

Vol. 33, No. 7**May 2018****FEATURE STORY:****Mormonism globalizes on leadership and lay levels**

The recent appointment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' newest apostles suggests that the global growth of Mormonism is being expressed at the leadership level. *The Conversation* magazine (April 9) reports that the two new members of the LDS church's second-highest governing body, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, announced at its recent semiannual General Conference, are a son of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. and a native Brazilian—the first non-white apostles in the church's history. Matthew Bowman of Henderson State University writes that the selection of Gerrit Gong and Ulisses Soares is an “indication that the church has begun to take seriously the task of growing outside the United States.” The growth of the church in Brazil and the rest of Latin America has been so strong over the past decades that members have expected a Latin American apostle for the last several vacancies. But “while Soares' selection reflects the Mormon present, Gong's may point to the future of Mormonism,” Bowman adds. Mormon growth in China is taking place “through expatriates and Chinese citizens converted by Mormon missionaries abroad.” The current president of the LDS church, Russell Nelson, has studied Mandarin and spent a great deal of time in China over his career.

Nelson's interest in the Chinese church has “been matched by signs that the church as a whole is interested in cultivating a higher profile there. For instance, the church recently launched a website devoted to its relationship with China.” Dallin Oaks, one of the members of the church's First Presidency, announced that the church has been building “a relationship of trust with Chinese officials”—an effort that may be aided by the appointment of Gong, who has worked at the State Department and Georgetown University. Bowman adds that the globalization of the church could also be seen in moves announced at the conference to decentralize church administration, thereby strengthening local congregations worldwide. In each local congregation, the leadership would be consolidated and simplified. Another change cut the paperwork and bureaucracy surrounding the practices of “home teaching” and “visiting teaching,” where congregants check in with each other monthly to ensure everybody in the congregation is doing well. By loosening its control of this

work, the church will be allowing for more local autonomy. It was also announced that seven new temples would be built in such distant locations as India, Russia, and the Phillipines—more signs that the church “sees potential for strong local leadership.”

Meanwhile, at the lay level, Mormonism is still growing far and wide, although recently released figures from 2017 show that its rate of growth has slowed considerably over the last few years and is now just under 1.5 percent. “This is the fewest converts we’ve had in 30 years,” said Matthew Martinich, founder of the *LDS Church Growth* blog. In her blog *Flunking Sainthood* for *Religion News Service* (April 21), Jana Reiss reports that church statistics show the church added 233,729 new converts in 2017, while that figure was closer to 300,000 just four or five years ago. Another area of concern is ward and branch creation, which is stagnant. “The increase in congregations was the lowest we’ve had since 2011,” largely because of a lack of U.S. growth, adds Martinich.

The growth rate in the United States has declined to .75 percent, down from .93 percent in 2016. U.S. growth has not been this low “in approximately 100 years or longer,” according to Martinich. He says that, once again, there was no net increase in the number of congregations in the United States, with a particular decline occurring in California. He notes, however, that church defectors are not numerous enough to change much in global membership trends. Among the bright spots are a growth in stakes, which suggests that there is more vitality among people who are already Mormons; a growth in missionaries; stronger and larger wards abroad; and particular growth in West Africa.

(*The Conversation*, https://theconversation.com/mormonisms-newest-apostles-reflect-growing-global-reach-94388?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=facebookbutton)



ARTICLES

On and off campus, FOCUS energizing and innovating Catholic evangelism

The new breed of Catholic campus ministry typified by the organization FOCUS has not only shown wide success among students but is influencing parish life with its “spiritual multiplication” approach to growth. A three-part series on FOCUS in *the National Catholic Reporter* (April 6–19, April 20–May 3) shows how in the last decade, even while stressing orthodox Catholicism, it has borrowed from evangelical counterparts, such as InterVarsity and Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ), using small-group Bible studies and one-on-one mentoring to build Christian disciples. While working within the Catholic Church structure, FOCUS has also improvised outside of institutional constraints, such as by training self-supporting “missionaries” who evangelize and disciple students and others in the faith. Today the organization has chapters on 137 campuses around the country, led by 700 missionaries, with an annual budget of \$57 million a year (double its operating budget of five years ago).

Such growth and influence has attracted the attention of Church officials and other campus ministries, some of whom are critical of FOCUS’ stress on individual piety rather than social action and its lack of training for its leaders. Nevertheless, FOCUS and its strategy of “spiritual multiplication,” which enlists students and other members to start their own



Bible studies and evangelize and disciple others, is moving into parish life, reports Heidi Schlumpf. FOCUS’ strategy of “win, build, send” is being tested in a new pilot program that has been launched in four parishes in Oklahoma, North Carolina, California and Illinois, and FOCUS plans to expand to 25 parishes in the next five years. Its ministry will likely be welcomed in parishes struggling to reach young adults. In one of the test parishes in Chicago, FOCUS missionaries started by hosting a young married couples’ group that broadened beyond the young adult demographic, leading to 16 Bible study groups of 8 to 10 parishioners each. Schlumpf adds that although FOCUS seems to be targeting large suburban and urban parishes, their self-supporting missionary approach may be needed more in inner-city and rural parishes that suffer most from a

lack of resources. But just by its large network of alumni who are now active in parishes, FOCUS is likely to have a long-term effect on parish evangelism efforts, she concludes.

(*National Catholic Reporter*, <https://www.ncronline.org/>)

“Silent exodus” of second-generation Korean-Americans accelerates

Dubbed the “silent exodus” by Helen Lee in 1996, second-generation Korean-Americans are continuing a decades-long trend of leaving their parents’ churches—often to multi-ethnic congregations and, more recently, to non-affiliation. Given that the Christian church has been a shelter where marginalized Korean immigrants, mostly of the first generation, could find comfort in their common cultural identity as well as their faith in God, the departure of the second generation raises significant concern for many Korean-American Christians. It seems that many second-generation Korean-Americans are not as strongly attached to Korean ethnic churches as their parents because of their identification as American rather than Korean, their language skills, the availability of multi-ethnic churches, but also the diverse sources of Korean-American social networking and fellowship available to them other than churches. “No longer restricted to the church, Korean-Americans today can turn to sources of their culture that didn’t exist when their parents first immigrated....Korean culture has flourished outside the church with the expansion of



Koreatown and the breakthrough of K-pop bands,” writes Paulina Cachero in a recent KPCC article. “The younger generations are not so apt to just be committed to a church. There are other things that will satisfy their cultural needs,” says Benjamin Shin of Biola University in the article by *Southern California Public Radio* (April 4).

According to sociologist Pyong Gap Min, only about 30 percent of second-generation Korean-Americans attend a Korean church every Sunday—bad news for a church that already suffers from schisms even among first-generation Korean-Americans. However, even though the “silent exodus” may seem to be an irreversible trend, the KPCC article describes the different experiences of two second-generation Korean-Americans at Young Nak Church, one of the largest Korean immigrant churches in Los Angeles, with one continuing to attend and the other leaving the congregation. Most second-generation Korean-Americans who go to either their parents’ or a multi-ethnic church hold to a conservative faith like many of their parents, and faith in Christianity remains important to this generation’s Korean identity. As the Korean-American who left Young Nak put it, “Young people can socialize in Koreatown and meet in Koreatown, but they all still grew up in church....Going to church is the Korean thing to do.”

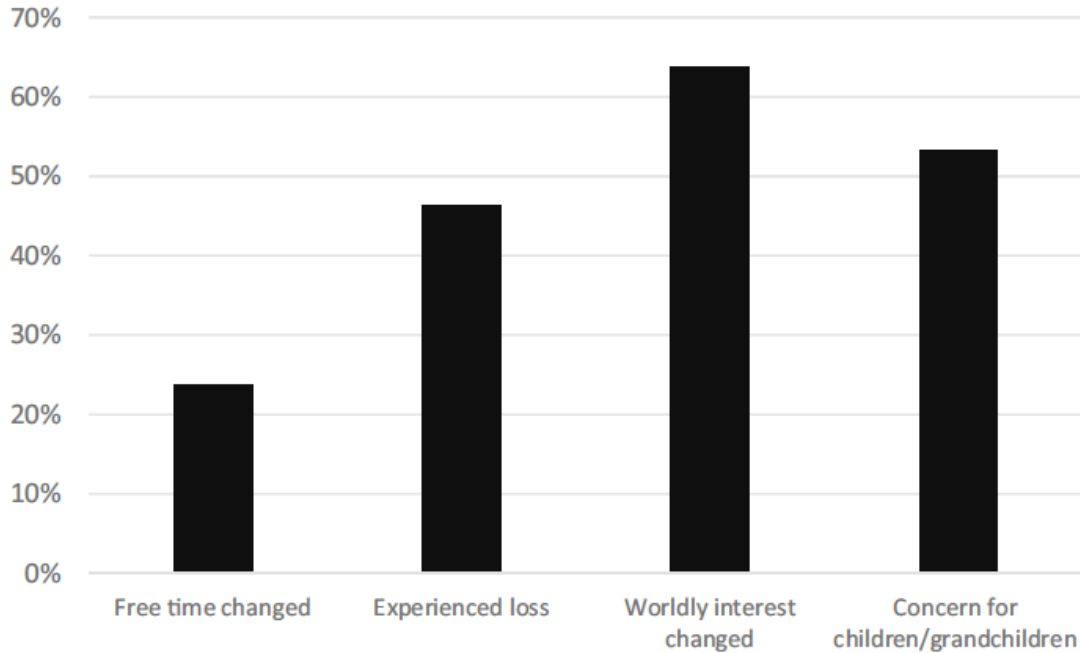
(*Southern California Public Radio*, <http://www.scpr.org/news/2018/04/03/81489/silent-exodus-from-korean-american-churches-as-you/>)

—By *KT Chun*, a New Jersey-based writer and researcher

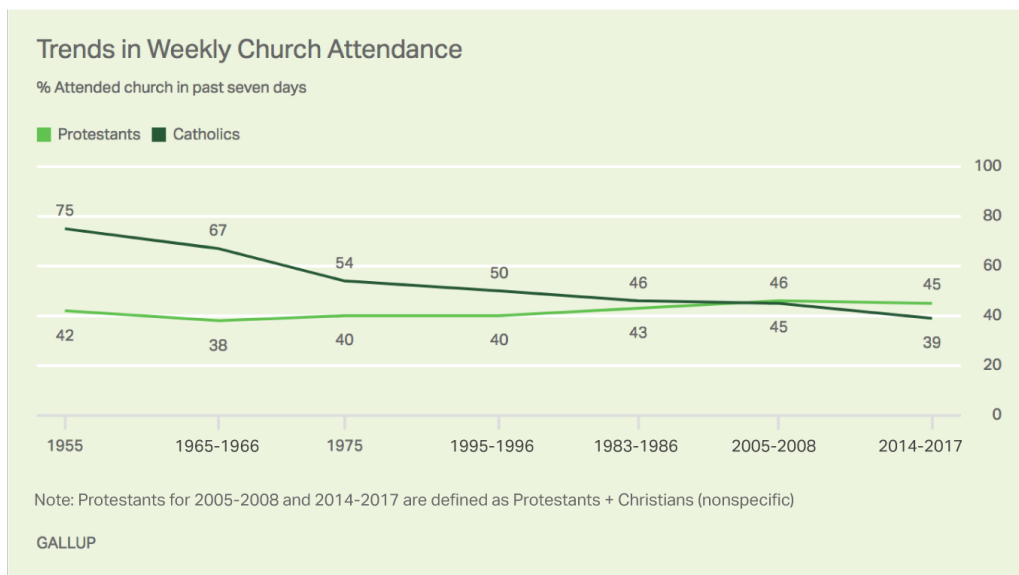
CURRENT RESEARCH

● **A recent multigenerational study that spans five decades finds that more than one in five boomers became more religious as they made their way from their 50s to their 60s.** The study, conducted by Merrill Silverstein and Vern Bengtson, used data from 599 respondents in its 2016 wave. Overall, 56 percent of aging boomers said their religiosity was stable over the period, but 21 percent reported an increase of their faith, 11 percent a decrease, and 12 percent said they were never religious. In his blog *Ahead of the Trend* (April 26), David Briggs reports that the study found that older boomers cited several reasons for their increased religiosity, from seeking solace in life after the death of a spouse, to finding other sources of meaning after the loss of a job, to a desire to pass on religious beliefs to their grandchildren. The primary reason given by boomers was the sense that there is more to life than material prosperity, with two-thirds saying that “their interest in worldly things changed.”

(*Ahead of the Trend*, <http://blogs.thearda.com/trend/featured/study-1-in-5-baby-boomers-increasing-faith-as-they-reach-old-age/>)



● **Weekly church attendance by American Catholics continues its decades-long decline, according to a new Gallup report.** The *Huffington Post* (April 11) reports that the poll found about 39 percent of Catholics reporting attending church in any given week, according to data collected between 2014 and 2017. This figure is down 45 percent from data taken between 2005 and 2008. The decline is far sharper when comparing it to the 1955 weekly Mass attendance of 75 percent. Even older Catholics, who are typically more religiously committed than younger ones, have stopped going to church as often. For the first time, Gallup found that no more than 49 percent of Catholics in any age group reported attending church in the past week.



● A study of Catholic dioceses generating the highest rates of ordination to the priesthood finds that five American dioceses have consistently been effective in encouraging religious vocations—the Archdioceses of Newark, St. Louis, and Atlanta, and the Dioceses of Patterson, NJ, and Arlington, VA.

In a study of these and nine other priest-producing dioceses from 2006–2016, sociologist Ann Hendershott discounts the view that it is the large size of these dioceses that makes them rich in ordinations (47 percent of Newark’s population is Catholic), since many large dioceses produce few. The *National Catholic Register* (April 29) reports that the study controlled for the number of Catholics in a given diocese by looking at the total number of ordinations per 100,000 Catholics and found that the size of the diocese matters much less than the culture of the diocese and especially the role of the bishop and his staff in promoting religious vocations. She also found that the strongest predictor of an increase in ordinations in a diocese was the effectiveness of the bishop in this area of ministry in his previous diocese; for example, Newark’s Archbishop Emeritus John Meyer presided over the most successful diocese in terms of priestly ordinations, which replicated his previous success in Peoria, Illinois. Hendershott also found that the orthodoxy of the diocese was important in drawing a high rate of vocations.

(*National Catholic Register*, <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/new-priests-orthodoxy-among-key-factors-in-ordination-numbers>)

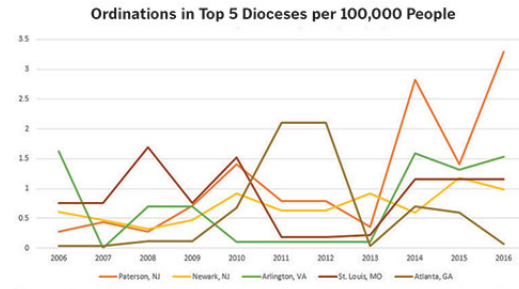


Figure 1
Between 2006 and 2016, there were 48 total dioceses that were in the top 20 for ordinations for at least one year. To narrow this down, dioceses that appeared in the top 20 for four or more years (not necessarily consecutively) were then isolated. This brought the total to 14 dioceses, which can be seen in Figure 3. The 14 were then taken, and the average of ordinations per 100,000 people was calculated for this 10-year period. The ones with the highest average number of ordinations were Patterson, New Jersey; St. Louis, Missouri; Arlington, Virginia; Newark, New Jersey; and Atlanta, Georgia.

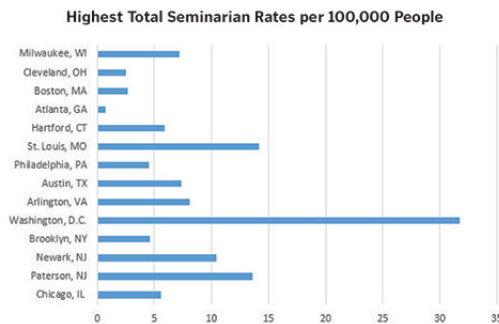


Figure 2
The same 14 dioceses that are outlined in Figure 3 were looked at to compare their rates of seminarians to ordinations. The average number of seminarians per 100,000 people was calculated from 2012 to 2016.

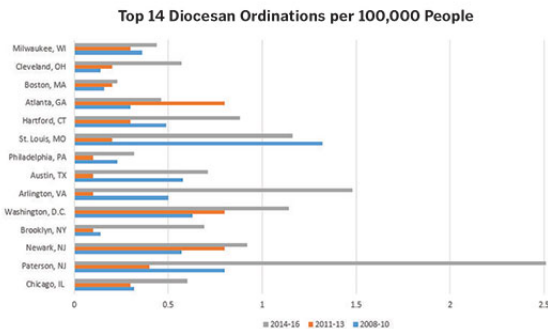


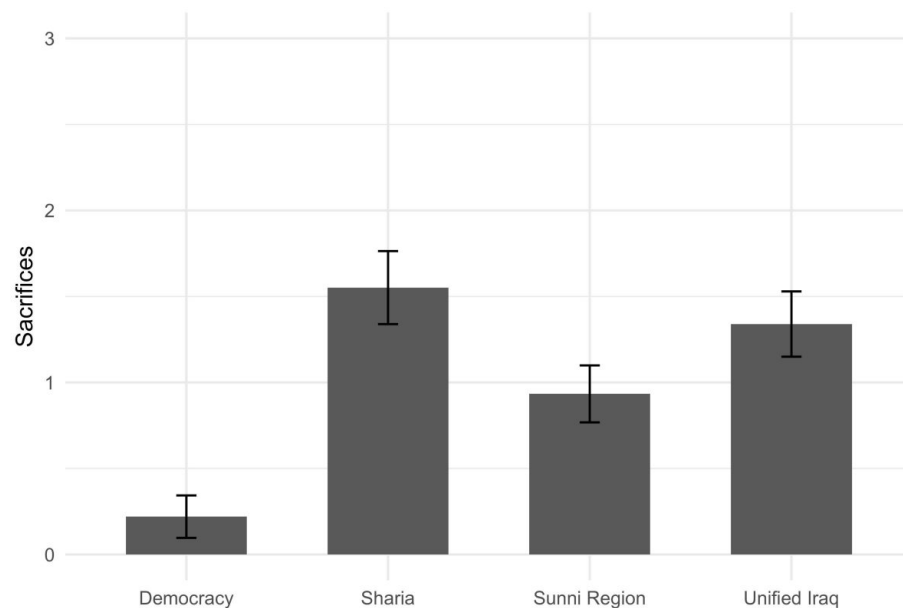
Figure 3
Between 2006 and 2016, there were 48 total dioceses that were in the top 20 for ordinations for at least one year. To narrow this down, dioceses that appeared in the top 20 for four or more years (not necessarily consecutively) were then isolated. This brought the total to 14 dioceses that are seen above. This graph shows the average ordinations per 100,000 people in 2008-10 (blue bar), 2011-13 (orange bar) and 2014-16 (gray bar). The separation between years allows for greater understanding of fluctuations within years.

DATA CULLED FROM THE OFFICIAL CATHOLIC DIRECTORY; DATA ANALYSIS AND GRAPHICS COURTESY OF ANNE HENDERSHOTT AND MAKENZIE WHITE

● **The Islamic State may be defeated as a political and military force but it still exerts considerable influence among Sunni Muslim men in the former heartland of Islamic extremism, according to an article in the *CTC Sentinel* (April), a publication of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Military Academy.** A team of researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 70 Sunni Arab men in five camps for displaced persons in the Mosul area of Iraq in late 2017. The researchers, led by anthropologist Scott Atran, used the “Devoted Actor” framework of analysis that focuses on “sacred values”—which could be secular or religious—that are immune to “material trade-offs,” and on a feeling of “oneness” that an individual may have with a particular group. A large segment of the interviewees still shared with the Islamic State its willingness to sacrifice to bring about a society governed by its strict interpretation of sharia. They viewed such strict sharia as eliminating injustice and bringing about freedom.

Nearly all the study participants were unwilling to sacrifice such principles for a unified Iraq or democracy and other forms of material gain. But they also criticized the Islamic State for dividing Muslims and engaging in corruption and unnecessary violence. Atran and his colleagues argue that “spiritual values can be leveraged as ‘wedge issues’ to divide groups such as the Islamic State from supporting populations....Focusing on spiritual values that participants believe they initially shared with the Islamic State but which they feel the Islamic State subsequently distorted or corrupted represents the least costly means to fragment the Islamic State and to foster cohesion among those who oppose [it].”

(*CTC Sentinel*, <https://ctc.usma.edu/islamic-states-lingering-legacy-among-young-men-mosul-area/>)



Willingness to Make Costly Sacrifices for Values: 0 = strongly disagree to 3 = strongly agree. Combined sacrifice set included lose job or source of income to defend the value; go to jail; use violence; die; let my children suffer physical punishment.

● While religious nationalism is a significant factor in opposition to immigration and resistance to ethnic pluralism, in the long term national identities tend to adjust to incorporate, in religious terms at least, non-Christian immigrants into the European continent, according to a study in the Serbian open-access journal *Politics and Religion* (Vol. 12, No. 1). Phillip Barker analyzed the World Values Survey and European Values Survey to create an index of religious nationalism by combining scores for religiosity and national pride. Contradicting the idea that the Arab world is a “hotbed of religious nationalism,” the region showed a weaker link between religion and nationalism than in Europe, Africa and Latin America. In looking at the relationship between religious nationalism and immigration in Europe, Barker did confirm previous findings that when more non-Europeans enter a country, the native population strengthens the ties between religion and nationalism. But he also found that the link between religious nationalism and immigration is not straightforward: at a certain point (Barker does not say when), as religious diversity increases, religious nationalism decreases. “In fact, it appears that, *in the long run*, increasing immigration would undermine a religious-based nationalism in favor of a more civil or cultural based nationalism,” Barker concludes.

(*Politics and Religion*, <https://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/index.php/prj>)



● As with Pentecostalism, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) has long been viewed as being quietist in relation to political and social involvement, but a recent study of Sub-Saharan African Catholic charismatics presents a more mixed picture of this relationship. In a study published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (online in April), political scientists Robert Dowd and Ani Sarkissian conducted a mass survey of charismatic Catholics in

four parishes in Kenya and Nigeria, combining it with in-depth interviews of 300 parishioners in each parish (and six parishioners who were not members of the Renewal were also interviewed in each parish). They found that, in the case of Kenya, involvement in the CCR and the time devoted to its activities had the effect of decreasing civic engagement among its members. But among women, involvement in the movement was found to increase such civic engagement as attending rallies and voting.

In Nigeria, CCR members who were frequent prayer-group attendees were more likely to have voted (which may be related to Christian-Muslim conflict and rivalry in that country); involvement in other activities, such as rally attendance, was not found to be significant. In the in-depth interviews, Dowd and Sarkissian found that CCR members drew on their belief in miracles and experiences of the supernatural to explain why it was important to be engaged in civic affairs. They add that “it was rather common for members of the CCR to stress the importance of prayer and social action rather than prayer *instead* of social action.”

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14685906>)



ARTICLES:

Political initiative in Argentina looks to Pope Francis' leadership to solve social ills

Claiming inspiration from Pope Francis, especially his 2015 Encyclical *Laudato si'*, Argentinian politicians have been promoting since early 2016 an initiative called “Pacto de San Antonio de Padua” (Pact of Saint Anthony of Padua) that calls for implementation of the guidelines of the Papal Encyclical in government. According to Juan Cruz Esquivel (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas e Técnicas, Argentina), who spoke at an April conference on “Politicization of the Sacred and Sacralization of Politics” at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), which **RW** attended, this has contributed to reinforcing the presence of the Catholic Church on the public scene in Argentina. The election of Argentinian Cardinal Bergoglio as Pope in 2013 gave the Catholic Church a renewed significance in Argentina’s political culture, with politicians attempting to appropriate the “legitimatory aura” derived from the leader of the Church and to position themselves as his “political representatives,” according to Esquivel.



The pact was launched by mayors belonging to the Justicialist (i.e., Peronist) party on January 18, 2016, in the convent of the Franciscan Brotherhood of Saint Anthony of Padua—hence its name. This took place in a context of questioning among Peronists after their 2015 defeat in both the presidential election and provincial elections in Buenos Aires, from where the initial signatories mostly came. The document quotes the Pope as well as General Perón (1895–1974) in supporting various causes, ranging from fighting against drug trafficking and overcoming poverty to defending family, developing renewable energies, etc. The local bishop came for a prayer and blessing.

However, Esquivel remarks that the pact represents more than the emergence of a new space within the Justicialist party. Members of various political groups from the entire country have signed the pact, and leaders of non-Catholic religious groups have joined as well. Political figures in neighboring Paraguay have also signed on. The initiative should not only be seen in strategic political terms. The authors of the pact are marked by a Catholic culture and see the Church as a moral resource. What is peculiar about the Pact of Padua is the central role assigned to the Pope,

not as a mediator, but as a leader, stresses Esquivel. While scholars have often paid attention to the ways in which religious institutions attempt to influence societies, less attention has been given to political figures contributing to the consolidation of the public role of religions.

(Juan Cruz Esquivel has also presented his analysis in an article published last year in Spanish: “‘Con la brújula de Francisco’: El Pacto de Padua como construcción político-religiosa en la Argentina pos-kirchnerista,” *Sociedad y Religión*, 2017, Vol. 27, No. 48, pp. 12–37, <http://www.ceil-conicet.gov.ar/ojs/index.php/sociedadreligion/index>)

Religion alive and well in Brazil’s public square

Despite legal foundations intended to enforce a secular political framework, developments in Brazil over the past ten years have led to a larger presence of religion in the public sphere, reported Marcelo Camurça (Universidad Federal Juiz de Fora) at the April conference on “Politicization of the Sacred and Sacralization of Politics,” which took place at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and which **RW** attended. This peculiar Brazilian understanding of secularism might be gaining strength in other Latin American countries as well, Camurça suggests. According to Article 19 of Brazil’s constitution, state institutions at all levels are forbidden to “establish religious sects or churches, subsidize them, hinder their activities, or maintain relationships of dependence or alliance with them or their representatives.” The document allows for different interpretations of “public interest,” however, that allow accommodations to religious groups.



Following a 2008 agreement between Brazil and the Holy See on the legal status of the Catholic Church in Brazil, which gave it such additional rights as confessional religious teaching at public

schools, both secular and evangelical politicians reacted. After initially opposing the concordat-like agreement in alliance with secular political sectors, evangelical members of the Brazilian Parliament opted to settle for a “General Law on Religions” bill, extending the benefits to all creeds. In this context, Camurça said he finds an increasing presence of religious symbols in Brazil’s public space. While the presence of crucifixes in schools, courts and parliaments reveals the lasting legacy of centuries of the Catholic Church’s presence, new religious symbols are also gaining visibility. Evangelicals—who understand secularism as protecting religious pluralism—are promoting monuments to the Bible in a variety of public spaces, from squares to schools, hospitals and parliaments. Imitating Catholic arguments regarding the crucifix, evangelicals claim that the Bible should be interpreted as a symbol of universal and inspiring values for humanity. Both Catholics and evangelicals claim that spiritual values are moral resources for the entire nation. But religion’s presence in the public sphere involves competition as well—Catholic charismatics in some areas of the country (especially the Northeast) have been eager to erect statues of the Virgin Mary in public places as part of a strategy to contain evangelical expansion.

Expanding festivals in France creating Protestant unity

The growth of Protestant festivals and other annual gatherings in France is creating greater unity among members of this religious minority, even if such events often showcase the growing diversity of Protestantism in the country, writes Anne-Laure Zwilling in the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* (March). The festivals, often involving concerts, teaching and preaching sessions, art



exhibits and other social activities, have attracted increasing participation since the 1980s. First confined to evangelical Protestants, these festivals, called Protestants en fête, have also come to embrace establishment Protestants, such as Lutherans and French Reformed.

The events have drawn up to 30,000 Protestants of all varieties, with different activities according to denomination but also a common worship service. Participants praise the gatherings for showing Protestants' vitality—publicized by extensive media coverage—although they only represent two percent of the French population. Zwilling writes that although French Protestants are marked by internal rivalry on issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion, the festivals have put the emphasis not on belonging to different denominations but on being French Protestant.

(*Bulletin for the Study of Religion*, <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/BSOR>)

State control over Islam in Algeria remains strong, while Salafism spreads

Secular-leaning newspapers in Algeria have expressed concerns about the expansion of Salafism in the country, reports Anouar Boukhars in *Diwan: Middle East Insights from Carnegie* (April 18). Due to its predominantly quietist stance and to successful instances of Salafism being a religious exit strategy for previous jihadists, Algerian authorities had often considered the spread of Salafism as a potentially helpful factor for national stability, while keeping an eye on Salafi mosques, too. During the 2011 Arab Spring and its uprisings, Algerian Salafists kept quiet. The regime remains determined anyway to keep political Salafists outside of the political field. Some public figures, such as Mohamed Aïssa, the Minister of Religious Affairs since 2014, have been critical of Salafism, which propagates rigid teachings influenced by Saudi Wahhabism. But other members of the government continue to see quietist Salafism as a useful tool. However, Boukhars writes that the spread of Salafism “reveals the deep crisis of state religious institutions,” with religious functionaries on the government’s payroll increasingly becoming discredited.

In an interview with *Diwan*’s Michael Young (April 20), scholar Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck (Carnegie Center, Beirut) remarks that state control of religion in Algeria is robust, including a control over textbooks, the authorization of religious books at book fairs, and the broadcasting of religious programming on national television and radio. But this control is not total and is facing competition—e.g., from Quranic schools outside the state’s control and illegal mosques (900 of which were closed in 2015). Commenting on those developments, James Dorsey, in *International Policy Digest* (April 26), points out that a policy of allowing the spread of Salafism in the hope of countering militants will ultimately experience difficulties in containing such streams “within the limits of the government’s agenda” at a time when Algerians—especially youth—have lost confidence in national religious institutions.

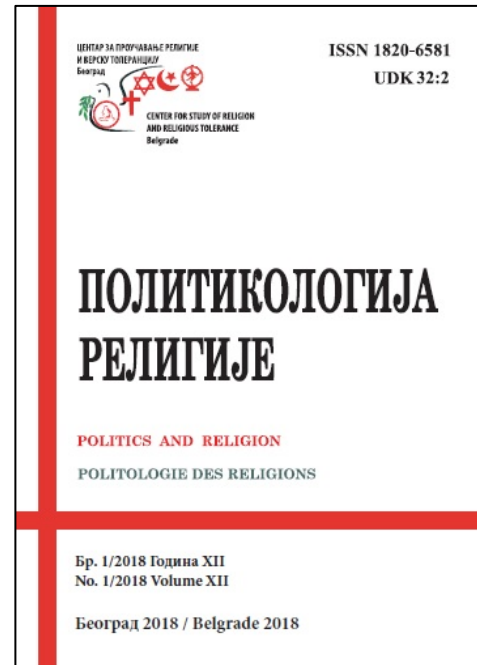
Dorsey quotes a recent study showing “that many Algerians were turning on social media to Saudi and Egyptian rather than Algerian religious scholars.” Algerian newspaper *El Watan* remarked that Saudi Arabia, while currently attempting to improve its image, was sending abroad “the most radical of its doctrines,” in the form of a supremacist and anti-pluralistic kind of Islam. In the long term, the spread of Salafism may have consequences which governments will have to face, and not only in Algeria. Algerian authorities have also attempted to promote Sufism as a model of healthy religion, but those attempts have not been successful, due both to the rejection of Sufi practices by a majority of Algerian Muslims (according to a 2011 scholarly survey) and to suspicions about its state instrumentalization, Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck observes in another recent article (*Diwan*, March 13).

(*Diwan*, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan>; *International Policy Digest*, <https://intpolicydigest.org/>)



Findings & Footnotes

■ The open-access Serbian journal *Politics and Religion* (not to be confused with the journal of the same name published by the religion section of the American Political Science Association) devotes its current issue (Vol. 12, No. 1) to the growth of Christian, mostly evangelical, parties and political mobilization in Latin America. Articles include an examination of the way evangelical political mobilization in Colombia has shifted from its previous stress on fighting for Protestants' religious freedom to focusing on culture war issues, particularly gay rights and abortion. Another article finds a similar pattern in Brazil, with a coalition of Pentecostals and Catholic charismatics having considerable impact, challenging the human rights platform of the Worker's Party, particularly on "gender ideology" and reproductive rights. Other articles cover the role of religious parties—Catholic and Protestant—in Argentina and the unexpected emergence of Catholic and evangelical politics in Mexico. This issue can be downloaded at: <https://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/index.php/prj>



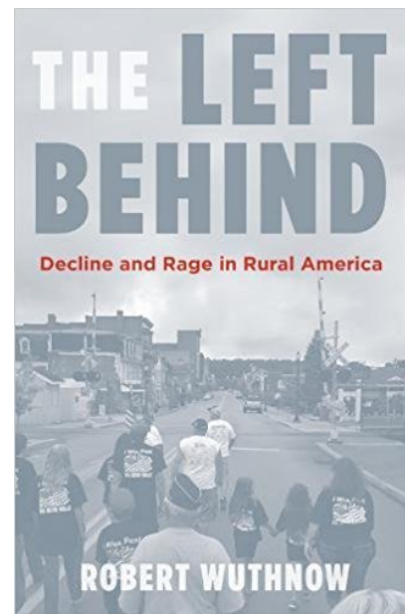
■ The hypothesis that alleged crypto-Jewish practices in New Mexico might actually be the remnants of missionary work by an Adventist Christian group should be considered seriously, writes Michael B. Carroll (Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada) in an update on the debate, published in *Religion* (April). A debate has been raging since the 1990s between scholars claiming that many early settlers of New Mexico were crypto-Jews and those who see no solid evidence for this thesis. Carroll's article pays special attention to scholarly reviews of two books published in the 2000s by proponents of the crypto-Jewish thesis. Even positive reviews point to a number of uncertainties and missing links, such as the lack of evidence of crypto-Jewish practices in the 18th and 19th centuries. While "some of the early



colonists in New Mexico were descended from crypto-Jewish families and so *may* have been crypto-Jews themselves,” many scholars hardly see convincing evidence of crypto-Jewish family traditions in modern New Mexico.

The Adventist hypothesis had been dismissed by scholars advocating the crypto-Jewish explanation, due to the low numbers of Adventist believers in the area. However, writes Carroll, this fails to take into account the impact of Adventist missionary activities and literature spread by Adventist colporteurs among Hispanos who heard the message without embracing it in the 1920s and 1930s. The claims of a crypto-Jewish descent during the 1970s and 1980s were made at a time when various identity claims and the rediscovery of roots became popular across various population groups. It may have been used for articulating a rejection of Catholicism and “to explain practices that had always made them or their families feel different.” Carroll is convinced that, whatever the evidence (or lack of it) is, the crypto-Jewish hypothesis will remain popular, not least because it has become part of an attractive vision of New Mexico as a proud multicultural society. For more information on this article, visit: *Religion*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/rrel/>

■ Recent research continues to confirm that it is not economic fears as much as a range of cultural and moral concerns that led to the surge of support that ushered Donald Trump into the White House. In his new book *The Left Behind* (Princeton University Press, \$24.95), sociologist Robert Wuthnow draws on decades of research in rural America to drive home the point that moral and socio-religious concerns fed the widespread disenchantment with establishment politics and the embrace of populism among small-town and rural Americans. Such an argument has been used to support the view that mainly white rural voters were reacting against the increasing ethnic and racial diversity of the U.S. But Wuthnow does not see racial animus as the main motivator of the “left behind.” Rather, he argues that the fear over the dissolution of their “moral communities”—a social life defined by relationships and obligations to neighbors—has led to a rising tide of populist sentiment.



The moral aspect of small-town and rural discontent can be seen in residents’ criticisms and protests of the Washington establishment, which they feel prefers regulatory and distanced solutions to community problems that politicians have little knowledge about. The norms of small towns centered on first-hand assistance and personal responsibility as often modeled in church life are seen by the people Wuthnow interviews as being eroded by elites and big government. Wuthnow argues that the idea that rural Americans are not voting in their self-interest by focusing on concerns such as gay rights and abortion ignores how these and other moral issues are part of the moral consensus of their communities and churches and thus *do* involve self-interest. Wuthnow concludes that too much reporting on the “left-behind” is about private resentments and

personal attitudes on a range of hot-button issues and that more attention needs to be paid to the communal nature of small-town life and how that shapes their views.

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

1) Started from a small group meeting in his house, **Thomas McConkie** has created a blend of Buddhism and Mormonism that draws up to 200 people—most of them from Mormon families—through guided meditations at a monthly gathering of the **Lower Lights Sangha**. Lower Lights Sangha is said to be a laboratory where a new generation of Mormons is shaping novel expressions of the faith that include a form of meditation derived from Buddhism. McConkie initially rebelled against Mormonism but has come to the position of integrating it with Buddhism after he participated in meditation retreats led by Joshu Sasaki Roshi at Mt. Baldy Zen Center in Southern California. The fact that McConkie integrates mainstream Mormon doctrine with a new contemplative approach to devotional practice has won him an unusual degree of acceptance within Salt Lake City's Mormon establishment. While he has faced opposition from some quarters of the church, McConkie has made presentations on his teaching at Lower Lights for administrators in the church's main offices, and he was invited to produce a podcast ("Mindfulness+") for the church-owned news radio station, KSL. (**Source:** *Tricycle*, March 14)



2) The **Madkhali** movement in Libya is an ultra-conservative Islamist movement that has quietly transformed the country while the rest of the world has been occupied with the Islamic State in the rest of the Middle East. The movement, based in Saudi Arabia, took hold of Libya during the upheaval of its revolution, aligning itself with every self-proclaimed warlord and government during the past three years and silencing other Islamist and liberal voices. The group has sought to prevent the Islamic State from setting up operations in the country while imposing its own theocratic rule and social and security services throughout society. A central tenet of the Madkhali movement is its belief in the principle of “*valid al amir*,” or “the one who rules,” which grants acceptance to whoever rules in government, which contrasts sharply with most Wahabi Islamic groups that will only support Islamist rulers who uphold Sharia. Madkhali ideology also has an aversion to politics and democracy. Like other Wahabi Muslims, the movement opposes any move to give women a greater role in society, as well as urging separation from any influences, such as music and literature, that are considered anti-Islamic. Because it lends leaders unqualified support and calls for silencing any alternative voices—whether Islamic or secular—Madkhalis have been granted wide privileges, including the authority to issue official fatwahs. Its security forces have been able to organize book burnings, ban public events, such as a comic book convention, and gain control of prisons throughout Libya. (**Source:** *Christian Century*, March 28).

