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Religion to Feature in Edinburgh Fringe Festival

By Ian MacKenzie

(Reuters) - Religion in guises ranging from violence in faith to Jesus as a stand-up comedian is a central theme in this year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The Fringe, which runs from August 6 to 28, is in its 60th year of providing an irreverent counterpoint to the mainstream productions of the month-long Edinburgh Festival.

The religious theme follows last year's emphasis on terrorism and reconciliation and mirrors such religiously controversial productions as the Hollywood film blockbuster "The Da Vinci Code." "Clearly it's a very personal subject that artists and writers currently feel a particular need to explain," said Fringe director Paul Gudin. Theatrical productions this year include a chilling new play on the violent consequences of faith, "Petrol Jesus Nightmare" by Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre Company while "Mary and the Stripper" by England's M+E productions compares the life of a modern-day girl to that of the Biblical Mary Magdalene. An investigation by WMD Theatre from England about how much the British public knows about Islam is entitled: "We Don't Know Shi'ite." England's Jason Kavan, in "... according to Jesus," and Ireland's Abie with "Jesus: The Guantanamo Years" portray Jesus Christ as a stand-up comedian. And **"The Black Jew Dialogues" a U.S. production is billed as a comical examination of the American Black Jew experience.**

Other international acts this year come from Denmark, Africa and Japan. More comedians are writing plays these days, Gudin told reporters at an introduction to this year's festival. "The boundary between theatre and comedy is increasingly blurred at the Fringe," he added.

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