

Political religion and European-style culture wars come under new scholarly scrutiny

At a conference better known for holding forth on the steady advance of secularization in much of Europe, it was striking how many of the papers at this year's meeting of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion in Barcelona showed the growing political influence of religious groups and discourse on the continent. In fact, the theme of the early-July conference, attended by **RW**, was "The Politics of Religion and Spirituality," and the wave of populist and nationalist politics sweeping the continent often served as the framework for viewing the churnings of political religion throughout the world.

In reporting on the results of the European Parliament's recent elections, Monica Simeoni of Sannio University noted that right-wing populist groups gained in elected representatives (along with Greens) and that this was associated with their appeal to religion or religious heritage. She cited a recent survey of Italian Catholics by political scientist Ilvo Diamanti showing that the number of them voting for the populist Lega party has increased, now standing at 27 percent. While the teachings of the church are considered personally important by 20 percent of Italians—both members and non-members of the Lega—they are considered useful for political and other purposes by 41 percent. Simeoni linked evangelical support for leaders such as Donald Trump in the U.S. and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil to the rise of populist politics, and many of the other scholars at the conference tended to view the religious right in its various guises as driving political change. This seems especially to be the case when it comes to the contested issue that is now known as "gender ideology." The term has become a battle cry for conservative Christians in scores of countries of Europe and Latin America against activists pushing for diversity in gender identities and expressions and for LGBTQ rights in general.

But in this new culture war over gender and sexuality in Europe and Latin America it is difficult to know which side fired the first shot. Sociologist Juan Vaggione (National University of Cordoba, Argentina) traced the use of the term "gender ideology" to debates in Argentina and other Latin American countries in the 1990s about distinguishing human rights from the legal rights that women and sexual minorities were seeking. Pope Francis was a bishop in his native

Argentina at that time and this rhetoric is still reflected in his speeches and writings, as well as in the work of the Vatican Commission on the Family over the concern that the natural family and the traditional roles of male and female are under attack. A recent Vatican document called for a dialogue on gender issues but also linked the promotion of gender activism to the economic domination of poorer developing countries by Western nations that disrespect their sovereignty and moral and family traditions. Vaggione noted that evangelicals, both in the U.S. and abroad, have joined the battle, arguing that gender activists are threatening religious freedom. The movement to challenge “gender ideology” has also sought to show that science backs up its claims, as it increasingly works to counter laws that have been put in place to enforce gender equality and diversity.

In Brazil, Bolsonaro was able to rally evangelicals and conservative Catholics in his campaign through his attack on “gender ideology,” and Catholic broadcasters like Fr. Paulo Ricardo have been on the front lines on this issue, according to a paper by Silvia Rodrigues and Bruna Carvalho (Pontifical Catholic University, Brazil). They found that Ricardo has a Facebook following of 1.5 million people and over 615,000 subscribers on YouTube, where his videos often attack “gender ideology” as a “pseudo-science” and a “war against biology.” Much of this activism started in response to the Brazilian Ministry of Education’s effort to introduce gender diversity into the curriculum; the initiative was silenced after congressmen defeated the effort and subsequently removed all references to gender in education programs.

In Lithuania, the culture war is being waged more over gay rights, with evangelical and Catholic NGOs fighting against advances made by the LGBTQ movement in its fight for same-sex marriage. Although the country was required to remove laws penalizing homosexuality as a condition for joining the European Union in 2008, there has been a backlash against gay rights since then. There have been attempts, though unsuccessful, to stop Baltic Pride marches. In 2019, a legislative attempt to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other countries received strong opposition. Milda Alisauskiene of Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania, said that a coalition uniting conservative Catholics and evangelicals has given them some influence among politicians. One proposed piece of legislation is calling for laws against polygamy as well as same-sex marriage, which the researcher said may be targeted toward Muslims. These activists and church leaders are finding support from both “Moscow and Rome,” which is unusual for Lithuanians since they have traditionally been anti-Russian. But Lithuanian Catholic bishops are finding support from Russian Orthodox bishops and from the Vatican in their support of “family rights.”

In a paper on the Romanian Orthodox Church, Lucian Cirlan (Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris) reported that it has shifted from a traditional political alliance with the state to mobilizing believers on traditional values. A “pink curtain” against gay rights now covers much of Eastern Europe, and in Romania this has translated into a prohibition of same-sex marriage, supported by up to 80 percent of the population (although younger Romanians tend to be in favor of civil unions), and the emergence of anti-gay rights and pro-traditional family groups such as the Coalition for the Family and the European Center for Law and Justice, which is founded by

American evangelical legal activist (and Trump advisor) Jay Sekulow. Cirlan concluded that there has been a “Catholicization of Orthodox Christianity” in Romania, where the church has developed a “social doctrine” on family rights in a similar way to Catholic social teaching.



Catholic Charismatic Renewal now extending influence within the Catholic Church in new ways

After more than fifty years of existence, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal’s (CCR) influence is now spreading in the Catholic Church through groups that are adopting some Charismatic practices while not wanting to be identified as Charismatics, writes Valérie Aubourg (Catholic University of Lyon) in *Social Compass* (June). Based on her research in France, Aubourg distinguishes four “seasons” in the history of the CCR, starting with the initial introduction of the Pentecostal experience within the Catholic Church (1972–1982); then a period of routinization, with the various CCR groups becoming integrated into the framework of the institutional church and dealing cautiously with such practices as prophecies and deliverance while being less involved in ecumenical activities with non-Catholics (1982–1997); and subsequently, under the influence of the third wave of Pentecostalism, a reactivation of emotional elements and growing interactions with evangelicals.

The fourth stage has seen the broader introduction of Pentecostal elements within the Catholic Church—at the same time that the diocesan groups of the CCR are aging and declining. This may take place through groups in which charisma is not expressed (such as through speaking in tongues and prophecy) but spontaneous prayers and praise are encouraged. Discussions of biblical passages are not primarily theological, but relate to the life and feelings of the participants. Some parishes also attempt to develop new models aimed at making the faithful into “missionary disciples.” Such efforts often start with the Alpha Courses that have played a major role both in the diffusion of Pentecostal practices and tools within Catholicism and in the creation of an international and interconfessional network. The first to introduce the Alpha Courses were actually Charismatic communities, such as the Emmanuel Community, which are also in charge of parishes and continue to play a significant role. This new stage in the Charismatic Renewal shows that the “evangelicalization” of Catholicism is not limited to self-identified Charismatics but is being encouraged by the current church leadership in the hope that Catholics will emulate the missionary zeal of evangelicals and create change in the church’s culture by introducing Pentecostal elements.

(*Social Compass*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/scpa>)



CURRENT RESEARCH

• **There has been a significant decline in religious freedom from just a decade ago, a trend which may adversely affect economic growth, according to an analysis by the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation (RFBF).** A just-released Pew Research study found that governments in 52 out of 198 countries and territories had high or very high restrictions on religion in 2017, up from 40 in 2007. An even larger number of countries (56) had high or very high social hostilities toward specific religious groups within their societies, increasing from 39 in 2007.

The RFBF analysis utilizing this data found that GDP growth in the 19 countries that either reduced or had very low increases in their overall religious restrictions and hostilities averaged 5.1 percent per year between 2009 and 2018. “It is notable that several of the countries in this category had high religious restrictions and hostilities, but even modest decreases in these were associated with economic dividends. Conversely, countries with significant increases in religious restrictions and/or hostilities averaged 2.6 percent annual GDP growth.” China, the world’s second largest economy, has seen a significant slowdown in its economic growth over the past decade coinciding with its multi-year national campaign to repress religion.

Average GDP Growth Among 57 Countries with Populations of 20 Million or More Since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis by Levels of Change in Religious Restrictions and Hostilities

Countries/territories** grouped by change*** in overall religious restrictions and hostilities between 2007-17:	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2009-2018 Average
Highest Increases in Religious Restrictions and/or Hostilities	-1.1	4.7	3.4	2.8	2.5	2.7	2.1	2.5	3.0	3.3	2.6%
Middle Increases in Religious Restrictions and/or Hostilities	1.2	5.7	4.1	3.9	4.4	3.7	2.5	1.1	2.9	2.1	3.2%
Decreases or Low Increases in Religious Restrictions and/or Hostilities	4.1	6.7	5.3	6.5	5.6	4.9	4.5	5.5	4.1	3.4	5.1%

Analysis: Brian J. Grim, Ph.D., Religious Freedom & Business Foundation. **Data:** Religious Restrictions Data, Pew Research Center, July 15, 2019; GDP Data, World Development Indicators, World Bank, July 10, 2019 version; Iran 2018 GDP growth estimate from: <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/iran>; Venezuela 2016-18 GDP growth estimates from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Venezuela.

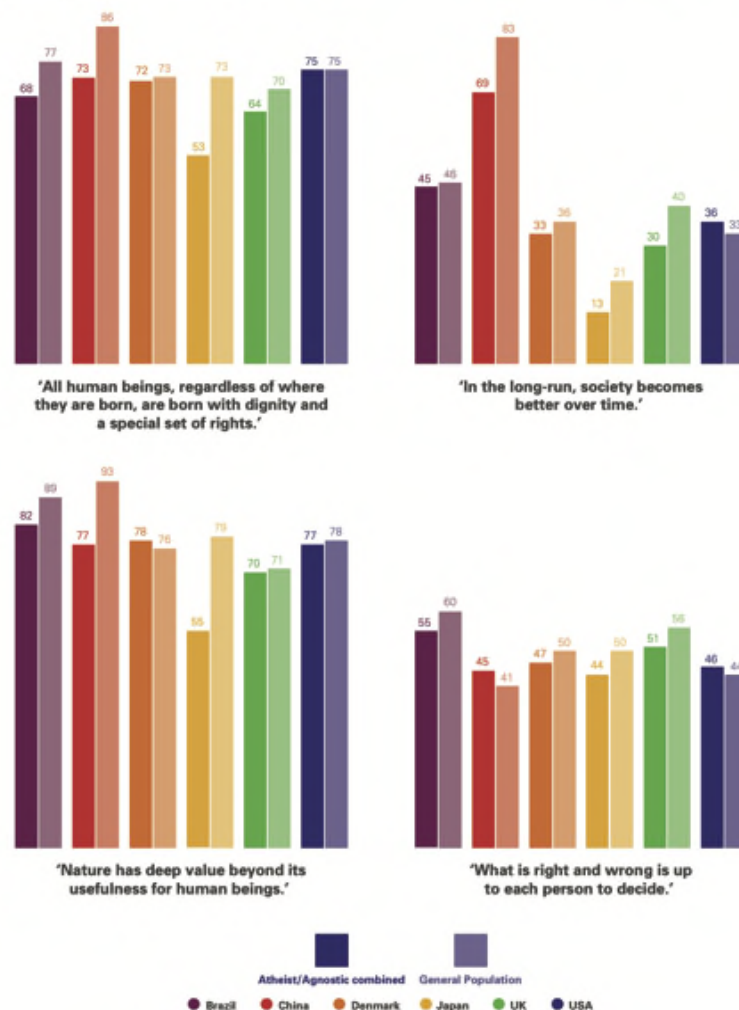
****Countries/territories by group:** **Highest Increases in Religious Restrictions/Hostilities:** Ukraine (6.4 increase), Uganda (6.3), United Kingdom (6.2), Cameroon (5.9), Malaysia (5.4), Algeria (5.1), Germany (5.1), Spain (4.9), Nigeria (4.9), Russia (4.9), Kenya (4.5), Brazil (4.4), France (4.2), United States (4.2), Thailand (4.1), Italy (4.0), Niger (3.6), Poland (3.2), and Egypt (3.2); **Middle Increases in Religious Restrictions/Hostilities:** Democratic Republic of the Congo (3.1), Madagascar (2.7), Mozambique (2.6), Argentina (2.2), Tanzania (2.0), Taiwan (1.9), Nepal (1.7), South Korea (1.6), China (1.5), Yemen (1.4), Canada (1.4), Morocco (1.4), Vietnam (1.3), India (1.3), Turkey (1.1), South Africa (0.9), Venezuela (0.9), Australia (0.6), Japan (0.6); **Decreases or Low Increases in Religious Restrictions/Hostilities:** Peru (0.5), Angola (0.3), Iraq (0.1), Ethiopia (0.1), Burma (Myanmar) (0.0), Bangladesh (-0.3), Philippines (-0.3), Pakistan (-0.4), Afghanistan (-0.4), Mexico (-0.5), Indonesia (-0.7), Colombia (-0.9), Uzbekistan (-1.3), Ghana (-1.9), Sri Lanka (-2.4), Saudi Arabia (-2.7), Sudan (-2.8), Iran (-2.9), Ivory Coast (-3.7).

*****Overall change is calculated by subtracting a country's combined scores on Pew's Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI) for 2007 from the country's combined index scores for 2017. For example, in Ukraine, 2007 GRI 2.6 + SHI 1.9 = 4.5, is subtracted from 2017 GRI 3.8 + SHI 7.1 = 10.9 [10.9 - 4.5 = 6.4 increase between 2007 and 2017].**

(The RFBF report can be downloaded at: <https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/2/post/2019/07/economic-growth-slowed-by-dramatic-global-decline-in-religious-freedom.html>)

• **“Understanding Unbelief,” an international study on atheism and other forms of non-religion, recently issued a report on its findings so far, challenging the view that self-identified nonbelievers are always equivalent to atheists.** The program, sponsored by the Templeton Foundation, is unique for its international approach, conducting surveys and other research in Japan, Brazil, China, Denmark, the UK, and the U.S. The most recent survey was conducted last April and May, with representative samples of both unbelievers (atheists and agnostics combined) and, for comparative purposes, the general population in each of these six countries. The national context was found to be important for the characteristics of unbelievers: While majorities of unbelievers in all six countries claimed no religious affiliation, in Denmark 28 percent identified as Christian, while in Brazil the figure was 18 percent. Eight percent of unbelievers in Japan identified as Buddhists. Unbelief in God does not necessarily mean not believing in other supernatural forces, with only minorities of atheists and agnostics in each country being “thoroughgoing naturalists.” While atheists and agnostics do tend to believe that the universe is “ultimately meaningless” compared to believers, only a minority of them in each country actually held to this position. The survey also found that atheists and agnostics believe in objective moral values and human dignity at rates similar to the general population.

3.1 Proportions of atheists/agnostics (combined) and general population ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreeing with selected worldview items



(To download this report, visit: <https://research.kent.ac.uk/understandingunbelief/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/2019/05/UUReportRome.pdf>)

• Amid growing negative reactions to immigrants and a growing anti-immigrant and populist movement in Italy, more religious Italians tend to take a less anti-immigrant stance, according to a paper presented at the recent meeting of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion in Barcelona, Spain. Cristiano Vezzoni (University of Milan) looked at data from the European Social Survey and the European Values Survey and found



increasingly critical views on immigration among Italians. Immigration went from being the most serious or second most serious issue for four percent of the Italian population in 2014 to 23 percent in 2018. Religious affiliation actually had a negative effect on holding a more inclusive view of immigration. But religious participation was found to have a positive effect on attitudes toward immigrants. “Going to church seems to immunize one from negative attitudes toward immigrants but belonging by itself seems to bring more negative attitudes towards immigrants,” Vezzoni concluded.

• While institutional religion is declining in Hungary, personal religiosity is growing and tending toward more orthodox beliefs, according to sociologist Gergely Rosta (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary), who presented a paper at the recent meeting of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion in Barcelona. Hungary has become more secularized than other Eastern European societies, with half of Hungarians claiming to be nonreligious. But accompanying this secularization is an increase in individual forms of religion, including the practice of prayer. There has also been a cohort change, with people who didn’t believe in God earlier now saying they do believe. The study, based on the European Values Survey (2017–18) and European Social Survey (2016), as well as surveys of youth (2016) and Catholic youth (2016), found that, between 2008 and 2018, patterns of religious participation have remained stable, with a slight increase in church attendance. And while the belief in God has remained stable, other beliefs, such as in life after death and in heaven and hell, have increased. In other words, those who believe in God are now more likely to have these related beliefs.

At the same time, the belief in a non-personal God has increased to the same level of prevalence as belief in a personal God. The general belief in God thus increased from nine percent in 2008 to 20 percent in 2018. There has also been an increase in “personal spirituality,” and these increases were found among all generational cohorts. In attempting to explain these changes, some observers have pointed to the growth of religious schools in Hungary, which has been encouraged since 2010 by Christian nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. But surveys of

Catholic youth have found a decline in youth religiosity, such as in the belief in a personal God, and there are also few religion classes offered in these schools. These findings leave open the question of whether these changes show the growth of a “deep religiosity” or whether such beliefs are just external, Rosta concluded.



- **The growth of nationalism in Hungary and the related drive to restrict immigration, particularly Muslims migrants, have been met with division and uncertainty among Hungarian religious leaders, according to a study presented at the Barcelona meeting of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion in early July.** Anna Vancsó (Corvinus University, Hungary) conducted interviews with religious leaders in Hungary between 2015 and 2017 and found that they tended to want to speak only as individuals rather than as representatives of their religious groups on matters of immigration and the rights of Muslims. She found a strong degree of polarization on these issues. Among Catholic and Reformed bishops, there were those who were outspoken on issues of immigration, but few engaged in church-wide attempts to address these concerns, although the Reformed Church has trained migration experts and developed the tools and networks to assist migrants. The smaller churches appear more united on immigration, with some evangelicals, such as the large Pentecostal Faith Church movement, shifting from a more liberal position in the 1990s to support of Prime

Minister Viktor Orbán and his immigration policies. Two of the three Jewish groups in the country are the most strongly opposed to Orbán and his immigration laws. Vancsó concluded that religious organizations mainly function in a reactive mode and are not “well-integrated into society...to shape” people’s understandings on faith and social issues.

• **Polish migrants to Ireland show declining religious devotion in their newly adopted country, according to a study presented at the recent conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion.**

The study, presented by Wojciech Sadlon of the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics in Poland, was based on a longitudinal survey of practicing Catholics in Dublin and Galway, focus groups in Dublin and Cork, as well as in-depth interviews. On first impression, Irish census data do not show a great drop in religious faith among Polish migrants, with 34 percent saying it remained the same, 18.4 percent saying it declined, and 7.3 percent saying it increased. But in asking about religious practice, the study found that while 18 percent attended Mass in Poland, only nine percent did so in Ireland. The proportion of those reporting maintaining other religious practices went from 50 percent in Poland to 32 percent in Ireland; participation in prayer groups went from 10 percent in Poland to five percent in Ireland; and while nine percent reported volunteering in Poland, only three percent did so in Ireland.



The paper reported a tendency among the migrants—many of whom are younger Poles— to see the church in Poland as oppressive while seeing the Irish church as easygoing. Most of the Catholic migrants have adapted to the Irish church, with only 24 percent praying in Polish, even if they are distanced from Irish Catholicism. Thirty-four percent still go to Poland to baptize their children, although first communions tend to be celebrated in Ireland. Sadlon concludes that the declining religiosity of the Polish migrants actually has Polish roots, being linked back to the younger generations’ alienation from the church after 1979. The young migrants’ search for “well-being” makes for an easy adaptation to the more liberal Catholicism of an increasingly secular Ireland.

• **The idea that Australia is a “Christian nation” is increasingly prominent in political discourse and in the platforms of conservative parties, according to a study by political scientist Marion Maddox (Macquarie University).** Maddox, who presented a paper at a conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion, meeting in Barcelona in early July, noted that while most indicators show a decline in Christian affiliation, belief and practice among Australians, the use of language referring to Australia as a “Christian nation” has increased since the 1990s. In conducting a textual analysis of the public record of parliamentary debates, Maddox found that mention of the idea of Australia as a



Christian nation reached an all-time high during the 1950s (20 mentions) and then fell away until the 1990s, making a comeback particularly in recent years, being raised 11 times in debate since 2011. The platforms of three political parties represented in federal parliament invoke either the idea that Australia is a Christian nation or that it was founded on “Christian principles.” While mentions of Christian nationhood were previously often related to the view that Australia should be more compassionate toward the poor or embrace social justice, the more recent references relate to campaigns to limit immigration, particularly of Muslims.

Quebec embracing secularism to limit Islam’s growing public presence?

Quebec has moved toward a strong form of secularism, known as *laïcité*, that challenges the growth of religious pluralism and of Islam in the province, reports Michael Higgins in *Commonweal* magazine (July 9). In June the National Assembly in Quebec City passed Bill 21, a law seeking to address the challenges of religious pluralism. The bill prohibits police, civil servants, teachers, government lawyers, prison guards, and other state employees from wearing any form of religious garment or symbol—the Sikh turban, the Jewish kippa, the Muslim hijab, niqab, and burka, and the Christian cross—while on the job. Those currently under contract will be grandfathered, although any change in their status will require compliance with the new legislation. Among the bill’s supporters are rural residents hostile to the elite urban centers of Montreal and Quebec City; “native Quebecers uncomfortable with significant immigration in recent years from former French colonies, principally in Africa and the Caribbean; and people increasingly anxious over perceived threats to the linguistic and cultural identity of Quebec by an expanding Muslim population, and what they see as relentless denigration of the old values.” Populist politicians further to the right of Premier François Legault, such as those in the People’s Party, have raised concerns about radical Islam and immigrants, but support for the bill has also come from leftists, including those pressing for democratic socialism in the European mode, as well as some feminist organizations that see religious attire such as the hijab as a prop of the patriarchy.

Among those dissenting from the measure are “the major universities of the province, the Montreal English-speaking school board and teacher unions (both French and English), law firms, journalists and editors of the premier media organs in Quebec, and religious bodies of every stripe, including the Assembly of Quebec Bishops. The Archbishop of Montreal, Christian Lépine, called Bill 21 an erosion of individual freedoms and a diminishment of human dignity. The Fédération des femmes du Québec warned of the damage that will be done to Muslim women through the bill’s discriminatory bias.” The federal government and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a native of the province, stand vigorously opposed to the bill, although Legault knows that in a national election year revoking the bill will be difficult. “The deal, in effect, is to eradicate the Catholic past in order to limit the public presence of Islam—and it is clearly the Muslim community that is the primary target of the legislation. This is now where the battle is

joined. And while its genesis and coloration may be provincial, its larger impact will be national,” Higgins concludes.

(*Commonweal*, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/>)



Supporting Jewish culture to undermine Catholic dominance in Poland?

The desire to dissociate Polish identity from a Catholic version of it forcefully promoted by the church has led a number of non-Jewish Poles to support the renewal of Jewish culture, according to Geneviève Zubrzycki (University of Michigan) at the International Society for the Sociology of Religion conference in Barcelona that **RW** attended. The kind of secularization that some observers had expected in the 1990s has not taken place in Poland. Catholicism remains

important in Polish life, with a high level of church attendance, but the alliance between the government and the Catholic Church is nevertheless meeting a growing resistance, including within the church itself, while other people choose to leave it and a growing number of young adults claim to never set foot in church (from 10 percent in 2004 to 18 percent in 2014).

Still, it is not easy to secularize Polishness in a country where around 95 percent of people still self-identify as Catholic, noted Zubrzycki. One of the unexpected ways is for non-Jews to support the renaissance of Judaism in Poland in order to weaken Catholicism's dominance over the nation's identity. Zubrzycki illustrated this approach with the statement of a young woman who said she was happy to see Orthodox Jews in Krakow because it broke the monopoly of the black cassocks of Catholic priests. Similarly, Jewish renewal is seen by evangelical groups in Poland as helping to undermine Catholic hegemony. For those reasons and others, all things Jewish are becoming popular beyond the Jewish community. There are nonreligious people who comment that they are glad to see a vibrant Jewish life starting again in Poland because "there's something else that we already know" offering a welcome change from the omnipresent Catholic symbols and practices. Jewish renewal may thus also serve the aspirations among some sectors of Polish society for a secular country.



Christian Zionism finding new sources of growth in global South?

Increasingly, one can notice the development of evangelical activities related to Israel in the Southern hemisphere—a rise that can be attributed to internal factors, but also to external influences involving U.S. Christian Zionists and the Israeli state, according to Paul Freston (Wilfrid Laurier University) at the conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion in Barcelona, which **RW** attended. **RW** has already reported on shifts in Christian Zionism occurring in the global South, especially the shedding of its end-times focus and its association with the prosperity gospel [see Vol. 32, No. 8, June 2017]. Freston confirmed those trends, while further highlighting how evangelicals have not only been supporting the State of Israel but also its alleged right to expand.

After the U.S. announced the move of its embassy to Jerusalem, the only other state that made the same move was Guatemala, the Latin American country with the largest percentage of evangelicals. Israel is aware of the significance of religiously motivated support in the global South. Since 2016, strengthening ties with African countries has been high on the agenda of the Israeli government. The head of the Christian Allies Caucus at the Knesset has remarked that faith-based diplomacy opened endless possibilities for cooperation with African countries. Attention should also be paid to Zionist attempts to relate to indigenous people and to present Israelis as the prototypical first nation. Christian Zionism is linked to a range of philosemitic attitudes and can look like “a nationalism through promoting another nation,” Freston observed. It can also function as a kind of national prosperity theology, something shown by a Zambian pastor who reads the economic history of his own country through its support or lack of support for the State of Israel.



Secularism gaining new visibility in Argentina

Despite an early presence of secularist movements in Argentina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, little was heard about them subsequently. But a reemergence of these movements over the past 10 years is drawing new attention to secularist activism, according to Hugo H. Rabbia (Catholic University of Cordoba and National University of Cordoba) in a paper presented at the International Society for the Sociology of Religion conference in Barcelona, which **RW** attended. The new visibility of secularism started with national congresses on atheism in 2008 and 2010, along with several acts of collective apostasy undertaken in 2009 as part of a campaign named “No en mi nombre” (“Not in my name”). Both secularist advocates and other people without an institutional religious identification (indifferent, unaffiliated, or spiritual

seekers), who together make up around 11 percent of the population, tend to share a sense of otherness and a critical attitude toward Catholicism. For the past several years, there have been demands for complete church-state separation in Argentina, supported by a coalition formed specifically for a secular state (Coalición Argentina por un Estado Laico) as well as by various pro-choice and sexual diversity groups.

The public debates in Argentina in 2018 over the legalization of abortion, strongly opposed by the leaders of the Catholic Church, opened new opportunities for the expression of secularist demands. There were many discussions in the media about the place of the Catholic Church in the country. A new wave of collective declarations of apostasy from the Catholic Church took place after the senate rejected the abortion bill, which also gave a new impetus to demands for church-state separation. (The Catholic Church itself has agreed that subsidies it receives from the state should gradually diminish.) Atheist activists insist there is no need to be an atheist to apostatize, encouraging people who disagree with the Catholic Church to do it in order to express their views. While Catholicism remains the dominant religion in Argentina (about 75 percent of people identify as Catholics), “dogmatic Catholics” only make up a tiny percentage of self-identified Catholics, and many of them have actually been disagreeing for a long time with official church teachings. A number of self-identified Catholics actually hold views very similar to secularists, according to Rabbia.



Japanese schools creating unbelief among children?

The label of “mushūkyō,” or non-religious, that is spread through Japan’s school system is having the effect of stigmatizing children with religious—often Catholic or religious minority—backgrounds, leading to their “silent exodus” from churches, according to a study in the journal *Religions* (July 1). Alec R. LeMay of Bunkyo University conducted observations of children, some of them foreign-born, at a Catholic church, Sunday school classes, and 15 biannual church camps, as well as in-depth interviews with a small group of Japanese people, ages 14–50, who had undergone public schooling. LeMay found the children to be sporadic in attending the church school. In observing classes over a period of 26 months (from April of 2017 to May of 2019), he found that 50 percent of the children attended only once; the same sparse attendance was seen at the church camps. The pattern was that children sent by their parents to church and classes would attend regularly until about the fourth grade, when their allegiance to school friends and activities outside of church increased, leading to their eventual disappearance from church life.



In his interviews with the small group of individuals raised in Japan's public schools, LeMay was informed that they often had to hide their Catholicism to fit in, both with their peers and authorities at school. One interviewee's church activity, including wearing a religious medal, was seen as strange and cast him in a negative light, leading to conflict. Teachers ridiculed weekly church attendance. Often these students began to feel alienated from their religious families. LeMay writes that school authorities place psychological and social pressures on children that often overreach class activities, such as making club attendance mandatory, incentivizing church absence and decreased parent-child time. He adds that this "environment 'encapsulates' children into *mushūkyō* groups they perceive as representative of the reality in Japan, thus producing the view that they alone practice the religious views they hold...In doing so, schools construct competing narratives of *mushūkyō* that challenge and displace Catholic primacy in these children's lives." But LeMay concludes that this is not only a Catholic problem. "The current educational system with its control of the time and life decisions of children is suffocating alternative and dissenting views."

(*Religions*, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/7/414>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ The current issue of the *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* (6:1) is devoted to "negotiations and diversifications of China's Christianities." The stress on "negotiation" among these articles suggests that church-state outcomes in China are far from uniform, varying by the resources and strategies that churches employ in bargaining with officials for various privileges and freedoms, as well as regional differences. This is most clearly seen in the case of the Vatican's back-and-forth relations with the Chinese government (although an article by Richard Madsen suggests that "grassroots Catholics" in the unregistered church are losing their agency), but also in the shifting relations between Protestants regarding the official Three-Self-Patriotic Movement. Based on a symposium last year, the updated and revised articles in this issue showcase the new fieldwork that has been undertaken in China during the past 15 years among Christians in the country. But the editorial to the issue notes that this research has been uneven; field studies on the Catholic Church are still far less numerous as compared to studies of Protestants.

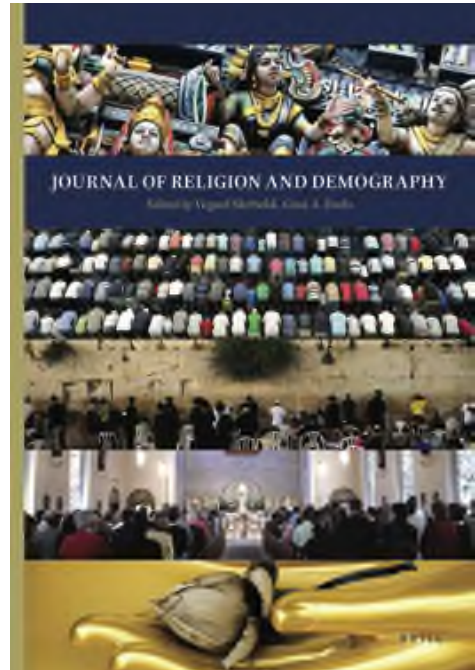


The articles look at how different church-state positions in various regions of China shape the ministries of churches. One example is the way Protestant churches in southern Fujian appropriate ancestral halls for Christian burials while non-Christian elites and state actors showcase Protestant heritage to encourage economic growth and promote local pride. But the editor notes that the role of centralization

remains significant, particularly as “Xi Jinping has so forcefully imposed the Party on state and society,... [doing so] in the sphere of religion to the point of dissolving the state’s religious affairs offices into the Party’s bureaucracy.”

For more information on this issue, visit: <https://brill.com/view/journals/rccs/rccs-overview.xml>

■ The demographics of religion has been the subject of an increasing number of books and articles in the last several years, and with the publication of the new *Journal of Religion and Demography*, the field now has a regular outlet for such research. Although the inaugural issue was just published, the publication had a previous incarnation as the *Yearbook of Religion and Demography*. The new journal format will provide research and analysis more frequently (two times a year) and in briefer form. The first issue features the ongoing statistical portrait of the world religious population that was first reported in the World Religion Database, drawn from several different formal and informal sources. The most recent count (2018) shows that, after North Korea and other communist nations, the U.S. has the next largest number of agnostics, mainly due to the rise of the non-affiliated, at 53.8 million (though this number can also include non-institutional believers); that the fastest-growing religious populations are in Asia; that because of the influx of guest workers, the fastest-growing Muslim populations are now in Finland and the Czech Republic; and that Zoroastrians are the only religion in the world likely to have fewer adherents in 2030 than in 2018 (falling to an estimated 184,000 members). Other articles in this issue include projections of Europe’s Muslim population and a study of how Jewish millennials tend to identify with Judaism more as a religion than an ethnicity, which is a departure from the growth of non-religion within this age group.



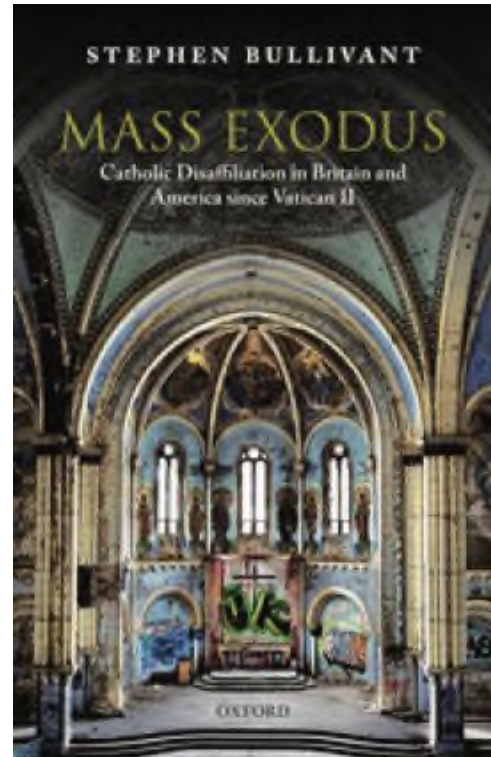
For more information on the journal, visit: <https://brill.com/view/journals/jrd/jrd-overview.xml>

■ Stephen Bullivant’s new book *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (Oxford University Press, \$32.95) is an engaging yet sobering analysis of the widespread pattern of disaffiliation that has impacted almost all the Catholic churches in Western countries during the last four decades. Bullivant, a British Catholic theologian and sociologist, uses quantitative and qualitative data as well as historical records to show that the church’s loss of Catholics is far from a life-cycle effect (with older people returning to the church) but more of a long-term change among cohorts, with each generation further weakening its ties to the institution (and the author makes it clear that these are not “cultural Catholics,” but people who no longer consider themselves to be Roman Catholic). The author is especially adept at analyzing accounts of disaffected Catholics, putting to use his wide

experience in studying atheists. Bullivant writes of the unpleasant irony that the church's Second Vatican Council actively sought to counter the small yet growing number of disaffected Catholics in Europe and even the U.S. in the mid-twentieth century (the main reason the council even focused on liturgy) only to accelerate the process of such church disaffection, leading to steeper and more serious kinds of decline. Just how the council had these unintended consequences is the subject of much of the book, with Bullivant focusing on the UK and U.S. as case studies of Catholic disaffiliation.

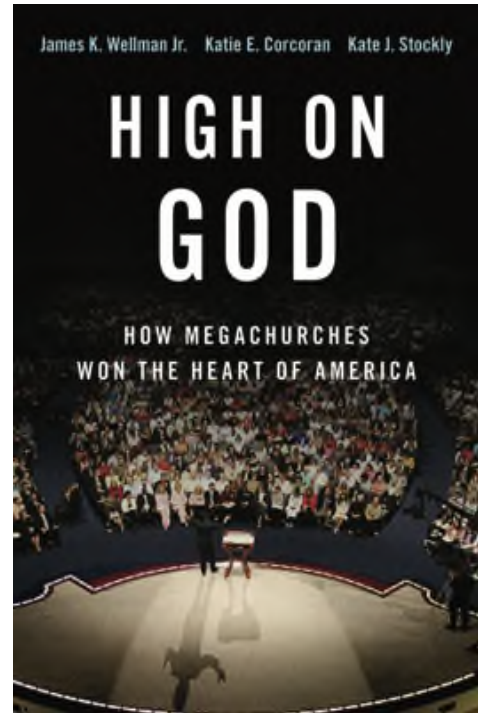
By citing Vatican II as a significant factor in Catholic disaffiliation, the author is likely to run into a torrent of criticism, such as the view that it was conservative counter-reaction to the council, as expressed as early as 1968 with the reinstatement of the prohibition on birth control, that was a trigger for church disenchantment. Bullivant doesn't discount the role of dissent in leading to the perfect storm of disaffiliation, but notes that it was a more gradual process that dovetailed with other factors (the loss of Catholic subcultures and neighborhoods, the sexual revolution in the wider society, and the failure of parents and older Catholics to serve as role models for the younger generation). Bullivant pronounces the main goal of making worship more meaningful and attractive to the average Catholic a failure, even if the above factors would still have created alienation between Catholics and the church. The attendance patterns of the British and U.S. cases are very similar, with 35 to 37 percent no longer considering themselves Catholic.

Bullivant does note that "leavers"—those who depart from the church and join no other religion—predominate in the UK, while "switchers"—those leaving for other churches, especially the evangelicals—are more common in the U.S. (although he puts too much emphasis on megachurches drawing Catholics during the evangelical revival of the 1970s, as these giant congregations were not so widespread back then). He delivers more bad news toward the end of the book, as he delves into the effect of the priestly sex abuse crisis on disaffiliation. It seems that greater distance from actual abuse (usually it was highly committed Catholics who suffered the most abuse given their greater frequency of contact with offending priests) has had more negative effects on affiliation; even those traumatized by abuse often retain some form of Catholic identity. The crisis has provided a powerful impetus for those already alienated from the church to actually disaffiliate and no longer call themselves Catholic, with some even viewing their nominal connection to the church as complicity with a tarnished institution.

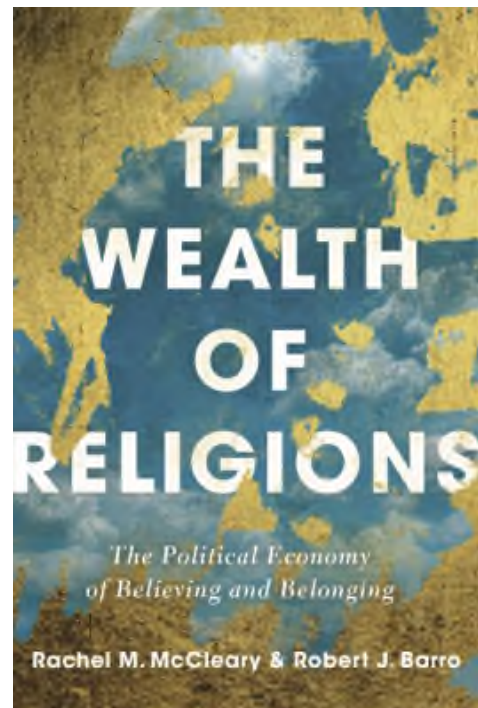


■ *High on God: How Megachurches Won the Heart of America* (Oxford University Press, \$24.95), by James Wellman Jr., Katie Corcoran, and Kate Stockly, is an intriguing examination of the social and cognitive psychology of these large congregations that takes the accent off beliefs and puts it on bodily

practices and emotions. Drawing on the work of Emile Durkheim and Randall Collins, the authors theorize that it is the strong emotions generated from crowded services and feelings of bonding with fellow attenders and the pastor that keep people coming and eventually getting more involved in church and community life. Wellman, Corcoran and Stockly find that it is a confluence of emotionally significant factors that drives this appeal, involving the charismatic leadership of the megachurch pastor, acceptance by fellow members, feelings of deliverance and certainty, a sense of purpose gained through church service, and what they call “remembering,” a process that takes place in smaller groups where a bridge is created between the larger church’s service and people’s personal lives. The book, which is based on a study of 12 megachurches, stresses how cultural relevance and informality in worship styles marks the megachurch’s appeal. But there has also been a trend of prominent megachurches embracing some forms of liturgy and sacramental worship [see **RW**, Vol. 34, No. 8], and it will be interesting to see if these congregations retain such high rates of loyalty.



■ While the economic study of religion has taken a lower profile in the last few years, this approach makes an impressive comeback in *The Wealth of Religions: the Political Economy of Believing and Belonging* (Princeton University Press, \$29.95) by Harvard University’s Rachel M. McCleary and Robert J. Barro. The book, based on the duo’s research for the past two decades, does a good job of unpacking economic concepts and how they apply to religion, as well as providing interesting case studies of the interplay between these two fields. Interestingly, McCleary and Barro support the secularization thesis—interpreting it as referring to the strong negative effect on measures of religiosity of higher economic development—which market theory has tended to criticize. But the authors argue that “secularization” is vague enough to allow for other prospects aside from the irrelevance not to mention disappearance of religion.



The most interesting chapters are those where McCleary and Barro look at the way religion remains an “independent variable” in affecting economic outcomes. They re-examine the Protestant ethic thesis of Max Weber

and find that religion does positively affect economic growth, though more in the way of generating moral values than promoting social interactions. In their chapter on Islam and economic growth, the authors seem to think it is more practice than beliefs that are important, though not always in the expected direction. For instance, observance of Ramadan appears to depress economic activity, yet this celebration is found to increase the happiness and wellbeing of Muslims. Other chapters include discussions of state regulation and religion (showing both that state religions increase participation in formal religious institutions and that regulation of the religious market drives down such participation), and a pioneering and fascinating look at the economy of saint-making, showing how competition and religious context (for instance whether it is a Protestant or Catholic society) shape the quantity and quality (they ask whether blessing too many saints weakens their effect on the church) of the beatification and canonization saints.

ON/FILE: A Continuing Record of Groups, Movements, People, and Events Impacting Contemporary Religion

The recent establishment as a pilgrimage site of a reenacted **Temple of Solomon** by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) in Brazil suggests how Christian Zionism circulates on a global level with Israel not always at the center of such a movement. The Pentecostal church built the temple in São Paulo as a center of Israeli and Jewish culture, “bringing a piece of Israel to Brazil,” but it has quickly become a worldwide pilgrimage site that is seen by believers as dispensing spiritual power and miracles. The temple takes up a whole city block, costing up to \$400 million



to build, and is actually four times larger than its ancient namesake. While importing “sacred soil” from Israel, the temple also produces and blesses its own sacred objects, such as olive oil, and then distributes them worldwide, including to places like Tel Aviv in Israel. Critics charge that it is an abuse and defamation of the original temple and see the UCKG’s promotion of it as self-serving and cynical.

(Source: paper presented at 2019 meeting of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion by Kathleen Openshaw of Western Sydney University)