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FEATURE STORY:

Congregations unprepared for growing rate of violence?

The mass shooting at a Texas church in November could be the sign of an increase in congregation-based murders, although religious institutions are ill-prepared for such occurrences. *CNN* (November 7) reports that criminologist Dallas Drake and a team of scholars compiled a database of all church shootings in the U.S. between 1980 and 2005 (not including other houses of worship like temples or mosques) and found that nearly half of the offenders (48 percent) were affiliated with the church, and about a quarter (23 percent) involved “intimate partners,” such as wives, girlfriends and husbands of attenders. In 17 percent of the church shootings, the attacker felt unwelcome or had been rejected by the church, Drake said. Twelve percent of the shooters suffered from a mental illness. More recent data from Carl Chinn, a church-security consultant, showed similar patterns. Based on data on more than 1,600 “deadly force incidents” since 1999 at all houses of worship, Chinn found that robberies accounted for more than a quarter of homicides within houses of worship, followed by fights between domestic partners (16 percent) and personal conflicts between people who did not live together (14 percent).

Like Drake, Chinn found that more than 10 percent of all homicides at houses of worship involved mental illness. Religious bias accounted for about 6 percent, while in Drake’s study, “religious differences” accounted for 9 percent of church shootings. And both Chinn and Drake found that deadly attacks at houses of worship have increased in recent years. Drake counted 147 church shootings from 2006–2016, while Chinn focused on all violence in congregations, finding more than 250 incidents each in 2015 and 2016. Through August of this year, there had already been 173 (excluding the Texas incident), according to Chinn. Drake stressed that believers were not being singled out because of their religion, but that the shootings were part of an overall—and alarming—increase in mass shootings within the country at large, and that congregations, like schools, were an open-access place where people could be targeted.

There has been a reported rise in congregations seeking greater security measures since the Texas massacre, with some even considering arming congregants, according to *USA Today* (November

7). A study by Christopher Scheitle in the *Review of Religious Research* (online November) finds that the majority of congregations do not have any security measures against crime in place, with only 42 percent having alarm systems. The survey of 10,615 congregations from a wide range of faiths found that vandalism and theft were the most common crimes, though Jewish and Muslim congregations were at greater risk than other congregations for perceived hate crimes, sometimes reporting threats against them. These fears translated into these congregations investing in more advanced security technology, such as cameras, than the other groups. Scheitle adds that the hesitancy about security may be associated with congregations' concerns about undermining the ability to create a feeling of sacredness for worshippers.

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



Millennials embrace “more or less Jewish” mindset—non-Jews invited

A study of American Jews shows that younger Jews are moving toward a “more or less Jewish” mentality that embraces self-autonomy and openness to non-Jews to a greater extent than that of their parents’ generation, said sociologist Steven Cohen in a talk he gave at the Committee on Religion at the City University of New York in early November, attended by **RW**. The preliminary study by Cohen, which is based on qualitative interviews of Jewish young adults, finds that Jewish Millennials embrace the individualism and search for meaning of the older Baby Boomers, but with less guilt and judgmentalism. But the second “move” the younger generation makes is more specific to them: “they believe that they shouldn’t exclude non-Jews from their communities. Synagogues are not just for Jews but places for people who want to do Jewish stuff,” Cohen said. This tendency is clearest in the Reform and Conservative Jewish worlds but can also be seen even in such places as the Orthodox-sponsored Jewish student unions in high schools, where as much as 10 percent of the members are not Jewish.

Cohen links these attitudes to the sharp growth in intermarried families in the U.S. He cited surveys among younger Jews showing that today 60 percent of identified Jews have a non-Jewish parent, and two-thirds have a close family member who is non-Jewish. He compared those figures to the 1970s when 22 percent of Jewish families were intermarried. Cohen sees a transformation from collective identity to a



“Protestant-individualist ethic of being Jewish.” Apart from the Orthodox community, Cohen concludes that the loss of norms for many American Jews will translate into less organizational vitality. When asked by **RW** about the alternative Jewish communities established by Baby Boomers, such as in the Jewish Renewal movement, and how they might attract such “more or less Jewish” young adults, he said that many of these older groups have aged and declined along with established ones. He added that there are also Jewish “small start-ups” that have been started by some Millennial Jews and have found a following, but that they are not measuring up to significant new growth.

Psychedelic festivals retain spiritual appeal despite commercialization

Psychedelic music festivals have become increasingly mainstream since their countercultural beginnings in the 1960s, but the large gatherings still generate a sense of spiritual identity for their fans, according to Scott Muir. In a paper presented at the Boston meeting of the American Academy of Religion in mid-November, which **RW** attended, Scott Muir of Duke University traced these music festivals back to the 1960s counterculture, marked by the use of psychedelic drugs and an oppositional stance toward society. This countercultural phase of these festivals lasted until the mid-1970s, when they became subcultures based around the Grateful Dead and their “Deadhead” followers. That changed again after leading band member Jerry Garcia died in 1995, and the festivals multiplied while also gaining a more mainstream following. These gatherings were based around “jam bands.” Muir adds that, “At rates nearly as strong as those found among Deadheads, large majorities of the 709 jam festival attendees I surveyed affirmed the spiritual nature of the Scene (82 percent), their experiences within it (75 percent), and acknowledged its impact on their religious identities (65 percent).”

The festivals are now corporately sponsored and expensive to attend, while enthusiasts still partake of psychedelics as well as incorporating art into the events. Such annual festivals as Coachella and Bonnaroo have become popular, with the latter televised on the Clear Nation Channel. Muir found that 36 percent of fans at a Bonnaroo festival



were first-time attenders. While the Coachella and Bonnaroo events are more mainstream and diverse, he found that attenders still derive a sense of spirituality from the festivals. In surveying 612 participants from a Bonnaroo festival, he found that “Bonnarooers are almost as likely (76 percent) as Deadheads and jam fest participants to affirm the spiritual nature of the collective experience, but they are somewhat less likely to frame their own experiences this way. Fifty-nine percent of respondents affirm that ‘there has been a spiritual quality’ to their festival experiences, but these affirmations are more measured and hesitant. [Fifty-six] percent acknowledge that the Scene has ‘influenced [their] religious/spiritual identity,’ but only 10 percent describe that influence as strong.” Muir concludes that the recent shooting in Las Vegas may dampen the popularity of these events, but that attenders “have too much to lose by [stopping], as it involves their identity.”

Casting spells for and against Trump divides Neopagan community

The election of Donald Trump has set off a battle among witchcraft and occult practitioners seeking to either bless or throw a magical wrench into the administration of the new U.S. president. A special session of the recent Boston meeting of the American Academy of Religion brought together both scholars and magical practitioners to address this growing conflict in the occult community. Scenes of Wiccan practitioners, or “witches,” casting spells to thwart the Trump presidency have taken place at some of the protest events that have mushroomed since last November’s elections. But these spectacles are part of a wider effort to join witchcraft and activism. A paper presented by Peg Aloï (State University of New York at New Paltz) looked at the activist group W.I.T.C.H. (Women’s International Troublemaker Conspiracy From Hell, among other acronyms) and a broader “bind Trump” movement, which uses homegrown rituals of “magical resistance” against the president, such as tarot cards and spells using orange candles (to symbolize Trump’s hair). W.I.T.C.H. actually started in the late 1960s as performance art and a feminist protest group and has since adopted more Wiccan elements. Its latest incarnation has been based around anonymous protests using magical ceremonies and has organized covens in several American cities.

These efforts have drawn criticism from other Neopagans, who view them as generating bad publicity, with the most extreme of these being groups and leaders who have sought to counteract the anti-Trump witch activists. Leading these right-wing Neopagans and Wiccans are David Griffin and Leslie McQuade of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, as well as such new groups as the Cult of Kek and Aristocrats of the Soul, which have launched magical counterattacks against the Trump attackers and carried out their own rituals to protect the president. Griffin and McQuade call on all believers to combat what they call the “black magical terrorists” targeting Trump. There is some intersection between these groups and what has been called the “alt-right,” mainly in the way they critique globalization, use social media and blend Internet “memes,” such as



Pepe the Frog, with magical themes, according to another paper by Egil Asprem of Stockholm University. He concluded that the Neopagan use of rituals is a case of generating “collective effervescence” in the face of diminishing trust in the establishment, pointing to a similar revival of magical interest and activity during the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **The Amish community is showing a unique continuity in fertility behaviors across the generations, according to a new study by Cory Anderson (Truman State University), Joseph Donnermeyer (Ohio State University), and Samson Wasao.** The preliminary study, which was presented at the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, is based on a newly constructed Amish population database that draws on information from 60 Amish directories published between 2011 and 2017. The average age of first marriages for male and female birth cohorts is actually getting younger, starting at 26 and 24 for men and women, respectively, in 1920–1929, and now being in the range of a 21 to 20 ratio at the new millennium. While “more recent cohorts have not all married or have not completed fertility, so figures can’t quite be compared, they seem on track to have large families again,” Anderson concludes.



● **Catholic voters who voted for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were more similar than different in their essential beliefs, according to a survey on American Catholics and politics conducted by William D’Antonio.** The survey results, published in the *National Catholic Reporter* (November 17–30), dealt particularly with the 2016 elections, showing that more Catholics voted for Clinton than Trump (48 versus 43 percent)—which conflicted with exit polling results showing a Trump victory among Catholics. D’Antonio writes that the difference may be

because the NCR poll was conducted six months after the election and voters may have been recalling how they wanted to vote. When it came to such beliefs as Mary as the mother of God and the papacy as essential, about half of both Trump and Clinton supporters said these were important. Only about half of both groups saw charitable efforts to help the poor as essential or agreed that celibate male clergy are essential. About half of each camp also agreed that one could be a good Catholic and disagree with church teachings. While there were predictable differences on such issues as immigration and the death penalty between Catholic Trump and Clinton supporters, differences also came out on such matters as perception of the increase or decrease of religion’s influence in the U.S.: 64 percent of Trump Catholics saw religion as losing influence compared to only 48 percent of Clinton Catholics.

| TABLE 2 BELIEFS AND VALUES THAT ARE HELD TO BE ESSENTIAL TO BEING CATHOLIC | | |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| | TRUMP VOTERS | CLINTON VOTERS |
| Belief in Jesus' resurrection | 80% | 73% |
| Devotion to Mary as the mother of God | 64 | 58 |
| The papacy | 60 | 59 |
| A daily prayer life | 51 | 48 |
| Charitable efforts to help the poor | 48 | 55 |
| The sacraments | 43 | 39 |
| Sunday Mass as an obligation | 41 | 37 |
| Devotions, e.g., rosary, adoration | 37 | 39 |
| Private confession to a priest | 35 | 30 |
| A celibate male clergy | 28 | 21 |

(National Catholic Reporter, <https://www.ncronline.org/>)

● **Canadians are fine with religious diversity, although when Islam is introduced into the picture a significant segment of the population reacts negatively, according to a new poll by the Angus Reid Institute.**

The survey, conducted in partnership with Faith in Canada, found 26 percent of respondents saying that increasing religious diversity was a good thing, while 28 percent said it was bad. Nearly half—44 percent—said diversity brought a mix of good and bad. Anti-Islamic views stood out among the respondents, with 46 percent saying Islam was damaging Canada in contrast to only 13 percent who said the religion was beneficial. The other respondents did not know (20 percent) or said it had no real impact (21 percent). The only other religion with an overall negative score was Sikhism, with 22 percent calling it damaging to Canada, compared with 13 percent saying it was beneficial.



● **An international poll on what makes for a good life by the British firm GfK found that respondents in the UK tended to rate spirituality differently by age—and not in the expected direction.** The blog *Counting Religion in Britain* (November) cites the poll as showing that, when asked to rate the 15 factors that go into making a “good life,” UK respondents ranked health, financial security, and leisure time at the top. Spiritual enrichment was in 11th place (26 percent compared with a multinational mean of 39 percent, the national peak being reached in Brazil at 47 percent). On the spirituality measure, there was no significant difference between the sexes in the UK, but, interestingly, it was surprisingly unimportant for the older respondents (21 percent for those over 60) and higher among those under 20 (30 percent).

(*Counting Religion in Britain*, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/2017/counting-religion-in-britain-november-2017/>)

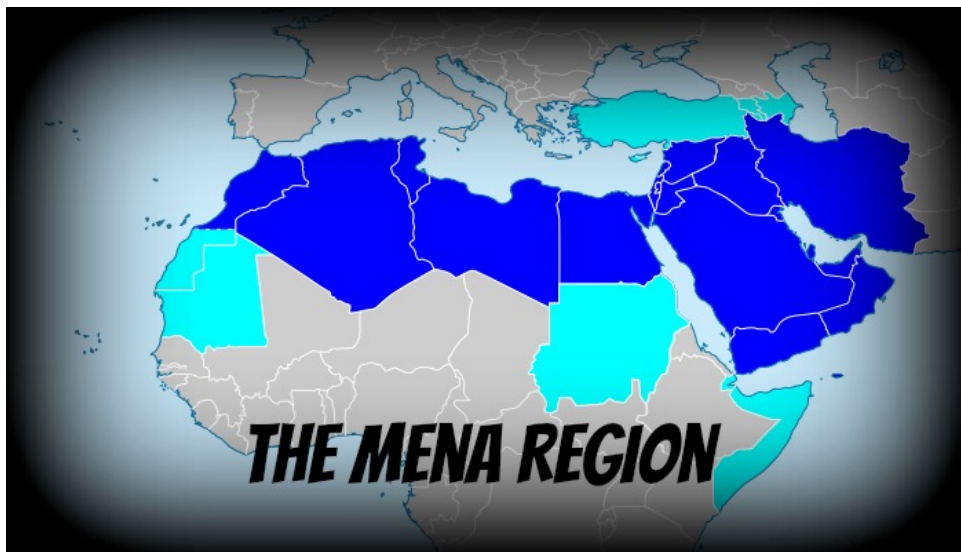


● **A study by Pew Research Center finds that Ethiopia, with the largest Orthodox Christian population outside Europe, shows higher levels of Orthodox religious commitment than in the faith’s heartland in the north.** Nearly all Orthodox Ethiopians (98 percent) say religion is very important to them, compared with a median of 34 percent of Orthodox agreeing with this across 13 countries surveyed in Central and Eastern Europe. About three-quarters of Orthodox Ethiopians say they attend church every week (78 percent), compared with a median of 10 percent in Central and Eastern Europe and just 6 percent in Russia. The vitality of Ethiopian Orthodoxy compared to Orthodoxy in the north is comparable to that of Catholic and Protestant churches in the global South versus their counterparts in Europe and the U.S.



● **The popular view that oil and Islam have gone into making the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) a region where religious freedom has one of the poorest records in the world comes in for criticism in a study by political scientists Daniel Albertsen and Indra de Soya.** Writing in the journal *Politics and Religion* (online November), the researchers note that oil-rich countries do use Islamic religious monopolization to control dissent, but that other geopolitical factors have more influence on religious freedom. Albertsen and de Soya used data on human rights based on information from the U.S. State Department and Amnesty International, comparing it with Pew-Templeton data on Muslim populations, oil rent per capita records compiled by the World Bank, and data on political structures in the Middle East and North Africa.

The authors find that the effect of Muslim dominance on religious freedom “washes out,” while Middle East and North Africa government dynamics and the effects of oil production are both

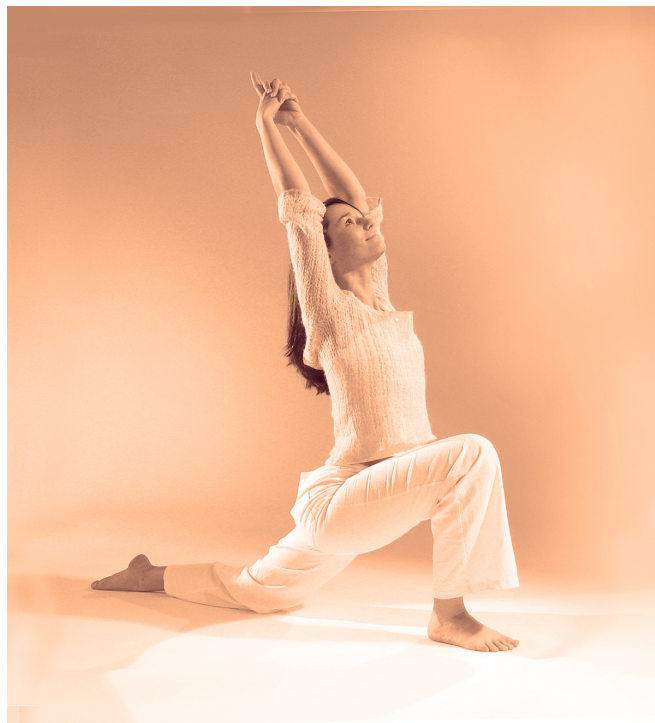


statistically significant. In fact, the MENA region has a strong effect on religious repression independently of both oil and Muslim dominance. Albertsen and de Soysa argue that what are seen as the double “curses” of oil and Islam on religious freedom do not hold up; in the MENA region, many oil producers tend to have marginally better rights for religion than several oil-producing countries in other regions, such as Central Asia, while Muslim dominance “seems to reduce the chance of minority exclusion and discrimination outside of the MENA region....”

(*Politics and Religion*, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-religion>)

Germany’s Yoga Vidya a success story in Europe

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, Yoga Vidya claims to organize the largest number of yoga seminars in Europe and to maintain the largest training institute for yoga teachers on the continent, having already trained more than 10,000 teachers and 800 to 1,000 more every year, writes Katharina Sigel (Bayreuth University) in *Materialdienst der EZW* (November). Yoga Vidya represents a success story and also testifies to the prolific legacy of Swami Sivananda (1887–1963) in the world of yoga. The German citizen who launched Yoga Vidya in 1992 and has led it since that time, Sukadev Volker Bretz (b. 1963), had become a student of one of Sivananda’s disciples, Swami Vishnudevananda (1927–1993), before



launching his own teaching in Germany in 1992 and formally organizing his movement in 1995. Most followers are still in Germany, with four large seminar centers and 100 yoga schools, although there are a few branches in neighboring countries, with aspirations to spread Yoga Vidya more widely in Germany as well as across Europe. Yoga Vidya sees its current growth only as a first step and is cultivating ambitious plans for the future.

While the main society counts 3,500 members, there is a network of various associations around Yoga Vidya. It also offers a franchise system for people willing to open centers or even ashrams abroad, or to become mobile yoga teachers. There are different levels of training, including an “intensive 4-week International Yoga Teachers’ Training” for learning “the classical yoga way of life which has been adapted to suit western culture.” “Yoga Vidya understands itself as a spiritual

community,” writes Sigel, which means that some Hindu rituals are also practiced, and that meditation is also part of the training. However, the group claims that it is possible to approach yoga from a secular as well as spiritual perspective, with some making it into their spiritual path while others are merely interested in physical well-being and self-development. Besides spreading yoga and allowing serious students to experience fast spiritual growth, Yoga Vidya also wants to “reinforce the forces of peace and understanding on Earth,” thus showing aspirations that go beyond individual goals.

(*Materialdienst der EZW, Auguststrasse 80, 10117 Berlin, Germany – www.ezw-berlin.de; Yoga Vidya (English), <http://www.yoga-vidya.org/english/>*)

Religious far-right finds a voice in Balkans

Far-right religious extremism is making an appearance in the Balkans after a long period of Westernization in the region, reports *The Economist* magazine blog *Erasmus* (November 27). Religiously inspired nationalism and ultra-nationalism has flourished in Greece under such parties as Golden Dawn, but more recently such currents have been felt in Serbia with the rise of the Serbian Radical Party and its connections to its Greek counterpart. Both parties draw on religious rhetoric to support their view of a state free of Islamic and foreign influence. At a recent event in Thessaloniki, leading members from both groups paid a “visit to two of the most conservative monastic houses on the nearby peninsula of Mount Athos: the ultra-zealous [Orthodox] Esphigmenou monastery and the Serbian monastery of Hilandar.” Both groups share a dislike of alien cultures, often brought by immigrants, and an enthusiasm for Vladimir Putin and warmer relations with Russia. They both cheered the election of Donald Trump. The article concludes that “neither the political life of the Balkans, nor even the religious life, begins or ends with these strident voices. But they are undoubtedly being projected with greater confidence, as though for the first time in a couple of decades, history was on their side.”



(*Erasmus, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2017/11/resurgent-right>*)

Religion and politics move Macedonian church into Bulgaria’s orbit

Unrecognized by other Orthodox churches, the Macedonian Orthodox Church has now approached the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, expressing its willingness to recognize it as its “mother Church” in order to receive from Bulgaria its autocephaly (independent status), according to several media reports (*Balkan Insight*, November 20). The Macedonian Orthodox Church had proclaimed its autocephaly unilaterally in 1967, during the Communist period, a move which at that time was also seen as an attempt in then-Yugoslavia to weaken the Serbian Orthodox Church. The declaration of independence was never accepted by other Orthodox Churches, since the Macedonian Church should have been granted autocephaly by its Serbian “mother Church.” This means that Macedonian priests cannot celebrate with other Orthodox clergy. For its part, Bulgaria’s Orthodox Patriarch stated that “We must accept the outstretched hand of Macedonia.” Bulgaria has language, historic and cultural ties with Macedonia (*Novinite*, November 30). Provided they can prove Bulgarian ethnicity, Macedonians can receive Bulgarian citizenship—which can bring advantages, since Bulgaria is a member of the European Union while Macedonia

is not. At the same time, this shows the complex situation of Macedonia, an area viewed differently by each of its three neighbors—

Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia. Greece continues to refuse to accept the name of “Macedonia,” since it considers



Macedonia the name of a region of Greece.

Thus, ecclesiastical moves also have political implications, especially “in a region where religious identity is often closely linked with nationalist passions and politics” (*Reuters*, November 27). Bulgarians would be delighted to have their national church recognize the Macedonian church, and symbolically bring Macedonia more strongly into Bulgaria’s sphere. A few months ago, a friendship treaty was signed between Macedonia and Bulgaria. But the Macedonian Church wants acceptance by the Bulgarian Church as a prelude to autocephaly—something the powerful Moscow Patriarchate is not eager to see, fearing this might create a precedent for a similar move in Ukraine (*Sofia Globe*, December 3). In addition, the Serbian Orthodox Church accepted in its ranks a bishop of the Macedonian Church, creating a small parallel Church structure in Macedonia. The Synod of the Bulgarian Church has appointed a committee to examine the Macedonian request and enter into consultations with other Orthodox Churches. While doubting that this will lead to

the recognition of self-rule, ecclesiastical analyst Branko Georgievski argues that this initiative and the way it has been received by the Bulgarian Church will result in strengthening relations between the Macedonian and Bulgarian Churches.

Qatar's Wahhabism serving as model for Saudi reforms

The lack of a powerful religious establishment that could enforce ultra-conservative social norms may be one of the reasons why the strict version of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism did not transform Qatar into a country similar to Saudi Arabia, writes James M. Dorsey (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore) in the *Huffington Post* (December 4). Especially in light of the tense relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar during the past months, many people are not aware that the two countries share a similar religious background in having Wahhabism as their official version of Islam. But there was a deliberate approach in Qatar not to follow the path of Saudi Arabia, even more so after reforms were initiated two decades ago. In contrast with the neighboring kingdom, Qatar does not enforce strict gender segregation, nor does it ban the practice of other religions by non-Muslim foreigners. As political scientists Birol Baskan and Steven

Wright had explained in an article published a few years ago in the *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Spring 2011), the Qatari rulers did not encourage the development of a class of Muslim legal scholars, since their training would have been heavily dependent on such scholars in Saudi Arabia. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Qatari religious schools are run by the Ministry of Education, and not by the religious affairs authority. Moreover, “Qatari religious authority is not institutionally vested.”



With the current developments in Saudi Arabia, it seems that Saudi prince Mohammed bin Salman is determined to trek at least in part on a path similar to that of Qatar. But deep political differences are unlikely to make them into allies, since what Saudi Arabia would expect from Qatar would be nothing less than accepting its tutelage. Qatar has been showing to Saudi youth that there is a way to change without renouncing Wahhabism. Dorsey notes that “Prince Mohammed’s efforts to reform Saudi Arabia with his...limited roll-back of puritan restrictions amounted in fact to a first

step in adopting a more Qatari version of Wahhabism[,] even if that is something he is unlikely to acknowledge.” But neither Saudi (or Emirati) nor Qatari rulers want political dissent and political change.

Findings & Footnotes

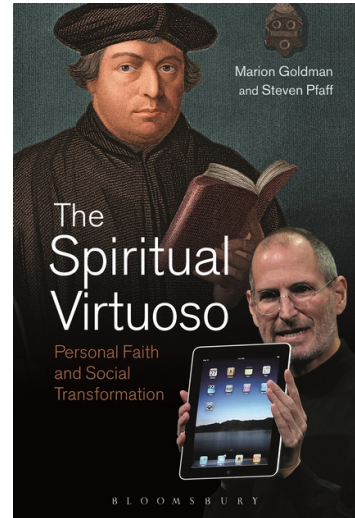
■ An interesting footnote to last month’s feature article on the growing alliance between American evangelicals and Eastern Orthodoxy over the role of Vladimir Putin is the influence of mid-20th century Russian sociologist Pitirim Sorokin. An article in the *Journal of Classical Sociology* (online November) by sociologists Dmitry Uzlaner and Kristina Stoeckl finds that Sorokin’s legacy, long in disrepair in mainstream sociology, is prospering among traditional religious conservatives in the U.S. and Russia, who hail the Harvard sociologist as predicting and outlining the rebirth of a moral society. It is particularly Sorokin’s theories of the “sensate culture”—that contemporary society is oriented toward materialism and the senses—and the rebirth of a moral order that are valued by conservatives.



Sorokin’s work on the importance of traditional family life and the power of culture (rather than economics) to shape society has won the devotion of such traditionalists as Allan Carlson, Rod Dreher in his book *The Benedict Option*, and even U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence. Transnational conservative organizations such as the World Congress of the Family use Sorokin’s influence as a bridge between conservatives in the U.S. and Russia, though it is the latter country where the thinker’s influence can be felt in universities and even politics. Uzlaner and Stoeckl note that Sorokin’s later works on an altruism (he founded a center for the study of love) that transcends politics and his non-dogmatic approach to religion, stressing religion’s mystical and ethical core that unites people, tend to be given less attention by today’s devotees. For more information on this article, visit: <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/jcs>

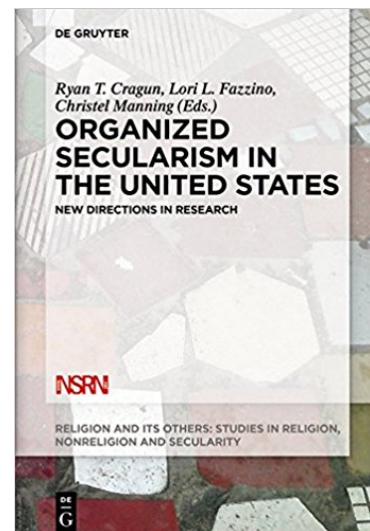
■ *The Spiritual Virtuoso* (Bloomsbury, \$23.99), by Marion Goldman and Steven Pfaff, looks at the classic sociological concept of the charismatic leader and applies it to a range of figures and their leadership styles—ranging from Martin Luther to Steve Jobs. The sociologists define a “spiritual virtuoso,” taking a leaf from Max Weber, as a specialist in spirituality and organized religion, though they find that the goal and extent of such charisma has changed over time. They find that spiritual virtuosity has changed its focus on purification and personal holiness to stress attaining sanctification or wholeness on earth. Where once the spiritual virtuoso was a role attained by a few, today it is the goal of many, thanks to such influences as the human potential movement. An interesting chapter on Sister Corita Kent and the counterculture shows how the virtuosity of traditional religious leaders created a bridge to the human potential movement, despite hierarchical pressure to constrain such charisma.

The section on Steve Jobs argues that the Apple founder used a blend of intense (Eastern) spiritual interest, charisma and branding to extend the human potential movement, even if the consumer-based and costly “indulgences” of such techniques stood in contrast to the more democratic impulses of the 1960s. Goldman and Pfaff tend to see the older forms of virtuosity located in institutions as self-limiting and passé, and argue that the future sites of spiritual virtuosity will emerge from coalitions of liberal believers and skeptics, such as in new forms of activism fighting for immigrant rights and against racism. They even see the mantle of spiritual virtuosity as moving to such secular movements as the Sunday Assembly, which holds church-like services, on account of their ambiguous and flexible spirituality (even though some atheist participants may take issue with that claim) and related social activism.

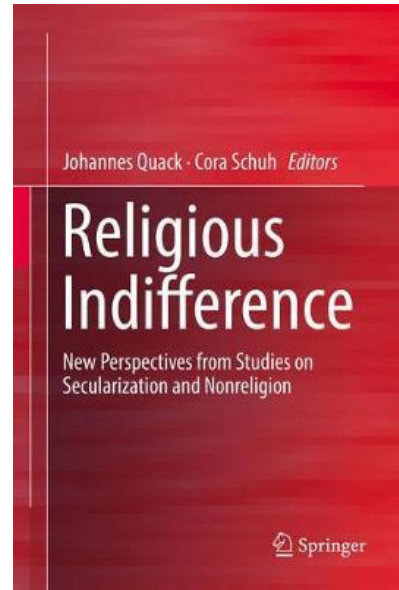


■ The anthology *Organized Secularism in the United States* (De Gruyter, \$114.99; electronic version is open access), edited by Ryan Cragun, Christel Manning, and Lori Fazzino, does a good job of examining the contours of atheist and secular humanist groups in America and how this movement has innovated in recent years. Although those who are active in such groups as American Atheists, the American Humanist Association, as well as such newcomers as Oasis and the Sunday Assembly, represent a small percentage of non-believers in the U.S., they tend to be the standard-bearers of activism among secular Americans. Many scholars and commentators (including the editor of RW in his 2014 book, with Christopher Smith, *Atheist Awakening*) have viewed organized secularism as a competitive and conflict-ridden world where cooperation between the different groups has been difficult. But a chapter by Lori L. Fazzino and Ryan Cragun argues that in recent years a new generation of secularist leaders have learned to cooperate and that the diversity in the movement shows its vitality rather than its disorganization and schismatic nature. Another chapter focuses on Houston, TX, and how the variety of secularist groups there have each taken different and (sometimes) shared roles in the community, from education to activism to charitable work.

A few chapters continue the debate about how to categorize and label the non-religious, suggesting that there is considerable pluralism in this group that defies the “atheist” designation (as, for example, do those pressing for a secular kind of spirituality). Nevertheless, it seems that, at least organizationally, the groups are split between activists (usually on church-state issues) and what can be called communalists, who are attempting to create support, rituals, and education for both “cradle” and convert atheists (as seen in the chapters on secularist wedding services and dying techniques). In a concluding chapter, Barry Kosmin addresses the perennial problem of secularists being non-joiners and increasingly diverse, though the organizations have been late in responding to their changing demographics. He also calls for organized secularists to embrace both popular (sports) and high culture (public schools and universities) to expand their numbers.



■ Scholars have long addressed the grey zone between religion and non-religion, phenomena such as “fuzzy faith,” implicit religion, and invisible religion, so the recent anthology *Religious Indifference* (Springer, \$79.99), edited by Johannes Quack and Cora Schuh, may seem like more of the same. But the volume does show that indifference is a sociological category, even though several of the contributors see it as shading more toward the non-religion side, especially those scholars who see indifference as the marker of secularization. But as the editors’ note in the Introduction, both religious persons and secularists often bemoan the growth of indifference to their concerns for either active faith or secularity, with the moral and ethical commitments that accompany these stances. Several chapters go into the ongoing attempts to define secularity and non-religion and how the category of indifference plays into these debates. For instance, Lois Lee looks at indifferent and nonreligious populations, noting that in some cases (much of Europe) the non-religious and the indifferent are one and the same group, while in other societies (the UK but especially the U.S.) they diverge.



The book also includes several interesting case studies of how religious indifference becomes visible in relation to real life religion and secularism. Rebecca Catto examines how religious indifference (and illiteracy) affects interfaith dialogues in one British city and how the indifferent and non-religious are left out of such two-way encounters. A contribution on the strongly secular Estonia finds the related religious indifference stemming from several sources—communism and nationalism as well as established Lutheranism. Also noteworthy is Quack’s comparison of Germany and India and analysis of how indifference is on a spectrum that is not irreversible; being indifferent can turn into a more positive or negative posture toward religion.