

Headlines:

- **Study: Pastors Grow More Polarized on Islam**
- **'Islam was Never Part of Europe': Hungary's Orban**
- **Russia Calls for Fresh Elections in Syria**

Details

Study: Pastors Grow More Polarized on Islam

Protestant pastors are increasingly polarized about Islam, with a growing share labeling the Muslim faith violent while a sharply rising minority calls it spiritually good, a new study shows. Although a majority considers Islam dangerous, a small but increasing segment believes Islam is similar to Christianity, according to a new survey by LifeWay Research. And two-thirds of Protestant pastors agree Christianity and Islam should seek to coexist in America. The softening of some pastors' views toward Islam is a key finding of a LifeWay Research survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors. Seventeen percent of pastors characterize Islam as similar to Christianity, nearly double the 9 percent from five years earlier. Although views shifted in both directions, positive opinions rose more significantly. The American public, meanwhile, is twice as likely as pastors to see common ground between Islam and Christianity. In a parallel survey of 1,000 Americans, more than a third say the two faiths are similar. "To understand the data, you have to understand that Protestant pastors are not of one mind," said Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research, "and minds are changing in more than one direction." While more than 8 in 10 Protestant pastors say Islam is fundamentally different from Christianity, just as they did in 2010, minority viewpoints are increasing, LifeWay Research finds. Compared to five years ago, pastors are much more likely to describe Islam in favorable terms. Fifty percent say Islam promotes charity, up from 33 percent. Significant numbers also describe Islam as spiritually good (32 percent, up from 19 percent), tolerant (24 percent, up from 16 percent), and open (22 percent, up from 12 percent.) Negative opinions are also on the rise, although the shift is less dramatic. A slim majority considers Islam dangerous (52 percent, up from 44 percent). Almost half say Islam promotes violence (49 percent, up from 42 percent) and is spiritually evil (46 percent, up from 39 percent). [Source: Baptist Press]

The negativity towards Islam has more to do with the media than the views of the protestant church. The same media remains silent about Jewish atrocities on the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, Palestine during the Bush administration and the village mosques throughout Palestine today.

'Islam was Never Part of Europe': Hungary's Orban

Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban defended his hardline stance against refugees, the vast majority of whom are Muslim, saying in an interview published last week that Islam "has never been part of Europe". Speaking to Germany's Focus news weekly about the record migrant influx, he said, "The language of the European elite is ideological and dogmatic". "Islam has never been part of Europe, it came to us," Orban told Focus in an interview. He conceded that Germany's Turkish migrants, who arrived in their tens of

thousands from the 1960s for work, now "belong to German history and therefore Europe's too". "But spiritually, Islam was never part of Europe. It's the rulebook of another world," said Orban. He also hit out at France and Germany for refusing to countenance "any doubts" over a multicultural society. "We in Hungary decide what we want or don't want. We don't want that," he said. Almost 600,000 people have arrived in Europe so far this year, with many of them heading for Germany and Sweden. Orban asserted that most asylum seekers arriving in Europe are actually economic migrants. "Not everyone is entitled to a life in Germany or a life in Hungary. That's only for those who have worked for it," he said. [Source: Yahoo.com]

Orban's comments about Islam are out of step with his earlier comments in Egypt in 2015. Then he praised Islam. His moral relativism revolves around benefit. In Egypt, Islam was praised as Hungary signed bilateral agreements with the government, while the influx of Muslim refugees hurts his pocket.

Russia Calls for Fresh Elections in Syria

Russia is pushing for fresh elections in Syria next year and offering air support to the opposition Free Syrian Army in its fight with ISIS as Moscow seeks to use the momentum of its military campaign to move towards political stabilisation in the war-torn country. Speaking on Saturday to state television, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said it was "necessary to prepare for elections, both presidential and parliamentary" in Syria. Recent successes of the Syrian army achieved with backing from the Russian air force have allowed the government of president Bashar al-Assad to "consolidate its position and should make the state more interested in progress of the political process," he said. Mr Lavrov added Russia was ready to "give air support to the so-called Free Syrian Army", but said that the US was refusing to share with Moscow its assessment about the respective location of terrorist groups and "patriotic" opposition forces. "The most important thing for us is to reach out to the people who authoritatively represent different armed groups that fight terrorism," he said. Russia's offer to back the FSA militarily sharply contrasts with its earlier denouncement of all armed opposition groups as "terrorists". It comes as Moscow seeks to stop its military support for Mr Assad's regime from undermining its credibility with the opposition. Although Russia has said that its military intervention in Syria is aimed at destroying ISIS, the radical jihadist group, the vast majority of its air strikes so far have hit other armed opposition forces. Moscow's appeal for elections and open offer for military support to the FSA cap a week of hectic diplomacy in which Moscow appeared to lean on Mr Assad to open up to dialogue with opposition groups and stepped up pressure on the US and its allies to accept a role for the Syrian president in a political transition. Russian president Vladimir Putin summoned Mr Assad to Moscow for marathon discussions on Wednesday and subsequently claimed the Syrian leader was open to working with moderate opposition forces and viewed positively the idea of Russian support for armed opposition groups who fight Isis. On Friday, Mr Lavrov discussed Syria with US Secretary of State John Kerry as well as the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. [Source: *Financial Times*]

Does the Russian plan differ in any way to America's plan for Syria? It appears now that Washington and Moscow are working together to kick-start a political process, which includes the butcher Assad as part of the solution.