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Religion goes undercover as publishers seek to reach the “nones”

The growth of religiously non-affiliated Americans or the “nones” is leading to a significant shift in religious publishing, not only in marketing books to religious professionals attempting to win nones back to the faith but also in targeting this amorphous group of readers that includes a mix of disaffected believers and non-believers. *Publisher’s Weekly* (Feb. 22) reports that the dilemma publishers face in finding a readership among the nones concerns “discoverability, when readers don’t think they care about your topic. How will those indifferent to religion find books they’re not looking for, especially if they avoid anything that carries a whiff of religion?” Lynn Garrett writes that publishers are tending to make their offerings as relevant and cliché-free as possible, such as the provocative title *The Faith of Christopher Hitchens* (referring to the influential atheist writer) from Thomas Nelson. Young adults and nones are often one and the same audience, since Millennials represent the fastest-growing segment of this phenomenon. In books for this audience, a conversational tone and “authenticity” are important, as well as using digital media environments.

There is also the trend of targeting the “dones,” those who have left their faiths, often with autobiographical accounts of leaving and then rediscovering spirituality and religion. One such popular title is *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church*, by Rachel Held Evans (Thomas Nelson), which traces the author’s journey from disillusionment through her discovery of the sacraments. But it seems that



many of the offerings to the nones are similar to the generic spirituality titles that were popular in the late 1980s and '90s; Thomas More, a pioneer in generic spirituality writing, is back with titles on the wisdom of Jesus for seekers and on creating a personal spirituality. If anything is different, it is the attempt to be even more indirect and even covert in introducing religious and spiritual topics. Such authors as David Nico and Ingrid Macher don't emphasize their faiths and introduce spirituality only after they have hooked readers with their diet and fitness methods.

The fragmenting of evangelical approaches to the Bible



The days when evangelicals defined themselves by their uncompromising style of biblical interpretation may be over according to an article by religion writer Jim Hinch, senior editor for *Guideposts* magazine, in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* (Feb. 15). Hinch sees this growing diversity as part of a wider transformation of evangelical Christianity confronted by a more diverse and more secular society: those challenges are leading to rethinking in areas ranging from politics to sexuality to

evangelization. Diversity also exists in the approach to Scripture despite the lasting image of evangelicals as “univocal followers of an inerrant, plainly interpreted Bible.” Evangelicals continue to believe in Jesus and to give the Bible a central place, but more of them are willing to approach it in its historical context too and thus to rethink the way to use it in the contemporary environment. The Bible is less seen as having to provide an answer to everything. The influx of people of diverse ethnic origins also tends to increase the varieties of theological views. Hinch sees several recent books as indicative of that opening, with evangelical authors dismissing claims such as scientific accuracy of the Bible and also questioning traditional approaches to homosexuality.

These developments correspond to wider trends in American society. Hinch quotes from the yearly “State of the Bible” survey by the American Bible Society, which shows that one in five Americans holds the Bible to be “the actual word of God” to be taken literally, and only 13 percent among those younger than 30. Hinch remarks that conservative evangelicals, such as Kevin DeYoung (prominent Michigan pastor and author of *Taking God at His Word*, 2014), agree that formal allegiance to Scripture and actual adherence to biblical principles might be two different things with a number of younger evangelicals. In practice, successful churches are willing to compromise on issues such as divorce or female ministry, taking into account the relation of those passages “to the broader teaching of Scripture and their specific contexts,” as the website of Willow Creek Community Church explains.

Moreover, Hinch quotes well-known ministers who admit that, although statements of faith usually proclaim the Bible “to be inspired, the infallible, authoritative Word of God,” in practice members do not all understand the same passages in the same way. What is unclear, Hinch adds, is “whether evangelicals’ gradual loosening of biblical strictness will enable them to overcome the significant demographic challenges coinciding with their change of course”: the number of American Christians is decreasing, while the share of non-religious people is growing.

(*Los Angeles Review of Books*, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/evangelicals-are-losing-the-battle-for-the-bible-and-theyre-just-fine-with-that>)

Is there a diversity problem at evangelical colleges?

American evangelical colleges are under pressure to diversify their student body and faculty as well as their worship programs according to a report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Feb. 5). The recent controversy over the firing of professor Larycia Hawkins from Wheaton College over her beliefs about Islam (claiming that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, for instance) has spilled over into wide-ranging criticisms about how inclusive evangelical colleges are to minority, especially African-American, faculty and students. This criticism is taking place as the proportion of minority undergraduates has steadily risen at evangelical schools—from 18 to 28 percent since 2004 (among all private colleges, minority students make up 33 percent of enrollments). Beth McMurtrie writes that at a handful of colleges in states such as Texas and California, minority students make up nearly half the campus. The article focuses more on the outcomes and experiences of African-Americans on evangelical campuses, citing research showing that black students at evangelical schools have graduation rates 15 percent lower than at other undergraduate institutions.

McMurtrie writes that the dilemma for evangelical colleges is that they expect a higher level of community and unity than other institutions, with minority students feeling that they have to “attend the same churches, for example, or join the same Bible study groups.... At the same time, Christian colleges that emphasize social justice and other relevant Biblical teachings may be better positioned than many secular ones to make diversity central to their missions....” Because most of the evangelical colleges affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities originate from white and European theological and church traditions, the move to include other worship styles has proved challenging. At Wheaton College, an effort to include a black worship service was ridiculed by some students in one much publicized controversy. At an institution such as Calvin College, faculty are required to attend the Christian Reformed Church, a policy which black faculty have criticized for excluding their black church traditions. Sociologist Michael Emerson of North Park University says that the “big challenge has been: how do you preserve a subculture that is Christian but formed out of a white understanding of Christianity, while embracing diversity?”



A Jewish-Christian breakthrough—Orthodox included?

Jewish-Christian relations have appeared to enter a new stage of tolerance and acceptance, although it is uncertain to what degree the new conciliatory attitudes will reach laypeople on the congregational level. In an exchange of letters marking the 50th anniversary of the Vatican document *Nostra Aetate* in December, more than 50 Orthodox rabbis issued a statement calling for an acceptance of Christianity not as an “accident or error but as the [as] the willed divine outcome and gift to the nations.” Under such a calling, both Jews and Christians have a common mission to “perfect the world,” so that all humanity will call on God’s name and “abominations will be removed from the world.” A week later, the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews announced that Catholics should not evangelize Jews in an organized way. The document adds “that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any institutional mission work directed towards Jews.” The Jewish statement “is a very real indication that the Orthodox rabbinate is grappling with how to understand Christianity in an era when Christianity is reaching out to Judaism and has repented of its sins against us,” says Yehiel Poupko, an Orthodox rabbi and scholar, in an article in *Christianity Today* (March).

In his blog at the *American Interest* magazine (Jan. 21), sociologist Peter Berger compares the recent statement by the Orthodox rabbis to *Dabru Emet/Speak the Truth*, a statement also affirming that Jews and Christians worship the same God issued in 2000 by a group of Reform and Conservative rabbis. Orthodox Jews sharply criticized the document and objected that claiming that Jews and Christians worship the same God ignored the idolatry of Christianity’s teachings on the incarnation and the Trinity. Berger writes, “Thus the statement by the group of Orthodox rabbis...must have been music to the ears of dialogue-minded Christians waiting for more orthodox partners than the signatories of *Davru Emet*...It opens a door for some Orthodox participation in the sought-after-interfaith dialogue; many Orthodox, even this side of Haredim, will not want to walk through this door. It will all depend on who on either side will make which interpretations....” As to the Vatican statement, it is likely to widen the already existing divide between Catholics and

evangelicals as to whether Christians should evangelize Jews. The *Christianity Today* article quotes Jim Melnick of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism as saying that “we strongly reject how [the Vatican] has turned scripture on its head,” in denying the biblical imperative to evangelize the Jews.



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

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **The perception that the Christian faith is “extreme” is “now firmly entrenched among the nation’s non-Christians,” according to a study by David Kinnaman of the Barna Group.** Three-quarters of all Americans—and nine out of ten Americans with no religious affiliation—hold that religious extremism is a threat to society, most likely a reaction to the growth of terrorism associated with extremist Islam. But the alarm about extremism seems to have spread to include Christianity as well according to the survey conducted among 1,000 adults. Forty-five percent of atheists, agnostics, and religiously unaffiliated Americans agree with the statement, “Christianity is extremist.” Only 14 percent of atheists and agnostics strongly disagree that Christianity is extremist; the remaining 41 percent disagree with this statement only somewhat.



Kinnaman and his colleagues go on to classify to what extent various beliefs and activities are viewed as extreme. As might be expected, using religion to justify violence, refusing standard medical care for children, and refusing to serve a customer whose lifestyle conflicted with one’s beliefs were rated as extreme by at least four in five adults in the U.S. But 50 to 79 percent think it is “very” or “somewhat” extreme to attempt to convert others to

their faith, to believe that same-sex relationships are wrong, and to demonstrate outside of an organization they consider immoral. Twenty to 49 percent believe it is “very” or “somewhat” extreme to wait until marriage to have sex, wear religious garments, speak in tongues, and adhere to religious diet restrictions. Also noteworthy was the large gap between evangelicals (a category which the Barna organization tends to define very strictly rather than on self-identification) and non-religious as to what is considered extreme. Evangelicals are equally as likely as the American public to view religious violence and refusing medical care to a child as being extreme, as well as such activities as wearing religious garments (head coverings, for instance). But in comparing evangelicals to atheists, agnostics, and the unaffiliated, there was an “incredible” perception gap of 73 percentage points on the question of converting others.

● **Less formal and more practical methods of training clergy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America tend to lead to longer calls and more effectiveness in congregations according to a study in the *Review of Religious Research* (published online, Jan. 16).** The growth of professionalized clergy in mainline churches has been viewed as a factor in denominational decline, whereas the informal training methods of evangelical churches have led to greater vitality, Nathan Porter of Penn State University writes. Some mainline churches have also recently adopted such programs, especially with the growth in distance learning. Porter looked at the differences in the length of call throughout the lifetime between ELCA pastors who took the



traditional route of a three-year Masters of Divinity degree program and one year of internship and those who participated in an alternative path of preparation that allows candidates to serve in parishes as they complete a short-term, part-time, and distance-learning course of study. Those who graduated from the alternative program had “significantly longer calls.” The program was able to recruit and train “successful, or at least stable, second-career clergy without the high personal or financial cost of full-time residential

seminary programs.” Porter theorizes that the “higher emotional attachment of less educated clergy to their traditions...may be fostered less by close association with a specific context than by training embedded in engaged practice in an everyday context, not the ivory conclave of religious academia.”

(*Review of Religious Research*, <http://link.springer.com/journal/13644>)

● **There is likely to be a much wider divergence between the numbers of Christians and Muslims in the world in the future than has been forecasted by demographers according to the annual review of religious demography featured in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (Jan.).** Todd M. Johnson and his colleagues at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity note that last year’s Pew Research Center study forecast that there would be roughly equal numbers of Muslims and Christians by 2050 (2.7 and 2.9 billion, respectively). In contrast, Johnson and colleagues forecast 3.4 billion Christians and 2.7 billion Muslims. The difference in estimates is due to Johnson’s inclusion of non-traditional forms of Christianity, such as house churches and “insider” movements (Christian believers who remain identified with their former religions), which are not easily picked up by surveys and censuses. Since these non-traditional Christians are often found in India and China, the differences between Pew’s and Johnson’s figures for Christians are particularly wide. Meanwhile, Johnson adds that for the first time ever, Latin America has passed Europe as the continent with the most Christians; by 2025, Africa is likely to surpass Latin America, with more than 700 million in the former and 628 million in the latter.



(*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, <http://internationalbulletin.org/index.html>)

● **A fairly large percentage of Belgians retain loyalty to the Catholic faith, although the numbers of practicing Catholics are dropping steadily, in some cases almost to the proportion that practicing Muslims are growing, according to *Erasmus* (Feb. 18), the religion and public policy blog of *The Economist* magazine.** Catholicism has historically united linguistically divided Belgium. The blog cites a recent survey by the Observatory of Religion and Secularism that finds that 63 percent of Belgians identify with Catholicism, although only 20 percent of the respondents were practicing Catholics. Six percent were practicing Muslims (with 1 percent non-practicing), and 26 percent atheist or agnostic. As in other European countries, levels of active adherence to Catholicism are highest among older populations, while Islamic practice correlates with youth. In other words, 30 percent of practicing Catholics are aged 55 and over, with less than 1 percent of Muslims of that age range, while active adherence to Islam (at 14 percent) exceeded the practice of Catholicism (12 percent) among 18-to-34-year-olds. In Brussels, active Muslims (19 percent) outpace active Catholics (12 percent). Although the researchers are struck by the percentage of Belgians retaining a cultural tie to Catholicism, such a weak identity is unlikely to “hold Belgium together through its third century....”



● **A qualitative study of young people from the UK who have converted to Islam finds the strictness and dedication of Muslim groups among the most appealing factors according to the *Erasmus* blog of *The Economist* (Feb. 12).**

The 18-month study of 50 male converts to Islam is the second part of a Cambridge University project, with the first part focusing on young women converts. As a whole, the young people were often drawn to the faith by seeing the camaraderie of Muslim student groups as well as the members' sense of purpose. The strict practices regarding dress and restrictions of diet and sexuality were generally seen as attractive, especially once these young people joined the fold. Almost all of the interviewees reported some problems with their relatives, especially those South Asians who had been Sikh or Hindu and were perceived to have betrayed their families. There were also disappointments with their new faith. Some had been drawn to Islam through its mystical branch of Sufism only to discover that Sufi practices and teachings are excluded or stigmatized by mosques heavily influenced by Salfist Islam stressing the purity of the faith. Others drawn to the universalistic aspect of Islam were disheartened by the ethnic and sectarian rivalries.



● **Rather than fueling a sense of Islamic superiority and promoting intolerance, making the hajj, or the pilgrimage to Mecca, tended to promote greater religious and political tolerance among participants** reports a study by Mikhail A. Alexseev and Sufian Zhemukhov in the journal *Religion, State and Society* (43:4). The researchers conducted an ethnographic and focus group study of Muslim pilgrims on the hajj and compared them to a control group of non-pilgrim Muslims, who had desired to make the pilgrimage but were unable to do so; the total of 28 participants in the four-year study were all from Russia's North Caucasus region and shared similar social backgrounds. In analyzing the themes of focus group conversations, the non-hajj participants were more likely to stress the importance of maintaining uniform standards of belief and ritual in Islam compared to the pilgrims.

The pilgrims were more likely to emphasize commonalities between different kinds of Muslims as well as with non-Muslims. They were also less likely to be swayed by “fundamentalist” and “radical” teachings of local activists. The hajj participants were also more open to discussing religion-state relations and social equality, as well as the possibility of traveling and living in the U.S. Alexseev and Zhemukhov add that though the focus groups were small in



number and from one country, the sharp differences they found between pilgrims and non-pilgrims in hundreds of observations and statements suggests the paradox of how participation in “mass, peaceful, common-identity-affirming religious rituals promotes socio-political tolerance.”

(*Religion, State and Society*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/crss20/current>)

GENERAL ARTICLES

Czech Republic no more atheist than the rest of Europe?

The Czech Republic has been called the most secular and atheistic society in the world, but its atheism is actually not much higher than in other European countries, and churches still play important roles in the nation writes sociologist Petr Pabian in the current issue of the Czech theological journal *Communio Vittorum* (1:2015). Pabian argues that the widely held estimate that half of the Czech population are atheists is overblown. Counts of atheists have tended to include those not affiliated with any religions. “When we include in the ‘atheist’ category only those who answer negatively to all survey questions relating to religious and/or spiritual beliefs and practices, the final count is around five percent. In other words, while Christians constitute a minority in Czech society [30 percent], atheists constitute an even smaller minority,” he writes. Pabian also criticizes other research suggesting new or alternative spiritualities are gaining ground in the country; he cites an in-depth qualitative study of two Czech cities showing a marginal alternative spiritual scene both in numbers and in the commitment of practitioners.



If not atheism, Christianity, or new religious movements, what is the predominant group or trend in the Czech Republic? Pabian argues that the key group is the religiously indifferent; “this is obvious in surveys that give a list of topics (up to 20) and ask respondents to arrange them by [their importance]. Irrespective of the numbers and range of topics, religion always comes last or, at best, second to last,” he writes. While many scholars

have traced Czech secularism to an anti-Catholic national identity formed in the 19th century, Pabian maintains that the majority of Czechs were religious up until the mid-20th century and the advent of communist rule. After communism collapsed, Czech society integrated into secular Western Europe. But he argues that churches have maintained a public role in the Czech Republic; in areas such as care for the elderly and poor, the majority of Czechs still expect these institutions to perform such tasks. The Catholic Church is “sometimes expected to step [into] the very center of national politics; it has come to play a role during presidential inauguration (including the new president visiting the tomb of Saint Wenceslaus), even as there are no rules prescribing this.” Pabian concludes that the most important public manifestation of Christianity is its pervasive symbolic presence through its churches and the public holidays of Christmas and Easter.

(*Communio Vittorum*, <http://web.etf.cuni.cz/CV-22.html>)

New religious movements showing no marked growth in post-communist Europe

While new religious movements (NRMs) tend to be seen by church and state authorities as a threat to “spiritual security” in the Russian Federation, they seem mostly to be perceived as a minor and relatively innocuous phenomenon in other post-Soviet countries if one reads the articles on various NRMs in Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic published in *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (Feb.). There are indications that the Russian Orthodox Church has been intensifying its work against NRMs in recent times. In December there was also a round table at Russia’s Parliament on “sects and destructive cults” as challenges to Russia’s security. Participants—including both academics and representatives of church and state—discussed if there might be a need for specific legal measures against “destructive cults.”

There is indeed a lively NRM scene in Russia writes Marat Shterin (King’s College London), although the number of their followers remains rather stable. Beside international NRMs (Scientology continues to be successful, Unification Church has declined), this group includes dozens of Russian-born NRMs with a regional or national presence, a few of them even with followings outside of Russia. After a liberal period after the end of the Soviet Union, the new legal framework in force since 1997 gives a privileged position to “traditional religions” (although this



expression is not used). Since 2000, the national security concept envisions foreign missionary activities as a potential threat. Cooperation between state organs and the Orthodox Church has also developed in that area. Even legally recognized groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses experience police harassment or local limitations to their activities. While some major (international) groups have

successfully protested to the European Court of Human Rights, not all NRMs are able to pursue such paths due to lack of human resources and legal knowledge. Thus while NRMs continue to attract Russian followers, their future to a large extent depends upon political and social developments within the country writes Shterin.

In Latvia, according to Milda Ališauskienė (Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas), there has been no lack of controversies around NRMs, including anti-cult groups (no longer active since the mid-2000s), and public opinion remains rather negative in general, although a trend toward a more neutral attitude is observed. But media reports tend to be sensational and to rely primarily on Roman Catholic priests and theologians as resource persons on the topic; the media have largely contributed to creating stereotypes about NRMs, Ališauskienė adds. In Poland, the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church still plays a role in NRM matters. While Paweł Załęcki (Copernic University, Toruń) estimates that there are more than 300 NRMs in the country, most of them are not growing or are declining. There is little indication that this trend might change in the coming

years. Załęcki emphasizes that renewal movements within the Roman Catholic Church, with new forms of religious expression compared to mainstream Catholicism, represent a significant phenomenon, on the other hand: for instance, the Light-Life Movement (Oasis Movement). In Slovenia, there are more than 100 NRMs, mostly small (half of them count less than 20 members), reports Aleš Črnič (University of Ljubljana). There has been little conflict, and it is easy to register, although there have been attempts to make requirements for registration stricter—but the Constitutional Court turned down this proposal.

In the Czech Republic, despite some criminal cases involving minor NRMs, the situation has been peaceful in recent years, writes Zdeně Vojtišek (Karls-University, Prague). It may be worth mentioning that several articles mention local Neo-Pagan groups in the respective countries attempting to revive or recreate what they see as native religious beliefs. This revival is obviously also related to a quest for identity that may be linked to political attitudes in some cases, writes Mariya Lesiv (University of Newfoundland, Canada) in her article about the situation in Ukraine, where Paganism has been growing significantly. She expects those groups too closely associated with politics to have a limited future, while other ones may offer spiritual paths (including alternative views and practices in such areas as healing) that will find their place in the religious spectrum of the country.

(*Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Birmensdorferstr. 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland - <http://www.g2w.eu>)

Tamil Hindus in the UK adapt in the absence of religious space

In areas where they have no access to “Tamil-orientated” temples, Tamil Hindus either visit non-Tamil temples or perform their own rituals in non-institutional settings, reports Demelza Jones (Aston University, Birmingham) in the journal *Religion* (Jan.). Tamil temples tend to be different from those of Northern India. Their deity images are carved from black granite, while such images are colorful or carved from marble stone in other parts of India. But it is easier for Tamils to visit temples from other areas of South India that come closer to their own cultural background. Other regional variations exist among other Hindus, while common features may be emphasized for establishing representative bodies that interact with the wider society. In a number of cases, Hindus have had to make adjustments to life in non-Hindu environments, for instance sharing the same temple with other Hindu (regional or caste) groups due to the lack of funding to establish their own religious buildings.

Tamil Hindus who have settled in the UK have access to their own



temples in the London area but not necessarily in other parts of the country. Some Tamils choose to visit available non-Tamil temples since the gods are the same, even if the appearance and language are not similar. People go there to pray individually; in such cases, there is an emphasis on a common Hindu heritage, although it does not mean a decline in “Tamilness.” Other Tamils, however, cannot relate to North Indian temples and feel more comfortable doing their rituals at home. There is also the option for a group gathering to rent a hall for a religious festival and to transform the secular space temporarily into a sacred one. Jones’s research shows the variety of responses among ethnic-religious groups to settings where familiar sacred places are not available. It remains to be seen, in the long run, if such circumstances will promote the construction of a Hindu commonality or rather encourage the creation of further ethnicised religious spaces as the Tamil population grows in those areas of Britain where it has had little presence.

(*Religion*, Taylor & Francis, 325 Chestnut Street, 8th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19106 - <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rrel20>)

Botswana’s labor movement cuts its teeth on church piety

Just as the growth of Methodist piety in the 19th and early 20th centuries led to trade union activism in Britain, the southern African country of Botswana is seeing strong church-based involvement in its burgeoning labor movement, writes Pnina Werbner in *Anthropology Today* (Feb.). She writes, “In Botswana, unlike in some neighboring countries including South Africa, no contradiction is perceived between workers’ left-wing socialist leanings and their Christian faith. Workers’ identities are equally intertwined in their affiliation to both their church and the labor



movement in Botswana.” Unlike England, where Methodist unionists were pitted against “Tory” Anglicans, trade union involvement in Botswana is found among a wide range of churches, including the established Catholic, Anglican, and Congregationalist churches, as well as the evangelicals and Pentecostals. Nor has Botswana been influenced greatly by liberation theology, she adds. A distinctive feature of the Botswana labor movement is the deployment of “political prayer.” Examples of this engagement are public prayer meetings surrounding protest marches and strikes. Such actions are joined by pragmatic negotiations over wages and rights. “Many union leaders stressed that they had cut their teeth in church preaching and organization,” Werbner writes.

(*Anthropology Today*, [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1467-8322/issues](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1467-8322/issues))

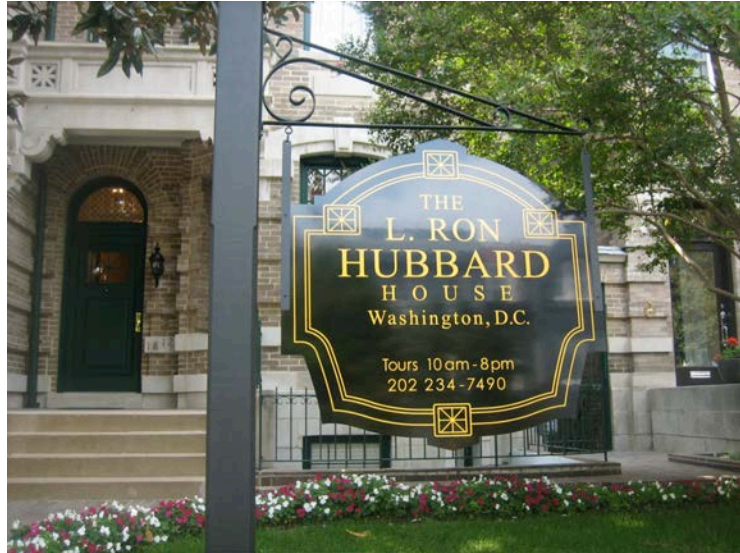
India's gurus take entrepreneurialism beyond their followers

While India's gurus have long combined financial acumen with spiritual and ascetic virtuosity, today's gurus are more likely to market and sell a wide range of products and services, often with the support of Hindu politicians, reports *BBC News* (Feb. 10). Prominent guru-entrepreneurs include Baba Ramdev, who is behind Patanjali, India's fastest growing consumer good company, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who has unveiled his own line of food products, and Sri Sri Ravishankhar, a popular spiritual leader among middle and upper class southern Indians, who started an ayurvedic (traditional Indian medicine) company. Earlier gurus, such as Mahesh Yoga, made money as they brought courses on meditation and yoga courses to millions of foreigners, but today's gurus market to their large base of followers and beyond, often seeking the support of politicians, particularly in the Hindu-friendly government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Soutik Biswas writes that "selling yoga to foreigners is almost passé. The new age—and often brash—gurus have set their sights beyond their followers and are reaching out to India's growing domestic market, a move that must be making a number of multinational companies skittish.... Their products are now finding buyers even among the non-believers."

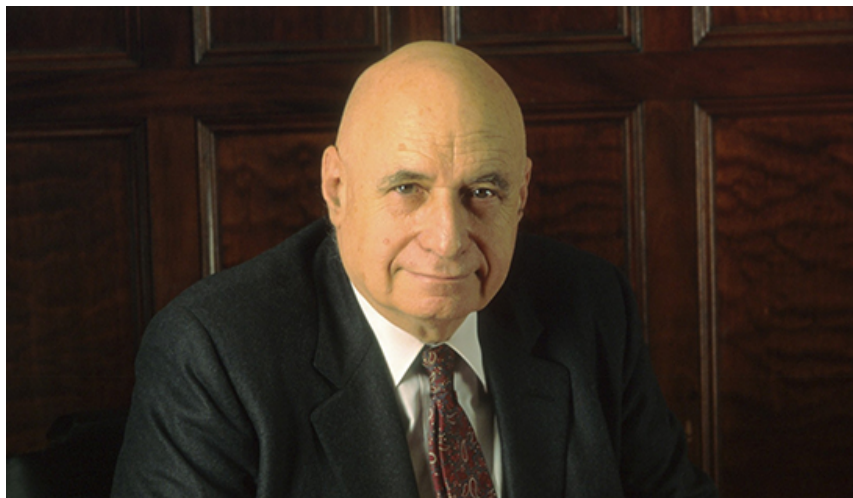


Findings & Footnotes

■ **Numen**, a journal of the history of religions, devotes much of its January issue to historical and current developments in the Church of Scientology. Editor of the section James R. Lewis notes that although there is increasing scholarly opinion that L. Ron Hubbard established Scientology as a religion for purely pragmatic reasons, the articles treat the church through the framework of traditional religion, particularly based on such themes as ritual, pilgrimage, and devotion to the founder. Scientology is viewed primarily as an individualized spiritual therapy, but contributor Richard V. Gallagher focuses on the church's communal rituals. He finds that several elements of the Sunday service used by the presiding minister are consistently based around a limited canon of Hubbard's writings. Another article looks at how key locations in the founding and development of Scientology can be understood as pilgrimage sites, including the L. Ron Hubbard Landmark Sites the church has established. For more information on this issue, visit: <http://www.brill.com/numen>

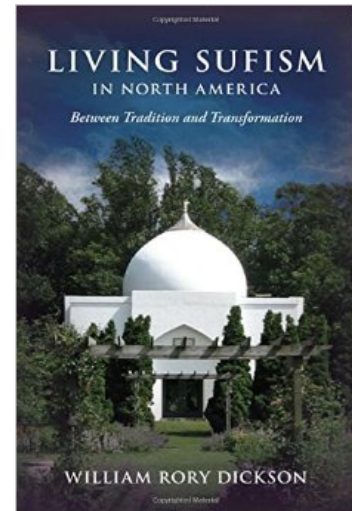


■ Sociologist Peter Berger's new theory of the "two pluralisms" has been making the rounds in the scholarly world and is the subject of a symposium in the current issue of the social science journal **Society** (March/April). Also called the new paradigm (although that term is generally used for the market or the religious economies theory), this theory holds that modern individuals switch between religious and secular discourses, leading both to patterns of secularization and religious pluralism. Most of the articles support Berger's thesis, with empirical accounts of religious pluralism in England, France, and Germany, but some authors question whether it just applies to modern society; anthropologist Robert Hefner argues that such internal pluralization of worldviews has marked traditional and non-Western societies as well. The article on France and Germany by Wolfran Weisse illustrates the complexity of the situation that the theory is



trying to address. Weisse writes that in Germany, the “decline in church membership is flanked by a growing interest in questions which could be regarded as religious and growing numbers and identification with religion among those belonging to religions other than traditional Christianity in Germany.” He points to the German state of Hamburg which has engaged in extensive dialogues with Muslims, including a religious program where students are no longer taught within one tradition (Protestant or Catholic) but rather interact across different traditions. For more information on this issue, visit: <http://link.springer.com/journal/12115>

■ Sufism has increasingly been portrayed as the more mystical and benign, if not totally separate, offspring of mainstream Islam. But as the new book ***Living Sufism in North America*** (SUNY Press, \$80) suggests, this neat distinction doesn’t capture the diversity of Sufi groups, teachings, and practices in the U.S. Author William Rory Dickson writes that Sufism accords so much influence to its leaders and their lineage of authority (the reason his interviews focused on them rather than members) that there can be almost as many different shades of Sufism as there are leaders. Dickson tries to dislodge other stereotypes about Sufism as well, such as the widely held view that the New Age movement has influenced a large segment of the faith in the U.S. Actually, even the most open and alternative Sufi group can remain deeply traditional in other aspects. Because the book mainly examines the ways in which Sufism has been adapted to its American context, it pays less attention to immigrant Sufi groups and Sufism’s reception and impact on the rest of American Islam. But Dickson, as suggested above, does vividly depict the unpredictable quality of Sufism in the U.S., finding Muslim traditions in the most Westernized and universalist of orders (such as those that do not require members to be Muslims) and syncretism (a statue of the Buddha, for example) in the most Islamic of orders.



■ ***Religion and Politics in the European Union*** (Cambridge University Press, \$95), by political scientist Francois Foret, provides a unique look at how and to what degree religion interacts with the new structures of governance in Europe. The book is based on the first survey of the religious beliefs of decision makers (members of the European Parliament or MEPs) in the EU. The 166 interviews, which focused on voting and policy-making patterns and affiliations of MEPs, clearly reflect the secular orientations of these leaders’ respective nations, although these political elites are found to be more secular than average Europeans. Even as Foret finds that religion does not mobilize votes or create cleavages, with few visible denominational differences (such as Catholic versus Protestant; Muslims have not gained many MEP seats yet) among these politicians, “it does inform a European founding narrative.” Religion can also mark identity boundaries, as, for instance, in the case of opposition to Islamic Turkey being admitted to a still predominantly Christian EU.

Aside from the survey, the book looks at public controversies and what they say about the place of religion in the EU. For instance, the furor over the objections of Catholic MEP Rocco Buttiglione to gay rights legislation in the EU in 2004 suggests similarities with the culture wars in the U.S. But Foret argues that the pragmatic and secular outlooks of the MEPs points more in the direction of avoidance of religious conflict and tolerance, even if there are new outbreaks of public religion that will demand EU attention. Foret acknowledges, “American hawks and Muslim extremists are prone to see the EU’s lack of assertiveness on the international stage as a consequence of its lack of spiritual values.” But he concludes that its version of “mild secularism” will continue to make the EU an exception in world politics.



On/File: A Continuing Record of People, Groups, Movements, and Events Impacting Religion

Mariam Mosque in Copenhagen, Denmark, is among the first Muslim houses of worship to be led entirely by female imams, or worship leaders. Sherin Khankan, a well-known author and political commentator in Denmark, founded the mosque in February. She criticizes the traditional pattern of segregating a mosque



according to male or female worshippers, claiming that many women are discouraged from attending prayer services because they view the mosque as a male-dominated space. Women’s mosques have existed in China for several hundred years, but they have only appeared in the West recently, with another recent one started in Los Angeles in 2015. The Danish mosque will be open to men on most days except for during Friday prayers.

Khankan calls the mosque a “feminist project” that she started because she “never felt at home in the existing mosques.” (Source: [Huffington Post](#), February 16)