciplinary approaches opens the way to richer and more nuanced assessments when linked with each other. The age range considered was from 13 to 25. Youth are growing up in a context in which all traditional modes of belonging (religious and political)

have eroded. But at the same time, religion is perceived as significant again in the public sphere, and thus worth researching, despite persistent decline in church attendance and the rise of non-affiliation.

It is not surprising to see that only 33 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in the U.K. say that Christianity currently has an influence on them. Still, Christianity remains the largest religious group among young people in the UK. Yet affirming oneself to be a Christian tends to become something of a counter-cultural choice, for instance among students. At schools,

local and regional differences can be noticed: in places in Northern Ireland and Scotland, being an active Christian can still bring respect, while students in rural Sussex rather see religion as “strange,” having little direct experience of it. In central Birmingham, religious and non religious pupils all take religion courses as part of everyday life.

When it comes to ethnic minorities, religious identities seem to acquire increasing significance among their young people in the UK. Young Muslims are subjected to public scrutiny. Among those families coming from Bangladesh, one research project has observed that they tend to place their Muslim identity above other labels, in contrast with their parents. Migration can make religion a more important part of personal identity.

The impact of modern commu-

nication technologies is obvious. One of the projects has showed how young Sikhs use online forums for learning more about their religion and connecting with each other: the Internet becomes a source of authority in itself.

Another research project was conducted on youth in areas of urban deprivation (Glasgow, Manchester): young people in such precarious environments may not set foot in places of worship or have a clear doctrine, but they speak of guardian angels, God, the afterlife and other topics, if one takes the time to listen to them. The author

of that research project called into question the “middle-class bias” often present in research on youth and religion, reports Catto. Interesting findings emerge when attention is shifted “beyond questions of numerical growth and decline,” stresses Catto. It should also not be forgotten that both religious and non-religious young

people are affected by the same changes and global forces. Religious change is multidirectional. Young people are religious in new ways, beyond traditional spaces of worship (e.g. online). Moreover, the grand narrative of decline and individualization is not fully realized in the study of young people and religiosity, as evidenced by the rise of religion as a possible signifier of identity.

(Religion, Taylor & Francis, 325 Chestnut St. 8th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19106; <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rrel20/current>). ■

“... only 33 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in the U.K. say that Christianity currently has an influence on them.”



Each year, millions of Muslims travel west into to Karbala, Iraq, during the Arbaeen festival.

SOURCE: Graphic by T.J. Thomson © 2014 Religion Watch

Iraq's quietist Shiite influence challenging Iran's religious establishment

Iraq's emergence as a center of Shiite pilgrimage since 2003, especially among Iranian Muslims, is presenting a "serious challenge to the legitimacy of Iran's state-sponsored religious establishment," according to the *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2014). Nearly two million Shiite pilgrims passed from Iran to Iraq between March 2009 and February 2010—comparable to if not greater than the number of pilgrims traveling to Mecca and to the Christian and Jewish sites in Israel during the same year. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Iranian government has made these pilgrimages a high priority, organizing package tours, which are accompanied by government-selected spiritual guides, "who are vetted for political awareness and loyalty to the Islamic

regime," writes Nathaniel Rabkin. Rather than Iran attempting to gain influence in Iraq, as some Americans and Iraqis claim, these government-guided tours actually avoid fostering close relationships with Iraqis; the government agency overseeing these pilgrimages make little attempt to use its citizens as good will ambassadors, advising them to avoid political discussions and reject gifts (pilgrim offerings are a folk tradition in Southern Iraq).

"Rather than strengthening Iranian influence over Iraqi affairs, the pilgrimage seems to be enhancing the popularity of Iraq-based religious leaders inside Iran," such as Najaf-based Shiite cleric Ayatollah Ali Sistani, according to Rabkin. He adds that Sistani's popularity "reflects a genuine hunger in

Iran for an independent religious leadership untainted by connections and corruption." Sistani and the rest of Iraq's Shiite religious establishment reflects the "quietist" school of Shiite thought, in which religious leaders can offer advice on political matters but do not take sides in the struggle for power. Rabkin concludes that "Tehran may exercise numerous forms of influence over its smaller, weaker and poorer neighbor, but when it comes to religious affairs, the influence seems to be running mostly in the opposite direction. In the coming years, Iranian authorities may be forced to devote their attention to counteracting Iraqi religious influence inside their country."

(*Middle East Quarterly*, 1500 Walnut St., Suite 1050, Philadelphia, PA 19102). ■

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

FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

► The new book *Religion, Politics and Polarization* (Rowman & Littlefield, \$28), by William D'Antonio, Steven A. Tuch and Josiah R. Baker, examines the relationship between religious affiliation and voting behavior of American politicians over the last four decades. The authors seek to test the hypothesis that there is a culture war in American society between “progressive” and “orthodox” parties, holding that such conflict should be especially evident among members of Congress on the contested issue of abortion, as well as defense spending, taxes, and military spending. They looked at the abortion voting records from 1977 to 2010 and the votes on the other three issues from 1969-2008. Not too surprisingly, while party affiliation was the strongest predictor of voting behavior, religion also correlated with the different voting patterns. The authors argue that the greater representation of conservative Protestants in the Republican Party and their simultaneous departure from the Democrats has fueled much of this polarization. The public, particularly white Protestants, have also experienced such polarization, though to a lesser

extent than politicians. D'Antonio, Tuch and Baker conclude there are currently few values and beliefs that are shared across parties.

► *Social Media and Religious Change* (DeGruyter, \$140), edited by Marie Gillespie, David Eric John Herbert, and Anita Greenhill, goes beyond past studies of online religion to examine how the new media forms, including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, are challenging and reconfiguring traditional religious institutions and forms of authority. The book's beginning chapters are highly theoretical, but the volume eventually gives way to interesting case studies on how various forms of religion are represented in and interact with various forms of social media. International in coverage, several of the topics deal with what has been called “implicit religion,” as religious meaning is invested in secular beliefs and practices. Thus a chapter on social media venerating celebrities looks particularly at how Facebook pages memorializing Michael Jackson endow the late performer with divine attributes. Other chapters include a study of how “post-denominational” Judaism is spread and constructed—with offline ex-

pressions—on Facebook pages; a look at how the Baha'i leadership seeks to guide and in some cases control members' online discussion of the faith; and an examination of the ways in which radical Islamic martyr videos (which have even gained a presence on Facebook and Twitter) seek to revive and galvanize a global “Ummah” (or community) into action.

► The new book *Secular and Sacred? The Scandinavian Case of Religion, Human Rights, Law and Public Space* (Vandenhoeck & Reprecht, for ordering information, visit: http://www.v-r.de/en/title-2-2/secular_and_sacred-1011025/) casts some doubt on the common view that the Scandinavian countries represent a secularized vanguard or endpoint toward which Europe (and even America) is heading. The book, edited by Rosemarie van den Breemer, Jose Casanova and Trygve Wyller, presents some evidence of a new role for religion, though in often unexpected places. The contributors particularly focus on case studies of graveyards, religion in public hospitals, and services for immigrants (mostly in Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish contexts). Especially noteworthy

thy is the chapter on the ministry to the undocumented in Sweden and Denmark, with Wyller showing that in the former country, a Lutheran church has engaged in unprecedented activism for immigrants—a social sphere usually reserved for the welfare state. But because of their illegal status, the church has worked with a secular philanthropic agency to become a center of immigrant welfare.

The congregation under study did not provide religious services to the undocumented, but only secular services such as healthcare. Yet such work is something new for the Swedish church—showing a process of “intertwinement” of secular and sacred. This case study is contrasted with Denmark where the state Lutheran church leaders and theologians actually supported authorities stepping in to stop a church giving sanctuary to illegal immigrants. Earlier chapters in the book explain that varying interpretations of the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms (teaching that there is a sharp distinction between the earthly and heavenly kingdoms) account for these different approaches. But more to the point, the book suggests that Lutheranism, even if it doesn’t draw many Scandinavians to attend church much, continues to shape the development of modernity and secularism in these nations.

► *Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion* (Bloomsbury, \$29.95), edited by Emma Tarlo and Annelies Moors, reveals how the wide diversity of Muslim dress practices around the world creates quite a discrepancy from the well worn debates that remain fixated on whether women should or should not wear the hijab (head covering)

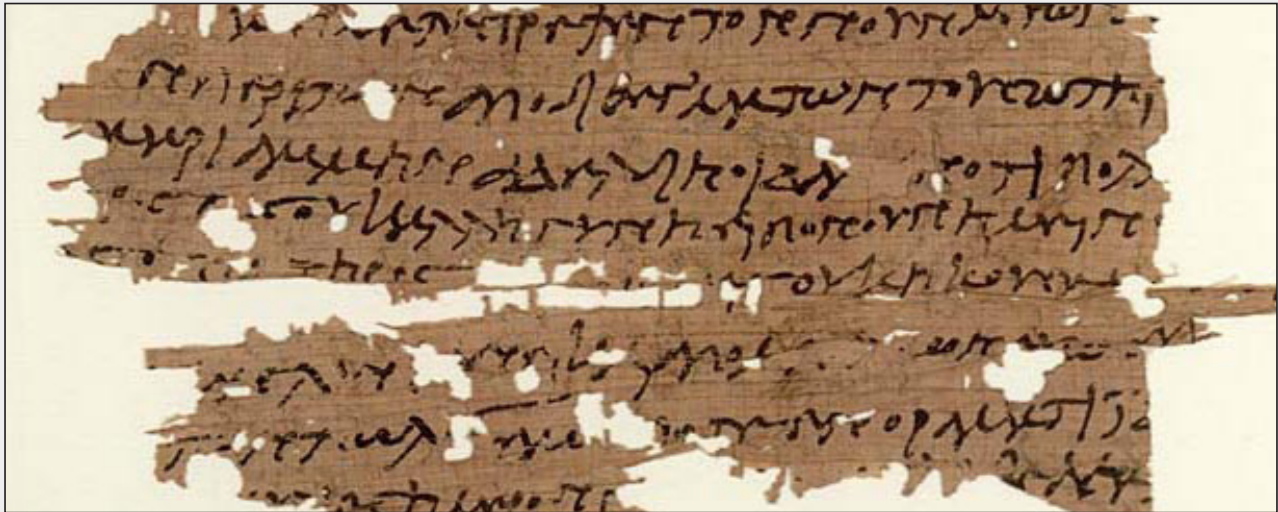
in public. In the introduction, the editors argue that the expansion of Islamic fashions shows significant differences among Muslim women in how they relate to the public, as well as different levels and kinds of piety. While some Muslim women stress a strictly internal piety and care little about fashion, only being concerned with dressing modestly, other women, blending piety and self-expression, are fueling a global market that reflects the growing diversity of dress practices based on both local custom and consumer taste. A theory underlying many of the contributions is that the covering of women may be a form of submission, but that there is also a measure of agency that women exercise, hence the growth of Islamic fashion.

As the chapters suggest, there is nonetheless conflict and new issues surrounding these diverse styles. In Italy and Sweden, women wearing the Islamic bathing suit known as the “burqini” find opposition by the sexually liberalized cultures (even making it illegal in some parts of Italy) for covering themselves too much, although this style is allowing Muslims to participate in the once-prohibited practice of mixed-bathing. A study of Turkish women in Texas shows some are looking for a middle ground — not veiling but choosing among the new fashions for modest dress — and actually find less public opposition than in their home country. In Denmark, a “Miss Headscarf” competition, which featured everything from a Goth punk style to a classic “biblical style,” showed how Muslims use these fashions both for piety and expressing their individual personalities—even

as the Danish media and public remained fixated on the “pro-” and “anti-” headscarf debate.

► The idea that the occult or esotericism is a Western phenomenon comes under critique in the edited collection *Occultism in a Global Perspective* (Acumen, \$99.95), edited by Henrik Bogdan and Gordon Djurdjevic. The editors argue that the growth of globalization, particularly as powered by the Internet, gives even marginal groups and movements associated with the occult a universal currency and an audience that blends these teachings and practices with their own cultural and religious sensibilities. In fact, several groups have moved entirely online, although allowing access only to initiates. Although several of the contributions are historical in nature, showing that the spread of occult teachings in many parts of the world is not a recent phenomenon, other chapters provide interesting case studies of how Western and largely European occult leaders and groups have influenced — and are influenced by — non-Western occultists.

Noteworthy chapters include a study of the rapid growth of esoteric groups in the former Yugoslavia after the collapse of communism (such as the *Ordo Templi Orientis*, which has the second largest membership in the world) — continuing the influence of occult ideas on Balkan artists. Another chapter examines the occult in an Islamic Turkey and a segment of the Sufi brotherhoods (although strongly opposed by other Sufi orders). A look at the spread of esoteric Hitlerism in Latin America shows a movement that venerates Hitler as a messianic figure bringing in a new age. ■



A fragment from the 5th-century papyrus "Gospel of Mary" text that is included in *The New New Testament*. // SOURCE: Public domain image via Wikimedia Commons

ON / FILE

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

01 *The New New Testament* is a novel attempt by liberal Protestant scholars to integrate extra-canonical texts, such as the Gospel of Mary, into the traditional biblical text. This expanded version of the Christian Bible is the brain child of United Church of Christ pastor and biblical scholar Hal Taussig, along with the work of a self-appointed council of 19 scholars and spiritual leaders. Taussig's version of the Bible, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, includes 37 works of scripture, including 10 books or texts not found in the traditional New Testament. Taussig argues against the view the books and letters included in the traditional New Testament were more genuine and divinely inspired than later texts that were excluded. *The New New Testament* is written for

a general audience and is designed to be used in settings of worship, prayer, and contemplation. (Source: *Spirituality & Health*, Jan. 23).

02 Trail Life USA, viewing itself as a Christian alternative to the Boy Scouts of America recently launched with close to 500 troops nationwide. The organization was started in the wake of the Boy Scouts' policy change last spring that permitted gay members, although not gay adult leaders. Mark Hancock, the head of Trail Life USA, said many participants are evangelical Christian, with a number of Catholic troops starting as well. Those that have signed up include churches and other organizations with a Christian statement of faith,

► Cont. on page 11

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

such as Christian Home Schooling organizations and Christian camps. Its values statement includes a section on purity that calls for sex to remain within the bounds of heterosexual marriage. Religious groups sponsor about 70 percent of Boy Scouts of America's 100,000 troops. A Boy Scouts spokesman said that he has only heard from a handful of troops that have not renewed their membership. (Source: *National Catholic Reporter*, Jan. 17). ■

CORRECTION: The article on the tenure and performance trajectory of U.S. bishops in the Volume 29, No. 4 edition (on page 5) misattributed the study's author. The correct author of this paper is Charles Zech of Villanova University. We are sorry for the confusion this error may have caused.

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.



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