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FEATURE STORY:

The Putin-effect galvanizing evangelicals and Eastern Orthodox?

American evangelicals are finding common cause with Eastern Orthodox believers inspired by the rise of President Donald Trump and his association with Russia's Vladimir Putin, according to scholars speaking at a recent New York conference attended by **RW**. Much of the conference, which was held at Fordham University in early November, echoed other observers' claims that evangelical supporters of Trump have warmed toward Orthodoxy and Russia because of their mutual embrace of "traditional values" (see January, 2017 **RW**). Nicholas Gvosdev, a political scientist at the U.S. Naval Academy, struck a different note early on by speaking about how Orthodox Americans responded to the 2016 elections, setting the stage for this unusual courtship. Trump's economic appeal to the Rust Belt states drew in many Orthodox who have traditionally been swing voters. Trump spoke about issues that resonated with the Orthodox such as on the Balkans, Egypt, and Syria, and some appreciated his more benign stance toward Russia and Putin, Gvosdev said. During the same time, the approval of same-sex marriage and the little-known case of gay rights supporters demonstrating at an Orthodox cathedral in San Francisco in 2015 made a segment of Orthodox believers more sympathetic to the religious freedom and prolife activism of the evangelicals and Catholics.

Writer and staunch "never-Trumper" Peter Wehner said that the evangelical-Orthodox alliance is growing stronger under the leadership of Franklin Graham, whose Samaritan Purse relief ministry draws from both Russian and American funders, as well as such religious right organizations as American Family Association and the World Congress of the Family. There is "a lot of courting going on" between evangelicals and the Russian Orthodox Church over their shared pro-life stances along with their critical attitude toward Islam and gay rights, he said. Gvosdev added that Putin's shift to a more pro-Israel stance in recent years has caught the attention of the evangelicals and is another reason for the stronger ties between these churches.

Sociologist Kristina Stoeckl of the University of Innsbruck in Austria conducted interviews with participants in the World Congress of the Family and finds that the Americans are on the "sending

rather than receiving” end of this relationship as they have exported the “culture wars” to countries such as Romania, Slovakia, and Croatia where “traditional values have moved from discourse to law.” She said that Orthodox activists in these countries have led referenda in their constitutions against gay rights measures. But participants at the conference wondered whether such activism and statements by leaders really reflect the attitudes of people in the pews. Wehner said that while laypeople may not be aware of such churnings, the evangelical climate has changed under Trump. He noted that the Republican evangelical favorable support of Russia has doubled in two years. “Evangelicals are attracted to fighters who will push back against the left,” he said regarding the appeal of Putin and Trump. Gvosdev concluded that the Eastern Orthodox dialogue with evangelicals on theology has not progressed very far, and that much of the evangelical and Orthodox shared affinity for Russia and Putin is based on perception and image. “Putin equals strength and Obama equaled weakness. The optics of Russia’s intervention in Syria was seen as decisive and the image of Putin in monasteries and churches should not be [underestimated]...These images circulate both in the evangelical and Orthodox worlds,” he added.



ARTICLES:

Young Catholic devotion extending beyond parish

Young practicing Catholics are increasingly involved in “trans-parish networks” and other organizations outside the traditional parish, according to Kathleen Garces-Foley of Marymount University. Garces-Foley, who was part of the Changing Spirituality of Emerging Adults project, presented a paper at the mid-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Washington, which **RW** attended. Based on interview with twenty-something Catholics in the Washington, DC area, she said that these Catholics fit into three ways of relating to parish life. The first way consists of young people with traditional allegiance to a particular parish (although usually not to their neighborhood parish). She found that about four D.C. area parishes were known for being open to young adults with activities aimed at this age group. Some of them had de facto young adult services, but other young adults were drawn to in intergenerational activities in their parishes. The second pattern consisted of young people who are not involved in one parish and are part of trans-parish networks. They frequent events at several parishes and also attend area events oriented towards young adults (such as being sponsored by dioceses or informal networks). Both of these ways of gathering are fueled both by social media and word of mouth (though they don’t find much on conventional parish websites about these activities).

These young adults are not interested in being connected with one particular parish and are not looking for one particular one; Garces-Foley said that this pattern is not “parish shopping” as much as “parish hopping.” They are also pretty exclusively interested in spending their religious time with other young adults. There are several metropolitan areas, such as Atlanta, Washington, Kansas City, and Chicago, which are known for having young adult Catholic scenes with very active trans-parish networks. Thirdly, a smaller number of young people Garces-Foley interviewed were linked with non-parish organizations that formed the center of their religious life, such as the Opus Dei-run Catholic Information Center in Washington. Some were very involved in devotional activities, such as daily Mass, frequent confession, and Eucharistic adoration. These young Catholics were not looking for a local parish, though that may change as they grow older. Garces-Foley



added that the trans-parish network model is apparent in some metro areas among young adults in

some non-Catholic faith communities, such as African American Baptists. [*This article is based on reporting by Perry Chang*]

Utah's LDS culture weakens, making the state's Mormons less distinctive

As the percentage of Mormons decline in Utah due to population changes and its least committed members leaving the fold, the LDS church is becoming more “sect-like” and ideological in a way similar to that of Mormons in other parts of the world, according to Rick Phillips of the University of North Florida. Since the 1990s and going up to 2013 (the most recent year for church figures), the number of defections in the LDS church in its heartland of the intermountain West has increased eight-fold at the same time when more non-Mormons have moved into Utah. In a paper presented at the mid-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Phillips argued that as non-Mormons move into the region, there is less stigma about leaving the church and not practicing the faith than was the case when the Mormon subculture was stronger.

He noted how the distance is narrowing between Utah Mormons and those in other parts of the world where Mormons are a minority and the church is stricter and more demanding, but also showing a high drop-out rate. Phillips finds that there will be repercussions for the changes in Mormon demography. Already there are signs the LDS church is investing more in real estate because of the likely drop in tithing among members. If the more conservative Mormons of Utah grow closer to a Trump-nationalist Republican right, it may also have an effect upon the LDS' extensive work in Latin America over such an issue as immigration.



Astrology gaining millennial's allegiance?

The millennial generation is showing interest in astrology and witchcraft, in some cases as alternatives to organized religion, reports the web site *Market Watch* (October 23). Writer Kari Paul cites the surveys showing a growing detachment from institutional religion and notes that

“more than half of young adults in the U.S. believe sociology is a science, compared to less than eight percent of the Chinese public. The psychic services industry — which includes astrology, aura reading, mediumship, tarot-card reading and palmistry, among other metaphysical services — grew 2 percent between 2011 and 2016. It is now worth \$2 billion annually, according to industry analysis firm IBIS World.”

One bookstore owner in New York says she has seen a major uptick in interest in the occult in the past five years. Banu Guler, the founder of the astrology app Co-Star says that when it was launched in early October, the high demand crashed the site three times in its first week. Guler cites the non-rational nature of astrology in a hyper-rationalized and mediated society as appealing to young people. Astrology is not the only area of the occult seeing high demand; the spiritual subscription service Mystic Lipstick has shown exponential growth, according to Paul. The service sells such occult items as crystals, reiki-infused bath salts, and incense customized to the unique energy of the current moon cycle. Proprietor Danielle Ayoka said that the business has seen a 75 percent increase in her audience in the past year.



CURRENT RESEARCH

● **For all the talk about the growth of “nones,” a core of active young Christians has remained constant in American society, although such young believers are more ethnically diverse than in the past, according to research by Timothy Clydesdale.** In a survey of 1880 young adults, the researchers found active twenty-something Christians represented about 30 percent of the Christian total, with evangelicals at 47 percent, mainline Protestants at 19 percent and Catholics at 22 percent. Survey research suggests that there are twice as many “devout” people in their 20s than “deliberately unaffiliated” young people. The highest percentage of young active mainline Protestants were under 25; after that age they tended to drop out at a higher rate than the evangelicals and Catholics. Clydesdale and colleagues found that it is married twenty-somethings that were the most devout, especially evangelicals, of whom 40 percent were married. Latino youth represented about half of all active young Catholics, while there is a substantial mix of blacks among active young evangelicals.

Two-thirds of the young active Catholics and evangelicals prayed daily, while less than half of mainline Protestants prayed that often. Clydesdale speculated that mainline Protestant emphasis on good works and social action may shift the young people’s idea of devotion away from such

practices. Among most of these active Christians, there was a strong sense of belonging to a tradition, with most claiming a sense of purpose and meaning. The researchers also found that young evangelicals were more a part of “closed networks and tribes,” with 85 percent of these Christians being “socially encapsulated.”



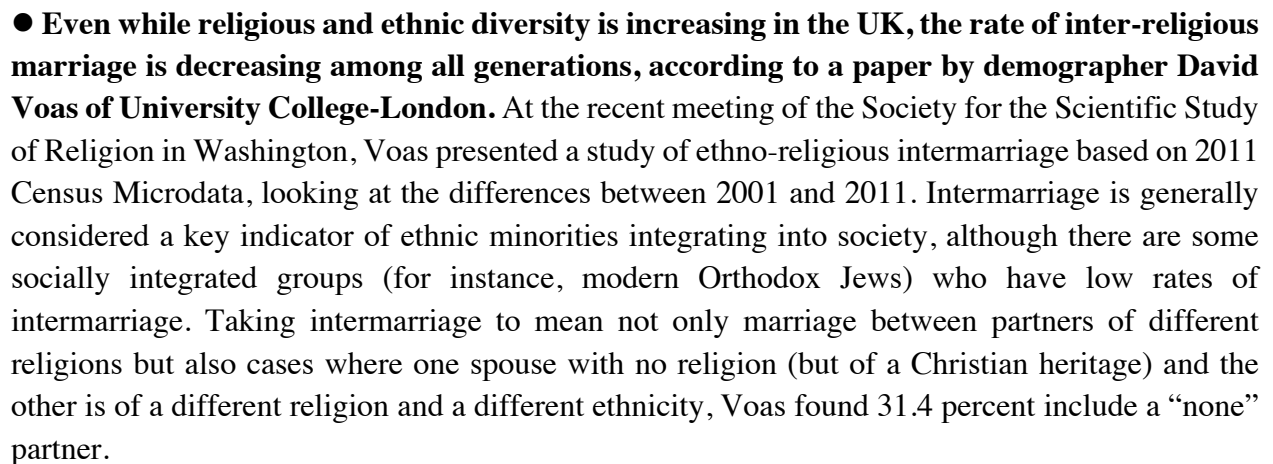
● **Eastern Orthodox parishes that are more diverse in ethnic makeup tend to draw more members and converts to the faith while having strong religious education programs and more community involvement, according to research by Alexei Krindatch.** In a paper presented at the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Washington, Krindatch based his findings on a 2016-2017 survey of parish leaders about demographic trends, leadership, and internal and external church dynamics. Krindatch finds that aside from a significant growth in converts and members, diverse parishes had more converts as priests and that priests in general had longer tenure at their parishes. The priests in ethnically diverse parishes also shifted their understanding to a greater extent from “running programs and administration” toward being good role models, teachers, and preachers for parishioners.

The study found that half or a dominant majority of parishioners are actively involved in all areas of parish life in these churches as compared to “normal,” more homogenous parishes where only a small core group is involved. In diverse parishes, outreach and evangelism is seen a way the parishioners see the church as compared to normal churches that are geared around a “program”

approach where evangelism is carried out by a group for that purpose. Krindatch also found that a “conciliar” model of church governance is found in diverse parishes, where decisions are made by consensus. Community involvement and impact in diverse parishes is expressed through members’ involvement in community events while normal parishes are known through ethnic events (festivals, food-sales) they hold. These parishes tend to be more ecumenically involved on a broader range of activities (joint services and social action programs) than the normal parishes’ focus on charitable events and participation in local clergy associations.



● **Pew research reports that for the first time, a majority of Americans — 56 percent — say it is possible to be a good person without a religious belief.** Based on two polls conducted among about 5,000 American adults, The belief that religious belief is not a prerequisite for good values and morality was associated with the spike in the share of Americans who are religious ‘nones,’” says Greg Smith, Pew’s associate director of research. Even Protestants and Catholic showed some gains in this view, with 45 percent of them agreeing that God is not necessary for personal morality, up from 42 percent in 2011. White evangelicals have also showed some change. In 2011, one quarter of them (26 percent) said it was possible to be good without God, while now almost a third (32 percent) say so.



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marriage. Voas also found that children of intermarriage are more likely to be classified as nones. Voas concludes that the incidence of intermarriage is growing in society among young adults are marrying outside their faith, but “the relative frequency of mixed marriages has not risen across generations in religious minorities.” But even for the well-educated members of religious minorities, the frequency of mixed marriages has halved.



● **While surveys of attitudes towards Jews have consistently shown that anti-Semitism in the UK remains relatively low (about 10 percent) when compared to other European countries, about half of British Jews perceive antisemitism to be a problem.** *British Politics and Policy* (October 1), a blog from London School of Economics, tries to unravel this puzzle by parsing the responses to a large survey of anti-Semitic attitudes in Britain, conducted in late 2016 and early 2017 by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. The study found that a negative opinion of any religious group is a minority position in Britain. The most favorably viewed group is Christians, perhaps unsurprisingly so, given the Christian heritage on Britain. The least favorably viewed group is Muslims (15 percent) with Jews and Hindus feature in-between. But when it comes to anti-Semitic views (such as Jews are too powerful), at least 30 percent of the British hold at least one such view. Thus, Daniel Statesky argues that while only a small proportion of the British can be called anti-Semitic, there is a broader diffusion of anti-Semitic ideas and attitudes in society.

“With this we make a shift from counting anti-Semites to quantifying antisemitism, which may appear subtle, but it is very important for a proper understanding of Jewish anxieties.”

(*British Politics and Policy*, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-elastic-view-of-antisemitism/>)



● **Catholicism plays a role in how European countries are dealing with the massive influx of immigrants, though the various national Catholic churches are dealing with immigration in very different ways.** A study of the churches in Italy and Croatia presented at the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in mid-October shows how Catholicism can be adapted to cultures that either accepting and more resistant to immigration. Sociologists Sinisa Zrinscak and Giuseppe Giordan studied coverage of immigration issues in Catholic publications in Croatia and Italy as well as interviewed leaders of Caritas and other Catholic organizations working on immigration. In the Catholic media coverage, they found that 41 percent of the articles in the Italian publications gave positive treatment to immigration as compared with 21 percent of the Croatian publication. In Croatia, 73 percent of the articles were neutral compared with 58.5 percent in Italy. In interviews with Catholic immigration organization leaders, in Croatia, the emphasis was on immigration as a disaster and a humanitarian approach; there was not much attention paid to human rights or questioning the closed transit routes that immigrants faced in the country. There were also concerns about the long-term consequences of immigration on the Christian identity of Europe.

In Italy, the accent was on human rights, dialogue, and the reality of immigration as a permanent change in the country. Along with a message of “solidarity,” Italians also acknowledged the utilitarian concern of needing more workers in a society undergoing a population decline. Zrinscak and Giordan conclude that the different human rights approaches of these countries may reflect the Eastern and Western European realities. Because human rights were used selectively during the communist era in such countries as Croatia (or the former Yugoslavia), cultural issues, such as the role of the church as a guardian of Croatian identity, still holds strong. In Italy, Catholicism is still seen as a factor in integrating a fragmented nation, and “social Catholicism” is seen in opposition to “xenophobic” political parties.



● The annual projections for global Christianity for 2018 and beyond are featured in the *International Bulletin of Missions Research* (online October) and includes continuing decline of Middle East Christians and an estimate of an average of 90,000 Christians martyred each year. Researchers Todd M. Johnson, Gina A. Zurlo, Andrew W. Hickman, and Peter F. Crossing find that by 2018, Christians in the Middle East will have dipped to 4 percent and will likely continue to decline to under 3 percent by 2050. The article defines martyrs as those believers in Christ who die prematurely in situations of “witness” as a result of human hostility. The authors estimate that on average, 90,000 Christians have been martyred each year during this past decade.

This figure has been criticized because it includes those Christians who were not killed specifically because they were Christians. But the researchers point to places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where most of the recent killings by rebel forces were Christians “living out lives of witness, thereby, by definition, making their deaths martyrdom.” The article concludes that “the world in 2018 is more religious than it was in 1970. In the same period, the percentage of all

Christians who live in countries 80 percent or more Christian has declined from 76 percent to 53 percent. Christianity continues to spread out more evenly around the world, further evidence of the decline of `Christendom.’”

(*International Bulletin of Missions Research*, <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/ibm>)



● Clergy statistics contrast from one Orthodox church to another, but the shortage of priests is reported to be serious in Bulgaria, where there are only 800 priests, while 2,500 would be needed in order to cover all the church’s needs, according to *The Sofia Globe* (October 7). According to the head of the Union of Church Workers in Bulgaria, the situation is uneven from one diocese to another in this country, where around 75 percent of the population is—at least nominally—Orthodox. Applications to study at the seminary have reportedly decreased, while 30 percent of the priests are retired. The main cause of this situation seems to be low pay, leading some priests to get secular, sometimes occasional or part-time jobs, in order to support themselves and their families. Priests living in large cities can supplement their income with fees received for baptisms or weddings, but this isn’t an option for those residing in poorer, rural areas. In 2012, it had been reported that their income level placed a majority of Bulgarian Orthodox priests below poverty level, according to *Orthodoxie.com* (February 1, 2012).



ARTICLES:

Santa Muerta movement expands appeal and finds less conflict with hierarchy

The cult of Santa Muerta continues to gain followers, not only in Mexico but in North and South America, most recently drawing Mexico's GLBT community, yet its conflict with the Catholic hierarchy has also come to a standstill, according to historian Andrew Chesnut. At the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Washington, Chesnut updated his findings from his popular book *Devoted to Death* (Oxford University Press), which chronicled the rise of the death cult. Although there are no clear numbers for Santa Muerte adherents, the historian estimates that there are approximately 10 million followers, making Santa Muerte the fastest growing new religious movement in the Americas.

The syncretistic movement that venerates a folk saint personifying death has reached far beyond its narco-drug gang subculture to find wider support, including GLBT Mexicans who feel alienated from the Catholic Church which has recently engaged in a campaign against gay rights in Mexico. Starting around 2013, Santa Muerta was targeted by bishops, leading up to Pope Francis making an indirect condemnation of the movement, linking it to the "narco culture of death" in 2016. U.S. bishops have also condemned the movement, with one bishop from Texas linking it to Satanism. But Chesnut doesn't expect further church action to be taken in the immediate future as the bishops are more preoccupied with border and immigration disputes with the U.S.



Mexico's evangelicals join Latin America's co-believers in political activism

Mexican evangelicals are following the trajectory of evangelicals in Latin America as they embrace conservative politics, according to Carlos Garma of Universidad Autonoma. Garma, who presented a paper at the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Washington, said that observers considered evangelicals in Mexico as an exception to the conservative trend because of the former's support of state secularism against the influence of Catholicism. But recently, gains in gay right initiatives have helped move evangelicals closer to Catholic right groups. In 2016, the Mexican Constitution was modified to allow for same-sex marriage and adoption by gays and lesbians. A coalition of Catholics, including bishops and cardinals, and evangelicals formed to fight such initiatives. Aside from Pentecostals the coalition also included traditional Protestants, such as the Presbyterians and Baptists.

The National Front for the Family was organized and supported by the Conservative Party, with the evangelicals eventually started their own party, El Pais (the Fish). Garma traced the conservative evolution of evangelicals to 2014 under the presidency of Felipe Calderon in the Conservative Party fight to defend the Mexican family. Although the party lost in several Mexican states, but by 2016, evangelicals and Canadians galvanized enough support through marches with one in Mexico City drawing 250,000. Garma says that it is difficult for one church, even the

Catholics, to have much influence under Mexican pluralism, but bringing together the “once-mortal enemies” of evangelicals and Catholics may have more political traction.



Radicalism finds few takers among Muslims in Latin America

Latino Muslims appear to be uniquely immune to the allure of Islamic radicalism, such as the Islamic State (IS), despite U.S. fears that potential terrorists may infiltrate Latin America. In the *Journal of Muslim-Minority Affairs* (37:3), Mehmet Ozkan writes that even though the IS has drawn a growing number of foreign fighters, Latin America has produced the least (the 70 that have drawn have mostly been from Trinidad and Tobago followed). Muslims in Latin America are connected to social media—the main IS recruiting tool— and many have backgrounds in the Middle East, “yet the strong presence of Latino Muslims in online spaces did not yield success in attracting Latinos to [IS] via these channels.” There are approximately six million Muslims in Latin America, with about 30 to 40 percent being converts to the religion. Ozkan argues that Muslim immigrants and their children have become so well-integrated into Latin American society with professional success and wide acceptance where radicalism has little appeal.

The Latin American converts are also largely apolitical, stemming from the influence of Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, in their communities and a tendency to turn inward away from political and social issues. Ozkan notes that regardless of these dynamics, there remains much talk about the

potential threat of the Islamic State in Latin America and its influence in the U.S. Even when the IS targeted Mexico for being part of anti-IS coalition, there is little evidence that there were any supposed cells of the group there. If anything, the “talk of the IS threat on the Mexico-US border has made life more difficult for Latinos in the US, considering the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the US President, Donald Trump.”

(*Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjmm20/current>)



Creation vs. evolution in Serbia brings controversy among Orthodox Christians

A controversy about teaching evolution in Serbia shows that the evolution-creation conflict can be played out along Eastern Orthodox lines. After “a group of interested citizens” in Serbia submitted a petition—with signatures from more than 50 academicians and 100 additional people with postgraduate degrees—asking to “revise the curriculum for study of evolution” so that it would be taught only as a theory, a group of 11 Orthodox theologians from the Faculty of Theology at Belgrade University reacted by stating that the petition was inappropriate and even anti-Orthodox, reports Gayle Woloschak and Tatjana Paunesku (both at Northwestern University School of Medicine) in an article published on the website *Public Orthodoxy* (October 10) of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University. Woloschak and Paunesku writes that it is significant to see theologians reacting to such demands and stating that “the Holy Bible is not, and

it was never meant to be, a textbook or an ultimate source for arbitration in any scientific discipline.”

According to the authors, there is currently a challenge from Orthodox “literalist fundamentalists” across the Orthodox world, going along with a new religious rigorism. They find it worth noticing that theologians would develop an articulate rebuke “in the current political climate in Serbia.” While debates about evolution tend mostly to evoke the reactions by American Christian fundamentalists, they are also found in other places of the world and other religious traditions, as evidenced by the development of an Islamic anti-evolutionist discourse, a trend already mentioned in RW (January 2014). In 2014, Stefaan Blancke, Hans Henrick Hjermslev and Peter C. Kjærgaard edited a volume on *Creationism in Europe* (John Hopkins University Press). Two chapters focused on creationist trends countries with a Christian Orthodox religious majority. Among other things, both mention the influence of the works of an American convert to Orthodoxy, the late Hieromonk Seraphim Rose (1934-1982), who wrote several books on various topics, one of them titled *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, in which had had developed an Orthodox, Patristic creationist approach.

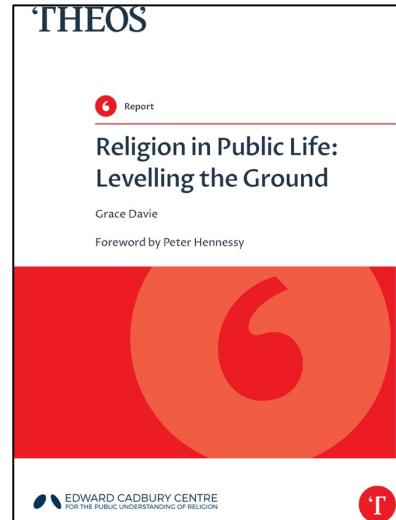
(Public Orthodoxy, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2017/10/10/evolution-debates-in-serbia/> The article includes a link to an English translation of the statement by the 11 Serbian theologians).



Findings & Footnotes

■ British sociologist Grace Davie presents an extended essay on local and global developments in British religion in the online report *Religion in Public Life: Levelling the Ground*. Presented as a series of lectures at the University of Birmingham and published by the think tank Theos, the 100-page report starts with her region of Exeter and the Southwest of England and the diminishing role of the churches in rural areas. While religious vitality was once more associated with the countryside than the city, Davies show how this has reversed in the case to such cities as London and their flourishing religious environments (from megachurches catering to immigrants to the renewal of cathedral life). Davie still holds to her theory of churches serving as public utilities (providing services in times of national crises), but she also sees British religion as a marketplace where the monopoly of the Church of England has lost its hold among the public. Other sections include a preview of the International Panel on Social Progress, an initiative that brings together more than 200 experts to weigh in a wide range of issues including religion, and a brief and critical discussion about Brexit and the election of Donald Trump.

The report can be downloaded at: <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Reportfiles/RELIGION.PDF>



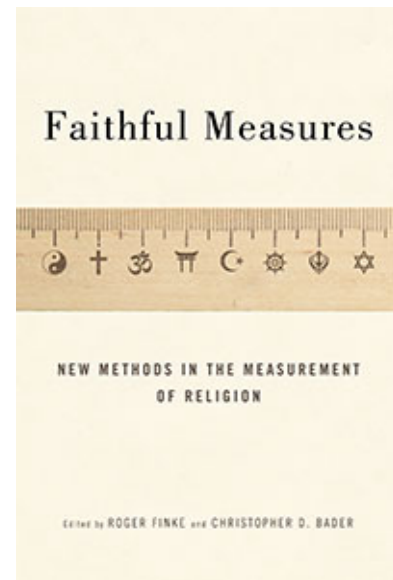
■ The story that sociologist Prema Kurien tells about the changes that Indian Christians experience in migrating to the U.S. in her new book *Ethnic Church Meets Megachurch* (NYU Press, \$35) is both familiar yet unique. Like other ethnographies of immigrant and ethnic religions, the book shows how the Christians in the Mar Thoma Church based in Kerala, India have both resisted and adapted to American religious structures and practices even as these adaptations reach back to their homeland. Yet Kurien notes the singularity of the Mar Thoma Church and its role among Indian immigrants; it's distinctive blending of Eastern and Western Christian influences and its Episcopal structure created a unique identity that has discouraged schisms between the first and second generations.

The second-generation Mar Thoma members have been heavily influenced by non-denominational evangelical these modernizing changes. She traces this dynamic to the influence (financial and otherwise) that first generation of immigrants still hold in the transnational church body. Kurien also looks at the rise of new charismatic



church networks, several formed in the U.S. and how that adds to the way globalization moves in many directions.

■ The new book *Faithful Measures* (NYU Press, \$35), edited by Roger Finke and Christopher D. Bader, may be focused on new methods for studying religion, but non-specialists may also find the contributors' examination of the way new technology and measurements can shed light on new dimensions of religious belief and practice. The Introduction provides a succinct history of measurement of religiosity and how single method approaches have yielded to the use of multi-methods (combining qualitative and quantitative techniques) and new instruments, such as complex indexes and scales. Still, these instruments have been criticized for not covering the complexity of often diffuse beliefs and increasingly non-institutionalized practices and being too obtrusive to explain the behaviors and diversity of religious belief. The editor's note that unobtrusive quasi-experiments are still more the exception than the rule in the social scientific study of religion as compared to the dominance of surveys.

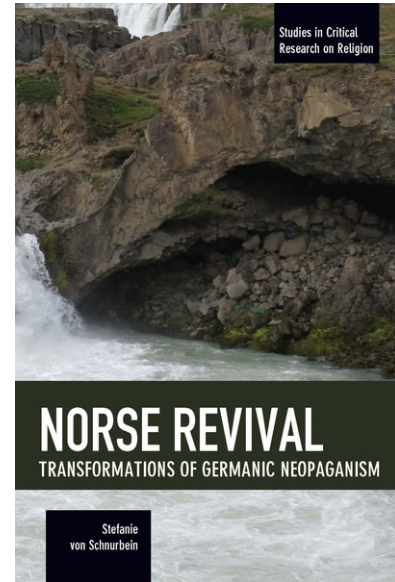


While the contributors find that new methods face institutional resistance and high costs, such new and promising areas as “big data” and other technology that catches individual behavior and attitudes without self-reporting will necessarily change the field. Noteworthy chapters include William Sims Bainbridge’s study of how the unobtrusive nature of Internet research, such as genealogy and Google Book sites that produces innovative insights on the organizational history of communal religious groups, such as the Oneida community. Additional chapters go deeper into how big data research sites like Google Books and Amazon, is particularly suitable in understanding how non-institutional spirituality, such as the varieties of belief in the paranormal, can be charted by studying book purchasing networks. A chapter by Christopher Scheitle looks at how ordinary sources of content, such as congregational web sites and databases of patents and trademarks, can be turned into useful data. A contribution by sociologist Bradley Wright and colleagues explore the use of cell phones apps that measure and record emotional states while subjects go about everyday spiritual and religious practices.

■ Far from being confined to promoters of a racial ideology, Asatru (Norse/Germanic Paganism) has become a diversified subculture, writes Stefanie von Schnurbein (Humboldt University, Berlin) in her book *Norse Revival: Transformations of Germanic Neopaganism* (Haymarket Books, \$19.60). The book had originally been published by Brill in 2016 and is now available to a wider audience thanks to a paperback edition. It offers what is currently the most comprehensive international overview of Asatru. According to Schnurbein’s observations, the number of Asatrueers around the world “probably does not surpass 20,000.” Schnurbein, a long-time academic observer of the scene of Germanic Neopaganism, was quite critical of the racist connections she observed. However, according to her, significant changes have taken place in the 1990s and even more so in the 2000s, with parts of the Norse Pagan community taking critical distance from the racist and right-wing elements of its legacy [see a recent report in the Atlantic magazine

for a more critical view of Germanic Neopaganism, including talk about creating a new Germanic Pagan theology at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/asatru-heathenry-racism/543864/>).

Today, three main factions can be identified. The first one is a racial-religious current, basing its religion on the biological concept of race and advocating race purity. The second one is “ethnicist,” with an emphasis on cultural essentialism—seen as immutable and homogeneous—but without conceptualizing the heritage in exclusively biological terms. The third one is “a-racist (but not engaging actively against racism), refusing to conflate biological heritage and religion, and “generally inclusive of individuals of all background.” This 400-page long book traces the roots of modern Asatru in the search for a national ideology of European romanticism, and subsequently the search for a German religion by rejecting central components of Christianity. The encounter with modern occultism also gave roots to a racial version known as Ariosophy. Those groups failed to receive much recognition from the National Socialist regime, but their race-based views and legacies suffered from the general discrediting of such views after WW II. While there were limited attempts at a revival, it was only in the 1970s that such groups started to attract again a younger membership, helped by the more general interest for alternative religious paths and the growth in popularity of other modern expressions of Paganism.



There were also efforts from the early 1970s in Iceland by people who apparently had no rightist political backgrounds and developed Asatru on different basis. In Sweden, Schnurbein shows interactions during the same period with life reform movements as well as with neo-Shamanic networks. The Internet has facilitated a rapid internationalization of the movement. But it had already started earlier, as evidenced by the creation of groups in the USA (e.g. the Asatru Free Assembly). The developments from the 1990s onward are marked by a quest for respectability by large segments of German Neopaganism, even if it is difficult to uphold a strict demarcation between a-racist and other varieties, Schnurbein stresses.

The book offers chapters on the beliefs and practices of Asatru as well as on the debates regarding the “hot questions” and the issues of gender and sexuality. There is also an interesting chapter on the relations between Germanic Neopaganism and academia, and the use of scholarly resources, as well as another chapter for attempting to apply the concept of “art-religion” (aesthetic dimensions). While Schnurbein acknowledges the real transformations in Asatru (as well as the fact that her own publications have contributed to critical self-reflections in some segments of the community), she concludes that the discourse on Germanic myth “has always been dependent on the idea of national, racial, or ethnic essences.” She deems it impossible to get completely rid of “essentialist operations.” For those reasons, “an elective affinity between this discourse on Nordic myth and right-wing thought is always immanent.”

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

Peoples Temple, the group most infamous for the Jonestown murder-suicides in 1978, is being reestablished by clergy in the Disciples of Christ (Christian Churches). Peoples Temple was a movement within the Disciple of Christ well-known for its strong social justice thrust in American inner-cities under the leadership of Jim Jones until he moved the group to Guyana. When the original Peoples Temple was dissolved, it was still in good standing with the denomination, and, under Rev. Cupid Osburn, clergy are taking steps to reestablish the group. Osburn started a temple in the Great River region of Arkansas and reports that there is interest in establishing Peoples Temples in other regions. Osburn and others found the original People's Temple inspiring for its ministry to the poor, supplying jobs to the unemployed and housing and legal aid to the needy. The new temples will meet in members' houses until people will be ordained and more congregations planted throughout the country. There will also be a special board of advisors to monitor People's Temple activities to insure the past does not repeat itself. "There will be life in the services such as seen in the Pentecostal movement," Osburn writes. (Source: *The Jonestown Report*, November)

