the revealer
a review of religion & media

In The News: Talal Asad, Taylor Swift, Turbans, and more!

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A round-up of recent religion and media stories in the news.

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Corita Kent

Welcome to this month's round-up of religion and media news. Can't get enough links? Good news! Starting next month, we'll be running these round-ups weekly. All links, all the time, starting May 2015.

First up, Religious Freedom:

So, probably the biggest religion news story this last month was controversy over religious freedom legislation in Indiana.

If you need a summary/ refresher, check out *The Atlantic's,* "**What Makes Indiana's Religious-Freedom Law Different?**" by **Garrett Epps**.

Of all the state "religious freedom" laws I have read, this new statute hints most strongly that it is there to be used as a means of excluding gays and same-sex couples from accessing employment, housing, and public accommodations on the same terms as other people. True, there is no actual language that says, All businesses wishing to discriminate in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation, please check this "religious objection" box. But, as Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk."

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Also from *The Atlantic*, "**Gays, Religious Traditionalists, and the Feeling of Being Under Siege**" by **Conor Friedersdorff.**

What everyone ought to be able to understand is why some members of both groups feel under siege—and why members of both groups understandably don't always empathize with one another. It is due to the fact that there is no such thing as a fully shared American culture: Life here is an amalgam of lots of subcultures that only partially overlap. People pay disproportionate attention to what affects them personally.

Also, Nascar weighed in.

For further elaboration, on religious freedom and the problem of pluralism there's "**Wiccan Prayer in Iowa House Highlights Religious Freedom Problem**" by **Joseph Laycock** for *Religion Dispatches.*

At stake in the response to Maynard's prayer is a theoretical problem about what religious pluralism is and ought to be. How can you include faiths that do not value inclusion? And if you exclude these faiths, how can you claim to be inclusive? This is the paradox of pluralism.

Finally, lest you think that the United States is the only country struggling with these issues, note, please, **the plight of this British Pastafarian**:



Ian Harris, 51, is a member of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Photo: Brighton Argus/Solent News & Photo Agency

Never not in the headlines these days, here's this month's installment of articles about Islam we think are worth reading:

Talal Asad, perennial intellectual crush of this publication, has bestowed us with "**Thinking About Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today**" by way of *Critical Inquiry.*

I have already argued against the claim that religious disagreements are typically inconclusive and therefore should be excluded from the rational debate that democracy requires. I might add that theological disagreements are themselves resolved—which is one way that religious traditions evolve. It is true that such resolutions presuppose certain assumptions that others may not share, but that is a problem common to all situations where opponents are unable to reconcile their fundamental values. This impasse doesn't in itself inevitably lead to violence, and not all eruptions of violence draw on "religious" values. However, my aim in this essay is not to "defend religion"; it is to explore a problem that remains generally obscured in the secular hostility to what is assumed to be "religion." I argue that the problem with "political religion" is not religion but the politics that derives from the sovereign state.

Can't get enough Asad, he's spoken out recently about his support for the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions movement. You can read his comments on the subject **here**.


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In case it seemed like maybe we were learning the lessons of Edward Said and his Asadian heirs, **J.S. Marcus** of *The Wall Street Journal* reports that, "**Orientalist Art Makes a Surprising Comeback**."

In contrast to many Western curators and scholars, Shafik Gabr, an Egyptian businessman and Orientalist collector, does not view the works in his collection as patronizing or fantastical. Mr. Gabr, the chairman and managing director of Cairo-based holding company Artoc Group, says he thinks of artists like Deutsch and Gérôme as chroniclers of his culture before the rise of mass media.

More optimistically, **Mike Hale** writes for *The New York Times* that, "**Aasif Mandvi and 'Halal in the Family' Test the Sitcom Family Formula**."

This all-American clan is the Qu'osbys (pronounced like Cosby with a slight hitch) — Aasif, Fatima, Whitney and Bobby — and it's that rarest of things in popular entertainment, a sympathetic Muslim family at the center of its own show. They're the heroes of "Halal in the Family," a web series that went live last week at Funny or Die. A broad parody of the classic family sitcom, it's the brainchild of the actor and writer Aasif Mandvi and his writing partner from "The Daily Show," Miles Kahn.

While *The Huffington Post* has a collection of animated videos about what it's like to be "**Muslim in America**."

Writing on an entirely different problem of representation**, Hussein Rashid** helpfully explains "**Images of Muhammed**" for *Sacred Matters.*

While Muslims do not use images in worship, they do live in a visual world and engage that sense in worship.

And **Anver Emon** does a thorough and thoughtful job of asking and explaining, "**Is ISIS Islamic? Why it matters for the study of Islam**" in *The Immanent Frame*.

Rather than asking whether ISIS is Islamic or not, the better question is why it matters so much and to whom. To ask this question, though, requires that "we" (i.e. producers of knowledge on Islam) interrogate our understandings of religion, politics, law, reason, and the state, and the consequences that follow when we encounter others whose different understandings appear to be the inverse of our own.

While we're at it, please, "**Forget what you're hearing. The civil war in Yemen is not a sectarian conflict**" by **Ishaan Tharoor** for *The Washington Post.*

The conflict on the ground in Yemen is very much a political one, fueled, as most conflicts are, by competing battles over turf, influence and power.

Lastly, a couple of good lists: *Patheos*' "**Top Muslim Twitterati**" and the *Goat Milk Blog*'s "**My Top 30 Dos and Don'ts for Covering Muslims and Islam in the Media**."

"What's new in Christianity?" you ask…

Michelle Lady reports for WLOX13 that "**Judge offers essay option for minors caught alcohol**"

"A 1,000 word essay on The Book of Revelations and also the effects from drinking alcohol," Fountain said. "I don't force them to do that. It's their choice. That's just my recommendation. They can write it on anything they want to."

Candace Chellow-Hodge interviews **Rachel Held Evans** about her new book *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church* for *Religion Dispatches* in, "**LGBT People Have a Lot to Teach Christians**."

Especially as religion in America changes and the demographics are changing and people aren't really going t

o church anymore, I think it's more important than ever to get down to what a faith community is supposed to be.

Meanwhile, at *Vice*, **Kelsey Lawrence** interviews **DiShan Washington** in "**The Ex-Wife of a Southern Pastor is Writing Bold Erotica for Christians**."

As far as the Christian erotica part of it is concerned, my books definitely resonate with women—church women particularly—because there's no one standing up being the voice of sexually oppressed women in the church. Nobody talks about it.

Yolande Knell of the *BBC* explains "**Why St. George is a Palestinian Hero**."

With its associations of courage, gallantry and honour, the Christian name, George, remains one of the most common in the Palestinian Territories.



PBS' Religion and Ethics News Weekly reports on "**Church Mass Mobs**."

Using social media to organize participants, the goal of a Mass mob is to fill empty pews and collection plates, inspire parishioners to return to church, and support significant sacred sites and houses of worship that have helped define their cities.

Israel is very hot with the reality TV set these days. Cases in point: "**Jill Duggar Named Her Baby Israel**" and "**Kim Kardashian and Kanya West have toddler baptized in Jerusalem**."

And the digital is hot with religionists. We highly recommend reading *The Immanent Frame*'s series on "**Religion and Digital Culture**" which includes excellent work by the likes of journalist **Nathan Schneider,** professors **Kathryn Lofton, Kathryn Reklis,** and tech-chaplain **Shamika Goddard.**

Boy did we love looking through these photographs of "**Corita Kent, Warhol's Kindred Spirit in the Convent**."


Corita Kent at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles, 1964.

Corita Kent at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles, 1964.

Finally, two takes on Christianity and coming out.

Braileen Hopper's "**Praying in the Closet**" for *The New Inquiry*,

But queer straight Christianity is not always camp or callous or open and affirming. It can be subtly, subliminally queer as well; coolly and quietly queer at heart. At least this is the case with the pop phenomenon Are You Running With Me, Jesus?, a 1965 book of prayers that sold over a million copies to people across the Christian spectrum and beyond, got rave reviews from church publications and the New York Times, and was written by an Episcopal priest who didn't come out of the closet till over a decade after its publication.

And **Ellen Muehlberger**'s review of **Douglas Boin**'s, *Coming Out Chrsitian in the Roman World* for *Marginalia, '***The Limits of Metaphor**."

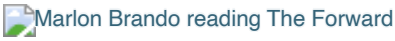
The limits of the coming out metaphor become even more clear when we think beyond the religious expression of a single person and begin to think of the rise

of Christian tradition over time. Despite the intimate view of Constantine's subjectivity that it seems to give us, the metaphor of coming out does not explain how the presence of closeted, moderate Christians in the first three centuries motivated Constantine to grant them the status of a legitimate religion. Did such Christians do their work behind the scenes, organizing deftly to change the emperor's mind? Was Constantine impressed by their quiet, almost Roman, decorum? And what can account for the next hundred years after Constantine, in which emperors and other Christians really do convert their neighbors when they can and advocate the use of compulsion to do so?

As for this month in Judaism:

First up, "**The Jewish Daily Forward Is Neither Jewish, Nor Daily (But Still Forward). Discuss!**" by **Brook Wilensky-Lanford** for *Religion Dispatches.*

The renaming seems to me a recognition not only of journalistic realities but of cultural ones. Here my best example is also an item of full disclosure: The Forward published my personal essay about how not-Jewish I am, despite my Jewish heritage, and what other Jewish publication would do that? I am a prime example of the audience that the Forward relaunch is designed to appeal to, that is, cultural Jews, or half-Jews, or converted Jews, those collectively known as "Jew-ish" or, as I call myself in the story, "a Jewish none." I'm part of that statistical group discovered by the 2013 Pew Center study that rocked the Jewish community, the one that reported that one in five of those respondents identifying as Jewish, also now describe themselves as having "no religion."



Marlon Brando reading The Forward

And from *The Forward,* **Asaf Shalev** on "**When Israel's Sephardic Black Panthers Used Passover To Decry Jewish 'Racism**.'"

Inspired by secular leftist ideology, the Black Panthers left God out of their quest for redress. Instead, this Haggadah confronts the oppression of Sephardim by inflicting 10 plagues of protests, hunger strikes, and solidarity rallies upon the government, until it is compelled to change policies that favor Ashkenazi Jews. Redemption is the moment when the socioeconomic gap between the two communities is finally closed.

The fight for fair treatment of non-Ashkanizim isn't over, though. *+972* has a helpful guide on "**Mizrahi struggle 101: A beginner's guide for Ashkenazim**." For example:

Remember: We are not offended, we are struggling. *One of the most disturbing aspects of these discussions is the tendency that many Ashkenazim have to talk about the Mizrahi discourse in terms of feelings and insults. "The Mizrahim are always offended." Actually, we aren't offended — we are struggling.*

Our emotional world is no one's business, and if we want to deal with our emotions, we have our own safe spaces to do so. But in the public realm, our struggle is a political one. We struggle for recognition of our culture and history, we struggle against our oppression, againstour ridiculing, against exploitative and unfair resource distribution, against the fact that our children are sent to vocational schools, against our erasure. We are not interested in your psychological treatment. We are interested in our piece of the cake.

On a brighter note, "**California Jewish school Marks 8th grader's gender transition**" reports **Renee Ghert-Zand** for *The Times of Israel*.

Lastly, "**What *Felix and Meira* Gets Right About Leaving Hasidic Life**" by **Shulem Deen** for *The New Republic.*

Felix and Meira *is the story of one Hasidic woman, not Hasidic womanhood; this is not a woman's rebellion against religion, but the story of a wife and husband badly paired, who simply want different things out of life. Shulem wants the life he was born to live. A typical Hasidic young man, he wants to study, pray, raise children, and maintain his good standing within the community. His wife wants more, but he does not understand her.*

April is an important time for Sikhs:

Simran Jeet Sing explains "**The Meaning of Vaisakhi, the biggest Sikh celebration**" in *The Daily Beast.*

In the Sikh spirit, Vaisakhi celebrates the integration of the spiritual and temporal worlds, and it provides practical avenues for bringing these to bear through shared values and practices. Vaisakhi is fundamentally about community, celebration, and progress, and these values are at the forefront of the collective consciousness as Sikhs gather together to mark the occasion.

And *Vogue* (yes, we read *Vogue*) has this amazing video on "**How to Tie a 200-Pound Turban — Sikh Style!**" made by photographer **Mark Hartman**, whose Instagram account is a favorite around here.

Scientology, beyond the clickbait:

Abraham Riesman writes about "**That Time the Avengers Battled Scientology**" in *Vulture.*

The turn of the millennium was a weird period for superhero comics; an era when financial desperation opened a path for wild experimentation. Marvel Comics was particularly hard hit, plunging into bankruptcy and emerging as a wounded giant. The company welcomed bold, weird ideas: Punisher became a zombie, Spider-Man and the X-Men got rebooted series where they were all angsty teens again, and … a Scientologist joined the Avengers. And then the Avengers teamed up with the evil super-powered leader of Scientology. And they all flew in a spaceship powered by the souls of Scientologists. And they fought a giant alien pyramid.

Okay, let's take a step back. Technically, the religion in question wasn't the Church of Scientology; it was an extremely thinly veiled stand-in for it called the Triune Understanding.

Okay, well, actually, maybe it's all just clickbait.

Gawker has "**A Comprehensive Updated List of Every Celebrity Linked to Scientology**" and "**Audit This: The Most Disturbing Scientology Stories of the Last Decade**" by **Gabrielle Bluestone**.

Celebrity Scientologists, According to Gawker

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And *Jezebel* (the *Gawker* family is *really* into Scientology these days) shared "**Doug E. Fresh's Long-Lost Scientology Jam 'The Joy of Creating**."

Which leads us nicely into a bit of religion and pop culture:

Meredith Graves writes about "**The Rapper Heems on Sticking to His Roots, Eschewing Stylists and His Signature Hermès Scarf**" for *T.*

"The reason I wear a bright orange Hermès scarf often is because it looks like a Hindu priest's scarf. When I brought that home, my dad was like, 'That was three dollars, right? You're wearing a sadhu scarf.' A sadhu is a wandering ascetic who is a devotee of Shiva. I was like, 'Yeah … three dollars.' It's a little joke with myself that the H for 'Hermès' actually stands for 'Hindu.' Coming from this immigrant background helps me keep my money and fashion in check."

Kelly J. Baker, the author of *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America* (Kansas 2011), writes about, of all things, "**The Altar of Taylor Swift**" for *Sacred Matters*.

Taylor Swift is not my religion. I'm a devoted fan to her music. Yet, she dominates the untold moments of my ordinary life. She is part of how I make time, a constant presence of my days and nights.

And last, but not least, miscellanea too good not to share, but too weird to categorize:

Our perennial Favorite Person on the Internet **Mallory Ortberg** graced us with "**Women Praying Furiously in Western Art**."



Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our lobster

"**Jedi Master Yoda spotted in 14th-century manuscript**" reports **Max Knoblauch** at *Mashable.*



And lastly, for our legal and philosophy wonks: "**Study Casts Doubt on Kantian Link to Bulgarian Law**" says **Jacob Gershman** of *The Wall Street Journal*.

Pick up a copy of any law review that you see, and the first article is likely to be, you know, the influence of Immanuel Kant on evidentiary approaches in eighteenth-century Bulgaria, or something, which I'm sure was of great interest to the academic that wrote it, but isn't of much help to the bar. — Chief Justice John Roberts, C-SPAN, June 25, 2011

*It's been nearly four years, but legal scholars haven't forgotten Chief Justice John Roberts' smirking critique of legal scholarship. Some law professors took umbrage at his glib tone, while others defended his facetious lament as a spot-on recognition of the fading relevance of law reviews. For one law professor, it was a source of comedic inspiration. "The Influence of Immanuel Kant on Evidentiary Approaches in Eighteenth Century Bulgaria" is the title of a self-published essay by George Washington University law professor Orin Kerr. Seldom has legal humor reached such ambitious heights or displayed such deadpan commitmen*t.

…

Law Blog doesn't doubt the conclusions drawn by the professor. But in the spirit of peer review, Law Blog checked in with historian Frederick B. Chary, a professor emeritus at Indiana University Northwest and author of "The History of Bulgaria." If any Bulgarian at the time was familiar with Kant, it would be Paisii, a Bulgarian monk from the Hilendar monastery who wrote the first modern book on

the history of the Bulgarian empires. "It's possible. It was a learned community," said Mr. Chary.

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-Kali Handelman, Editor, *The Revealer*

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