

Vol. 33, No. 5**March 2018****FEATURE STORY:****The uncertain fate of civil religion in the Trump era**

Does American civil religion, a shared, generic faith based upon belief in America as an exceptional nation and marked by national symbols and rituals, have a future? Judging by reporting on the recent death and burial of evangelist Billy Graham, it seems that the idea of civil religion is alive and well. In the *Religion News Service* feature “The ‘Splainer,” (February 28), Kimberly Winston writes that the rituals surrounding Graham’s death, such as having his body “lie in honor” in the nation’s Capitol, the first religious figure to do so, are “part of the American civil religion that can unite us all.” But according to scholars speaking at a recent Fordham University conference in New York attended by **RW**, growing religious illiteracy as well as the more nationalistic policies and themes of the Trump administration spell more of a death knell for this political religion. Proponents of civil or public religion, such as the sociologist Robert Bellah and Martin Luther King, Jr., viewed such a non-denominational faith as a basis of moral judgement that could be espoused independently of specific religions. But the speakers at the February conference viewed civil religion as either dissipating or shifting to more secular grounds.

John Carlson of Arizona State University said that the stress on pluralism and consensus in American civil religion may be giving way to greater “tribalism.” He pointed to the recent change of motto on presidential coins from *e pluribus unum* to “Make America Great Again.” Kathleen Flake of the University of Virginia said that while civil religion provided a way for the “nation to judge itself beyond itself,” today there is little sense of the common good and how it is defined with religious values. “Schools are no longer teaching it...even my graduate students show little basic knowledge of the Bible,” Flake said. Most of the participants cited the weakening of mainline Protestantism as serving to empty American civil religion of its religious contents. Mark Silk of Trinity College of Hartford, CT, argued that “[w]e don’t need theism to appeal to a civil religion based on patriotism.”

Silk argued that many of the functions that civil religion was supposed to fill now have a more secular basis, as reflected in the kneeling protests in the National Football League and the protests over immigrants’ rights. Such efforts provide the “transcendent” value of equality even if they are not addressed to a religious audience, he said. The conference participants seemed to rule out the Trump administration or its religious allies providing any civil religious values and located most of the energy on that front in state-based and local activism and movements. Flake cited the

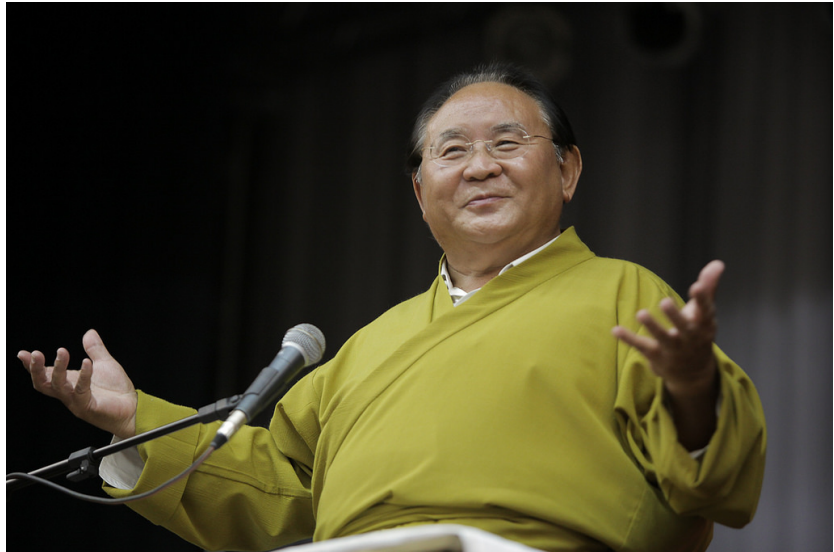
protests over confederate statues as more prominent in southern states than in national government. Carlson concluded that the neglect of civil religious themes by the government may “provide an anti-virus, where the public provides its own account” of a new civil religion.



Buddhist movements feeling pressure over sexual abuse cases

Following the crisis around Sogyal Rinpoche, the leader of the Buddhist group Rigpa International who had to retire in August 2017 after being confronted with massive allegations of abuse, and the impact of the #MeToo movement, another Buddhist group, Shambhala International, has admitted to several abuse cases. The group recently announced that “There have been instances of sexual harm and inappropriate relations between members and between teachers and students,” and that “such cases were not always addressed with care and skill.” In a message sent to all members and published on the Shambhala Facebook account (February 12), the Kalapa Council announced its intent to “move toward a comprehensive plan to address abuse and discrimination within our Shambhala culture.” In an article published in *The Guardian* (March 5), journalist Sarah Marsh writes that the initiative followed a report exposing a “shadow of sexualized violence,” written by a member of the Shambhala community in the U.S.

According to the report's author, Andrea Winn, "[k]nown child abusers are freely active within the Shambhala community, [and] some are even senior teachers." The report also acknowledges that a handful of male teachers have been removed from their positions. The *Guardian* article quotes Sarah Harvey, a senior research officer at INFORM (a London-based center monitoring new religious movements), who says that "[t]he majority of our inquiries at the moment concern Buddhist groups....I think there is a popular assumption that Buddhism as a whole is unproblematic and people are surprised when they do encounter controversies or have negative experiences."



(Statement from the Kalapa Council:

<https://www.facebook.com/Shambhala.org/posts/1999897840264640>; *Project Sunshine*, "Final Report" (Feb. 15, 2018), download:

http://www.andreamwinn.com/pdfs/Project_Sunshine_Final_Report.pdf; independent website on abuse in Buddhist communities: <http://howdidthathappen.org>)

Biomedical research buttresses and changes Buddhism

Buddhism has been the focus of recent biomedical and neurological research suggesting that the practice of meditation is psychologically and physically healthy, but Buddhist organizations have also been both changed and challenged by these insights, writes Jeff Wilson in the journal *Zygon* (March). Wilson finds that few Buddhist groups have discounted the findings about the healthy effect of Buddhist meditation, but only a segment of Buddhists have used them to actually promote the faith. Such a leader as Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche actively uses neurological findings and concepts to attract a skeptical, Western audience to Buddhism. He references his own participation in neurological experiments (Buddhist monks were among the main subjects in these studies) to make the point that he and "his religion are not at war with science, unlike some conservative forms of religion in the modern day," Wilson writes. Such popular books as Rick Hanson's *Buddha's Brain* and James Kingland's *Siddhartha's Brain* are also examples of this approach. Wilson adds that relying on science to prove the claims of Buddhism "actually undercuts many inherited aspects of Buddhism itself, such as monastic and scriptural authority." Another way Buddhists have approached scientific research on meditation is to hide their identity, as "large numbers of Buddhists disparage or eliminate Buddhism from meditation" as they cite these studies. One of the primary venues for this approach is *Mindful* magazine, a popular publication edited by Buddhists, though "you'd never know it from reading [it]," Wilson writes. Rather than reinforcing

the truth of Buddhism, it makes it removable. “This allows the publishers to reach a wide audience of non-Buddhists, both for the well-being of readers and of course for the financial benefit of *Mindful’s* staff and writers.”

Thirdly, these scientific studies can also change Buddhism. Author Stephen Batchelor “deploys scientific studies in order to bolster his call for the reorganization of Buddhism in an agnostic, Euro-Enlightenment mode.” This is most evident in Buddhist groups that have not traditionally practiced meditation, such as the Buddhist Churches of America in the Jodo Shinshu tradition, but have recently adopted the practice. For instance, the Idaho-Oregon Buddhist Temple’s 750th anniversary celebration of Jodo Shinshu founder Shinran included a 24-hour meditation vigil. The organization used a form of chanting while the studies have stressed silent meditation, but these Buddhists also stress the health benefits of these practices.

At the same time, some Buddhist groups may acknowledge the health benefits of meditation but point to their teachings as more authentic than biomedical studies and transcending such material concerns. Such Buddhist critics see the science driving these studies as too materialistic and reductionist. Lastly, a segment of Buddhists also see themselves as reforming science. Buddhist scholar Alan Wallace sees Buddhism as a “super science” proposing a superior way of life. He proposes the “Jiva Project,” which would use the advanced EEG signatures of Tibetan monks to “determine if they were indeed reincarnated into the bodies chosen as their successors.”

(Zygon: <http://www.zygonjournal.org/>)



CURRENT RESEARCH

● **In a new study, researchers find that Republicans who view God as actively involved in the world tend to support more generous welfare policies, in opposition to their party's platform.** The study, conducted by Paul Froese and Robert Thomson and published in the journal *Sociological Forum* (online January 30), is based on an analysis of the Baylor Religion Survey (2007 wave). The authors note that Republicans are consistently and distinctly more conservative on both issues of social justice and retributive justice than Democrats. Conservatism predicts negative views toward such policy positions as distributing wealth more evenly, improving the standard of living for ethnic minorities, seeking social and economic justice, and taking care of the sick and needy. "Conservatives who feel close to God tend to go to church more, volunteer more, but are also more likely to want help from the government to take care of the poor. Republicans with a distant God tend to be less compassionate," according to Froese and Thomson. The sample size was 1,588 respondents, excluding atheists because they did not have an image of God to compare with other respondents' perceptions. The group's makeup was 41 percent Republican, 37 percent Democrat, and 22 percent Independent.

(*Sociological Forum*:

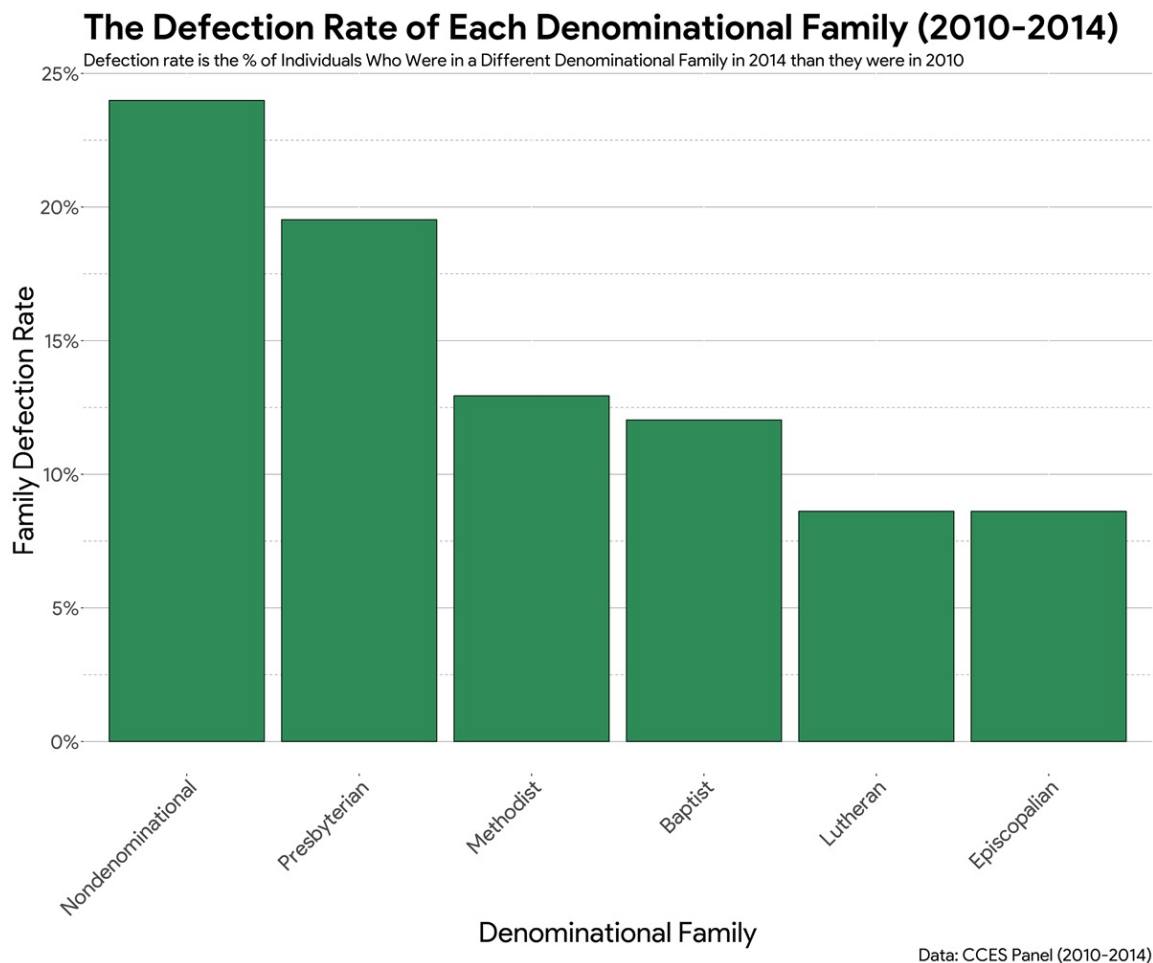
[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1573-7861/earlyview](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1573-7861/earlyview))



● **A survey of 9,500 individuals between 2010 and 2014 that traces their religious journeys finds considerable movement both into and out of non-denominational churches.** In an article in *Christianity Today* (February 20), the study finds that Catholics tend to stay in their church, changing churches less than half as often as Americans as a whole (8.8 percent compared to 18.9 percent). Of the 2,112 Catholics in the study, 39 became Protestants, six became Orthodox, and three became Buddhists. The defection rate from Protestantism was about the same as Catholicism (9.1 percent). Switchers tend to leave Christianity altogether, with 6.4 percent becoming agnostics, atheists, or "nothing in particular." Within Protestantism there was considerable switching, with 16 percent changing from one Protestant group to another. Since 9 percent have left completely, this means that 25 percent of Protestants changed their religious affiliation over the course of four years.

As has often been noted, the major beneficiary of such switching is the burgeoning non-denominational movement, with non-denominational churches comprising the second-largest category of all Protestants. But non-denominational congregations also show the largest number of defections. About 24 percent of all members of non-denominational churches—almost one in four—switched churches. This is double the number of Baptists (12 percent) and Methodists (12.9 percent) who changed, and nearly three times the number of Episcopalians (8.6 percent) and Lutherans (8.6 percent). Baptists received the largest share of non-denominational switchers, with 6.1 percent. Others migrate to even less definable groups, with 5.6 percent selecting “none of these” on the survey, according to researcher Ryan Burge.

(*Christianity Today*, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)



● **A study by the American Psychological Association finds that fewer Americans are engaging in prayer to relieve stress.** The survey of 3,440 adults finds that the public’s overall stress level remains the same as the previous year’s, with an average level of 4.8 on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most stress. But how Americans respond to stress is changing. Only 29 percent of Americans polled said they pray to relieve stress, a steady decline from the high of 37 percent recorded in 2008. While a growing number of Americans are turning to alternative spiritual

practices such as meditation and yoga, they are still not very widespread, with only 12 percent of Americans reporting they meditate or do yoga, up from 9 percent in 2016. Listening to music (47 percent) and exercising (46 percent) were the main ways of relieving stress.



ARTICLES

Hillsong Church—a model for Catholics too?

As a contemporary Pentecostal church, Hillsong (launched in Sydney in 1983) has gained international fame, especially through its music, and it seems to have become a source of inspiration for some European Catholics eager to revitalize their church as well. In France, according to an article by Youna Rivallain in the French Catholic weekly *La Vie* (Feb. 28), Hillsong has not only managed to develop its own network of congregations in some major French cities and influence other Evangelical groups, but is attracting the attention of some Catholics as a possible model. Well-known among French Catholics, the Lyon-based praise band Glorious was launched in 2002. However, its founders acknowledge that their encounter with Hillsong, at the time a local branch was established in 2008, gave them a new vision, to the extent that they now see their Catholic band as having a “spiritual affiliation” with Pentecostal Hillsong. According to Benjamin Pouzin, one of Glorious’ leaders, what impressed them were the efforts by Hillsong to make the Christian message relevant to contemporary culture and to daily life in a way that could credibly compete with secular offers. Moreover, they feel that one of Hillsong’s strengths is its ability to communicate Christianity.

“The 21st century will be evangelical,” says Pouzin. French journalist Linda Caille, who has authored a book on French Evangelicals (*Soldats de Jésus*, 2013) and another one on French Catholics (*Les Cathos*, 2017), sees in such encounters between contemporary Catholics and Evangelical culture the seeds of something that could turn into a Catholic revival. However, she notes that Catholics have to deal with institutional constraints unknown to Evangelicals. In Lyon, Cardinal Barbarin has allowed for experimenting with new ways of parish life in the flourishing St. Blandine parish, where the Glorious band is based.



Orthodox Churches in need of a multilateral institution

The close association between contemporary Orthodox Churches and nation-states has often been highlighted by Orthodox scholars, but Rev. Nicolas Kazarian, an Orthodox priest as well as academic expert in the field of religion and geopolitics, has put the issue in a new light by drawing attention to a crisis for multilateralism in contemporary Orthodoxy. In the blog *Public Orthodoxy* (February 13), Rev. Kazarian observes that while Orthodox conciliarity is by nature multilateral, embracing unity, reciprocity and dialogue between Orthodox Churches, it finds itself challenged today in the same way that there has been “a global turn against multilateralism.” Thus, what is happening among Orthodox Churches might be mirroring wider trends, besides the consequences of developments in post-communist national environments.

According to Rev. Kazarian, the Orthodox Council that gathered in Crete in 2016 “should have been, and in fact was, a crucial exercise of Orthodox multilateralism, despite the absence of four Churches.” But its aftermath has made it clear that there is actually an absence of an “institutional space for Orthodox multilateralism.” It is true that Orthodox Churches together attend ecumenical gatherings and that there are assemblies gathering all Orthodox bishops in a number of countries,

“but there does not seem to be a post-council pan-Orthodox agenda, even though the reception of the Holy and Great Council is determined by their ability to prepare for the next step.” Some Churches, especially the Russian Orthodox Church, develop a multipolar strategy and use commemorations of important events as opportunities for inviting representatives of other Orthodox Churches. But Rev. Kazarian stresses that such initiatives can be seen rather as a way for such Churches to assert their own local or even global leadership. After the 2016 Synod, Orthodox Churches are in need of a multilateral institution or process, he concludes.

(*Public Orthodoxy*: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2018/02/13/crisis-of-orthodoxy-multilateralism/>
To place those observations into context, one can also read the article by Lucian N. Leustean, “Eastern Orthodoxy, Geopolitics and the 2016 ‘Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church,’” *Geopolitics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2018, pp. 201–216.)



Hong Kong connection to mainland China’s Christians threatened but not likely cut

Hong Kong, long a stepping-off point for evangelization and Christian education efforts in China, is becoming a special target of Communist Party efforts to stem the growth of Christianity in the country, *Time* magazine (March 5) reports. China’s President Xi Jinping has recently kicked off a new effort to bring Christianity under control by instituting new regulations against clergy in Hong Kong. With more than 60 percent of Hong Kong’s churches involved in some form of ministry (especially Bible and Christian book distribution and short-term training for church

workers) on the mainland, the recent revision of religious regulations threatens religious exchanges with both Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau. In response, “many Hong Kong pastors are suspending or outright canceling their work for fear of endangering their followers,” writes Laignee Barron. The regulations may also be a way of trying to reintegrate Hong Kong into the mainland after its 150 years of independence from China. Sociologist Fenggang Yang sees the change as “trying to legitimate the repressive measures in the past few years,” which have included destroying underground churches and detaining church leaders in China.

Barron adds that “[t]rouble was brewing even before the rollout of the new regulations. Mainland Christians were sporadically barred from attending conferences and conventions in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong pastors have increasingly paid a price for trying to spread the gospel beyond the territory’s border.” This crackdown has especially targeted the growth of unofficial churches in China, but a recent article in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (online in January) suggests that such an effort of repressing both Hong Kong’s and the mainland’s churches is unlikely to succeed due to the growth of transnational activism and mission in China. Ray Wang of National Chengchi University looks at four Chinese cities and finds that government-approved churches represented by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and foreign church workers (including those from Hong Kong) have formed a quiet strategic alliance, creating a “backdoor listing” effect that allows “illegal” practices to exist. Another tactic is a minority-majority alliance where TSPM churches predominate in an area and allow underground activity to continue. Because of this type of alliance, foreign missionary funding and services have flowed into the city with few obstacles. These alliances and forms of activism are influential in determining whether religious freedom and tolerance gain traction in a given city. Wang concludes that such a diverse pattern of religious freedom in the country suggests the difficulty of enforcing national religious repression. (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1468-5906](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1468-5906))



Russian Orthodox social ministry embracing lay ethic

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is shifting from a model of social ministry that emphasizes obedience to church authority to a more modern kind of volunteerism stressing personal autonomy, according to an article by Boris Knorre in the journal *Religion, State & Society* (online February 13). Knorre studied ROC volunteer programs as well as official church documents on volunteering and found that an “authoritarian-mystical” model had in the past been dominant, where social ministry volunteering was viewed in a monastic framework and church members were instructed to engage in some charitable work as a form of spiritual discipline. This model had been coupled with a “band-aid” approach to social ministry focusing on people in poverty and other forms of social distress rather than encouraging preventative programs. As the ROC has become more aligned with the state after 2013, it has sought to take a broader approach, engaging in more comprehensive ministries to the homeless, poor, and unemployed. Special guidelines have been provided on housing assistance, psychiatric and spiritual support, and employment assistance.

But Knorre adds that there is still a lack of support for the implementation of these policies at the Church level. Most grants given by the ROC for social ministry are aimed at projects seeking to strengthen patriotism, with fewer designated to programs directed at the homeless and disabled. It is at the level of volunteering that Knorre sees the major change taking place. Rather than viewing volunteerism as a form of obligation and obedience to one’s priest rather than self-fulfillment,



which is closely tied to the Orthodox tradition and monasticism, Knorre found that many volunteers and social ministry organizations are seeing their work as an act of choice and personal

freedom. This shift in attitudes has partly come from Russian church organizations coming into greater contact with secular NGOs and foundations, but also with ecumenical and Catholic organizations such as Caritas and Sant'Egidio. This more open type of volunteer organization allows members freedom to choose their type of social ministry and the ability to reach a larger group of people as well as have dialogue with the media and experts in different fields. These volunteers represent a new type of Orthodox believer, more attached to their social ministry than to the parish and choosing their own beliefs and practices. "In the ROC's attempt to develop a humanitarian-anthropological approach..., we can see a trend towards developing new ethical behavioral attitudes which correspond more closely to lay ethics than to monastic ethics," Knorre concludes.

(*Religion, State & Society*: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/crss20>)

Sharia encompassing more of Turkish society

Islamic law is gaining ground in large sectors of Turkish society, reports the *Washington Post* (February 16). "Over the past few weeks, Turkish officials have broken with decades of precedent in what is still, at least nominally, a secular republic: they have begun describing the country's military deployment in Syria as 'jihad.' During the first two days of the operation, which began on Jan. 20, the government's Directorate of Religious



Affairs ordered all of Turkey's nearly 90,000 mosques to broadcast the 'Al-Fath' verse from the Koran—"the prayer of conquest"—through the loudspeakers on their minarets," writes Soner Cagaptay. While the secular constitutional system remains in place, recent changes by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan have been seen as curtailing religious freedom. Since last November 2017, the national police have been monitoring online commentary on religion and censoring commentary they find "offensive to Islam," Cagaptay adds.

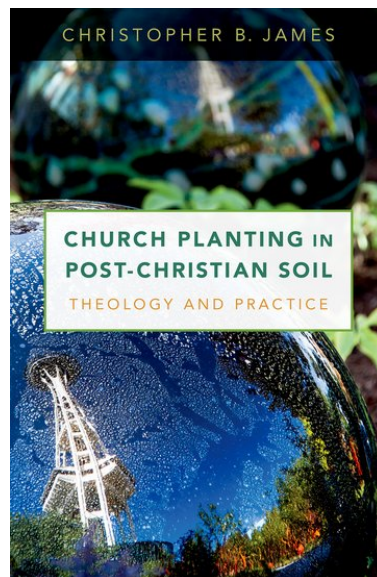
Education is an important sector where Erdogan is seeking to enforce his version of Islamic law, or sharia, in Turkey. The country's education system, like the police, falls under control of the central government, and the Ministry of Education has been "pressuring citizens to conform to conservative Islamic practices in public schools. The government is formally inserting religious practices into the public education system by requiring all newly-built schools in Turkey to house Islamic prayer rooms. [And] [r]ecently...a local education official in Istanbul demanded that

teachers bring pupils to attend morning prayers at local mosques,” Cagaptay writes. Erdogan’s effort to blend Islamic practices with his political power can also be seen in the recent elevation of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (known as the “Diyanet”) and the status its new leader, Ali Erbas. He “now regularly attends major public events at Erdogan’s side, blessing everything from Istanbul’s third bridge across the Bosphorus to Turkey’s campaign against Kurdish militia in Syria.” The Diyanet is now adding to the effort to bring sharia law to Turkish society, recently releasing “a fatwa on its website suggesting that girls as young as 9 and boys as young as 12 could marry” (following an interpretation of sharia law that adulthood begins at puberty). This ruling was withdrawn only after the Diyanet faced significant protests. “And more recently, on Feb. 9, the religious body announced a new plan to appoint ‘Diyanet representatives’ among pupils in every class of Turkey’s nearly 60,000 public schools, bringing public education under closer scrutiny of Erdogan-guided religion,” Cagaptay concludes.

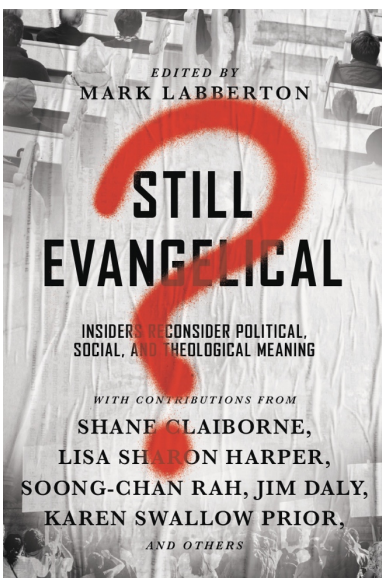
Findings & Footnotes

■ *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil* (Oxford University Press, \$35), by Christopher James, reports from the unlikely ground zero of church planting in the U.S.—Seattle. Although much of the book is a theology and ecclesiology of church planting, it is based on James’ extensive research of new churches in a city known as the epicenter of unchurched Americans (some of the findings from James’ study were reported in the April 2016 issue of RW). James conducted a survey of 105 new churches founded since 2001 and then categorized them into four broad types: “Great Commission Team,” which are mission-based evangelical congregations; “Household of the Spirit,” mainly charismatic-Pentecostal worship-centered churches; “New Community,” including mainline and “emerging” worship and community-centered churches; and “Neighborhood Incarnation,” community and mission-centered congregations.

James’ survey of the congregations finds that they are in the most diverse and gentrified sections of Seattle and tend to be predominantly evangelical. The book focuses on and sees the most promise in the neighborhood related congregations, finding that they are adaptable to a diversity of theological perspectives and are relevant to concerns about building ties between surrounding communities and churches. James is upbeat about his findings, especially the high survival rate of these new churches, believing that Seattle is something of a bellwether for the rest of the country; just as it was a leader in the emergence of the non-affiliated, he argues that these kinds of church plants (and new combinations of these various models) can flourish in more receptive religious “ecologies” or environments in other cities.



■ There is considerable turmoil in the conservative Protestant world, at least among its intellectual elite, about evangelical identity and even the use of the term “evangelical” ever since surveys have shown a large segment of these Christians voted for Donald Trump. The new book *Still Evangelical?* (InterVarsity Press, \$15.99), edited by Mark Labberton, reflects this mood of evangelical questioning and even disillusionment, as contributing scholars dissect the diffuse movement and ask whether they still find a place in it. On one hand, Labberton views the current controversy as one of a “fundamentalist” contingent

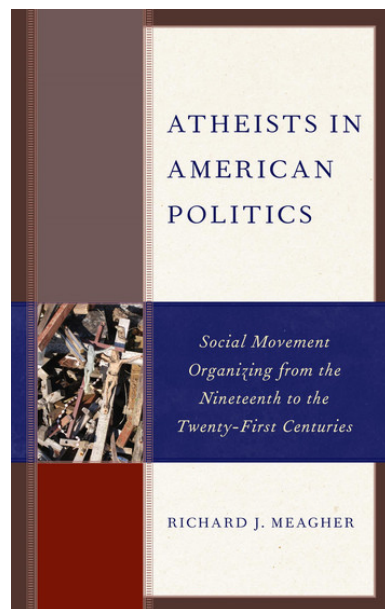


being misrepresented as the wider evangelical movement by the media and other opinion-makers. On the other hand, he acknowledges that “many white evangelicals, particularly in the central and southern states, made an alliance with the unlikely candidacy of Donald Trump. In an iconoclastic and populist eruption of desire for ideological change in our national narrative around issues of class, race, gender, religion, government, nation, and globalization, 81 percent of white evangelicals reportedly voted in support of Trump. Many white evangelicals voted out of protest and rejection of the liberalizing effects of the Democratic Party, and particularly of Hillary Clinton.”

The rest of the chapters—several by immigrant and minority scholars—tend to differentiate what is considered forward-looking evangelicalism from what are seen as the distortions of the tradition—American exceptionalism, the embrace of anti-immigrant policies, and white nationalism—with little attempt to create a unifying new image for such a diverse movement. Mark Galli concludes on a more self-

critical note by admitting that the contributors represent an evangelical elite that excludes evangelicals of lower classes: “They don’t write books or give speeches; they don’t attend conferences of evangelicals for social justice or evangelicals for immigration reform. They are deeply suspicious of mainstream media. And a lot of them voted for Donald Trump.”

■ *Atheists in American Politics* (Lexington Books, \$90), by Richard J. Meagher, ably chronicles and analyzes the past, present, and future of atheist organizing and politics in the U.S. It does an especially good job of tracing how this diffuse movement has, on the one hand, gained a good deal of political and social capital in the last two decades, yet, on the other hand, has been beset by problems of infighting and, until very recently, lack of resources. The use of the Internet by both elite (such as the “New Atheists”) and lay atheists was a decisive step in secularist political organizing. In fact, it was only when the movement took advantage of new communication technologies in the early 2000s that it was able to form such a successful lobbying organization as the Secularist Coalition of America. Its adaptation of identity politics and the gay rights movement’s strategy of “coming out of the closet” was another innovation that gave organized secularism some traction in American society (even as such a posture has been criticized by secularists who see atheism more as a philosophy than an identity).

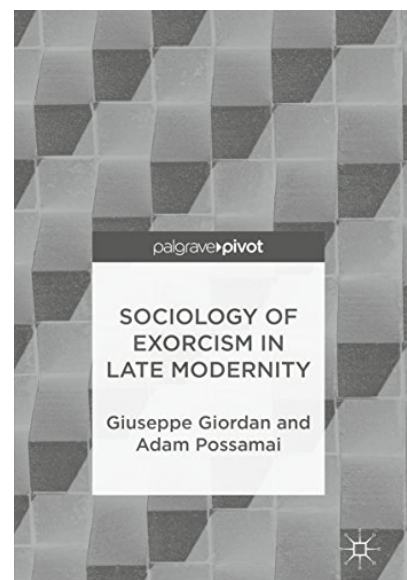


The author’s use of discourse and textual analysis, particularly of early American atheist publications, is particularly impressive, including chapters on atheists and communism and on the activism of Madelyn Murray O’Hare. The chronological structure of the book makes sense and adds to the author’s argument that today’s atheist activism builds on earlier approaches. While Meagher captures the sharp polemics and debates over “intersectional concerns,” namely feminism, he could have done more on the recent split between activists and those involved in community building efforts, including the use of ritual (such as the Sunday Assembly). The author speculates that the “opportunity” given to secularists by the more liberal political culture in the U.S. up until 2016 (as well as the related but

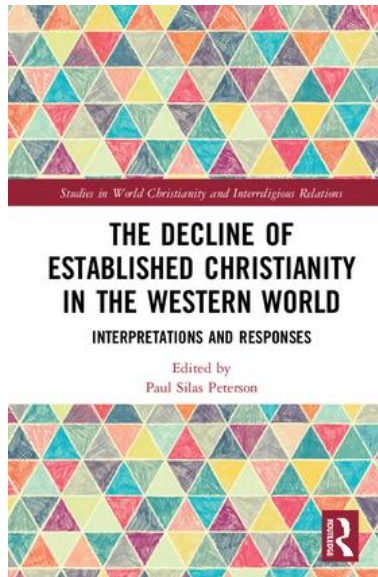
not identical phenomenon of the rise of the non-affiliated or the “nones”) could well be upset by the rise of conservative populism and the Trump era.

■ **RW** has already reported on sociologists Giuseppe Giordan and Adam Possamai’s work on contemporary exorcism (see October 2016 issue), but further aspects of this phenomenon are explored in their new book, *Sociology of Exorcism in Late Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, \$54.99). The theme of demonic possession had never disappeared in the contemporary world, but it became a component of mainstream popular culture in the 1970s with the famous movie *The Exorcist* (1973). While there is no way to assess whether there are more people believed to be possessed today than in previous decades, the authors claim that there has been an increase in the number of people believing in the reality of possession. When interviewing priests in an Italian diocese where an exorcist had given them access to his files, the authors noticed that the younger priests (between 30 and 45 years of age) tended to believe most strongly in the existence of the devil and of demonic possession. Since the end of the last century there has been a renewed interest in exorcism, not only by the Catholic Church but also the Anglicans. The International Association of Exorcists (IAE) was founded by Catholic priests in 1991 and was recognized by the Congregation for Clergy in 2014.

According to the authors, the growing number of religious professionals of various denominations who point out the presence of the devil “create an over-awareness of the devil in general consciousness.” Exorcism tends to reinforce the strength of a religion and its effectiveness in the eyes of believers. An interesting chapter pays attention to exorcism as a field of competition between religious groups. Despite similarities (and influences on Catholic Charismatic groups), Roman Catholic priests working as exorcists tend to emphasize the difference between rituals of blessing and liberation and Pentecostal rituals of deliverance; they are also critical of aspects they see as closer to theatrical performances. The authors see it as the Catholic Church “branding its own style of deliverance ministry.” Some Catholic professionals acknowledge that there are people being afflicted by the devil more than they are possessed and admit that their “rituals that do not seem as effervescent as those delivered by Pentecostals.” In most cases, institutional exorcists deem the problems reported by patients to be of a different nature than possession. In their case study in an Italian diocese, the authors found rituals of blessing and rituals of liberation to be practiced much more frequently than exorcism itself (only 5 percent of the cases). The case study pays attention to an “institutional” exorcist, complying with the regulations of the institution. But the authors are aware that there are other types of exorcists, acting outside of the boundaries of a religious institution, and that it might be a good idea to pay attention to them in the future.



■ *The Decline of Established Christianity in the Western World* (Routledge, \$140), edited by Paul Silas Peterson, brings together theologians, anthropologists, philosophers, church historians, religious studies scholars, and sociologists to wrestle with the reality of religious decline, even if they are more critical about an overarching trajectory of inevitable non-belief and religious indifference. Peterson, a German church historian, acknowledges a dramatically shrinking Christian presence in Europe and a diminishment of vitality in places like the U.S. as signs of irreversible secularization. Interestingly, the sociologists tend to take a more skeptical stance toward secularization. Eva Hamburg of Uppsala University uses Sweden



as a case study, arguing that the Church of Sweden has so adapted to secular culture that it creates further religious indifference that is only reversed by immigrant religion and congregations that heavily stress religious socialization of the younger generations. The most unique part of the book lies in those chapters addressing how religious decline and secularization are treated by theologians and religious practitioners. In a later chapter, Peterson writes that the tendency of liberal theologians to see secularization as a way of realizing human liberation has receded, especially as hard-core secularists (such as the New Atheism), who see no place for churches or the transcendent at all, have taken up this project in earnest. But some churches and theologians have sought numerous reasons and remedies for Christian decline—from its being the result of a legitimate reaction to overbearing and legalistic churches to that of a failure to adapt to modern and postmodern culture. Others have accepted a future as a minority or counterculture even as Christianity expands in the global South. These diverse responses to secularization are fleshed out in a case study on religious indifference in Germany.

German theologians and clergy are calling for an “ecumenism of the third kind” that seeks to create a special kind of mission to the indifferent (those who see no need for any religious faith). This can mean creating new rituals for weddings between believers and the indifferent, as the Catholics have done, or developing the idea of “vicarious religion” as a way for Christians to mediate on behalf of their non-believing friends and families in their churches. The overall tone, however, of the more theological chapters, such as one on decline in Canada, seems to be one of resignation and the idea of churches becoming a small voice among many working for human betterment.