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Coronavirus disrupts organized religion, raising issues of religious freedom and responsibility

The fast-moving nature of the coronavirus pandemic defies easy forecasts about how religious institutions and even patterns of religious beliefs and practices may change from this crisis. But the disruptive nature of the virus on congregational life as well as the more long-term implications for religious freedom stand out as recurring themes. Probably never before has health concerns impacted major religious traditions around the world in such a rapid and simultaneous manner. Public Catholic Masses are no longer celebrated at St. Peter Basilica in Rome, pilgrimage to Mecca is currently not permitted, megachurches have cancelled services, the rare visitors to Jerusalem's Western Wall are requested not to touch it, and major Hindu temples such Jagannath Temple in Puri have shut down. French President Emmanuel Macron has informed the leaders of the main religious bodies in France that it would not be possible for them to have any kind of gathering for Easter this year, Pessah, and the beginning of Ramadan (*France TV Info*, March 23).

Religious freedom has emerged as a concern for religious groups finding themselves in the middle of government management and containment of the virus. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) issued a statement focusing especially on China and South Korea. The statement focuses on the way the Chinese government's unannounced quarantines discriminated against and exploited Uighur Muslims who were already relocated to concentration camps. In South

Korea, the controversial 300,000-member Shincheonji church was seen as a center of contagion in the heavily hit city of Daegu. Shinchunji church, which is often criticized by the media and mainstream churches for its secrecy, received national attention because the "31st" coronavirus patient, a member of Shinchunji church, was seen as responsible for the rapid spread of the virus by attending a church service. Furthermore, the church's list of its membership that Korean health authorities demanded to track the spread of the virus was seen as not transparent and forthcoming. While media, government and religious leaders viewed Shinchunji church as



culpable in the spread of the coronavirus in Korea, the USCIRF statement says the church has faced unwarranted harassment from the government and that the church's role in the outbreak was exaggerated.

At the initial stages, it sometimes seemed that the response to coronavirus would be marked by a divide between conservative and liberal believers. This was illustrated by the reaction to the decisions of some Catholic bishops to instruct clergy to give communion only in the hands (and not on the tongue), in order to prevent the spread of the virus. Very soon, however, the main issue became plainly that any kind of public gathering would no longer be permitted in most Western countries as well as in some other ones. Religious groups in all those countries have complied, whatever their doctrinal inclinations. Since some religious gatherings in different places of the world have been channels for the propagation of the virus (the same could be said of secular gatherings), no religious group would like to be accused of bearing such responsibility, even if there have been a few exceptions of US pastors vowing not to close their churches (e.g. Life Tabernacle Church, Baton Rouge). In some other parts of the world, however, the response has been more mixed. In countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia, the governments have been unable to forbid some large Muslim gatherings. Similarly, in some Indian States such as Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, local authorities have permitted large gatherings of Hindu believers, despite the contrary advice of the central government (*The Print*, March 18).

In some areas of Europe, even gatherings of more than two or five people are now banned. In a number of Catholic or Orthodox parishes, this means that the Mass or Liturgy is still being celebrated, but behind closed doors, with only a priest or the priest with two or three assistants. While the measures preventing any gathering definitely came as a shock, they have also encouraged creative responses. There have been churches offering drive-thru prayers, drive-in services (*Fox News*, March 19)—or even drive-thru confessions, reviving the earlier version of drive-thru churches. The significance of the Internet is obvious, and it seems hard to imagine how churches might have reacted if a pandemic with such an impact had struck in pre-web times. In Europe, a number of evangelical churches have been among the first ones to switch to online worship—the fact that a 2,000-person gathering at a megachurch in Mulhouse (Eastern France) had become a major channel for the spread of the virus certainly gave a boost to this impetus. Church services of various denominations are now regularly broadcasting online. Talks and messages attempting to make sense of the situation (especially during the current Lenten period for a number of Churches) are being shared through Facebook and other social networks. There are also synagogues starting to hold online bar mitzvahs (*The Jewish Chronicle*, March 20).

All of this has not replaced physical contact with the believers however, and at a time of epidemics, some chaplains in hospitals and nursing homes do not always find it easy to access people they would like to minister to, due to protective measures enforced. In Italy, a number of priests have already died from the virus, some of them after ministering to people in need. While religious bodies reacted as well as they could to the current crisis and the way it has changed their entire situation in a matter of weeks or even days, and while they are legitimately eager to emphasize that any measure that may help saving human lives should be accepted and supported, religious institutions seem not to have taken a leading role in responding to the crisis. Some isolated conservative religious figures in various denominations have actually been critical of the tendency to follow “only the logic of the state, the secular one,” according to an article in

LifeSiteNews (March 18). True, there are more and more calls to pray on specific days and times for an end to the current crisis, but clearly believers first trust governments, hospitals and health authorities to find a solution. – *K.T. Chun, a New Jersey-based writer and researcher, contributed to this article.*

Prophetic LDS subculture face divisions over leadership scandal

The prophetic subculture within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is experiencing new strains and divisions over the alleged crimes scandal involving teachers Chad and Lori Daybell, according to the e-newsletter *Sightings* (February 27, 2020). The couple are under suspicion for child disappearances and unexplained deaths of family members and have been labeled as “cult leaders” by the mainstream media. As end-times and prophetic teachers and groups within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have been marginalized by church leaders, they have retreated into their own subculture, with various digital communities and organizations such as Preparing a People being the most recent outgrowths. Christopher James Blythe writes that there is a tendency among these communities to draw on influences from other prophetic groups that are not usually found among the LDS. For instance, ideas are taken from proponents of new age spirituality and prepper communities. Participants may share by personal revelations, dreams, and visions about the last days. A few visionaries have published or given



lectures on their own collections of their revelations. “This is not uncontroversial, but it usually is presented as personal revelation that might be useful to others, rather than the individual establishing themselves as a source of authority outside of the Church of Jesus Christ,” Blythe writes.

Daybell has also revealed that his prophetic gifts began with a near-death experience when he was younger. While near-death experiences have become a

common theme in prophetic writings, they are not part of the official discourse of the LDS. Blythe notes that “If we are speaking about the prophecy subculture as a whole, it would be very difficult to claim any of these visionaries are 'cult leaders,' at least not in the same category as David Koresh or Jim Jones. This is a marketplace for consumers of prophecy, not a religious organization in the traditional sense.” Even given its marginal status within the church, most individuals involved in this movement consider themselves strongly committed to the church and its leaders. Blythe notes that when popular visionary Julie Rowe was excommunicated in 2019, her audience dwindled rapidly. Chad Daybell would consider himself faithful to the Church of Jesus Christ. Those involved in the Latter-day Saint prophecy subculture are split around their support of the Daybells. “Many believe that Chad and Lori are innocent of any wrongdoing, that there is a custody battle occurring behind the scenes, and that the children are fine. Others have

grown suspicious. LDS members involved in the prophetic subculture have seen past visionaries who gained popularity and then did questionable things. Only time will tell, but this controversy unfolding in the media will have a long-term impact on that community.”

Women gain entry into the Jewish bris ritual marketplace

Along with women gaining more leadership positions in synagogues and Jewish education, they are also assuming new ritual roles, most recently that of the “mohel,” those who perform circumcisions, according to the *New York Times* (March 1, 2020). What is called the brit milah or bris circumcision ceremony has traditionally been conducted by male religious leaders, though it has been taken up by doctors and medical professionals within Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, especially as it has become more lucrative. The broadening of the mohel role inadvertently created a space for women doctors to gain admittance to performing this ceremony. These women professionals “are offering a new option, holistic in its approach, for Jewish parents,” writes Alyson Krueger. One women rabbi says that female mohels tend to emphasize “making everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike, feel welcome and part of the process. They are giving the whole thing a lot more TLC. Some more traditionally oriented parents still prefer male mohels, even if they concede that the ceremony is valid. The mix of entrepreneurialism and Judaism in the work of the mohel appeals to these professional women, who say they have made a lucrative living from it.



CURRENT RESEARCH

● **Contrary to their reputation as proselytizers, evangelicals tend to de-emphasize their religious beliefs, new research indicates that evangelicals actually downplay religious expression when working with religiously diverse and secular groups.** In a study of multifaith initiatives in Boston, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Portland, Oregon published in the online magazine *The Conversation* (March 3, 2020), sociologists Brad Fulton, Wes Markofski and Richard L. Wood looked at white evangelicals living in urban and suburban settings, involved in collaborations, such as policy advocacy organizations and volunteer initiatives like Serving the City in Portland. In such religiously diverse and secular contexts, evangelicals tend to downplay religious expression. In one case, they found that when the 26,000 evangelicals from 500 churches volunteered with Portland’s Serving the City initiative, they adopted a self-imposed “no-proselytizing” policy as they helped with cleaning up parks, refurbishing schools

and conducting clothing drives. These evangelicals said they want to simply serve their neighbors. They cite one evangelical leader as saying, “The reason this works ... is that we’ve agreed to play by the rules: serving with no strings attached.”

The study found evangelicals adopting a similar approach in various parts of the U.S., including more liberal and secular places like New England and the West Coast as well as the more religious South. The researchers’ findings extend to politically centrist and conservative evangelical organizations rather than the small segment of more liberal evangelicals. A larger study, the National Study of Community Organizing, of 3,225 religious congregations involved in 178 community organizing efforts indicate that white evangelicals are more likely to participate in coalitions that display minimal religious expression. Participating white evangelical congregations are twice as likely to join a coalition that does not open or close its meetings with prayer.

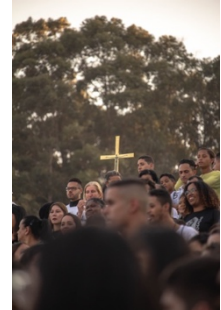
(*The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/evangelicals-downplay-religious-expression-when-working-with-secular-groups>)



● **Although populism and Catholicism have been associated in Poland, a study finds a weak association between religiosity and populist support, with the former even having a preventative effect on the latter.** The study, conducted by Agnieszka Turska-Kawa and Waldemar Wojtasik and published in the Romanian-based *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* (Spring, 2020), is based on a nationwide survey of 950 people throughout Poland measuring attitudes on religion and populism. The analysis found that in the segment of people with the highest declared religiosity displayed less of a tendency to “antagonize the relationship between ordinary people and elites...they do not manifest a clear priority of the needs of average people versus the views of social and political elites.” They further conclude that “religiosity

coexisting with lower levels of populism may serve as a kind of umbrella protecting from populist attitudes.” The results may partly be explained by the relationship between religiosity and political parties, where the two mainstream parties already refer to Christian values.

(*Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*,
<http://jsri.ro/ojs/index.php/jsri/article/view/1183>)



Liturgical, bodily Christianity draws young Brits

Greater numbers of young people are being drawn to Anglo-Catholic and other liturgical churches, according to the *Catholic Herald* (February 7, 2020). British media have reported that young people are “flocking” to these liturgical parishes of the Church of England, such as St. Bartholomew the Great, in the City of London. Marcus Walker, the pastor of St. Bartholomew



the Great, writes that “With two per cent of those under 25 in Britain calling themselves Anglican, almost any number of Anglo-Catholic millennials looks positive when contrasted with the regular turnout in Church of England churches; even a handful would honestly count as ‘flocking.’” But over the last year we have seen a notable uptick in the number of millennials (and, indeed, post-millennials, if we’re going to be strict about definitions) both to our High Mass on Sunday mornings and to Evensong on Sunday evenings.

Walker sees similar growth in such high church Anglican expressions as Westcott House, an Anglican seminary, and the Prayer Book Society, which has recently seen a 40 percent rise in its more youthful membership. “I would add to this a trend that was impossible to ignore in my previous position (that of deputy director at the Anglican Centre in Rome): by a considerable margin most of Rome’s young seminarians are liturgical traditionalists. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is broadly true across the Anglosphere for the young laity. Latin Masses, east-facing liturgies: these are the order of the day for those rebelling against their peers and parents,” Walker adds. He calls this a counter-revolution from the liturgical renewal of the 1960s. “There is, in fact, a shared border here. All three manifestations of Christianity – the Charismatic, traditionalist Catholic and Anglo-Catholic – demand a high quality of music...All three use the body physically in worship: whether crossing yourself at the elevation of the Host or following Elizabeth I’s injunction to bow at the Name of Jesus or raising your hands at a profound moment of singing, there is an acknowledgement that worship is physical as well as mental. Finally, all three take preaching seriously...”

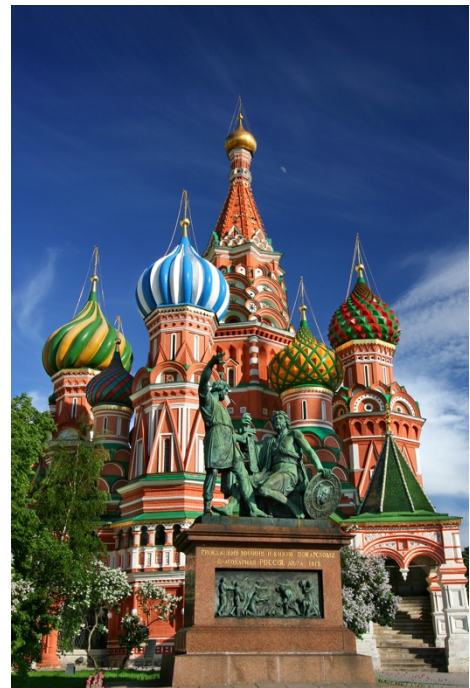
(*Catholic Herald*, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/why-anglo-catholicism-appeals-to-millennials/?fbclid=IwAR3UO-IwelmYVumqEQpX-h6Wv5nThOhXF9yuuNtaXy8UoVP9H8kx5eAY-8>)

Russia's spiritual turn becomes official, with broad approval

While the Russian Federation continues to define itself as a secular state, it has come a long way from the earlier atheist Soviet system, with forthcoming amendments to the Constitution expected to include reference to God. While there are indeed a number of Western states who keep the reference to God in their respective constitutions, it is less frequent to see a contemporary state adding it when it was not already present. The current constitution was adopted in 1993. President Putin proposed various amendments during his annual address to the Federal Assembly on January 15. This led to the proposal of various additional amendments, with the Moscow Patriarchate calling in early February for a reference to God, a move supported by the leaders of other traditional religious groups present in Russia (*Church Times*, March 20). Some observers however see it primarily as a way to increase the influence of the Orthodox Church (*Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, February 10). If ratified, article 3 would state that the Russian Federation, “united by a thousand years of history, recognizes the historically developed state unity while preserving the memory of ancestors who gave us ideals, belief in God and continuity in the development of the Russian state”. In order to protect family values, a clause should also enshrine marriage “as a union of man and woman.” President Putin has followed those suggestions and supported those additional amendments.

Ironically, although some sectors of Russian public opinion object to the reference to God in the preamble to the constitution, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) does not mind, CPRF leader Gennady Zyuganov said (*Interfax*, February 11). The changes in the Constitution would confirm Russia's conservative turn in recent years, although analysts remark that religious observance remains low in the Russian Federation despite a clear resurgence with religious identification (*Global Voices*, Feb. 19). In the journal *Religion, State & Society* (Vol.48, No. 1, 2020), Kathy Rouslet (Science Po, Paris) writes that the greater references to God and traditional values in Russian public life is associated with increased use of the concept of “*dukhovnost*,” which is now translated as “spirituality” in political life. Rouslet traces the use and meaning of “*dukhovnost*” from the pre-Soviet era to the contemporary period, particularly in the 2010s, and finds that the term has shifted from meaning a special morality and “authenticity” of Russians and other Slavic people to now include connotations of “spirituality.” Some Russian Orthodox leaders use the term of *dukhovnost* to prop up the role of Orthodoxy in Russian society, but other elites use the term to promote the preservation of a diversity of spiritual and religious traditions.

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



Russian Protestants move to the fringes of traditional denominational life



Russian Protestants are increasingly experiencing “atomization and decentralization,” closing the curtain on an early Soviet era, where the million-member Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (UECB) was unifying force of Protestantism, writes William Yoder in the online journal *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* (March). The change can be seen in the state of the Russian Baptist Union, once the mother church of the UECB, now reduced to no more than

70,000 members, with many members and congregations on its fringes holding conflicting teachings and practices. Yoder writes that Russia today has a wide pluralism of old and new denominations ranging from Exodus, a church body consisting mainly of former substance abusers, to new Pentecostal churches that include many “cultural outsiders,” such as retired Army officers, who have come to the faith since the 1990s. And there is more cooperation between Russian evangelical churches. But today, bishops and church offices “have less and less to say. Decentralization is the key... This trend is due in part to past foreign funding for individual projects, and the greatly increased crowd of [Russian] immigrants in the West expecting a say in the governance of congregational affairs in their homeland.” He adds that the church mission groups from overseas have largely left for greener pastures and the “congregations remaining behind are now, more than ever, required to determine their own fates.”

The increased government pressure on foreign religions is only one factor in this new independence of Russian congregations; another reason is the “short attention spans in the West.” The case of the Baptist Union, once one million strong, is the clearest example of this decentralization. Starting in the 1990s, when conservative Calvinists from the U.S. under such a leader as Californian John MacArthur exported their teachings, groups and congregations began to form on the edges of the Baptist Union. They now include the Kansas City-based charismatic International House of Prayer and the multi-lingual and multi-racial movement known as The Father’s House, which has 7,500 members in Moscow and throughout Orange County, CA. Yoder writes that the Baptist Union leadership appreciates the fringe’s help in “propping up the membership rolls, but relationships and power bases with independent funding are being formed beyond the reach of Union leadership. A covert emigration, an erosion from within, is beckoning.”

(*Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*,
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss2/4/>)

Religious dissidence challenges Iran's Islamic Republic

In the *Journal of Democracy* (Spring, 2020), Ladan Boroumand chronicles the significant religious and social transformations taking place in Iran, something that the coronavirus pandemic may intensify. Last year the Islamic Republic celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Islamic revolution but by last December, there were demonstrations filling the streets of the Tehran against the clerical government and Islamist ideology ruling the country. Along with human rights activists, revisionist Shia seminarians, Liberal theologians and alternative Islamic schools of thought, such as “merciful Islam” (which has 2.3 million followers on Instagram), are challenging the ruling Islamist leadership. Boroumand writes that “Iranian society has not been waiting for Shia theology to reform itself. In a highly subversive yet largely unnoticed form of dissidence, considerable numbers of people have been choosing other spiritual alternatives. Various brands of mysticism—some traditional and some modern, some Islamic, some not—have been attracting many followers.”

As mosques are emptying, the mystical Sufi prayer houses are filling up, with the intelligence service warning that disillusioned Hezbollah militants have been drawn to such groups. Christianity, and traditional religious minority groups, such as the Baha'is and Zoroastrians, and even atheist and agnostic websites are attracting disenchanted Iranians and are facing new repressive measures. The “tectonic cultural and political shifts” occurring within Iran are likely to be accelerated by the massive coronavirus outbreak in the country. The *Terrorism Monitor* (March, 2020) reports that the failure of Iran's government to contain the virus, especially allowing it to spread to the Shia center of Qom drew wide public criticism. “While the virus has mostly kept the outrage off the streets, the ongoing handling of the situation and its impact will almost certainly come to bear when the dust settles,” says Brian M. Perkins.

(*Journal of Democracy*, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/>; *Terrorism Monitor*, <https://jamestown.org/program/briefs-323/>)



Findings & Footnotes

■ As the journal *Religion* (January 2020) turns fifty, it has seized the opportunity to welcome several articles dealing with “futures.” The issue mixes prospective observations about the future of the study of religion and its various subfields along with more general views on the future shape of religion in the contemporary world. Contributors all agree that the discipline has already changed over the years, such as by questioning Western biases (Adriaan van Klinken, Univeesity of Leeds, UK). The discipline is also facing challenges in those countries where the interest of the state for the humanities has eroded, with consequences for funding and possibly an increasing need to look for external funding (Olav Hammer, University of Southern Denmark). Adam Amnczyk and Halina Grzymała-Moszczyńska (Jesuit University Ignatium, Krakow, Poland) emphasize the ever growing role of migration for putting religions in direct touch with each other. Ann Taves (University of California at Santa Barbara) sees the growth in research on nonreligion and secularity as long overdue. This leads her to plead for drawing full consequences and, instead of an “indefensible” attempt to incorporate it into religious studies, to locate religious studies as a subfield of worldview studies—something that might also help scholars to escape from the challenge of defining religion and then excluding what does not fit our definition.



Stephen C. Berkwitz and J. Dané Stoneburner Wallace (Missouri State University) call for the future study of religion to discard a vocabulary linked to the history of religions borrowed from “alleged perspectives of the practitioner” and bring it back “into ordinary, mundane spheres of human behavior.” The emphasis on affinities with other spheres of human thought and practice will give greater recognition and vitality to the study of religion, according to the authors. Abby Day (University of London, UK) concurs by encouraging scholars to define religion more in terms of lived and everyday experiences and to unravel its complexities (for instance, people not conventionally religious experiencing “a sensuous, social supernatural”). While the discipline is grounded in comparison, Ingvild Sælid Gilhus warns that “the comparative approach is at present more of an ideal than a program that has been fully realized.” And Wouter Hanegraaff (University of Amsterdam) suggests that, after all we have learnt from deconstructing, time has come for the discipline to reconstruct the study of religion in order to avoid becoming irrelevant and defunded, since it should not “imply the end of *any* notion of religion.” Scholars of religion need to have a story to tell about the “human importance” of religion. For more information on this issue, visit: *Religion* - <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rrel20/current>

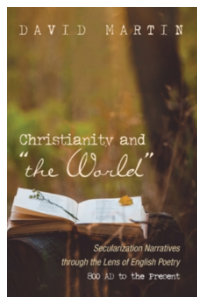
■ The rapidly expanding field of secular studies and the way it is becoming a major subfield in the sociology of religion is explored by Stephen Bullivant in the journal *Social Compass* (online in February). Bullivant notes that as recently as 2008, the number of books, articles and other scholarly material on atheism, secularity, and non-religion was meager and pursued by lone scholars without much support. By 2014, a bibliography cited 150 nonreligion related publications in that year—and the rate of publishing has since increased. The author sees much of the impetus for research on atheism and nonreligion as being the new atheism phenomenon of the early 2000s as well as the rise of the non-affiliated (“nones”)



during this time.

The way in which the non-religious began to see themselves as a minority and embrace identity politics was another factor that drew scholars to this field. Bullivant finds a substantial number of scholars studying atheism and other forms of non-religion coming from that perspective themselves; just as a group of French Catholic sociologists formed their own school of “religious sociology” in the last century, he wonders if they are creating a similar kind of “sociologie non-religieuse.” Bullivant concludes that it may be too soon to know if the sociology of non-religion will become an institutionalized subfield of the sociology of religion in the way that the study of new religious movements has, though the panoply of journals (already two of them), conferences, associations, and funding opportunities suggest such a prospect. For more information on this article, visit: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/scp>

■ Veteran sociologist David Martin’s final book before his death last year, *Christianity and ‘the World’* (Cascade Books, \$21.60), upsets the usual story of secularization through a unique “lens of English poetry.” Martin’s historical scope is broad, ranging from 800 AD to the present, as he surveys the major



poets and looks at how their writings show an oscillation between “this worldly,” secular themes and a serious engagement with Christianity. These alternating periods of adapting secular and Christian elements and subjects do not follow a one-directional secularization narrative of a high Christian literary tradition in England falling prey to modernization and irrelevance. Where one might expect a steady Christian influence in poetry in earlier periods, Martin finds “other elements quite distinct from Christianity but partially fused with it, such as the pagan honor code, Renaissance humanism, and Enlightenment rationality.”

While the Protestant Reformation did unintentionally led to the desacralization of nature and a rejection of extra-biblical miracles and mystical ecstasy, there was also a “staggered” movement between Christian and secular themes seen in poetry of the last quarter of the 18th century. This period embraced secular elements in contrast to the more religious poetry of the 17th and 19th centuries (and then revived during the wars of the mid-20th century). That there is a “surprisingly resilient Christian trajectory up to the present” can be found in the contemporary poetry of Geoffrey Hill, Andrew Motion, Michael Symmons Roberts, and Simon Jarvis, who, if not practicing Christians (usually of the Anglican and Catholic persuasions) take Christianity seriously in their work. But even more broadly, Martin argues that the nature of poetry is in some ways is similar to liturgy and prophecy, especially as it draws on the Bible and Prayer Book in its call for protest and solidarity and communion.

■ *Back Pocket God: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford University Press, \$29.95), by Melinda Lundquist Denton and Richard Flory, represents the fourth and final longitudinal study of the National Study of Youth, following the beliefs of practices of a subset of Millennials from their teens to their mid- to late-twenties. As might be expected, the rise the non-affiliated is given center stage in this book due to the high rate of “nones” in this generation. Indeed, many of the young adults who we meet in Denton and Flory’s book tended to have some contact with religious institutions in their teen years (especially in church attendance) only to discard such ties, if not necessarily their beliefs, in their twenties. Through quantitative and qualitative research (in-depth interviews), the authors confirm that “emerging adulthood” is an increasingly transitional period (in education, career plans, family formation), making it difficult to forecast patterns of religiosity. But the researchers do not

find much outright opposition to organized religion as much as disinterest. Even the common label of “spiritual but not religious” was not a popular self-identifier among these young adults. The slippage in religious indicators over time was not across the board; more conservative Protestants, Latter Day Saints, Africa Americans, and Jews showed greater commitment over time, while Catholics had the highest rate of disengagement on several measures.

Most notable is that the other categories of engagement and disengagement (as outlined in the study’s previous books)— from “disaffiliated,” to “marginal” to even (to some extent) “committed”— are marked by a tendency to take religion on their own terms with little real importance. This stance is marked by low level of knowledge and articulation about their beliefs, a low priority given to greater or future involvement (and thus learning about their faiths), and a taken-for granted quality that requires little need to think about their beliefs. A “do it yourself” religious or spiritual outlook has emerged that is marked by a general belief in “karma,” or that everything happens for a reason; the belief that “everybody goes to heaven;” that religion is easy; the importance of the golden rule; that morals are self-evident; and a belief in “no regrets” as one goes through life (“it’s all good”). These elements create what has been called (by the original authors of this study) “moralistic therapeutic deism 2.0,” with the main difference for these twenty-somethings being that God is even more remote and reduced from their teenage years, only to called upon when needed. The book concludes that the general stability of trends from their youth while showing gradual religious decline may make the return of this segment of young adults to organized religion unlikely.

