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How shifts in communion practices during pandemic play into worship wars

Controversial and possibly long-lasting effects from the coronavirus pandemic are being felt in Christian churches and the way they celebrate the sacrament of communion. This can be seen in new online observances and rituals that have emerged, but also challenges have been posed to smaller but ancient ways of celebrating this central sacrament. It is an issue that cuts across the usual conservative-liberal divide, with, for instance, both low-church conservative and liberal Lutherans holding virtual communion services while high church Lutherans opposing such innovations. The *Journal of Anglican Studies* (18) notes that the debate over “virtual Eucharists” has broken out in various Anglican churches, though even the liberal Episcopal Church has officially condemned the practice, holding that it overrides the actions of the priest in consecrating the bread and wine. Editor Andrew McGowan writes that the debate about virtual Eucharists is part of a larger disruption in Anglican ritual and liturgy afforded by the virus that coincides with the disruption caused by the Internet itself. “Anglicans are now sharing in prayer with others (not just other Anglicans) all over the world now, seeing things they had not before, hearing familiar words in unfamiliar cadences and new words spoken in unfamiliar holy places...Worship may indeed be changed; it may increasingly be streamed even when available in the flesh, and perhaps even hybridized by including streamed elements, but it will not cease to be primarily a physical and communal activity if it remains characteristically Christian.”



Meanwhile, in the Eastern Orthodox churches, the use of a common spoon for giving communion during the virus has made a number of the faithful apprehensive and has led some Orthodox jurisdictions, dioceses and parishes to allow certain changes in the manner of administering communion, while some are still deliberating on this matter, writes Alexei Krindatch in a new report. The study is part of series of surveys on the impact of the pandemic in American Orthodox Christian parishes. The study was initiated by the Orthodox Theological Society in America, conducted in late July, and based on the responses of 609 Orthodox priests representing all American Orthodox jurisdictions. At the time of the study, only a quarter of the parishes had been able to fully resume their liturgical life, without rules limiting the number of

participants. Traditionally, communion is served with the same spoon and from a common chalice. Nearly half of US Orthodox parishes administer the Holy Communion in exactly the same way as they did prior to the pandemic, with variations across jurisdictions.

“Parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (GOA, 61 percent of parishes) and of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russian (ROCOR, 70 percent) adhere most strongly to serving Holy Communion in a traditional manner,” Krindatch reports. In contrast, only 25 percent of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) parishes continue giving communion in this way. One-fifth of the parishes require communicants to tilt their heads back so that the priest can drop communion into their mouths without physical contact of communicant with the spoon. The study finds that 13 percent of the parishes use either one or several spoons in rotation which are then sanitized; 12 percent use multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant). There are also parishes offering different options. Internal diversity is the strongest within the OCA. In half of the parishes, the priests responded that some members refrain from receiving communion due to fear of getting sick. The highest percentage is found in parishes sticking to the traditional method. Opinions about changes in the way of giving communion are contrasted among clergy of all jurisdictions. Overall, 55 percent of clergy believe that “participation in the Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution.” Clergy in the OCA are on average most open to accept new methods for administering communion. Krindatch concludes that “the distinctive ‘internal culture’ of each jurisdiction is the most important predictor of the clergy’s personal opinions and feelings on this topic”—something that illustrates the difficulty of enforcing uniform policies across Orthodox jurisdictions and dioceses.

(*Journal of Anglican Studies*, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-anglican-studies>; the report “Holy Communion during the Pandemic in American Orthodox Christian Parishes” (53 pages) as well as an executive summary can be downloaded from the following page: <https://orthodoxreality.org/coronavirus-and-american-orthodox-parishes/>)

'Double lifers' have hidden impact on ultra-Orthodox Judaism

The growth and networking of “double lifers,” those ultra-Orthodox Jews who doubt and often secretly live lives in conflict with their religious communities, is having a liberalizing impact on Orthodox Judaism, writes Michal Leibowitz in the *Jewish Review of Books* (Summer, 2020). In reviewing the recent book *Hidden Heretics; Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age*, Leibowitz notes that the phenomenon of double lifers first became visible in 2002, when disillusioned ultra-Orthodox Jews “seized on the anonymity of blogs to share their opinions on subjects that they couldn’t speak about openly in their communities: crises of faith, reactions to rabbinic sexual abuse scandals, reflections on banned books, criticisms of the ultra-Orthodox leadership, and the like.” These bloggers came from across the Orthodox



spectrum, with the majority being men. The book, authored by Ayala Fader, argues that the phenomenon took on sociological dimensions since these blogs increasingly link to one another, with their writers and readers engaging each other in the comments sections, and sometimes meeting up, creating what she calls a “counterpublic.”

The growth of this increasingly visible network was alarming enough for ultra-Orthodox leaders to shift their discourse about the Internet. Where they had previously warned against immoral activity online, especially pornography, from about 2009 onward, the rabbinic discourse increasingly focused on the dangers of exposure to literature, media, and social contacts that would cast doubt on religious orthodoxy. The concern was strong enough to draw 40,000 Orthodox men to an anti-Internet rally in New York in 2012. But leaders have seen how their community is increasingly fragile to such outside influence and has cracked down on such doubters and double lifers since then. Fader finds that the community that double lifers have created may have kept them from leaving ultra-Orthodox Judaism. But in the process, they have liberalized this branch of Judaism, especially through family dynamics. Double-life parents tend to teach their children fluency in the English language and American culture to increase career options and subtly encouraged their children to question authority. Some have “changed their partners’ minds, “influencing them to become more flexible on issues of Jewish law or even flipping them entirely,” Leibowitz adds.

(*Jewish Review of Books*, <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/8053/double-lifers/>)

The decline and fall of urban Catholic schooling from the epidemic?



Urban Catholic schools “are facing an unprecedented crisis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic,” according to a report by *National Public Radio* (July 30, 2020). Tom Gjelton reports that at least 100 urban Catholic schools are estimated to close in the fall because of declining tuition revenue, “and school administrators say the number could double in the next two months.” The economic downturn resulting from the virus has led to widespread unemployment, which in turn has depleted the funds of many parents for paying Catholic school tuition

fees. As families pull their children out of Catholic schools, these institutions will likely have to shut their doors. “If the school had a lot of low-income families in it, [it] got hit really hard,” says Tom Carroll, superintendent of Catholic schools in the archdiocese of Boston, where nine are due to close. “For those schools that were already on the edge, it just put them over.”

About 80 percent of the budget of Catholic schools depend on tuition revenue, with the remaining 20 percent coming from fundraising and donations, according to an official from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. All of these sources were significantly depleted during the pandemic, not to mention subsidies from parishes of affiliated schools, where weekly collections suffered from church closings since March. Many of these schools have received

funding under the federal government’s Paycheck Protection Program started during the pandemic, but that money is running out soon. Although urban Catholic schools have faced declining enrollments for some time as a result of many middle-class Catholic families leaving cities for the suburbs, they have become educational lifelines for many low-income families. Many of these students are not Catholic but they have profited from the strong emphases on moral values and discipline these schools offered. One of the urban areas most affected by Catholic school closings is the archdiocese of New York, where at least 20 will be shutting down, while nine are slated to close in Boston and 24 more are on a "watch list.”

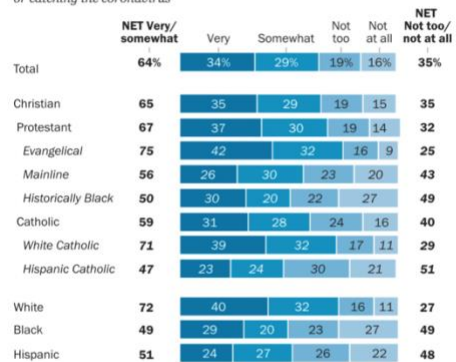
CURRENT RESEARCH

● **Conflict is growing in congregations as they deliberate on plans to reopen during the pandemic, even as a majority of religious believers and the public tend to accept social distancing rules for all organizations, according to recent studies.** A July survey by Lifeway Research found that 27 percent of evangelical and mainline pastors cited addressing complaints and conflict and keeping unity in their congregations as the pressure points they are most strongly feeling. In an April survey, just eight percent cited conflict and disagreement as significant issues (most congregations had discontinued services during that time). Much of the conflicts and division regarding reopening reflect the polarization in the wider society, with some pastors commenting that where there was unity on common beliefs before the pandemic, they now see more political division.

Yet a Pew Research Center survey finds that Americans overwhelmingly say houses of worship should follow the same rules about social distancing and large gatherings as any other organizations or businesses in their local area. This position was taken by 79 percent of respondents while only 19 percent say that congregations should be given more flexibility than other groups in following social distancing rules. The majority of respondents are in line with recent Supreme Court rulings on this issue. Among U.S. Christians, about three-quarters say churches should be subject to the same rules as other groups, with evangelicals expressing the most support for giving more flexibility to churches. While Democrats were most likely to support social distancing rules applied to all groups, two-thirds of Republicans also agreed on this issue.

More than six-in-ten regular attenders at least somewhat confident they can safely attend religious services without catching, spreading COVID-19

Among U.S. religious attenders, % who say they are ____ confident that they could safely attend in-person religious services right now without spreading or catching the coronavirus



Note: Religious attenders are those who said, in a 2019 survey, that they typically attend religious services monthly or more often, or who said in the new survey that they attended religious services in person in the last month. The survey did not obtain enough interviews with members of non-Christian religious groups in this category to analyze separately. Those who did not answer are not shown. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.
 Source: Survey conducted July 13-19, 2020, among U.S. adults.
 Americans Oppose Religious Exemptions From Coronavirus-Related Restrictions

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The resistance to the health measures and policies and other incautious health behaviors surrounding COVID-19 among American conservatives is driven more by politicized ideology than by religious motivations and commitment, according to a study in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (online in August 2020). Sociologists Samuel Perry, Joshua Grubbs, and Andrew Whitehead use data from

the Public and Discourse Ethics Study, which surveyed 2,519 people and was conducted in 2019 and then later in 2020 during the pandemic. They find that religious commitment, once political ideology is accounted for, tended to move people toward more health-conscious practices, such as washing of hands, wearing masks, and not touching one's face, during the pandemic. The espousal of conservative ideology and also what the authors call "Christian nationalism" was the leading predictors of Americans engaging in incautious behaviors, including eating in restaurants, visiting friends and family, and gathering in groups of more than 10 people. The authors argue that their conception of Christian nationalism moves people toward incautious behavior through beliefs in divine protection, distrust of scientists and the news media, and devotion to President Donald Trump. This ideology was second behind religious commitment in predicting whether Americans took up cautious or incautious practices, such as mask-wearing. Thus religion, with political ideology, could move people in either direction.

(*The Lifeway Research study can be downloaded here:* <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Coronavirus-Pastors-Full-Report-July-2020.pdf>; *The Pew Research Center Study can be downloaded here:* <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/08/07/americans-oppose-religious-exemptions-from-coronavirus-related-restrictions>; *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14685906>)

● **The pandemic in Ireland and Northern Ireland saw an increase in online religious participation as well an interest in continuing such alternative forms of spirituality and religion when the crisis is over, according to a study cited in the blog *The Emerging Church in Eire and Northern Ireland* (August 5, 2020).** The blog cites the recent survey by Gladys Ganiel and her colleagues at Queens University (Belfast) of 439 faith leaders from most denominations in the two countries, with a key finding being an "astonishing" rise of engagement with online worship activities during the pandemic. Before the crisis, 44 percent of all churches had no online provision for worship. By the time the survey was conducted in the midst of the pandemic 87 percent of the churches were engaged in online ministry. Seventy percent of respondents said they would keep some (55 percent) or all (15 percent) of online



worship after the pandemic. Like similar research in Great Britain, roughly one-quarter of the public engaged in online worship compared to normal church attendance rate of about 10 percent (in Britain). Faith leaders—in both Great Britain and Ireland and Northern Ireland—noted an increase in online religious practice, especially a deeper desire for prayer and reading the Bible. Those surveyed tended to agree that the current situation was an opportunity for radical change, including

rethinking the preoccupation of keeping buildings open and the challenge of finances.

(*Emerging Church in Eire and Northern Ireland*, <https://medium.com/@pmphillips/the-emerging-hybrid-church-in-eire-and-northern-ireland-524517ec57a4>)

● A "global decline of religion" has accelerated since 2007, "with surprising speed," as lower income nations have joined more secularized high income nations in retreating from faith, writes Ronald F. Inglehart in the journal *Foreign Affairs* (September/October, 2020).

Inglehart has long propagated his theory of how "existential security" (freedom from economic distress and longevity) drives down the importance of religion in people's lives, but he was even has caught off-guard by the sudden growth in secularism around the world. Using the World Values Survey, Inglehart finds that from 2007 to 2019, "overwhelming majority of the countries we studied—43 out of 49—became less religious. The decline in belief was not confined to high-income countries and appeared across most of the world." This pattern stood in contrast to even as recent a period as the early 2000s when religious beliefs were strengthened in countries of the former Soviet Union as well in such developing nations as Brazil, China, Mexico, and South Africa. The only noticeable exceptions to the secularizing trend are India and most of the Muslim world.



Inglehart finds the most dramatic change taking place in the U.S. Since 2007, the U.S. showed a drastic drop in the importance Americans give to religion— from a mean rating of the importance of God in their lives at 8.2 on a ten-point scale to a figure of 4.6 by 2017. "By this measure, America now ranks as the 11th least religious country for which we have data," Inglehart writes. As to why this decline took place so suddenly, he argues that secularization "can reach a tipping point when the dominant opinion shifts and, swayed by the forces of conformism and social desirability, people start to favor the outlook they once opposed—producing exceptionally rapid cultural change. Younger and better educated groups in high-income countries have recently reached that threshold." Inglehart points out the usual suspects of secularization—"modernization" and technological progress, a reaction against the religious right, and the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. But he also stresses how the "pro-fertility norms" of most religions as no longer being necessary in many societies, while the secular norms of divorce, abortion, gay rights, and gender equality rapidly gain favor. Even though pandemics, such as COVID-19, can reduce people's existential security and thus increase the importance of religion, Inglehart doubts the likelihood of such a shift, "because it would run counter to the powerful, long-term, technology-driven trend of growing prosperity and increased life expectancy that is helping push people away from religion."

(*Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com>)

● **With more than a quarter of the population being unaffiliated and the share of the religious non-affiliated (“nones”) in the UK increasing, this population should be seen beyond a generic category as the long-term influence of their religious upbringing may still be shaping some of their attitudes, writes Yinxuan Huang (University of Manchester) in the *Journal of Contemporary Religion* (May, 2020).** Huang cautions against approaching religious nones in Britain as an undifferentiated category. Many of them had been brought up as Christians and have subsequently renounced their Christian identities, but this does not mean that they have lost their cultural heritage. This raises the question of knowing to which extent this background affects their attitudes and behavior and differentiates them from the other nones. The purpose of the research is to fill a gap through understanding “how internal variations divide the religiously unaffiliated in the UK in terms of political attitudes,” based on the data of the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey of 2016, which was conducted after the referendum on the UK European Union (EU) membership vote. Research findings had suggested that Anglican voters had mainly supported leaving the EU (Leavers), with Catholics, non-Christians and nones more likely to support staying in the EU (Remainers).



Huang’s careful analysis of the BSA data shows that both religious upbringing and current religious affiliation were important factors in attitudes towards Brexit. Former Anglicans were more likely to support it than consistent nones by a margin of 10% and were much closer to consistent Anglicans. Interestingly, the voting patterns of former Catholics and consistent Catholics were strikingly similar. Thus, even in a more secular environment, the religious background plays a role in shaping socio-political attitudes. Both an Anglican or a Catholic upbringing leads to the formation of distinct non-religious identities. Even if the beliefs are no longer there, “Christian backgrounds may still have a discernible social function in their close association with nones’ secular perceptions of national, ethnic or cultural identity.” While the nature of a “Christian upbringing” is a matter for discussion, as Huang acknowledges, this research suggests ways into which the cultural influence of religion remains relevant for secular segments of the population.

(*Journal of Contemporary Religion*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjcr20/current>)

Drawing on diverse segments of society, Jewish revival in Ukraine flourishes

Judaism and Jewish culture in general in Ukraine are flourishing and is likely to expand further in the future, even among non-Jews, writes Viktor Yelsenkyi of the National Academy of Sciences (Kiev) in the current issue of the online journal *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* (40:6). The revival of Judaism and Jewish culture in Ukraine started shortly after the country gained independence from the former Soviet Union, but the joining of several current

trends is likely to add to the Jewish growth. The country's history of having an early Jewish population that was traumatized by pogroms and eventually the Holocaust and Communism resulted in significant migration and a disassociation between Jewish ethnicity and religion for many Ukraine Jews. That changed by the early 2000s when anti-Semitic attitudes in Ukraine society eased, migration slowed down, and a plethora of Jewish societies and schools were established, and holy sites of famous rabbis' graves and synagogues were refurbished. As of the beginning of 2020, there were more than 300 Jewish organizations in Ukraine, with 40 percent of them belonging to the imported Hasidic Chabad movement (even as Hasidism has deep historical



roots in Ukraine). The lack of a central Jewish leadership and structure in the country leads to a more pluralistic and competitive environment (in a similar way to the Christian scene, where there is no predominant state-based Orthodox church).

The high-demand Chabad has turned off the large segment of secularized post-Soviet Jews, and progressive Jewish groups have made some inroads among such a population (with about 40 communities). The estimates of Ukraine's Jewish population at about 160,000 (consisting of core Jews, nominal ones and Israelis) is thought to be lower than it actually is by demographers and other observers. This is because an increase of Jewish life in a given city "leads to noticeable increase in the local community at the expense of those who have not previously mentioned their Jewish roots," Yelsenkyi writes. Along with the Jewish population, "a phenomenon has emerged in Ukrainian public life which can be called intellectual or 'cultura' [conversion to Judaism]...where non-Jews immerse themselves into the Jewish civilization [and] Jewish culture in the broadest sense of the term: studying Jewish history, Hebrew, customs, cuisine, participating in Jewish events, etc." A similar phenomenon of Jewish revival among non-Jews is taking place in Poland.

(*Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*,
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss6/7/>)

German schools introducing Islam, fostering Protestant-Catholic cooperation

Behind a variety of practical implementations of religious education at German schools, two trends are emerging, the first one being the increasingly established presence of Islam and the second one the growing interest of Protestants and Catholics in cooperating instead of keeping separate syllabuses, writes Alexander Benatar in the most recent issue of *Materialdienst der EZW* (4/2020). According to article 7 of the Fundamental Law (*Grundgesetz* or the German Constitution), "religion classes form part of the ordinary curriculum in state schools, except for secular schools," and "religious instruction is given in accordance with the tenets of religious communities." In Germany, the federal states (*Länder*) are in charge of education, and there is no unitary approach regarding the way of integrating religious education into school teaching, resulting into a variety of (evolving) systems. In Baden-Württemberg, not only the historical

churches—Protestants, Catholics and Old Catholics—can provide their own, denominational religious education at schools, but also Jews, Syrian Orthodox, Alevites, Orthodox, and Muslims (currently in a test phase). In Hamburg, a radically different model of common religious education for all pupils (including those without a religious affiliation) has been adopted, with multireligious support. In Lower Saxony, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Alevi and Muslim religious education must be made available, provided at least 12 pupils of the same religious tradition can be gathered for the course and qualified teachers are available, while a course on “values and norms” has also been made available in consideration of the rising number of pupils without a religious affiliation.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, since 2018, schools are free to opt for a cooperative teaching between Protestants and Catholics at those places where denominational religious education of both churches previously existed. In Saxony-Anhalt, state authorities have no intent to introduce



Islamic religious education at this point and prefer Muslim pupils to visit a religiously neutral ethics course. Those examples show the variety of arrangements and a field constantly being reworked in order to adjust to changes in religion and society. The trend toward offering Islamic religious education has been clear in recent years, but less marked in the former states of Eastern Germany, where fewer Muslims are living. Since there is no unitary Islamic

organization in Germany, it involves in each case selecting those who will have a voice in the design of the teaching (not without debates), or opting for a more academic version, not influenced by Muslim organizations and under direct state control. Regarding cooperative religious teaching associating Protestants and Catholics, Benatar sees it as a response to growing religious pluralism (primarily in cities) and increasing numbers of unaffiliated people. But this seems relatively easy in comparison with ambitious attempts such as the one implemented in Hamburg for offering a common “religious education for all,” with teachers being trained at an academy of world religions at the local university.

(*Materialdienst der EZW*, Auguststrasse 80, 10117 Berlin, Germany; www.ezw-berlin.de)

Buddhism’s temple economy shows reversal during pandemic



The coronavirus pandemic in Thailand and other Asian countries has reversed the role that Buddhist monks and laity play in supporting religious life as the former are ministering to those suffering from the virus and its effects on the economy, writes Brooke Schedneck in the online magazine *The Conversation* (August 5, 2020). Buddhist monks have traditionally been given offerings of food and material goods by the laity as a way of gaining merit, which negates the

effect of past evil in their present and future reincarnated lives. As a result of the pandemic in

Thailand and other Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka, monks are increasingly providing material goods, such as meals and non-perishable items, for laypeople, “thus reversing roles within this moral economy.” The “merit economy” of Buddhism is also seen as a way of being lay people and monks together like a family, so sharing offered goods with others often takes place. But the large numbers of people—estimated at 12 percent—that are suffering economically because of the pandemic in Thailand has moved monks to create programs to distribute the goods that they receive.

In northern Thailand, monks post announcements on Facebook for community members to donate what they can, according to Schedneck. With the money and food donated, monks and other volunteers prepare the meals to feed the community. Monks usually are not allowed to cook, but given the circumstances, such work is permitted. Schedneck concludes that “This reversal of roles between monks and lay Buddhists has helped improve the image of monks in Thai media, which prior to the coronavirus had a tendency to focus on monastic excesses, such as riding in a private jet, taking trips to the mall, and embezzling money. It has also shown that material goods do not always have to flow exclusively from laypeople to monks.”

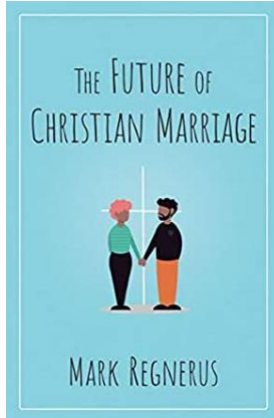
(*The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/buddhist-monks-have-reversed-roles-in-thailand-now-they-are-the-ones-donating-goods-to-others-142899>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ The current issue of the journal *Approaching Religion* (Summer) is devoted to the Laestadians in northern Finland, Norway and Sweden, known as the largest Christian revivalist movement in secularized Scandinavia. Laestadianism broke off from the Lutheran state churches in Scandinavia in the 19th century (though not in Norway) and is known for its pietistic and communal faith, with members often living apart from mainstream society (although increasingly active in conservative politics) and having large families. While research on the movement has burgeoned in recent years, there continue to be gaps and challenges in the literature, especially on Laestadians in Sweden and diasporas, such as in the U.S. and Canada, as well as the various schisms and splintering of these churches in general. Much of the issue includes issues in researching Laestadianism, but several articles have broader appeal, covering such topics as the churches’ relationship with the native Sami people and how the growing secularization has led to a fascination with Laestadians in Finnish and Finnish-American popular culture. For instance, there have been a series of films, such as the award-winning and popular drama, “Forbidden Fruit,” depicting the struggle of young members breaking away from Laestadian communities and entering secular society (very similar to the recent spate of American movies and documentaries on ex-Hasidic Jews and Amish “apostates”). For more information on this issue, visit: <https://journal.fi/ar>.



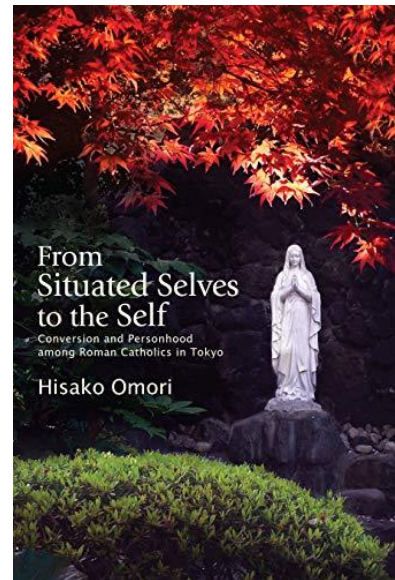
■ Mark Regnerus’ new book *The Future of Christian Marriage* (Oxford University Press, \$29.95), widens the scope of his work on marriage, the family, and religion from the U.S. to include global Christianity. The sociologist uses survey research and in-depth interviews to understand how young Christians view



marriage in Poland, Spain, Mexico, Lebanon, Nigeria, and Russia, which covers the Christian traditions of evangelical Protestantism, Spain, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism (though neglecting mainline Protestantism). Regnerus' previous work has found that American Christians are increasingly adopting the liberalized attitudes and lifestyles of other American young people, such as on late marriage, acceptance of divorce, and engaging in premarital sex and even cohabitation. The pace of young Christians' acceptance of these changes surrounding marriage is slower in these countries (especially in Poland and Nigeria), but Regnerus sees a growing acceptance of marriage as a "capstone" of self-development rather than as a "foundation" for future formation.

Leading to an overall pattern of late marriage and uncertainty regarding the institution, the capstone view of marriage is a Western import, though it and other changes are mediated through different religious and cultural contexts—from the high prevalence of short-term marriages and divorce in Russia to the strong sanction against cohabitating in Lebanon. Regnerus finds that explaining the effect that religious commitment has on strengthening marriage is best explained by the "moral communities" theory, where the surrounding beliefs and values support marriage rather than the "embattled-and-thriving" theory, which argues that opposition from the surrounding society strengthens the resolve and beliefs in Christian marriage. He takes off his sociologist hat toward the conclusion of the book, where he recommends measures and initiatives to strengthen Christian marriage.

■ In her new book, *From Situated Selves to the Self: Conversion and Personhood among Roman Catholics in Tokyo* (SUNY Press \$95), Hisako Omori, a Japanese scholar trained in Canada, gives us a glimpse of the lives of Catholics in Tokyo, and an understanding of how the faith has endowed them with a new sense of self, especially among the Catholic women. In her ethnographic study of the two most active parishes and a charismatic group in central Tokyo, Omori finds that baptism has liberated those devout Catholic women from the traditionally assigned gender images and roles in society by forming a new relationship with God. Deep-seated neo-Confucius values in Japanese society require people to constantly evaluate and shift one's social position and actions in a given situation. Therefore, one's sense of self is often "relational" because it is determined by the people around the individual. However, Omori points out, by converting to Catholicism, the focal point of the authority changes from the people in society to God, a higher authority to the people and society. By having God as the pivot of one's life, self-images imposed by society pose less importance to those women, and a new self is formed with God in the center and aligned with Catholic values.



Omori further examines the situations surrounding these Catholic women in Tokyo and introduces their tactful ways of maneuvering in Japanese society. The Catholics were once persecuted in the history of Japan and are still a minority religious faith. The newly formed self-image gives a new sense of self with more power to the converts. However, Catholic practices and values are often seen as contradicting the traditional values and practices in Japan. Because of that, these women have faced many conflicts and stigma which can affect the entire family. Omori finds that some women hide their religious identity

even from their loved ones to accommodate themselves to family duties and societal expectations. Nevertheless, those women can be powerful agents to spread the gospel to their family members. Due to gender roles imposed by Japanese society, and also the public image of Catholicism, men tend to face a high hurdle in becoming Christians, converting to Catholicism after retirement and on their deathbed, often under the influence of Catholic women. Omori also discusses how the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan has recognized those issues that Catholics in Japan may face and has published a guide that has sought to compromise with traditional practices related to Shinto and Buddhism. The Second Vatican Council's declaration toward non-Christian religion has a great impact on more open and inclusive practices among Catholics, making it easier for Catholics to live in Japan while fulfilling their social obligations—*reviewed by Ayako Sairenji, a Tokyo-based writer and researcher.*