

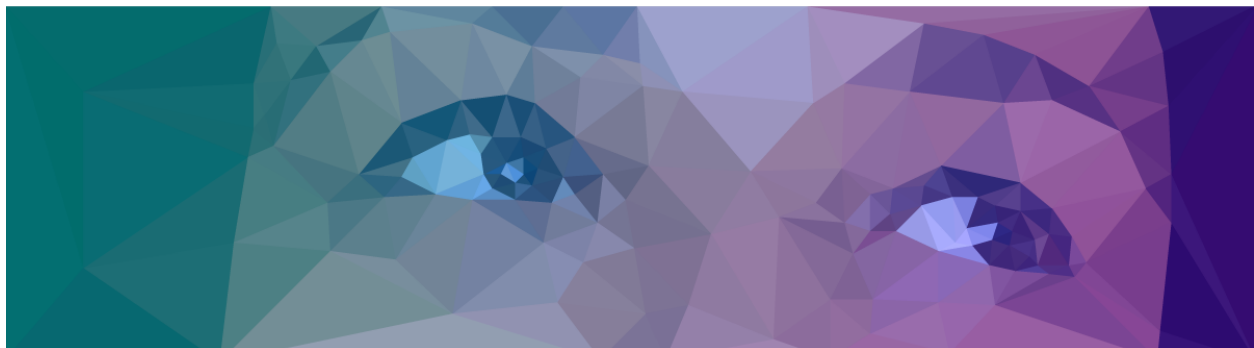
Vol. 31, No. 12

October 2016

FEATURE STORY:

Women gain place in organized secularism amidst divisions in their ranks

Female atheists and secular humanists can be considered a minority of a minority—atheists representing a small proportion of the U.S. population and women comprising a small proportion of that number—but they have been reaching higher levels of involvement and leadership in secularist organizations in recent years. At the Women in Secularism conference meeting in Washington in late September, attended by **RW**, several speakers confirmed that women are more involved in organized atheist and secular humanist activism and communities even while there are still divisions over the role of feminism in the wider movement. This event was the fourth such conference, with its origin in 2010 over the concern that more strident voices of new atheists, who were viewed as demeaning women (and even having a role in cases of alleged sexual harassment at atheist events), were drowning out women's issues. The clash between the more science-oriented new atheists and activist and social justice-oriented secularists was evident at the conference. Organizer Debbie Goddard told **RW** in an interview that the recent merger of the Center for Inquiry, the sponsor of the Women in Secularism conferences, and the new atheist-oriented Richard Dawkins Foundation has been a source of dissension among women in the movement, likely causing the recent gathering's registration to hit a low of 80 participants. Past conferences put more stress on social activism, and several of the earlier activist and feminist leaders did not attend the event, Goddard added.

WOMEN  SECULARISM 

But other speakers reported on the new openness of women to atheism as the movement tries to draw on the swelling numbers of non-affiliated Americans. Melanie Brewster of Columbia University presented a paper on why men are more likely to be atheists than women. Prominent new atheist leaders such as Sam Harris have made controversial statements that the cerebral nature of atheism attracts men more than women, who are more “nurturing.” Brewster argued that whatever the reasons for the gap between male and female secularists (and religiosity), the differences are narrowing, especially in Western nations. She added that women may be experiencing a “time-lag” in secularization and only today are showing the drop off in religiosity. Another study she cited showed that women feel excluded from the atheist movement and need to see greater representation of atheist women in the media.

At least in the ranks of leadership, the conference demonstrated that women are more visible: women have recently been appointed as the leaders of the Center for Inquiry and the American Humanist Association. In the latter group, over 30 percent of its leadership committee and chapter leaders are women. The Freedom from Religion Foundation, with 23,000 members, has long been led by a mother-daughter team, with half of the staffers being female (though 73 percent of the members are men). A woman also recently co-founded the Ex-Muslims of North America. The conference also revealed a division among secularist women (as in the wider movement) between those holding to identity politics and others stressing free speech. This split emerged in a session on identity politics and such policies influenced by feminism as providing safe spaces for minorities on college campuses, professors using “trigger warnings” in the cases when material may be objectionable to students, and barring controversial speakers from campus. While Brewster and Black Lives Matter activist Diane Burkholder supported such measures, at least in part, they came in for sharp criticism by ex-Muslim activists Sarah Haider and Maryam Namazie. Citing her experiences being barred from campuses because of her secularist views, Namazie charged that Muslim groups are “shutting down debate,” and feminists and other activists on the left are aiding and abetting this restrictive climate.

ARTICLES:

Relief efforts dividing evangelicals

While politicians associated with the religious right have opposed resettlement of refugees from the civil war in Syria, evangelical congregations and relief organizations have increasingly engaged in such efforts. *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 11) reports that Republican nominee Donald Trump and more than 30 state governors have opposed President Obama’s resettlement program of taking in 10,000 refugees (a goal reached last month) in the fear that terrorists are arriving with such newcomers. During the last year when the governors announced their opposition, conservative churches “have joined their liberal counterparts in working to help the refugees find new homes in the United States.” Under such evangelical organizations as World Relief, congregations “are instrumental in the effort, since they’re tasked with welcoming and resettling a refugee in the community, a process that takes several months,” Priscilla Alvarez writes.

Even in South Carolina, a state officially opposing resettlement, about 50 Syrian refugees are or will be resettled with church assistance. But the contentious nature of the debate, especially during a polarizing election year, has had repercussions at the local level, with some congregations becoming more wary of admitting such refugees, especially after incidents such as the Paris attack. The refugees also fear being targeted, believing they are being identified with their oppressors who have driven them from Syria and Iraq. The Southern Baptist Convention included a resolution welcoming refugees in its gathering last spring—the first time in more than 20 years that the group included a resolution about refugees. But Russell Moore, the head of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, wonders what will happen to the Republican religious base as party officials and churches move in different directions on this and other issues.



Ayahuasca—being appropriated or just commercialized?

The growing use of the hallucinogenic plant substance Ayahuasca in the West is coming in for criticism for commercializing an indigenous practice, as well as posing adverse affects for the uninitiated. While the widespread use of Ayahuasca is fairly recent, the controversy goes back a century to the clash between indigenous practitioners who use a wide range of substances and practices (from peyote to yoga) for traditional religious and social rituals and Western seekers who appropriate them for their spiritual and healing properties, writes Evgenia Fotiou in the journal *Anthropology of Consciousness* (September). The use of Ayahuasca “has expanded to a global level and has had an enormous impact on religious and neo-shamanic currents in the West. It has also attracted the attention of scientists internationally, who conduct research with ayahuasca in order to determine possible uses for it in the West.” The number of spiritual tourists coming to Peru, where the plant is harvested for use, has grown from about 200 annually starting in 2005 to thousands in the last few years, thanks to conferences and other forms of publicity.

Another article in this issue notes that the context of ayahuasca use has changed in recent years; there are now Christian-oriented ayahuasca churches in countries such as Brazil, the U.S., Australia, and parts of Europe, where worshippers take the substance as a form of communion. Since 2012 numerous ayahuasca treatment centers have opened up in Peru, where they are legal, while both indigenous and non-indigenous shamans advertise their services for tourists. Many of these centers stress ayahuasca’s spiritual and health benefits (from emotional illnesses to addictions to cancer), but they don’t mention the risks to users, including psychosis and death. Fotiou adds that an unpublicized aspect of ayahuasca shamanism is the dark side of sorcery, where shamans admit that they contend with and have to control urges to harm or kill: “Thus, far from being the spiritual and healing tradition that Westerners seek, accusations of sorcery attacks abound in the area, with Westerners often being the victims.” The old stereotype about Western spiritual and medical entrepreneurs appropriating indigenous traditions and practices doesn’t

explain the globalization of ayahuasca. Indigenous shamans and treatment centers are heavily involved in the global production and commercialization of ayahuasca, and it does no good for Western academics self-righteously to denounce the “appropriation of beliefs” and “New Agers as postcolonial exploiters” when indigenous people are already involved in the capitalist system, Fotiou concludes.



(*Anthropology of Consciousness*,
[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1556-3537](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1556-3537))

Homeschooling as last recourse for Hassidic children in Quebec

Hassidic schools in Quebec are attempting to preserve their Jewish heritage while facing restrictions from education authorities, with homeschooling often left as the only legally acceptable option for lack of certified teachers, writes Jessica Nadeau in the daily newspaper *Le Devoir* (September 30). Since September the Satmar and Viznitz Hassidic communities, imitating a similar move made a few years ago by a Christian community unable to get permission to open its own school, have begun homeschooling more than 600 Jewish children. In a state where no more than 1,300 children were being homeschooled until now, this substantial increase means that authorities have decided to give more money for supervising homeschooled children (*Radio Canada*, July 12). The fate of a girls' school unable to get its temporary permit renewed highlighted the situation of those schools last June. Founded 60 years ago and counting some 300 students, the long-lasting efforts by the school to meet the requirements in order to get the permit had not succeeded due to the lack of a sufficient number of hours for secular subjects. Moreover, only 2 out of 24 teachers were legally qualified. Consequently, religious teaching is now imparted in the morning, while pupils are homeschooled in the afternoon.



It is not the first time that Jewish schools in Quebec have been met with suspicion. Jewish supporters of those schools admit that they do not follow the usual curriculum of secular schools but contend that they still deliver an equivalent knowledge of secular subjects while centered around the study of the Talmud and its emphasis on reasoning. For boys even more than for girls, religious education takes a large part of the time. Boys used to devote no more than 6 to 10 hours per week to secular education and

are now being homeschooled too. As a consequence, women in the community tend to be better

educated in secular subjects than males and can more easily get a secular job, Nadeau adds. Moreover, young men tend to move abroad as adults and are not motivated to learn French beside Hebrew, Yiddish, and English, while female members of the community stay in Quebec and mostly find husbands coming from the U.S. On another front, Hassidic schools face criticism from former members claiming that the state failed to provide adequate secular educations to prepare them for life outside the community. They acknowledge that the coverage of secular subjects has improved over the years but claim that the situation is still far from adequate. In Israel too, where Jewish religious schools are strongly state-subsidized, former pupils of such schools have lodged complaints against the state for educational neglect.

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **Religion annually contributes nearly \$1.2 trillion of socio-economic value to the U.S. economy, according to a new study by Brian Grim and Melissa Grim in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* (12:3).** This figure is equivalent to being the world's fifteenth largest national economy, putting it ahead of about 180 other countries. The study is the first documented quantitative national estimate of the economic value of religion to U.S. society. The authors point out that the sum is more than the annual revenues of the world's top ten tech companies, including Apple, Amazon, and Google. It's also more than 50 percent larger than the annual global revenues of America's six largest oil and gas companies. A higher-end estimate based on the household incomes of religiously affiliated Americans places the value of faith to U.S. society at \$4.8 trillion annually, or the equivalent of nearly a third of America's gross domestic product.



(*Interdisciplinary Journal for Research on Religion*,
http://www.religjournal.com/articles/article_view.php?id=108)

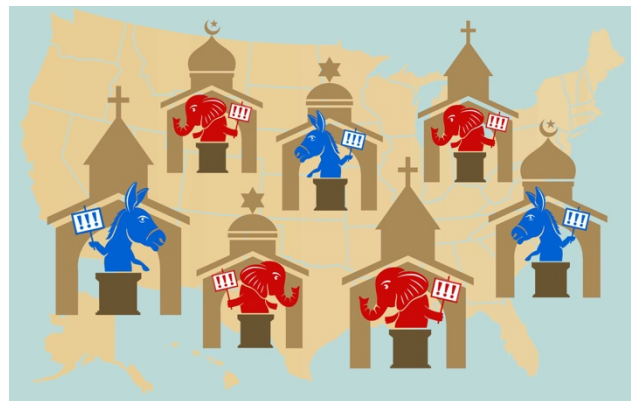
● **The growth of the religiously non-affiliated demographic is unlikely to please political strategists, as this diffuse population does not form a voting bloc, according to a study by the Public Religion Research Institute.** The study found that more than one-quarter (26 percent) of unaffiliated Americans (who are now reported to be up to 25 percent of the population) report they are not registered to vote, a significantly higher rate than among white evangelical Protestants (10 percent), white mainline Protestants (11 percent), or white Catholics (12 percent). A plurality (48 percent) of “nones” are politically independent. One-third of the unaffiliated (33 percent) are Democrats, and only 12 percent identify as Republican (they are about twice as likely to be



politically liberal as they are to be conservative). In studying the reasons that the unaffiliated left or remain unattached to religious institutions, a lack of belief was cited as the main factor; only a minority report bad personal experiences with congregations that led to their position, although Catholics were more likely to cite church teachings on sexuality and the child sex abuse crisis as factors for leaving. The study found that few unaffiliated Americans are actively looking to join a religious community. Only 7 percent of the unaffiliated report they are searching for a religion that would be right for them, compared to 93 percent who say they are not.

(To download the report, visit:<http://www.ppri.org/research/ppri-rns-2016-religiously-unaffiliated-americans/>)

● **Political messages are being delivered from the pulpits of churches during this election season, with 64 percent of attendees reporting that they have heard their clergy speak on political issues, according to a Pew Research Center survey.** The survey was conducted online and by mail from June 7 to July 5 among a sample 4,602 adults. Of those surveyed 40 percent reported attending religious services at least once or twice in the months before receiving the survey. The issues that respondents heard in sermons included economic inequality, immigration, environmental protections, religious liberty, abortions, and same-sex relationships. Fourteen percent said they heard their pastors speak about a specific presidential candidate; 9 percent heard statements of endorsement or opposition (11 percent) from the pulpit, a violation that can strip churches of their tax-exempt status. More churchgoers have heard their pastors speak against Donald Trump (7 percent compared to 4 percent against Hillary Clinton) than for his Democratic rival (6 percent for Clinton, compared to 1 percent for Trump).



● **The recent interest in demonic possession and exorcism may be a result of the “over-policing of the devil” as more churches train and use exorcists, creating a new demand for this type of ministry, according to sociologists Giuseppe Giordan and Adam Possamai.** Accounts of demonic possession and exorcism have been on the increase in both Protestant and Catholic churches in the West, with the proportion of people believing in the devil also rising. The researchers, writing in the journal *Social Compass* (online in September), use a unique source of data to explain the growth of this phenomenon. They received unprecedented access to records from ten years’ worth of cases of an exorcist of a prominent and large diocese in southern Europe (for the last decade, Italy has “played a leading role in organizing and systematizing the fight against the devil,” not only because of the large number of exorcists used in the country but because several Italian dioceses have started special offices and training seminars to deal with people who think they are possessed). Giordan and Possamai analyzed 1,075 cases and found that the frequency of people consulting the exorcist has remained steady between 2007 and 2014 (with a

peak in 2009). The peaks in exorcist activity tend to happen at two specific periods of the year—March–April (around Easter) and October–November (All Saints’ Day and Halloween).

Among all the cases, only 55 cases were seen as requiring 1 or more exorcisms. For 140 cases, the exorcists consulted recommended a psychologist, and for 5 cases, medical services. For the rest of the cases, the exorcist recommended other rituals, such as blessings, confessions, and “rituals of liberation” (13.2 percent). In 20 percent of the cases, the exorcist and patient identified someone in the family tree (usually a woman) renowned as a witch or medium who cast an “evil eye” on the patient. Of those referred for exorcism, most were men (60 percent). Most were in the working and lower-middle classes, with only six being professionals or college graduates. In 40 percent of the cases, the patient appears to have recovered and did not need any more exorcisms. Yet 25



percent continue to be subjected to exorcisms, either because “liberation” has not occurred or because there have been relapses. As for the numbers of exorcisms practiced on an individual, 62 percent of the patients are subjected to a number of exorcisms ranging from 1–10; one patient received 354 exorcisms in 9 years. The authors conclude that the amount of people consulting exorcists is significant and that the practice of exorcism is becoming more mainstream and normalized. The “increase of religious professionals in the field looking for the devil

and being available for rituals of exorcism...is greatly contributing to the increase of belief in the devil and the need to practice rituals of exorcism.”

(*Social Compass*, <http://scp.sagepub.com/>)

● **Not only is the proportion of funerals in Britain conducted by religious celebrants fast diminishing, but “religion is disappearing from their content,” reports the blog *Counting Religion in Britain* (September).**

The blog cites the Co-operative Funeralcare’s latest biennial survey of funeral music, which shows that 54 percent of its funeral directors state that hymns are the funeral music genre declining fastest in popularity. In a survey of over 30,000 funerals conducted by the group, seven of the top ten pieces of funeral music in 2016 were secular, the chart being headed by Frank Sinatra’s “My Way.” Although the



other three were hymns, they had all slipped since the 2014 rating: “The Lord is My Shepherd”

from second to fifth position, “Abide with Me” from third to ninth, and “All Things Bright and Beautiful” from sixth to seventh.

(*Counting Religion in Britain*, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/2016/counting-religion-in-britain-september-2016/>)

● **The centuries-old tradition of ringing church bells in England may soon be lost due to a shortage of new recruits.** A survey by BBC local radio of 180 delegates to the 2016 annual conference of the Central Conference of Church Bell Ringers found that three-quarters of the delegates said that it had become harder during the past ten years to attract new members of any age, and an even higher proportion claimed that it was difficult to recruit young people under 21, according to the blog *Counting British Religion* (September). More than half (54 percent) agreed that declining church attendance had exacerbated the problem. At the same time, three-fifths of delegates thought the actual demand for bell-ringing had increased in the previous decade.



problem. At the same time, three-fifths of delegates thought the actual demand for bell-ringing had increased in the previous decade.

(BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-37257729>)

ARTICLES:

Christian LGBT groups caught between conservative churches and secular partners in Eastern Europe

Since the 1990s, Christian LGBT groups have appeared in Eastern European, post-communist countries, but they have to live in a difficult social and religious environment, although changes in Western churches on those issues inspire some of them to seek constructive dialogue with their own churches, writes theologian and sociologist Michael Brinkschröder (Munich) in *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (August). A French Catholic priest founded the European Forum of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Christian Groups in Western Europe in 1982, which now counts some 50 member organizations in 23 countries, including Central and Eastern European ones. Groups from the latter countries started participating at the 1992 meeting. Many of those groups, however, were unable to establish solid foundations. Despite support and training provided by Western European groups as well as by the U.S.-based Metropolitan Community Church to their Eastern European counterparts since 2002, several of them have declined or failed to reach stability, frustrated by the lack of dialogue with their churches (or excommunications), not to mention burnout experienced by some activists.

Such setbacks have not prevented the movement from expanding, targeting countries from the former Soviet Union since 2008 (Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldavia, and Estonia). Some of those groups limit membership to specific denominations, such as Queer Credo in Kyiv for Orthodox homosexuals. In contrast, another group in Moscow is ecumenical and also welcomes non-Christian seekers. This diversity, however, makes it difficult to find a common identity—thus most groups affirm a Christian orientation. Recently, there have been renewed interest and activities by Catholic LGBT groups in several countries, something that may be influenced both by current debates in those countries and by the “Pope Francis effect,” possibly opening the way to a more liberal approach by the Roman Catholic Church. Brinkschröder remarks that one of the difficulties for those Christian LGBT groups is that they find themselves in the midst of culture wars between the secular LGBT movement, on the one hand, and conservative churches that sees them as sinners, on the other hand. This tension puts them in a position that many people fail to understand. Moreover, due to widespread hostile attitudes, LGBT Christians tend to internalize an attitude of fear that is not conducive to productive cooperation. It is also difficult for several groups to get legally registered, thus leaving their status in limbo.



(*Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Birmensdorferstr. 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland - <http://www.g2w.eu>)

Religious minorities and missionaries feeling effect of Russian religious restrictions



New restrictions against “extremist” religions in Russia are causing considerable struggle among missionaries and other groups involved in preaching and disseminating religious materials, reports the *Washington Post* (September 20). The recent law, passed by President Vladimir Putin, prohibits proselytizing among all religious groups except in officially registered buildings and sites. The restrictions extend to private homes and online communications. Mormon church officials have reassigned 65 missionaries and have renamed others as “volunteers” who will not engage in recruiting for the LDS church. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association has

canceled a World Summit on Persecuted Christians scheduled to meet in Russia, and other religious minorities, such as the Hare Krishnas, claim the law has created a climate of fear among these groups.

The law, originally designed as an anti-terrorist measure, passed in July, and so far only seven people have been charged under it. But the law is the latest in a series of restrictions since 2007 aimed at “religious extremism” but turned against religious minorities. Part of the Russian move against often American-based minority religions has been aggravated by the U.S. support of anti-Russian protests in its conflict with Ukraine. The law has particularly affected the Jehovah’s Witnesses since every member is considered a missionary who is required to recruit new members. Regional governments have been stringent in their supervision of the law, using visa infractions to control the movement of some religions, such as Mormons.

Russian Orthodox Church promoting national interests abroad

Russia is expanding its influence throughout the former Soviet territories and Europe by also advancing Russian Orthodoxy in these areas, reports the *New York Times* (September 13). From its critical stance on Western liberalism to its stress on conservative family values, President Vladimir Putin has mobilized Russian Orthodoxy to expand Russia’s reach and influence and help project the nation “as a natural ally of all those who pine for a more



secure, illiberal world free from the tradition crushing rush of globalization, multiculturalism and women’s and gay rights,” writes Andrew Higgins. In Paris, a new Russian Orthodox cathedral is being built in proximity to government buildings, leading some French observers to fear that the spiritual center may also serve as a “listening post” for Russian intelligence.

The Russian push in Europe has taken a stronger turn in the French city of Nice, where the church tried to seize a private Orthodox cemetery and came into conflict with a French Orthodox association, just the latest “episode in a long campaign to grab up church real estate controlled by rivals to Moscow’s religious hierarchy,” Higgins adds. The same association, which is under the rival Patriarchate of Constantinople, lost control of the local cathedral when the Moscow Patriarchate installed its own priests. Religion has also assisted the Kremlin in former Soviet lands such as Moldova, “where senior priests loyal to the Moscow church hierarchy have campaigned tirelessly to block their country’s integration with the West. Priests in Montenegro, meanwhile, have spearheaded efforts to derail their country’s plans to join NATO,” Higgins adds.

Korean megachurches stressing innovation continue growth

Although the growth in Korean churches and megachurches has slowed and in some cases shows signs of decline, churches that innovate in such ways as stressing expository preaching and intercessory prayer while downplaying the church's corporate nature are showing signs of growth, according to research by the Center on Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California. A conference on religious competition and innovation in Korea sponsored by the center presented research by sociologist Sung Gun Kim on growing Korean megachurches that are unaffected by the stagnation and financial scandals involving other prominent megachurches. In case studies of four out of twenty growing megachurches in Seoul with 10,000 attendees each, Kim found that even megachurches that have retained their dynastic leadership and wealthy facilities are able to deflect concern about these features through innovation. Unlike in U.S. megachurches where topical preaching predominates, these growing Korean congregations engage in expository preaching from the Bible, as well as embracing more humble measures, such as limiting elders' tenure and vowing not to own church property.

While Korean megachurches have a history of embracing the status quo and accommodating authoritarian regimes, the new breed of megachurch veers away from “political and popular themes, such as love and money to focus on biblical teachings—considered a novel approach in Korea that is leading to higher levels of regular tithes,” reports *The Diplomat* online magazine (September 21). In interviewing members of these churches, Kim finds that church leaders have retained the loyalty of members, even after they have been involved in scandals. Kim's survey of 800 attendees (200 per church) found that they attend church 2.9 times a week, with 81 percent reporting being “born again” and 67 percent tithing regularly. As in the U.S., recent surveys have found a sharp increase in religious disaffiliation among Korean young people, growing from 12 to 35 percent in the last decade. Richard Flory, director of the USC center, attributes the increase to the growing distrust of social groups and organizations in general. The article notes that there is a continued interest in spirituality, as seen in young people who were raised Buddhist converting to Catholicism, impressed by the transparency of the church embodied by Pope Francis. Catholic and Protestant approaches to evangelization are becoming more “progressive,” with their styles even converging. At the same time, Koreans are becoming more concentrated in large churches, with even a Buddhist “mega-temple” coming on the scene.

(<https://crcc.usc.edu/the-diplomat-south-koreas-megachurches/>)



Saudi leadership of the Sunni world being challenged

A religious struggle for legitimacy along with geopolitical rivalry with Saudi-promoted Salafism as a target may be underway in the Muslim world, as evidenced by a conference of 200 Sunni scholars in Grozny, Chechnya, on August 27–29, according to reports by Abbas Kadhimi (Johns Hopkins University) in the *Huffington Post* (September 9) and James M. Dorsey (Nanyang Technological University) in *RSIS Commentary* (September 30). Backed by the United Arab Emirates and Russia, the Abu Dhabi-based Tabah Foundation organized the conference, while Yemeni Sufi preacher Alhabib Ali al-Jafri sent out the invitation. Among participants, there was “a very high level delegation from Egypt,” writes Kadhimi, as well as the Grand Mufti of Syria. Striking was the fact that Saudi scholars were not invited—neither were Salafis from other countries or members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Dorsey mentions the fact that the Tabah Foundation is the sponsor of the Senior Scholars Council, which was launched not only to counter Saudi discourse but also the views of the Doha-based International Union of Muslim Scholars, headed by Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, who is “widely viewed as a spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood.”

The conference made it clear not only that Islam had been hijacked and distorted but also that Wahhabism was outside of the pale of Sunni Islam. On the opposite, it declared that Sufis—often accused by Wahhabis and Salafis of non-Islamic practices—were true Sunnis. As expected, those statements led to a wave of fiery criticism from pro-Saudi clerics and media, with some going as far as to suggest that the conference was an operation engineered by Russian and Iranian intelligence against the Saudi Kingdom. The conference is seen as being potentially a significant challenge to Saudi Wahhabism and its powerful support of Salafism at a critical time for the Kingdom. Dorsey also remarks that Saudi largesse to Egypt and its religious leadership seems not to have succeeded in buying lasting political and religious loyalty.

(*RSIS*, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg>; Tabah Foundation - <http://www.tabahfoundation.org/>)

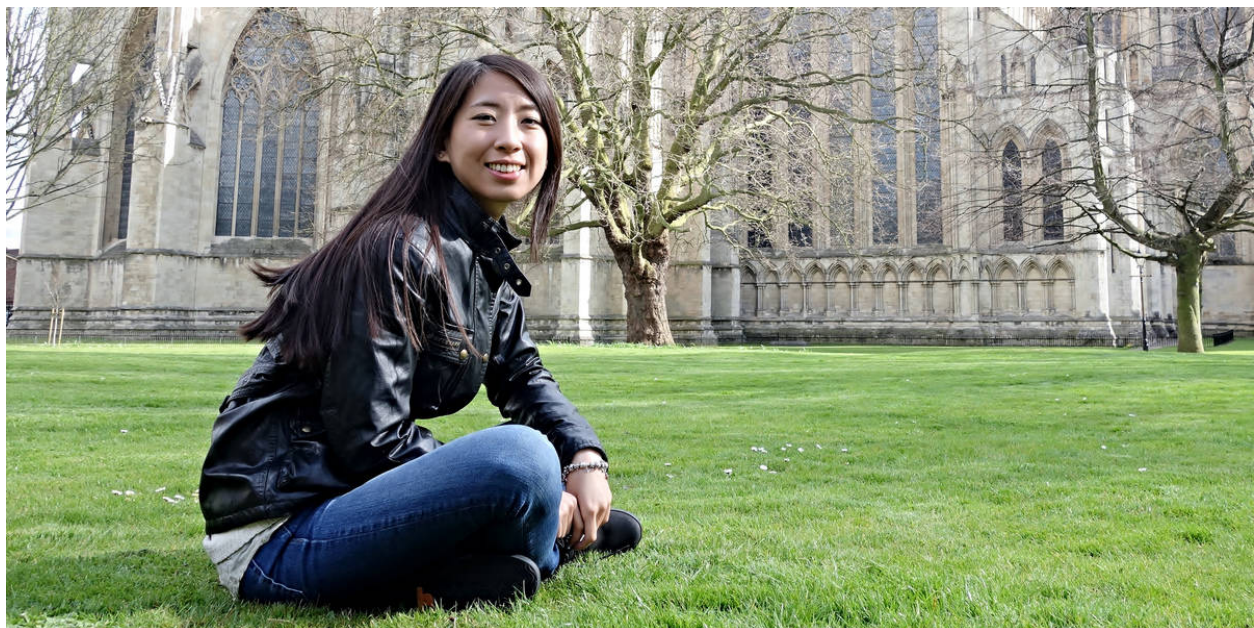


Chinese international student revival in U.S. weakens among returnees

The large and growing number of Chinese international students who have become Christian while in the U.S. frequently fall away from or are weakened in the faith upon returning to China, reports *ChinaSource Quarterly* (September). This issue of the online journal is devoted to the problem of the “returnees,” who are not prepared nor assisted in the transition from the U.S. to China by churches and ministries in either country. The number of Chinese students in the U.S. is as many as half a million, and a segment of them have converted to Christianity through concerted efforts by evangelical campus ministries and Chinese congregations. With the developing Chinese economy, the number of students returning to China has increased significantly. But the Christian returnees face “reverse culture shock” in their home country; they are unused to the different church life in China, with its many restrictions and political penalties for attending some congregations, while also dealing with family pressures against their new found faith.

Writer Lydia Song estimates that 75 percent of returnees do not have a consistent religious life, and many fall away from the faith. There have been new “hidden returnee fellowships” started in China as a form of support, but they are difficult to find, with many returnees not even knowing that they exist. New converts in the U.S. are sustained by strong support systems not only of churches but also fellow Christian students and older mentors who involve them in a steady stream of social gatherings and Christian events. In contrast, in China churches meet secretly in many cases, and returnees find “huge gaps in age, education, and social status between themselves and the church members.” Song reports that there have been recent attempts to establish internal and overseas church networks to minister to returnees, with house churches and returnee-based congregations reported as having some success in retaining them.

(*ChinaSource Quarterly*, <http://www.chinasource.org/about/publications/quarterly>)



Findings & Footnotes

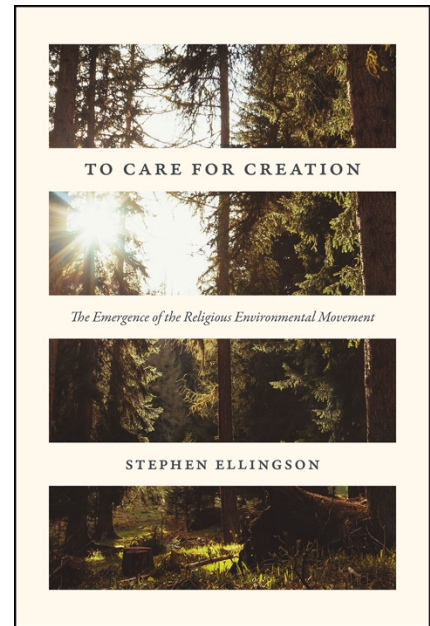
■ R. Scott Hanson's book *City of Gods* (Fordham University Press, \$35) is a study of a very particular place, the Flushing section of Queens in New York City, but the author believes that the "super-diversity" of this neighborhood can tell us a great deal about American religious pluralism. Flushing is unique in several ways—it has a long and yet neglected history of pluralism and religious freedom stemming from the Flushing Remonstrance, a historic document that guaranteed freedom to Quakers during the Dutch settlement of New York. But more importantly, the neighborhood's high concentration of different faith traditions and congregations is singular in the U.S. (other neighborhoods in Queens have the distinction of being the most diverse zip codes in the country, but Flushing carries the title in terms of religious institutions). In about a two-mile-radius of downtown, Hanson counts dozens of Hindu and Buddhist temples, mosques, Sikh gurdwaras, and, most noticeably, over 100 Korean churches (not to mention other churches). The diversification since the 1990s (although starting with the post-1965 immigration) makes Hanson ask the obvious questions: Can society withstand such extreme diversity? Can any kind of identity and unity exist in such pluralism?

Using ethnographic and historical methods, Hanson finds that there isn't a limit to pluralism as far as its effect on interreligious conflict; residents show considerable tolerance among each other, except when it comes to the lack of parking due to churches being built in residential areas (due to zoning laws). The theory that pluralism raises religious vitality may be evident at least in the Korean church community, as congregations compete with (and often split off from) each other. But Hanson is less optimistic about the level of "active tolerance" and "inclusivism" in Flushing; most people did not try to learn from or even interact with those of other faith traditions. The newcomers did not generate the sense of community as found among the older white population of the 1970s and before. At least that was the case going up to 2001, when Hanson formally ended his study. In a final chapter updating his findings, Hanson finds somewhat more interaction as residents have integrated into the community; different ethnic and religious groups are more involved in civic and neighborhood organizations—especially the second-generation Chinese—and several leaders have even become aware of Flushing's heritage of religious freedom, though this is still quite rare.

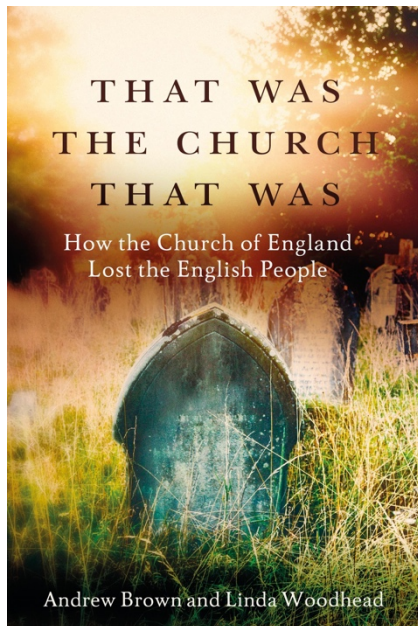


■ *To Care for Creation* (University of Chicago Press, \$30), by Stephen Ellingson, examines both the growth and limits of religious environmentalism through focus on the careers and work of activists in the movement. Based on interviews with leaders from more than 60 religious environmental groups, Ellingson finds that there is a lack of unity and cooperation among many of these groups, even though there are umbrella

organizations such as the National Religious Partnership for the Environment. There has also been a time lag, with most secular environmental groups starting at least 25 years before religious ones. Ellingson writes that it was in the 1990s when religious bodies issued various statements and consultations; only after they developed religious rationales for getting involved in the environmental movement did they actually start forming organizations. In a statistical overview of the 63 organizations that he studied, the author finds considerable differences in issues and approaches—although 89 percent deal with climate change—with fewer groups working on legislation and lobbying to the extent that the secular movement does. The lack of coordination between religious groups and between secular and religious organizations (along with a level of suspicion existing between both movements) hampers the effectiveness of faith-based environmentalism.



Ellingson argues that these organizations are shaped by their broader religious traditions and contexts, which support but can also restrict their strategies as religious actors in the environmentalist field. For instance, he finds that Jewish environmental groups are adept at reinterpreting sacred texts and ritual practices in developing a “green ethic.” Other groups are more constrained or conflicted in the institutional choices they can make; mainline Protestants may have a wider variety of resources to use but have to be careful about alienating the audiences of their particular organizations through misinterpreting or over-emphasizing one particular tradition. Ellingson concludes that religious environmental groups’ strength is the moral and ethical tone they inject into environmental activism and that they are more likely to balance their message of concern about the environment with one of hope and moderation than are secular groups. But because religious groups are still at the stage of trying to convince their constituencies and audiences that the environment is an important issue, they are not yet ready to mobilize them into action. ■ Journalist Andrew Brown and sociologist



Linda Woodhead join forces in the new book *This Was the Church That Was* (Bloomsbury, \$29.95), to produce a no-holds-barred and controversial account of the declining fortunes of the Church of England. The book, which was delayed in publication this summer over contested sections regarding C of E leaders, argues that the church is out of touch with the English people both as an establishment institution and as a spiritual community. They trace much of this disconnect with society to the Thatcher years when the class structure crumbled and the bishops and the machinery of the church couldn’t

deal with the reality that they were no longer the establishment. Their candid and at times humorous account of the subcultures in the C of E—describing one Anglo-Catholic seminary as so “spikey” that “men called each other by girl’s names like ‘Doris’ and ‘Betty’ and got excited about lacy cottas and embroidered chasubles”—lays the blame for the decline on all parties concerned. The evangelicals insisted on moral purity and 1950s-style conservatism that was out of touch with modern British mores and lifestyles, while the more liberal bishops, such as former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, were married to social policies out of touch with more conservative members. They write that Williams backtracked from his support of gay clergy and women bishops while making confusing statements about the validity of sharia law in Britain, leaving both the conservative and liberal public disaffected.

These and other missteps led to the growing number of British “nones”—though not necessarily atheists or irreligious as seen in their interest in alternative spiritual practices. Brown and Woodhead provide an interesting comparison between the state church in Denmark and the C of E—the latter has lost its monopoly in “hatching, matching and dispatching” members (as seen in the rise of non-C of E funerals), while the Danes still largely use the church for these services (even with their very low rates of attendance). The gloomy picture the authors draw (especially about the demise of rural parishes) offers only a few glimmers of hope. The charismatics’ and Anglo-Catholics’ worship service resonate with many people, while the other various movements and parties offer elements that can help renew the church, including the enthusiasm and organizational pragmatism of the evangelicals, the spirituality of the Anglo-Catholics, and the liberals’ interest in the outside world.

■ *New Ways of Being Pentecostal in Latin America* (Lexington Books, \$90), edited by Martin Lindhardt, suggests that while Pentecostalism will continue its growth on this continent, it will increasingly diversify as it faces new cultural and religious challenges. In his introduction, Lindhardt argues that while the long-held theory that Latin American Pentecostals see their faith as an alternative to poverty and lower class status still is relevant, new developments are shaping the movement, such as the rise of an educated Pentecostal middle class, new political and civic involvement, and a “de-institutional” tendency where believers pick and choose their beliefs and practices or drop out of the churches completely or return to Catholicism. Several of the chapters look at the ways Pentecostal churches have adapted and innovated in their



styles of music, including contemporary, black gospel, and rap (even as certain dance moves or what is considered inappropriate clothing are prohibited).

In chapters on Chile and the Central American countries of Guatemala and El Salvador, Pentecostal political involvement has noticeably increased, at least among the younger generations, especially in direct social ministry, but it would be an exaggeration to say Pentecostalism has been politicized or aligned with a particular political orientation. Other chapters cover the ongoing competition between Catholicism and Pentecostalism, with the former adopting Pentecostal practices while struggling to keep their identity, and an in-depth look at the Congregacao Christa no Brasil (CCB), the largest Pentecostal body in Brazil that has effectively transmitted the faith to younger generations. In the Afterword, sociologists David and Bernice Martin provide an exhaustive annotated bibliography of global Pentecostalism, concluding that while Pentecostalism may “work” best on the micro level of social life, the movement’s public role in weak and failing states—from pacifying urban ghettos to reintegrating those fighting in civil wars in Africa—should not be underestimated.

On/File: A Continuing Record of Groups, Movements, Events and People Shaping Religion

1. **Oasis** is one of several networks of atheist or humanist congregations that have emerged in the past few years. As with the more well-known secular congregations known as Sunday Assemblies, Oasis brings together non-believers for church-like functions, involving services with live music, sermon-like messages, children’s activities, and testimonies of losing one’s faith while finding secularism. Founded in 2012, Oasis now has affiliates in seven U.S. cities and one in Toronto, with several more being planned. Leaders and participants see the network as an alternative to the polemics of the new atheism, as they are more focused on “bringing people together than on proving their ideas” or belittling believers; the Kansas City Oasis even invites speakers from religious communities to discuss topics related to their faith. Most Oasis groups have formed in areas with high numbers of evangelicals and Mormons, possibly serving as a subculture of support for secularists, even as they compete with traditional congregations. (**Source:** *The Atlantic*, September 11).



2. **Longquan Monastery** in Beijing, China, has become a center for stressed-out tech professionals, though its message and methods owe a lot to technology itself. Some of the most educated monks in the world run the temple, including nuclear physicists, math prodigies, and computer programmers who gave up their jobs for the monastic call. The monks have used their technological and media prowess to pioneer a series of cartoons based on Buddhist concepts as well as a robot to answer visitors' questions, as well as equipping the temple with fingerprint scanners, web cams, and iPads for studying Buddhist texts. The temple stresses connectivity rather than seclusion and offers talk and seminars on practical topics, such as achieving success and resolving family conflicts, rather than being focused on meditation and philosophical questions. The temple has become a showpiece for the ruling Communist Party, with its leader the Venerable Xuecheng serving as president of the party-controlled Buddhist Association of China. But Xuecheng has also sought to export the teachings of the temple as a global product, translating his writings into a dozen languages and opening a temple in Botswana for Chinese expatriates. The temple has become a pilgrimage site for those in start-up circles, with professionals believing they will get inspiration and creativity for their companies, as well as some respite from the materialism and pressures of society. (Source: *New York Times*, September 7).

