

The **BOISI CENTER** *for*

RELIGION *and* AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

Symposium on Religion and Politics

**RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND THE
COMMON GOOD**

“Assimilation”

Reading Packet 5

March 19, 2014



BOSTON COLLEGE

BOISI CENTER
FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

Symposium on Religion and Politics

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND THE COMMON GOOD

“Assimilation”

Table of Contents:

Alan Wolfe, “And the Winner Is . . . : The Coming Religious Peace,” *The Atlantic* (March 2008).

Laurie Goodstein, “Poll Shows Major Shift in Identity of U.S. Jews,” *New York Times*, October 1, 2013.

Gustav Niebuhr, “The Church and the State of Matrimony: Review of Naomi Schaefer Riley’s *Til Faith Do Us Part*,” *New York Times*, May 23, 2013.

Russell Shaw, “Jews, Catholics, and the Assimilation Problem,” *The Catholic World Report*, October 31, 2013.

George Weigel, “U.S. Catholics: Overly Assimilated?” *First Things* (2013).

Alan Cooperman, “Survey: U.S. Muslims Assimilated, Opposed to Extremism,” *Washington Post*, May 23, 2007.

Shadi Hamid, “The Major Roadblock to Muslim Assimilation in Europe,” *The Atlantic*, (August 2011).

Geneive Abdo, “America’s Muslims Aren’t as Assimilated as You Think,” *Washington Post*, August 27, 2006.

Faheem Younus, “When Will Muslim Americans Assimilate?” *Huffington Post*, May 27, 2011.

24 quincy road, chestnut hill, massachusetts 02467

tel: 617.552.1861 fax: 617.552.1863 email: publife@bc.edu web: www.bc.edu/boisi

The Atlantic



- SUBSCRIBE
- RENEW
- GIVE A GIFT
- DIGITAL EDITION

Print | Close

And The Winner Is...

THE COMING RELIGIOUS PEACE

By Alan Wolfe

Human beings have never lacked for things to fight over, but for the last two millennia, they have fought the most over ideas involving the divine. Politics, technology, military capacity, and diseases have all played decisive roles in shaping history, yet it is impossible to understand the rise and fall of empires, the clash of civilizations, and the evolving balance of power without appreciating the unique fervor that religion inspires, and the speed with which new religions can spread.

Christianity, a minority sect during much of the Roman Empire, became a world religion with a vast following after the Emperor Constantine converted to it, in the fourth century A.D. Then came Islam, in the seventh century: just a hundred years after Muhammad's death, in 632, the religion he founded reached beyond the Middle East to Africa, India, and significant parts of Spain and France. The Protestant Reformation of 1517 quickly engulfed half of Europe, migrated to the New World, and fueled the Counter-Reformation in the remaining Catholic states on the Continent—by 1618, the Thirty Years' War had begun, resulting in the devastation of large swaths of western Europe and the death of some 30 percent of Germany's population. Every new outburst of religious passion, while producing ecstasy and revelation for some, has disrupted established loyalties, fueled intolerance, and led to violence between the chosen and the damned.

WEALTH AND RELIGIOSITY





[Click here](#) to see a larger version of this graph.

It may seem, at first glance, that little has changed. A recent cover story in *The Economist*, titled “[The New Wars of Religion](#),” proclaimed, “Faith will unsettle politics everywhere this century.” Some scholars of religion have found new sport in predicting which religions will gain the most adherents (and upset the most applecarts) during the coming decades. Pentecostalism is one favorite candidate; it is sweeping through Latin America and Africa, already claiming some half-billion followers around the world. Catholicism is vying for the same conservative turf; Pope Benedict XVI’s insistence on stricter religious teachings, though not likely to grow the Church in Boston, appears intended to win more souls in Bogotá and Brazzaville. Islam claims a fifth of the world’s population, and its share is climbing quickly; it is only a matter of time, many believe, before it surpasses Christianity, which is embraced by a third of the world’s population, to become the predominant faith. Hindus and Buddhists together make up 20 percent of the world’s people, and high birthrates in the countries in which they are dominant suggest that this proportion will grow. Some think that other religions will have to make room for Mormonism, an infant compared with many other faiths. (Those others will have ample time to do so—although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is growing quickly, it has just 12 million members, half in the United States.) All in all, *The Economist* forecasts, by mid-century, 80 percent of the world’s people will adhere to one of the major faiths.

A lot rides on which of these predictions turn out to be true, and on how and where different religions bump up against one another. A common worry is that intense competition for souls could produce another era in which religious conflict leads to religious war—only this time with nuclear weapons. If we are really in for anything like the kind of zeal that accompanied earlier periods of religious expansion, we might as well say goodbye to the Enlightenment and its principles of tolerance.

Yet breathless warnings about rising religious fervor and conflicts to come ignore two basic facts. First, many areas of the world are experiencing a *decline* in religious belief and practice. Second, where religions are flourishing, they are also generally evolving—very often in ways that allow them to fit more easily into secular societies, and that weaken them as politically disruptive forces. The French philosopher Blaise Pascal once famously showed that it would be irrational to bet against the existence of God. It would be equally foolish, in the long run, to bet against the power of the Enlightenment. The

answer to the question of which religion will dominate the future, at least politically, may well be: None of the above.

Until relatively recently, most social theorists, from Marx to Freud to Weber, believed that as societies became more modern, religion would lose its capacity to inspire. Industrialization would substitute the rational pursuit of self-interest for blind submission to authority. Science would undermine belief in miracles. Democracy would encourage the separation of church and state. Gender equality would undermine patriarchy, and with it, clerical authority. However one defined *modernity*, it always seemed likely to involve societies focused on this world rather than on some other.

But intellectual fashions are fickle, and the idea of inevitable secularization has fallen out of favor with many scholars and journalists. Still, its most basic tenet—that material progress will slowly erode religious fervor—appears unassailable. Last October, the Pew Global Attitudes Project plotted 44 countries according to per capita gross domestic product and intensity of religious belief, gauged by the responses to several questions about faith (a rendition of the Pew data appears on the opposite page). The pattern, as seen in the Pew study and a number of other sources, is hard to miss: when God and Mammon collide, Mammon usually wins.

Toward the right edge of the graph—in the realm of the most-prosperous countries—and at the very bottom lies western Europe, where God, if not dead, has only a faint pulse. Islam, to be sure, is increasingly prevalent in countries such as France and Great Britain, and one can also detect a slight uptick in Christian religiosity across much of the Continent in the past decade or so. But at the same time, the region's last significant pockets of concentrated religiosity are collapsing. Fifty years ago, Spain and Ireland were two of the most religious countries in Europe; now they are among the least. Not long ago, Spain was governed by a fascist dictator in close collaboration with the Catholic Church; now it allows both gay marriage and adoption by gay couples, making it as liberal as Massachusetts. Ireland once gave us, in the form of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, one of the most chilling depictions of damnation in world literature; these days, Dublin's churches are emptying out, and the few parishioners are apt to be Polish immigrants, most of whom presumably came to Ireland to nourish their bank accounts, not their souls.

Eastern Europe lies to the left of western Europe on the graph. Poland is of course well known for its religiosity; the Communists who governed the country for nearly half a century tried to suppress the Church but were ousted by Solidarity, in large part a faith-based movement, with the encouragement of a native-son pope. But most of the countries of eastern Europe, though poorer than their counterparts

in the West, are not very different from them in religious terms. And increasing prosperity in eastern Europe may lower religiosity even more. Poland shows signs of this already. The country's outspokenly Catholic prime minister, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who governed in collaboration with his equally devout twin brother, was defeated late last year by Donald Tusk. Tusk is far less religious in his personal life than the Kaczynskis— he was married in a civil ceremony, and held a church wedding later only to further his political career. During the election campaign, he attacked Kaczynski's ties to a right-wing, ultra-Catholic broadcasting station, and took more-liberal positions on in vitro fertilization and abortion (although he does not support legalized abortion, he opposed a Church-sponsored constitutional amendment to ban it). The first European states to fully embrace secularism did so over hundreds of years. The last holdouts appear to be making the shift in a generation.

Heading up the graph from eastern Europe in comparative religiosity, we arrive at Latin America, a region famous for its piety. Yet secular values are transforming this part of the world, too, and as they do, religiosity is declining. In 2006, Chile—one of Latin America's wealthiest nations—elected Michelle Bachelet, an openly agnostic single mother, as president. Last spring, Mexico City, the capital of the world's second-largest Catholic country, legalized early-term abortions; the law passed in the city's legislative assembly by a vote of 46–19. One cannot ignore the rising cultural and political importance of Pentecostalism in countries ranging from Brazil to Guatemala. But neither can one ignore the growth of an increasingly secular middle class in countries such as Argentina, Colombia, and Peru.

The Asian countries surveyed are scattered around the graph, but they follow the graph's basic pattern (as do Asian countries not included in the graph). Indonesia, one of the poorest countries in the region, is up among the world's most religious ones, and has been the scene of considerable, and considerably gruesome, religious violence. China, a bit richer, is less religious (though even in poorer times, China was not generally given to religious fervor, at least not in the way that Westerners understand the term). India, China's main rival for future domination of the world economy, is also less religious than the continent's poorer countries. It does have a popular political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, that advocates a militant and politicized form of Hinduism. But the BJP, which was part of a coalition that led the government for several years beginning in 1998, lost power in 2004 and has not recovered. Pakistan, India's poorer neighbor, shelters Osama bin Laden and turns out jihadists in droves. But its population is more moderate than many Westerners suppose: its leader, Pervez Mu-sharraf, gets his main support from the military, not the mullahs; and the chief opposition figure, until her assassination in December, was an Oxford- and Harvard-educated woman backed by legions of well-dressed lawyers.

Among the so-called Asian Tigers—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—only South Korea, where Christian fundamentalism is thriving, is known for religiosity. And even there, it has been leveling off in recent years. Japan, the richest nation in Asia, is right where one would expect it to be on the religiosity scale—alongside the godless countries of western Europe.

The Middle East, of course, is the region of greatest concern to many Americans when it comes to religious fervor, for the religion in question is Islam, and Islam, we are told by conservatives of both the neo- and religious varieties, is an enemy of our way of life. Despite its oil, the Middle East is still relatively poor and only recently urbanized. No one doubts that to arrive there is to pass through the doors of devotion. When Pew asked people whether one must believe in God in order to be moral, the answers in Islamic countries were off the charts: 99 percent of Egyptians and 97 percent of Jordanians, for instance, said yes. Mathematically speaking, it is hard for societies to be more religious than that.

Much has been written about the nourishment that autocracy, on the one hand, and foreign meddling, on the other, have provided to reactionary Islamist movements in the Middle East. Worries about militant Islam often focus on Saudi Arabia, where Islamic fundamentalism really is powerful. The Saudis, moreover, use the considerable cash at their disposal to spread their version of the faith around the world. Given that 15 of the 19 September 11 hijackers were citizens of Saudi Arabia, no one should dismiss the dangers of religious fanaticism originating there.

But the Middle East is a huge area, with many forms of religious expression: the notion that Islamic fundamentalism will sweep the entire region is simply not realistic. Consider another set of data collected by Pew: among Lebanese, Turks, Kuwaitis, and Egyptians who see a struggle in their countries between modernizers and fundamentalists, a majority (or, in the case of the Egyptians, a near- majority) say that they identify with the former. It is true that Turkey, one of the world's largest Muslim countries, is governed by an Islamist party—but that party is both politically and religiously moderate (for example, it favors membership in the European Union). Dubai, one of the richest Muslim countries, is less interested in propagating radical Islam than in attracting gamblers to Las Vegas's MGM Mirage, in which it is a significant shareholder. And even in Saudi Arabia, according to a recent poll by the research organization Terror Free Tomorrow, only 15 percent of the population have a favorable view of Osama bin Laden, and 69 percent support stronger ties with the U.S.

We are left, finally, with Africa. Religiosity there is widely regarded as high, perhaps higher than in the Middle East, but it differs in character. It is in Africa where the predictions of an old-fashioned, broad-

based religious revival, with all its attendant conflicts, may come closest to the mark. Much of the commentary on religion's muscle in Africa, and the consequent potential for clashing civilizations, centers on Nigeria, the continent's most populous country and one in which, Pew found, most of those who perceive a struggle between modernizers and fundamentalists put themselves in the latter camp. In recent years, 12 states in northern Nigeria have adopted sharia, or Islamic law, and created special morality police to enforce its tenets. [Eliza Griswold explores Africa's religious revival](#), and in particular the subtleties of the contest between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, elsewhere in this issue. Here, suffice it to say that Africa is indeed in the throes of a great awakening.

Will it endure? A hundred years ago, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber quoted the great evangelical John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church:

I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches.

In 19th-century Europe, as Weber's reference suggests, religious devotion did make people better off materially, and thereby moderated godly fervor. Just because it may have happened that way then does not mean that religion will have the same effect in the developing world now. Yet whether it is faith or some other force that stimulates economic growth in Africa (or Asia or the Middle East), growth is bound to occur, and to continue to moderate religious fervor.

You'll have noticed that I've said nothing yet about the United States. Talk about an outlier—there on the Pew chart it stands, nearly alone, as the only country in the world, apart from Kuwait, that is both wealthy and religious. Americans are not only more religious than Europeans; they are more religious than the citizens of some Latin American countries. If proof is needed that religion will remain a dominant force in history for a long time to come, the fact that the world's most affluent society is also well up among the faithful would seem to provide it. When the president says that his decision to invade another country was influenced by a call from God, or when school boards decide to include creationism in their curriculum, it appears safe to conclude that Americans are not living in the world envisioned by Marx or Freud.

But one shouldn't go overboard in describing American religiosity. For one thing, it is as shallow as it is broad: Americans know relatively little about the histories, the theological controversies, or even the sacred texts of their chosen faiths. Recent decades have seen the rise of the Christian right in the United States, but they have also witnessed the seemingly inexorable advance of secular ideals, such as personal choice and pluralism, that blossomed in the 1960s. Some signs indicate that the Christian right may be losing steam, or at least moderating, as a political force. Nonbelief, meanwhile, is increasing: not only are atheist manifestos selling in large numbers, but the percentage of those who express no religious preference to pollsters doubled between 1990 and 2001, to 15 percent.

The most important religious phenomenon in the United States, however, has nothing to do with the number of atheists. It concerns another trend that, like modernization, is changing the trajectories of religion worldwide: the creation and spread of a free religious marketplace, which partly (though by no means completely) revives religious devotion wherever it reaches, but also tends to moderate the religions offered within it.

Religious monopolies or near-monopolies, such as state-sponsored churches, generally throttle religious practice over time, especially as a country becomes wealthier; the European experience amply demonstrates this. Lacking any incentive to innovate, churches atrophy, and their congregations dwindle. But places with a free religious marketplace witness something very different: entrepreneurs of the spirit compete to save souls, honing their messages and modulating many of their beliefs so as to appeal to the consumer. With more options to choose from, more consumers find something they like, and the ranks of the religious grow.

The key precondition for this sort of marketplace is the presence of rudimentary secular values. This may sound odd, since the secular has long been thought the opposite of the religious; the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the 1905 French law establishing *laïcité*, or the removal of religion from public affairs, and the creation of modern Turkey were once seen as the replacement of religious orthodoxy by Enlightenment principles. Secularism is still commonly understood in this way: a secular society is viewed as one with large numbers of freethinkers choosing science over superstition and reason over revelation.

But secularism is not the opposite of belief; nonbelief is. Indeed, secularism has religious, specifically Christian, roots; it renders unto Caesar what is Caesar's, while leaving to God what properly belongs in his realm. John Locke argued as much in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, first published in 1689: genuine salvation, he wrote, can never be achieved through governmental coercion. In contemporary societies influenced by Lockean ideals, then, religion's priority of belief and secularism's commitment to individual rights are not in opposition; rather, they complement each other. It was once thought that the First Amendment was written to protect public life from the depredations of religious orthodoxy. It is now commonly accepted that the Founders also separated church and state in order to protect religion from government.

So what happens to religions that find themselves with many competitors? Consider what is occurring within the growing American evangelical movement. It has built megachurches that meet the needs of

time-pressed professionals by offering such things as day-care centers, self-help groups, and networking opportunities. Its music owes more to Janis Joplin than to Johann Sebastian Bach. Its church officials learn more from business-school case studies than from theological texts. And its young people—well, as the children of parents who have gone through a born-again experience, they are not likely to be as obedient as the evangelical leader James Dobson wants them to be. Having opted to grow on secular terms, American evangelicalism is becoming less hostile to liberal ideas such as tolerance and pluralism. New efforts to take it in directions sympathetic to environmentalism and social justice are a direct result of the maturing of the faith, which followed from earlier decisions to make the movement more appealing to large numbers of Americans, especially the young.

Does the pattern hold outside America? After all, it is often said that the promulgation of secular values and lifestyles, one result of globalization, is prompting a reactionary religious backlash. There is some truth to this argument, but it misses the bigger picture. Most of the religious revivals we are seeing throughout the world today complement, and ultimately reinforce, secular developments; they are more likely to encourage moderation than fanaticism.

Let's look at how global commerce is affecting religion in the developing world. Religious leaders are using advanced media technologies to propagate their message, bringing new religious options and interpretations even to many remote areas. At the same time, globalization is drawing people into the cities, where they must fend for themselves in an unfamiliar environment; in these circumstances, people begin to look to religion not for instruction in traditional ways of life, but as a means of coming to terms with new experiences. Both developments weaken the hold that local, insular religions have on their adherents, and also make it harder for governmental or clerical authorities to restrict religious choice.

How does this lead to moderation? It doesn't always—rejectionist religious strains can certainly prosper, at least for a time, during periods of intense dislocation. Still, although Jihad may be at war with McWorld, most other forms of religious enthusiasm, including most forms of Islam, are not. Various versions of the prosperity movement are attracting followers in developing countries, as well as in poorer areas of the United States, precisely because they value success in this world as much as holiness in another. These movements can be rightly accused of theological thinness, but not of adherence to old-fashioned doctrine. Their goal is not to question the modern world's riches but to bring them within the reach of more people. And once this dynamic is set in motion, it tends to gather momentum. As Eliza Griswold points out, the success of the Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity in Nigeria has prompted the creation of a new Islamic organization focused on economic empowerment, which already has 1.2 million members in Nigeria alone.

In our time, as in Locke's, forcible conversion does not work very well, if at all. One does not spread the good news of the Lord through the bad news of war. As religious leaders recognize that they are more likely to swell their ranks through persuasion than through coercion, they find themselves accepting such secular ideas as free will and individual autonomy. And even religions that are culturally

dominant and closely linked with the state must worry about holding on to the allegiance of the young, as well as retaining the loyalties—and the money—of those who have moved abroad and been exposed to religious pluralism and tolerance. As one part of the world becomes modern, those parts it touches also gain exposure to modern ideas. Few places remain where old-fashioned, rigidly dogmatic forms of religion are isolated.

One can see intimations of a pluralistic, American-style religious revival around the world. In Europe, a moderating of fundamentalist extremism, in the name of religious revivalism, may well be under way. Americans worried about the clash of civilizations tend to focus on those forms of Islam called *salafist*, a generic term meant to include those who wish to restore the Muslim faith to the purity it presumably possessed during the era of the Prophet Muhammad. Perhaps they should focus more attention on Muslim religious leaders like Amr Khaled, an Egyptian televangelist now living much of the year in England. Combining idealistic themes of self-empowerment with prosperity movement themes of self-improvement, Khaled appeals to young people in ways that are neither strictly modern nor strictly fundamentalist. So does Mustafa Hosni, a young Egyptian whose YouTube videos bring messages of self-fulfillment and spiritual renewal to jeans-clad Muslims in both Europe and the Middle East. These secularly influenced forms of Islamic revivalism may not draw huge masses into the streets, but they are exceptionally influential among the well-off, ambitious, and upwardly mobile Muslims who will be leading their countries in the future.

The pattern is similar virtually everywhere we look. Latin Americans are leaving Catholicism because they want the sense of personal empowerment that Pentecostal forms of worship can provide. The preacher and best-selling author Rick Warren is invited to Africa because his ideas about the purpose-driven life, read in the United States as a guide to getting one's personal act together, can be read in that part of the world as encouraging wider, bourgeois virtues of thrift and responsibility. In this light, Pope Benedict's decision to steer Catholicism in a more conservative, traditional direction—a move that effectively forfeits the Church's future in the developed world in order to expand its appeal in developing regions—seems like a winner only in the short run.

Even in Nigeria, there are signs of accommodation, as Lydia Polgreen of The New York Times wrote in a recent report from Kano, one of the states that adopted sharia. The harsher aspects of Islamic law have not been implemented there, and Christians, many of whom had fled the region, are beginning to return. "*Shariah* needs to be practical," a civil servant in Kano told Polgreen. "We are a developing country, so there is a kind of moderation between the ideas of the West and traditional Islamic values. We try to weigh it so that there is no contradiction." Those who worry about religious revivals in the world today usually pose an either/or choice between religion and secularism. In reality, the two can work together.

Religious peace will be the single most important consequence of the secular underpinning of today's religious growth. All religions tend to be protective of their traditions and rituals, but all religions also change depending upon the cultural practices of the societies in which they are based. Protestantism

and secularism have always had close ties: as noted, Locke was drawing on a specifically Protestant sensibility when he wrote in defense of secular ideals. Other religions in secular environments have shown themselves quite willing to adopt Protestant notions about how faith should be practiced in order to gain or retain adherents. During the Second Vatican Council, in the early 1960s, the Catholic Church accepted the idea of religious liberty. Jews in the United States find themselves organized into denominations—Reform, Conservative, Orthodox—in ways that borrow from Protestant traditions. Despite the attention paid to what once were hotbeds of extremism like the North London Central Mosque in Finsbury Park, significant numbers of Muslims in both North America and western Europe are turning their mosques into all-purpose religious institutions and accepting innovations in gender equality foreign to the practice of Islam in the non-secular past.

What about religions in non-secular environments—can they find ways to live in peace with one another? If not, we have a pretty good idea of what will happen: the Sunni-Shia wars in Iraq, and everyday life in the occupied territories, provide examples enough. Yet because so much of the world is now, if not secular, then moving toward secularization, the sort of accommodation recently seen in Kano may ultimately take hold in other developing areas as well.

The world will never be rid of fanaticism; globalization is just as capable of disseminating extreme ideas as it is of advancing moderation. But fanaticism should not be confused with religious intensity. One can pray passionately to God and lead an otherwise balanced life, just as one can be monomaniacal about things having nothing to do with the divine.

And religious leaders prone to fanaticism are likely to find that the price of using force to spread God's word, or to try to monopolize it, will be a greatly diminished hold on the future. Moreover, the future may come sooner than we think. We have seen how rapidly religion has spread in the past, claiming adherents from competing faiths before the competition knew what hit them. Both secularism and secularly inspired ways of being religious are spreading just as rapidly—maybe even more so. Historians may one day look back on the next few decades, not as yet another era when religious conflicts enveloped countries and blew apart established societies, but as the era when secularization took over the world.

This article available online at:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/03/and-the-winner-is/306654/>

Copyright © 2014 by The Atlantic Monthly Group. All Rights Reserved.

The New York Times

October 1, 2013

Poll Shows Major Shift in Identity of U.S. Jews

By **LAURIE GOODSTEIN**

The first major survey of American Jews in more than 10 years finds a significant rise in those who are not religious, marry outside the faith and are not raising their children Jewish — resulting in rapid assimilation that is sweeping through every branch of Judaism except the Orthodox.

The intermarriage rate, a bellwether statistic, has reached a high of 58 percent for all Jews, and 71 percent for non-Orthodox Jews — a huge change from before 1970 when only 17 percent of Jews married outside the faith. Two-thirds of Jews do not belong to a synagogue, one-fourth do not believe in God and one-third had a Christmas tree in their home last year.

“It’s a very grim portrait of the health of the American Jewish population in terms of their Jewish identification,” said Jack Wertheimer, a professor of American Jewish history at the [Jewish Theological Seminary](#), in New York.

The survey, by the Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, found that despite the declines in religious identity and participation, American Jews say they are proud to be Jewish and have a “strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people.”

While 69 percent say they feel an emotional attachment to Israel, and 40 percent believe that the land that is now Israel was “given to the Jewish people by God,” only 17 percent think that the continued building of settlements in the West Bank is helpful to Israel’s security.

Jews make up 2.2 percent of the American population, a percentage that has held steady for the past two decades. The survey estimates there are 5.3 million Jewish adults as well as 1.3 million children being raised at least partly Jewish.

The survey uses a wide definition of who is a Jew, a much-debated topic. The researchers included the 22 percent of Jews who describe themselves as having “no religion,” but who identify as Jewish because they have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish, and feel Jewish by culture or ethnicity.

However, the percentage of “Jews of no religion” has grown with each successive generation,

peaking with the millennials (those born after 1980), of whom 32 percent say they have no religion.

“It’s very stark,” Alan Cooperman, deputy director of the Pew religion project, said in an interview. “Older Jews are Jews by religion. Younger Jews are Jews of no religion.”

The trend toward secularism is also happening in the American population in general, with increasing proportions of each generation claiming no religious affiliation.

But Jews without religion tend not to raise their children Jewish, so this secular trend has serious consequences for what Jewish leaders call “Jewish continuity.” Of the “Jews of no religion” who have children at home, two-thirds are not raising their children Jewish in any way. This is in contrast to the “Jews with religion,” of whom 93 percent said they are raising their children to have a Jewish identity.

Reform Judaism remains the largest American Jewish movement, at 35 percent. Conservative Jews are 18 percent, Orthodox 10 percent, and groups such as Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal make up 6 percent combined. Thirty percent of Jews do not identify with any denomination.

In a surprising finding, 34 percent said you could still be Jewish if you believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

When Jews leave the movements they grew up in, they tend to shift in the direction of less tradition, with Orthodox Jews becoming Conservative or Reform, and Conservative Jews becoming Reform. Most Reform Jews who leave become nonreligious. (Two percent of Jews are converts, the survey found.)

Jews from the former Soviet Union and their offspring make up about 10 percent of the American Jewish population.

While earlier generations of Orthodox Jews defected in large numbers, those in the younger generation are being retained. Several scholars attributed this to the Orthodox marrying young, having large families and sending their children to Jewish schools.

Steven M. Cohen, a sociologist of American Jewry at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, in New York, and a paid consultant on the poll, said the report foretold “a sharply declining non-Orthodox population in the second half of the 21st century, and a rising fraction of Jews who are Orthodox.”

The survey also portends “growing polarization” between religious and nonreligious Jews, said

Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, senior director of research and analysis at the Jewish Federations of North America.

The Jewish Federations has conducted major surveys of American Jews over many decades, but the last one in 2000 was mired in controversy over methodology. When the federations decided not to undertake another survey in 2010, Jane Eisner, editor in chief of [The Jewish Daily Forward](#), urged the Pew researchers to jump in.

It was a multimillion-dollar effort to cull 3,475 respondents from a pool of 70,000. They were interviewed in English and Russian, on landlines and cellphones from Feb. 20 to June 13, 2013. The margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus three percentage points.

Ms. Eisner found the results “devastating” because, she said in an interview, “I thought there would be more American Jews who cared about religion.”

“This should serve as a wake-up call for all of us as Jews,” she said, “to think about what kind of community we’re going to be able to sustain if we have so much assimilation.”

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: October 2, 2013

A chart with an article on Tuesday about a poll that shows a major shift in the identity of Jews in the United States misstated one age range of adults surveyed. It was those born from 1946 to 1964, not 1946 to 1954.

The New York Times

May 23, 2013

The Church and the State of Matrimony

By GUSTAV NIEBUHR

'TIL FAITH DO US PART

How Interfaith Marriage Is Transforming America

By Naomi Schaefer Riley
234 pp. Oxford University Press. \$24.95.

Americans have always been a religiously diverse people, even as the definition of what counts as diversity has changed. In 1774, members of the Continental Congress protested the idea of bringing in a chaplain to lead prayers: “We were so divided in religious sentiment,” one of them explained, “that we could not join in the same act of worship.”

Overwhelmingly Protestant, they nonetheless recognized the significant differences of theology and

practice that divided Anglicans from Presbyterians, Baptists from Quakers.

On this pluralistic foundation, immigrants and native-born innovators freely built. Transoceanic travel brought explosive growth to America’s Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian and Jewish minorities from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries. More recently, liberalized immigration laws have swelled the ranks of religious adherents who trace their theological roots to South and Southeast Asia, with Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs often sharing our college and corporate campuses.

In “’Til Faith Do Us Part,” Naomi Schaefer Riley continues the exploration of these trends, but she chooses a particular territory: beyond the challenge of interfaith proximity lies that of interfaith intimacy. The people we casually meet in class or the next cubicle may become our marriage partners, despite real religious differences. Such unions are on the increase, and Riley reminds us how touchy a subject interfaith marriage can be, among religious authorities as well as parents. Both groups fret about potential disappointments short- and long-term, including unforeseen disagreements between partners and, among the next generation, a waning of religious and ethnic identity — a kind of extinction.

Riley, a former editor at The Wall Street Journal, is neither a cheerleader nor a scold. Her book functions more as a flashing yellow light at an intersection: slow down, be alert — pay attention to what serious differences may mean to a close relationship. She brings a careful, nuanced and thoughtful approach to an often contentious subject. And she adds considerable value by including results of a poll she commissioned to survey 2,450 Americans on the subject of interfaith marriage. Thus we learn that same-faith couples report somewhat higher rates of “marital satisfaction” (8.4 on a scale of 10) than do their interfaith counterparts (7.9). But the responses by specific groups vary. For example, mainline Protestants seem happy in their interfaith unions, at 8.2 on Riley’s scale. So, too, do Roman Catholics, at 8.1. Evangelical Protestants (those who describe themselves as “born-again”) are further down the scale at 7.7. Still, given the various challenges marriage itself can pose, none of these numbers are bad.

Riley’s initial interest in the subject is personal. A Jew who married a lapsed Jehovah’s Witness, she reassured her future husband — on their first date — that her family would like him as long as he agreed their children should be raised as Jews. Years on, it’s a happy marriage. (Her sister, by the way, is married to an Orthodox rabbi.) But this is no memoir. Riley rigorously sticks to her role as inquiring journalist, crossing the nation to interview people in interfaith marriages, as well as clergymen and -women who think a great deal about these unions. She covers a broad waterfront, even including mention of niche products that cater to interfaith couples (for example, holiday cards with elves spinning dreidels).

Unsurprisingly, the couples she interviews prove most interesting for the stories they tell. Amy, an evangelical Christian married to Farid, a Muslim, have a relaxed, gently humorous way of relating to each other. David, a Jew married to a Catholic, finds his wife emphatic that their family be observant, transposing her childhood experience in church onto her new family’s Jewish practice. As her husband says, that has “forced me to be much more active and engaged and involved” as a Jew. But such success stories have their unhappy counterparts; Riley’s chapter on divorce makes for painful reading. One woman, a lapsed Christian who married a Jew and rediscovered a powerful faith after her father died, bluntly tells Riley that she would “recommend

against” marrying someone of a different faith. “Marriage is hard enough to not add the added dimension of such a fundamental disagreement,” she said. “Both faiths warn against marrying outside the faith for good reasons.”

Deeply interwoven with Riley’s narrative is an inevitable question: How do the children of these unions turn out? Will they have a religious identity or practice in a nation where pollsters tell us the population at large values religion?

This is actually an old question. The rifle barrels of the Revolution had barely cooled when a French immigrant, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, published “Letters From an American Farmer,” a book-length description of the emerging nation. He frankly marveled at the tolerance that allowed Catholics, Lutherans and Protestant sectaries to coexist peacefully. But he also worried about the consequences for religion: “It may happen that the daughter of the Catholic will marry the son of the seceder, and settle by themselves at a distance from their parents. What religious education will they give their children? A very imperfect one.”

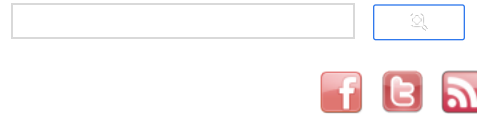
But maybe not. The durability of religious affiliations in America seems to defy the dire predictions. Religionists have fretted about spiritual decline since the second generation of the Puritans. Had Crèvecoeur been right, his co-national Alexis de Tocqueville wouldn’t have discovered a population steeped in religious faith and practice. Tocqueville arrived in 1831, ahead of the great waves of immigration, yet at a time when prophets enlivened the spiritual scene. He visited a colony of Shakers near Albany, followers of Mother Ann Lee. But he missed the biggest religious story of the time: the revelations of Joseph Smith that led to the founding of what would become the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Riley notes that Mormons — while distinctly friendly to the non-Mormon spouses of mixed-faith couples — are the least likely among major religious groups to form interfaith marriages. She attributes this in part to the high demands the church makes on young men and women to serve as missionaries in their late teens, a deeply formative religious experience.

But back to that question about the progeny of interfaith couples. Are Riley’s findings intriguing? Yes, certainly. But they do not seem to fit a clear model.

Take the case of Eileen, a Roman Catholic who had three children with her Jewish husband. Now adults, “one identifies as Catholic, one as Jewish, and one she describes as a ‘philosophy major.’ ”

And then there’s Judy, a Jew who also married a Roman Catholic — in this instance in 1964, with disapproval from both families. Their union lasted until her husband’s death. Their grown children include two who are religiously unaffiliated and a third who is a Roman Catholic priest. The cousins include Orthodox Jews. Perhaps a plot for a sitcom can be found here. But the issue goes well beyond entertainment. Is interfaith marriage good for America? To the extent that it dispels ignorance, punches holes in stereotypes and deflates bias, I would say it surely can be.

Gustav Niebuhr, who teaches at Syracuse University, is the author of “Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America.”



[HOME](#) [ARCHIVED ARTICLES](#) [EDITORIAL](#) [CWR BLOG](#) [VIDEO](#) [ABOUT US](#) [NEWS BRIEFS / RSS](#) [FREE eNEWSLETTER](#) [DONATE](#) [ADVERTISE](#)

The CWR Blog

Jews, Catholics, and the Assimilation Problem

It's time to stop hailing the charms of the melting pot and urging no-strings-attached assimilation into American secular culture

October 31, 2013 02:08 EST

By Russell Shaw



Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York greets Rabbi Moses A. Birnbaum of the Kew Gardens Hills, N.Y., Jewish Center before a luncheon for Jewish and Catholic leaders at the archbishop's residence in New York in January 2010. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

In the years since Vatican Council II, American Catholics and Jews have pursued a positive dialogue aimed, among other things, at exploring areas of common ground. Far from positive, but a crucial area of shared experience all the same, is

the damage done to the respective religious identities of Jews and Catholics by assimilation into a secular culture becoming ever more hostile to faith. (If you think it isn't, by the way, consider that some 20% of Americans now say they have no religious affiliation--up 5% in just a few years.)

On the Jewish side, the latest evidence of this process is the study of American Jews--the most comprehensive in a dozen years--released last month by the Pew Research Center. Not only has the percentage of adults who say they're Jews fallen by half since the 1950s to under 2% now, but among those who still self-identify as Jewish, more than one in five report having no religion.

This is possible, the Pew people explain, because Jews can be Jews simply "on the basis of ancestry, ethnicity or culture," without reference to religion. Now, it seems, a substantial number do just that.

This phenomenon has no close parallel among American Catholics. Or does it?

Of the 75 million Catholics in the United States, a little math shows that as many as 20 million aren't "practicing" members of the Church as measured by at least occasional attendance at Mass. (Another 20 million-plus Americans raised as Catholics no longer claim any affiliation with the Church, but we aren't talking about them.)

So what moves the 20 million non-practicing to self-identify as Catholic when asked about their religion? With them as with non-religious Jews, ancestry,

ethnicity and culture--plus force of habit and a touch of nostalgia--seem as good explanations as any. And, explanations aside, the problem for the non-practiced religion is pretty much the same in both cases.

How did Jews get like this? Inter-marriage has a lot to do with assimilation and loss of religious identity. The Pew researchers found that 79% of the married "no religion" Jews had non-Jewish spouses compared with only 36% of religious Jews. Similarly, on the Catholic side, it's long been recognized that Catholics who marry other Catholics are less likely to divorce than Catholics in religiously mixed marriages.

Assimilation is central to what's happening to both religious groups. The *New York Times* begins its account of the Pew study by speaking of the "rapid assimilation" sweeping through all sectors of American Judaism with the notable exception of the Orthodox. Near the end comes this quote from Jane Eisner,

editor of *The Jewish Daily Forward*, who is said to have urged Pew to undertake the new research: "This should serve as a wake-up call for all of us as Jews to think about what kind of community we're going to be able to sustain if we have so much assimilation."

For Catholics, concern about the impact of cultural assimilation on religious identity is hardly a brand new thought. Analysis of the assimilation process and its unintended consequences supplies the conceptual background of my recent book *American Church*, as it does for much else of the serious writing about U.S. Catholicism over the years.

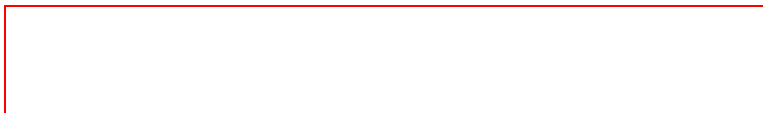
The time, in short, is long past for hailing the charms of the melting pot and urging no-strings-attached assimilation into American secular culture. Catholics, Jews, and others who value their religious traditions have all the wake-up calls they need. Now they had better wake up.

Like 2 Tweet 6
18

About the Author

Russell Shaw

Russell Shaw was secretary for public affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference from 1969 to 1987. He is the author of 20 books, including *Nothing to Hide* and the highly acclaimed *American Church: The Remarkable Rise, Meteoric Fall, and Uncertain Future of Catholicism in America*.



FIRST THINGS

U.S. CATHOLICS: OVERLY ASSIMILATED?

by George Weigel

With his new book, *American Church: The Remarkable Rise, Meteoric Fall, and Uncertain Future of Catholicism in America*, mild-mannered Russell Shaw has become the bull in the china shop of U.S. Catholic history, knocking heroes off pedestals and overturning conventional story-lines”all in aid of trying to understand why the Church in America is in a precarious position today vis- -vis the ambient public culture and the government.

Shaw’s answer: We’re in deep trouble because of a longstanding U.S. Catholic determination to be more American than thou”to disprove ancient charges of Catholicism’s incompatibility with American democracy by assimilating so dramatically that there’s no discernible difference between Catholics (and their attitudes toward public policy) and an increasingly secularized, mainstream public opinion.

Shaw mounts an impressive case that Catholic Lite in these United States has indeed taken its cues from the wider culture, and as that culture has become ever more individualistic and hedonistic, the historic U.S. Catholic passion for assimilation and acceptance has backfired. Moreover, Shaw’s call to build a culture-reforming Catholic counterculture is not dissimilar to the argument I make about the Church and public life in *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church*.

But on a second reading of Shaw’s book, I began to wonder whether he’s gotten the question of the moment quite right.

To read the history of the Catholic Church in the United States as a centuries-long struggle for assimilation and acceptance certainly sheds light on one dynamic in the development of the Church in America. Yet too

close a focus on the question, “Is it possible to be a good Catholic and a good American?” is to argue the question of Catholicism and America on the other guy’s turf. Once, the “other guy” challenging Catholics’ patriotic credentials was militant Protestantism; now, the other guy is militant secularism. To play on the other guy’s turf, however, is to concede at the outset that the other guy sets the terms of debate: “*We* (militant Protestants/militant secularists) know what it means to be a good American; *you* (Catholics) have to prove yourselves to us.”

That’s not the game, however. It wasn’t really the game from 1776 through the 1960 presidential campaign”when militant Protestantism was the aggressor”and it isn’t the game today. The real game involves different, deeper questions: “Who best understands the nature of the American experiment in ordered liberty, and who can best give a persuasive defense of the first liberty, which is religious freedom?”

The nineteenth-century U.S. bishops and intellectuals whose enthusiasm for American democracy Russell Shaw now views skeptically (and, yes, they did go over the top on occasion) did get one crucial point right: the American founders “built better than they knew,” i.e., the founders designed a democratic republic for which they couldn’t provide a durable moral and philosophical defense. But the long-despised (and now despised-again) Catholics could: Catholics could (and can) give a robust, compelling account of American democracy and its commitments to ordered liberty.

Mid“twentieth-century Catholic scholars like historian Theodore Maynard and theologian John Courtney Murray picked up this theme and made it central to their reading of U.S. Catholic history. Murray presciently warned that, if Catholicism didn’t fill the cultural vacuum being created by a dying mainline Protestantism, the “noble, many-storied mansion of democracy [may] be dismantled, leveled to the dimensions of a flat majoritarianism, which is no mansion but a barn, perhaps even a tool shed in which the weapons of tyranny may be forged.”

That is the argument the U.S. bishops have mounted in their challenge to the Obama administration’s demolition of civil society through the HHS mandate on contraceptives and abortifacients: What is the nature of American democracy and the fundamental freedoms government is created to protect? Who are the true patriots: the men and women who can give an account of freedom’s moral character, an account capable of sustaining a genuine democracy against a rising dictatorship of relativism, “in which the weapons

of tyranny may be forged”?

The argument today isn’t about assimilation. The argument today is about who “gets” America.

George Weigel is Distinguished Senior Fellow of Washington’s Ethics and Public Policy Center. His previous “On the Square” articles can be [found here](#).

Become a fan of FIRST THINGS on [Facebook](#), subscribe to FIRST THINGS via [RSS](#), and follow FIRST THINGS on [Twitter](#).

The Washington Post

Survey: U.S. Muslims Assimilated, Opposed to Extremism

By Alan Cooperman
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, May 23, 2007

Unlike Muslim minorities in many European countries, U.S. Muslims are highly assimilated, close to parity with other Americans in income and overwhelmingly opposed to Islamic extremism, according to the first major, nationwide random survey of Muslims.

The survey by the Pew Research Center found that 78 percent of U.S. Muslims said the use of suicide bombings against civilian targets to defend Islam is never justified. But 5 percent said it is justified "rarely," 7 percent said "sometimes," and 1 percent said "often"; the remaining 9 percent said they did not know or declined to answer.

By comparison, Muslims in France, Spain and Britain were almost twice as likely to say suicide bombing is sometimes or often justified, and public acceptance of the tactic is even higher in some countries with large Muslim populations, such as Nigeria, Jordan and Egypt.

Titled "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," the Pew report draws a picture of a diverse population of about 2.35 million U.S. Muslims, of which two-thirds of the adults were born abroad, and which has a generally positive view of the larger society.

Most call their communities good or excellent places to live, and most report that a large portion of their closest friends are non-Muslims. They are slightly more satisfied than the general public is with the state of the nation.

On balance, they believe that Muslims coming to the United States should adopt American customs, rather than trying to remain distinct. And they are even more inclined than other Americans to say that people who want to get ahead can make it if they work hard; 71 percent of U.S. Muslims agreed with that statement, compared with 64 percent of the general public.

"What emerges is the great success of the Muslim American population in its socioeconomic assimilation," said Amaney Jamal, an assistant professor of politics at Princeton University who was a senior adviser on the poll. "Given that for the past few years they've been dealing with the backlash from 9/11, these numbers are extremely impressive."

A majority say their lives have become more difficult since Sept. 11, 2001, and most think the government has singled out Muslims for monitoring. About one in four said they do not think that "groups of Arabs" were responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Though socially conservative, Muslims lean toward the Democratic Party, six to one.

Farid Senzai, another Muslim adviser on the poll, said the findings are in sharp contrast to the "ghettoization" of Muslim minorities in parts of Western Europe, where Muslim immigrants are markedly less well off than the general population, frustrated with economic opportunities and socially isolated.

Just less than half of Muslim Americans have attended or graduated from college, close to the national figure of 54 percent, and the income distribution among Muslim families closely matches the national norm.

Still, the poll found "pockets of sympathy for extremism" particularly among African Americans and young Muslims, said Andrew Kohut, head of the Pew Research Center.

Native-born African American Muslims, who represent about 20 percent of the total Muslim population, are its most disillusioned segment, the report shows. They are more skeptical than foreign-born Muslims of the idea that hard work pays off. About 13 percent are satisfied with the way things are going, compared with 29 percent of other native-born Muslims and 45 percent of Muslim immigrants.

One of the poll's most striking findings, Kohut said, is that African American Muslims are considerably more likely than immigrant Muslims to express support for al-Qaeda.

Nine percent of African American Muslims expressed a favorable attitude toward Osama bin Laden's terrorist organization, while 36 percent held a very unfavorable view. Among foreign-born Muslims, 3 percent had a favorable view of al-Qaeda while 63 percent chose "very unfavorable."

Jamal, the Princeton professor, said the data seem to indicate that African American Muslims are sympathetic to the goals but not the means of al-Qaeda, because 85 percent said suicide bombing is rarely or never justified. She speculated that they may see al-Qaeda "not just as the force behind terrorist attacks . . . but as resistance to a status quo that is seen to treat them unfairly."

The poll found that U.S. Muslims overwhelmingly oppose the war in Iraq, while the general population is closely split on that question. Muslims also oppose the war in Afghanistan, 48 percent to 35 percent. The reverse view prevails in the general populace, which supports the Afghan war by nearly two to one.

Muslims under age 30 are more religious than their elders, as well as more inclined to support suicide bombing and more likely to identify themselves as Muslims first, then Americans, the poll found.

Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, said the Washington-based nonprofit organization spent \$1 million on the poll. It surveyed 1,050 Muslim adults in four languages -- English, Arabic, Urdu and Farsi -- and paid them \$50 each for their time.

To generate the sample, Pew used randomly dialed telephone numbers to reach more than 57,000 households. In addition, it gleaned likely Muslim names from a commercial database and re-contacted some English-speaking Muslim households that had been identified in other surveys since 2000. The overall margin of sampling error was plus or minus five percentage points.

One finding likely to generate controversy is Pew's estimate of 2.35 million Muslims in the United States, including 1.5 million adults. Because the U.S. Census does not ask

Advertisement



about religious identity, there has been no previous, widely accepted estimate of the Muslim population. Smaller, less random surveys have come up with lower numbers, while some Muslim groups have contended, based on loose methodology, that there are 7 million Muslims or more.

Polling director Jon Cohen and polling analyst Jennifer Agiesta contributed to this report.

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

© 2007 The Washington Post Company



- SUBSCRIBE
- RENEW
- GIVE A GIFT
- DIGITAL EDITION

[Print](#) | [Close](#)

The Major Roadblock to Muslim Assimilation in Europe

By Shadi Hamid

For religious Muslims, the thought of keeping faith out of public view is an odd, even inconceivable, concept



Two Muslim women were fined earlier this year in France for wearing the niqab (full-body covering) in public / Reuters

I was having dinner the other day with some European friends who are reasonable center-left types.

London riots

were in full swing. Anders Breivik had killed more than 80 of his countrymen in an apparent bid to halt the "Islamization" of Europe. Greece's economy had collapsed. The consensus among my friends was that the next five to 10 years could turn out "very scary" for Europe.

Muslims are only one part -- and a small part -- of these problems. But, unfortunately, economic collapse tends to fuel racism and intolerance, which is exactly what is happening now. The slow progress made on Muslim integration is likely to unravel as more Europeans find refuge in populism in general and far-right, radical parties in particular.

While dutifully disavowing such groups, my leftish friends, like so many Europeans, asked why

European Muslims weren't doing more to assimilate and respect the culture of their new countries. And this brings us to the issue at hand: there is a clash of values, one which will make it considerably harder to find a path of compromise between Muslims and the rest of Europe.

Secularism, as its understood and practiced in Europe, is not value-neutral. It asks conservative Muslims to be something that they're likely not. "Secularism," the thinking goes, allows all groups, including Muslims, to practice their religion as they see fit. This assumes that the practice of religion is fundamentally a personal, private act detached from public, political life. It is here that Islam (how it is understood, if not necessarily practiced by most Muslims) and Europe's traditional identity and culture find themselves at odds.

It is this expectation or, rather, hope -- that Islam will somehow cease to be what it is -- that colors so many debates not just in Europe but also in a rapidly changing Middle East.

There is, in fact, something uniquely "uncompromising" about Islam, at least compared to other faiths. This is not a value judgment but rather a descriptive statement about what Islam is today (rather than what it could or should be). Many Muslims take pride in this very fact. It is this unwillingness to compromise in the face of secularizing pressures, they would say, that makes Islam both vibrant and distinctive. Indeed, Islam has proven remarkably resistant to the persistent attempts to relegate it to the private sphere.

The fact that someone like Swiss scholar Tariq Ramadan and tens of thousands his fellow "Euro-Islam" followers are seen in Europe as too conservative is illustrative of the problem. Ramadan's proposed moratorium on the hadd punishments (for example cutting off the hands of thieves and stoning adulterers) was seen as beyond the pale in secular France. In a memorable [debate](#) on French television, Nicholas Sarkozy, then the interior minister, [attacked Ramadan](#) for refusing to unequivocally condemn the stoning of women.

In a place like Egypt, however, such a moratorium would likely provoke controversy for the opposite reason -- for being too "liberal." Whether we like it or not, Ramadan's version of Islam, by the standards of mainstream Islamic thought, is actually quite "progressive," which is one reason it has, so far, failed to catch on in the Arab world. Consider the findings of a December 2010 [Pew poll](#). In Egypt, 82 percent of respondents supported the stoning of adulterers while 77 percent said they favored cutting off the hands of thieves.

As I note in my recent [Foreign Affairs article](#), "The Rise of the Islamists," many Western observers made the mistake of thinking that this year's Arab revolutions were "secular." There was the naïve view -- one almost entirely divorced from the Egyptian reality -- that once the yoke of dictatorship was removed, Egyptians, and Arabs more generally, would turn out to be fluffy pro-American liberals. Well, they aren't and won't be anytime soon.

From an American perspective, the rapid rise of [Egypt's Salafis](#) -- conservative Islamists who advocate

a strict, uncompromising view of Islamic law -- is indeed troubling. That said, it is undemocratic, as well as illiberal, to ask millions of Salafis to stop being Salafis once they enter the public sphere, as some Egyptian liberals seem to be demanding. Similarly, it is undemocratic and illiberal to ask European Muslims to be as religious as they want at home but to keep their Islam out of public view. For many, if not most religious Muslims, such a distinction is as odd as it is inconceivable. Yet asking Muslims to respect such distinctions is also entirely understandable in the troubled, bloody context of European history. In the pre-Enlightenment period, mixing religion with politics brought Europe close to the brink of destruction, with the Thirty Years' War being only the most obvious example. The French Revolution was, in part, about correcting this "imbalance." For Europe to prosper, religion would have to be controlled and constrained by the state. And so French *laïcité* was born. *Laïcité*, in turn, became central to France's social fabric and to French national identity. To be French is, in some sense, to believe in this constructed secular ideal.

The French national ideal, then, and the beliefs of a large number of French Muslims are in tension, if not contradiction. French Muslims much more strongly identify with their religion than the French population at large. According to a [2009 Gallup poll](#), 52 percent of French Muslims either "very strongly" or "extremely strongly" identify with their religion -- compared to only 23 percent of the French public. The numbers for Britain are even starker -- 75 percent versus 23 percent. Other poll results underline this clash in values. Remarkably, zero percent -- yes, zero percent -- of British Muslims [believe](#) homosexuality is morally acceptable. Inevitably, such views, informed by religion, are not simply a matter of private concern. They have an effect on public policy (just as the anti-gay attitudes of conservative Christians shape Republican policy in America).

It doesn't have to be this way, but that's the way it is now. In times of economic distress -- and with the euro zone inching toward collapse -- Europeans may increasingly take refuge in anti-Muslim scapegoating. This, in turn, will hurt the already dim job prospects of the European Muslim underclass. For their part, European Muslims who face heightened discrimination may very well find refuge in an increasingly rigid construction of their Muslim identity. Unemployment, immigration fears, the ascendance of the far right -- along with a very real clash of religious and cultural values -- make for a potent combination.

If there was a strong, confident left in Europe, then perhaps this dangerous mix could be effectively fought and opposed. For now, though, we may just have to hope - and pray - that cooler heads prevail.

This article available online at:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/08/the-major-roadblock-to-muslim-assimilation-in-europe/243769/>



The Washington Post

America's Muslims Aren't as Assimilated as You Think

By Geneive Abdo
Sunday, August 27, 2006

If only the Muslims in Europe -- with their hearts focused on the Islamic world and their carry-on liquids poised for destruction in the West -- could behave like the well-educated, secular and Americanizing Muslims in the United States, no one would have to worry.

So runs the comforting media narrative that has developed around the approximately 6 million Muslims in the United States, who are often portrayed as well-assimilated and willing to leave their religion and culture behind in pursuit of American values and lifestyle. But over the past two years, I have traveled the country, visiting mosques, interviewing Muslim leaders and speaking to Muslim youths in universities and Islamic centers from New York to Michigan to California -- and I have encountered a different truth. I found few signs of London-style radicalism among Muslims in the United States. At the same time, the real story of American Muslims is one of accelerating alienation from the mainstream of U.S. life, with Muslims in this country choosing their Islamic identity over their American one.

A new generation of American Muslims -- living in the shadow of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks -- is becoming more religious. They are more likely to take comfort in their own communities, and less likely to embrace the nation's fabled melting pot of shared values and common culture.

Part of this is linked to the resurgence of Islam over the past several decades, a growth as visible in Western Europe and the United States as it is in Egypt and Morocco. But the Sept. 11 attacks also had the dual effect of making American Muslims feel isolated in their adopted country, while pushing them to rediscover their faith.

From schools to language to religion, American Muslims are becoming a people apart. Young, first-generation American Muslim women -- whose parents were born in Egypt, Pakistan and other Islamic countries -- are wearing head scarves even if their mothers had left them behind; increasing numbers of young Muslims are attending Islamic schools and lectures; Muslim student associations in high schools and at colleges are proliferating; and the role of the mosque has evolved from strictly a place of worship to a center for socializing and for learning Arabic and Urdu as well as the Koran.

The men and women I spoke to -- all mosque-goers, most born in the United States to immigrants -- include students, activists, imams and everyday working Muslims. Almost without exception, they recall feeling

Advertisement

The
RealReal



Luxury
Consignment
Up to 90% off

[SHOP NOW >](#)

under siege after Sept. 11, with FBI agents raiding their mosques and homes, neighbors eyeing them suspiciously and television programs portraying Muslims as the new enemies of the West.

Such feelings led them, they say, to adopt Islamic symbols -- the *hijab*, or head covering, for women and the *kufi*, or cap, for men -- as a defense mechanism. Many, such as Rehan, whom I met at a *madrassa* (religious school) in California with her husband, Ramy, also felt compelled to deepen their faith.

"After I covered, I changed," Rehan told me. "I felt I wanted to give people a good impression of Islam. I wanted people to know how happy I am to be Muslim." But not everyone understood, she said, recalling an incident in a supermarket in 2003: "The man next to me in the vegetable section said, 'You'd be much more beautiful without that thing on your head. It's demeaning to women.' " But to her the head scarf symbolized piety, not oppression.

A group of young college-educated women at the Dix mosque in Dearborn, Mich., described the challenges many Muslims face as they carve out their identity in the United States. I spoke with them in the winter of 2004, after they had been to the mosque one Sunday for a *halaqa* (a study circle) focused on integrating faith and daily life. They were in their twenties: Hayat, a psychologist; Ismahan, a computer scientist; and Fatma, a third-grade teacher.

Hayat said veiling was easier for her than it had been for her sister,

10 years her senior, because Hayat had more Muslim peers when she reached high school and felt far less pressure to conform to American ways. When she went on to the University of Michigan, she was surrounded for the first time by young Muslims who dared to show pride in their religion in a non-Muslim setting.

Ismahan recalled similar experiences. In elementary school, she had tried to fit in. As an adult, though, "I know I don't have to fit in," she said. "I don't think Muslims have to assimilate. We are not treated like Americans. At work, I get up from my desk and go to pray. I thought I would face opposition from my boss. Even before I realized he didn't mind, I thought, 'I have a right to be a Muslim, and I don't have to assimilate.' "

Fatma described the mosque as central to her future: "What made me sane during years of public high school," she said, "was coming to the halaqa every Sunday." Fatma was also quick to distinguish herself from other young Muslim women who embrace American mores. "Some Muslims do anything to fit in. They drink. They date. My biggest fear is that I might assimilate to the American lifestyle so much that my modesty goes out the window."

Imam Zaid Shakir -- who teaches at San Francisco's Zaytuna Institute, America's only true *madrassa* -- refers to such young Muslims as the "rejectionist generation." They are rejectionist, he says, because they turn their backs not only on absolutist religious interpretations, but also on America's secular ways. Many of these young American Muslims look to Shakir (and to celebrated Zaytuna founder Hamza Yusuf) for guidance on how to live pious lives in the United States.

I spent several days at one of the institute's "mobile madrassas," this one in San Jose, and watched hundreds of young Muslim professionals sit on cushioned folding chairs and listen intently as Yusuf delivered his lecture. "Everywhere I go, I see Muslims," he told them. "Go to the gas station and the airport. Muslims are present in the United States, and that was not true 20 years ago. There are more Muslims living outside the Dar al-Islam [Islamic countries, or literally the House of Islam] than ever. So we have to be strategic in our

thinking, because people who are our enemies are strategic in their thinking."

The "enemies" Yusuf referred to that day were not non-Muslims, but rather those who use Islam as a rationale for violence. For the students at this madrassa and for many Muslims I interviewed, their strategy focuses on public displays of their faith.

Being ambassadors of Islam is daring behavior when you consider that American Muslims live in a country where so many people are ignorant of -- if not hostile to -- their faith. In a Gallup poll this year, when U.S. respondents were asked what they admire about the Muslim world, the most common response was "nothing" (33 percent); the second most common was "I don't know" (22 percent).

Despite contemporary public opinion -- or perhaps because of it -- Muslim Americans consider Islam their defining characteristic, beyond any national identity. In this way, their experience in the United States resembles that of their co-religionists in Europe, where mosques are also growing, Islamic schools are being built, and practicing the faith is the center of life, particularly for the young generation. In Europe and the United States, young Muslims are unifying around popular imams they believe understand the challenges they face in Western societies; these leaders include Yusuf in the United States and Amer Khaled, an Egyptian-born imam who lives in Britain. Thousands of young Muslims attend their lectures.

In my years of interviews, I found few indications of homegrown militancy among American Muslims. Indeed, thus far, they have proved they can compete economically with other Americans. Although the unemployment rate for Muslims in Britain is far higher than for most other groups, the average annual income of a Muslim household surpasses that of average American households. Yet, outside the workplace, Muslims retreat into the comfort zone of their mosques and Islamic schools.

It is too soon to say where the growing alienation of American Muslims will lead, but it seems clear that the factors contributing to it will endure. U.S. foreign policy persists in dividing Muslim and Western societies, making it harder still for Americans to realize that there is a difference between their Muslim neighbor and the plotter in London or the kidnapper in Baghdad.

geneive.abdo@geneiveabdo.com

Geneive Abdo is the liaison for the Alliance of Civilizations at the United Nations and author of "Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America After 9/11" (Oxford).

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

© 2006 The Washington Post Company



March 11, 2014

HUFF POST RELIGION

When Will Muslim Americans Assimilate?

Posted: 05/27/11 02:07 PM ET

The assimilation of my wife and me into American culture started in New Jersey in 1996. That is where we, both doctors, settled after moving from Pakistan.

As I started my medical residency at Monmouth Medical Center, she sacrificed her career for our newborn daughter and became a full-time homemaker. Our inability to afford a car left us stranded on weekends.

And even though a NJ Transit train station was right across from our home, round trips to Manhattan were expensive. This always left us one available and affordable excursion: a walk to the beach.

As practicing Muslims, you could recognize us from a mile away on the wooden boardwalk. My wife always chose to wear an outer garment with an Islamic head cover (burqa) and I kept a well-trimmed beard.

One thing we remember the most from those chilly evenings on the beach is the warmth of our interactions with the locals. Comments like "What a great day" and an occasional but curious "Where are you from?" were routine.

One decade and three children later, our nostalgia kicked in, and last week we planned a trip back to Long Branch. Same burqa. Same beard.

"See what a beautiful new middle school they built?" my wife said, trying (unsuccessfully) to distract our daughter from her Harry Potter book. And a few minutes later, when we reached the beach, it struck. While crossing the boardwalk, a woman on a bike, dressed in shorts and a tank top, scornfully yelled at my wife, "Assimilate!"

The rest of the day went by with us wondering, "Is it possible that we were more assimilated in American culture 15 years ago than now?"

So I went to my one-stop shop, Google, to understand the science of assimilation. Social scientists have primarily relied on four markers to measure cultural assimilation: socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, language attainment and intermarriages.

Data from Pew 2007 polls claims that Muslim-Americans share similar socioeconomic characteristics with the general U.S. population: one-fourth have a bachelor's degree or higher, one-fourth live in households with incomes of \$75,000 per year or more and the majority are fluent in English.

With the exception of Dearborn, Mich., spatial concentration is not a prominent phenomenon among Muslim-Americans. And even though Islamic law prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims, 62 percent of Muslim-Americans say it's "OK" to marry non-Muslims.

President Barack Obama said in his 2009 Cairo speech, "American Muslims have enriched the United States. They have fought in our wars, served in government, stood for civil rights, started businesses, taught at our universities, excelled in our sports arenas, won Nobel Prizes, built our tallest building and lit the Olympic torch."

Trust me. Showing more skin (whether by removing burqas or shaving beards) would not have enriched our country. In reality, such an expectation to "assimilate" is antithetical to the freedoms that attract millions of talented immigrants to this great country of ours in the first place.

Just a day later, as we stopped at a rest area along the New Jersey Turnpike on our ride back home, a Caucasian woman approached my wife. With the same old New Jersey warmth, she said, "*kaifa ha luk*," an Arabic phrase meaning, "How are you?"

When my wife expressed in fluent English that she could not speak Arabic, her new acquaintance shared that she had lived in the United Arab Emirates and had Muslim friends.

Remembering the new middle school building, we are convinced the state of New Jersey is spending its taxpayer dollars in the right place: education.

For education may reveal that assimilation of most "Muslimericans" has already occurred.

A version of this article previously appeared in Asbury Park Press.

Faheem Younus is an adjunct faculty member for religion/history at the Community Colleges of Baltimore County and a clinical associate professor at the University of Maryland. He can be reached [here](#).