

Crises and reinvention mark religion in 2020

RW's previous annual reviews of religion often left the editors stymied over whether the developments that we spotted could really be traced to the year in question. For better and worse, that dilemma doesn't apply to 2020. Almost from the beginning of this momentous year, we entered a vortex of crises and events that will likely shape contemporary religion for several years to come. It is difficult to confine the coronavirus pandemic to one entry since it has impacted so many different aspects of religious life. To a lesser extent this is also true of the 2020 elections and the Black Lives Matter protests, as their impact spilled over into other areas. We cite other trends that unfolded last year, as well as including sources other than RW in order to incorporate our regular reporting on related developments into this extended review.



Source: @diloka107 | freepik.com

- 1) From the first outbreak of the coronavirus, its interaction with religious communities and institutions has been clear, whether the subject was concerns about religious gatherings serving as super-spreader events or the need to maintain connections with quarantining and socially distanced members. Each religious adaptation to Covid-19 has been singular, carrying its own issues depending on the respective tradition (as suggested by our over 30 articles since March on just this subject alone). It seems likely that, even as the virus becomes less of a threat, the numerous experiments with online worship and services will result in long-term changes in how congregations and larger religious institutions interact with their members, with hybrid online expressions and home-based rituals (virtual celebrations of communion bringing these two trends together) becoming more popular—as well as stoking continued debates.
- 2) The management of the Covid-19 pandemic by governments has led to serious restrictions on the exercise of religion around the world, resulting either in the banning of public worship or limitations on the number of faithful allowed to attend. In some cases, state interventions have gone further in attempting to define acceptable religious practices. In an article in *La Croix International* (Dec. 1), Loup Besmond de Senneville remarks that “what worries Rome is not so much the closure of churches for health reasons, but rather government interference in how worship services are organized.” In December **RW** attended an online conference on “The Covid-19 Pandemic and Religious Freedom: Reports from North America and Europe,” organized by the Religious Liberty and Covid-19 Research Project at Andrews University. It was pointed out that while most religious groups rapidly complied with state measures during the initial period of the pandemic, criticism emerged over time, raising issues related to the proportionality of the measures and comparing them with those affecting some secular activities. Either religious organizations themselves or subgroups and individuals went to court in several countries, sometimes resulting in state measures being revised. Moreover, Andreas Jacobs of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation has observed that the Covid-19 crisis has presented an opportunity for testing relations between states and religious bodies around the world (*EZW-Texte*, Issue 268). Thus the pandemic might not merely contribute to the shaping of various developments within religions, but also their place and rights within contemporary societies.
- 3) The pandemic might have the effect of speeding the decrease in church attendance already under way in a number of areas of the world. In an article published in *Foreign Affairs* (September/October), Ronald F. Inglehart reported a decline in religion since 2007 in 43 out of a panel of 49 countries he analyzed. Moreover, the rise of the non-affiliated, or “nones,” has been stressed by a number of scholars in recent years, as it was in October 2019 when Pew Research released a report on the continuing decline of Christianity at a rapid pace. However, articles on Generation Z by Paul A. Djupe and Ryan P. Burge, and by Melissa Deckman, published in *Religion in Public* (February 10), suggested that the nones’ rate of growth might

be slowing in the U.S.—although the authors acknowledged that this remains to be confirmed, since the age cohort under consideration was quite young.

- 4) The religious right has had a checkered history of perceived decline and unexpected revival in its 40 years of existence, but it may be facing its most serious challenge as it seeks to navigate the post-Trump era, an era where it found both support from government and derision and criticism from the liberal (and in some cases conservative) public and other religious groups. The last year of campaigns and protests suggests that the populist turn among religious conservatives will outlast Donald Trump. Over the past four years, religious conservative support for Trump and populism evolved from a mainly transactional relationship, where political support was exchanged for Trump's support of the prolife cause and religious freedom, to a more full-throated populist and Trumpian thrust. This could most recently be seen in the protests against the presidential vote and particularly in such events as the Jericho March, as a segment of conservative Christians framed the results of the election in terms of a fight between good and evil. As Julia Duin reports on the website *Get Religion* (December 15), the Washington event had a definite charismatic component (and charismatics and Pentecostals have been among Trump's strongest supporters), with marchers claiming that they had received prophecies of Trump's victory and continued presidency. Duin and others have noted that such supporters represent a new split in Christian conservative ranks. Indeed, conservative Protestant critic Michael Horton, writing on the *Gospel Coalition* website (December 16), charges that "Christian Trumpism" has become a "cult" and a heresy and is the result of three converging trends: Christian Americanism, end-times conspiracy, and the prosperity gospel. Similar critiques are being made against the Catholic right, personified by Bishop Vigano, who dovetail their protests against the "deep state" with attacks on the "deep church" led by Pope Francis (see Kathryn Joyce's critique in *Vanity Fair*, October 30).
- 5) Aside from questions about the fortunes of the religious right in a gridlocked but Democratic administration, the results of the 2020 elections pose other interesting questions. Contrary to the pre-election polls, voting for Trump and populism held strong, suggesting to some observers an alternative future to the usual forecasts of white Republican decline and a Democratic surge from the support of people of color. Trump picked up a significant number of votes from Latinos and black men (and even more Muslims than he did in 2016), with some commentators suggesting that the future of the Republicans—minus the divisive personality of Trump—may be as a working-class populist party that draws minorities for its socially conservative and pro-religious positions in the face of a secularizing Democratic Party. **(November RW)**
- 6) Related to the above developments associated with Covid-19 and politics is the growth of conspiracy theories in the past year. Although conspiracy theories such as QAnon were around before 2020, these currents were further fueled by the pandemic and a campaign year's political fervor, finding a following among religious believers of various shades. The media

has widely reported on how evangelical pastors are concerned that their congregants are being drawn to QAnon and its conspiracies of the evil—even Satanic—workings of the “deep state,” but variants of this conspiracy are also evident among “holistic” and alternative spiritual groups. These two conspiratorial wings may be brought together in theories surrounding the Covid-19 vaccines—a key concern for public health officials. **(June RW)**

- 7) On the other side of the political spectrum, the protests that broke out over the killing of George Floyd last year seemed at first to represent a broadly based national response over questions of race and policing. But the protests themselves became an issue and opened another front in the culture wars and polarization, rallying calls both for “law and order” and against “white supremacy.” The conflict mirrored long-time divisions between the religious right and left, and an argument can be made that the young “woke” protestors were the forerunners of a new kind of religio-political revival that may receive more affirmation in the Biden administration. As the smoke clears in 2021, there may be less heated incitement and some goodwill remaining among religious leaders and laypeople to address these issues. **(June RW)**
- 8) The Trump administration’s brokering of peace treaties between Israel and the small Muslim nations of Morocco, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain may not solve the most pressing Middle Eastern conflicts, but the establishment of new ties between these nations and Israel may assist in helping to defuse decades of Jewish-Islamic conflict. The *Spectator* magazine (December 17) reports that the new ties with Israel have encouraged Morocco to go a step further and start teaching Jewish history as part of its school curriculum. “Morocco is now the first modern Arabic state to embrace its tradition of religious pluralism—a pluralism that has over the decades fallen into monocultural Sunni Islam,” writes Kunwar Khuldane.

Korean American Christians, churches undergoing ethnic revival?

The ways that Korean churches have become Americanized and experienced divisions between the immigrant and more assimilated second generations are giving way to a more conflicted relationship between these churches and American culture, according to research presented at the recent virtual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. A paper by Eunil David Cho of Brite Divinity School on the growth of Korean language schools in American churches, often attended by second- and third-generation members, complicates the popular idea that younger Korean Americans feel alienated from and seek alternatives to their ethnic parents’ and grandparents’ faith. There are now over 1,000 Korean language schools in the U.S., and 80 percent of them are run by churches and church workers, though they are open to the public. Often younger members will not only attend these schools but also attend Korean church services with their parents and grandparents. In research on a Korean Presbyterian church in

Atlanta, Cho observed younger members say that these schools helped them understand their parents and community and found that they often saw such participation as a rite of passage that gave them a sense of belonging. “Learning the language doesn’t shape Christian identity, but the church is encouraging people to embrace identity and language. The church continues to be a refuge and a haven. It will not be predominantly English but bilingual. The immigrant church allows [members] to be both Korean and American,” Cho said. All this means is that the “de-ethnicizing of the Korean church is highly unlikely,” a reality that also challenges views of religion as assisting in the assimilation process.

Another ethnographic study of a Korean congregation by Seokweon Jeon of Harvard Divinity School suggests that newer Korean immigrants are different from the older ones in their lack of attachment to the U.S. as a permanent haven and center for their Christian faith. Jeon studied a congregation in the Boston area that has attracted a large share of recent young Korean immigrants. He found that the young professionals who attended this large congregation had few plans to remain in the U.S., instead viewing their stay in the country as a “rite of passage” for becoming a prominent leader in Korea. For such members, “The U.S. is not the land of promise; it’s more of a wilderness and God’s training ground,” he said. Members saw the country as immoral and believed in the importance of “standing against Sodom and Gomorrah.” The temporary nature of this new wave of Korean immigration is shown by the high and rising numbers of Koreans who are planning to return to their homeland—from 50 percent in 2012 to about 80 percent since 2018. The congregation Jeon studied functioned more as a center for



Chilgol Church (Uri Tours [uritours.com], CC BY-SA 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons).

forming social networks and socialization; conversation on spiritual topics was not common among members. Organized into small groups, the church was highly segmented by class and was often seen as elitist and exclusive to Korean Americans who had visited, Jeon added.

Pagans adopt apocalyptic tone in Trump era and beyond

American Pagans have increasingly been adopting an apocalyptic worldview and spirituality, especially during the Trump era, according to Sabina Magliocco of the University of British Columbia. Presenting a paper at the early December virtual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, attended by **RW**, Magliocco said that the apocalyptic narratives taken up by Pagan leaders and writers place Paganism closer to other new religious movements in the U.S. This apocalyptic shift is somewhat different than the magic “resistance” mounted by Wiccans and other Pagan groups during the Trump presidency, where practitioners cast spells against the administration. Rather, the trend is marked by visions of the collapse of America, capitalism, and “patriarchy” under the pressures of the pandemic, climate change, and political unrest, Magliocco said.



Source: Haukurth, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons.

This tendency is most clearly seen in the writings of H. Byron Ballard, especially in her book, *Earth Works: Ceremonies in Tower Time*. It is also evident in the recent work of Starhawk, a longtime Wiccan leader and author. Ballard writes of creating “circles on the ground,” which means establishing alternatives, such as permaculture and ethnobotany. The Pagan apocalypse portrayed in this literature shows considerable borrowing from other religious movements and even Christianity. In her book, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, Starhawk foresees a utopian matriarchal oasis in San Francisco in an authoritarian America circa 2048. “Pagans play a key role in rebuilding society and retrieving lost kinds of knowledge. [In such scenarios, Pagans] play the long game rather than casting spells,” Magliocco said. While the Trump presidency is seen as the catalyst for societal collapse, Magliocco expects the apocalyptic trend to continue into the Biden years, since the “system that allowed for Trump to come into power still exists.”

CURRENT RESEARCH

•While it is true that the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is showing steady membership losses, a study parsing these figures by ethnicity reveals patterns of growth beyond the majority white members. The study, conducted by the denomination’s International Mission Board, found that while the overall SBC membership decreased slightly by -0.1 percent from 1990 to 2018, ethnic minority groups and congregations increased by more than one million members. Asian American membership increased by more than 270 percent while Anglo membership declined by 6.3 percent during this time. Especially since 2000, the most SBC membership growth occurred among African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics. Ronnie Floyd of the SBC Executive Committee writes that, with 22.3 percent of its congregations now being non-Anglo and many worshipping in multiple languages, the SBC may well be the most multi-ethnic and multi-lingual denomination in the U.S.

Total Members by Race/Ethnicity

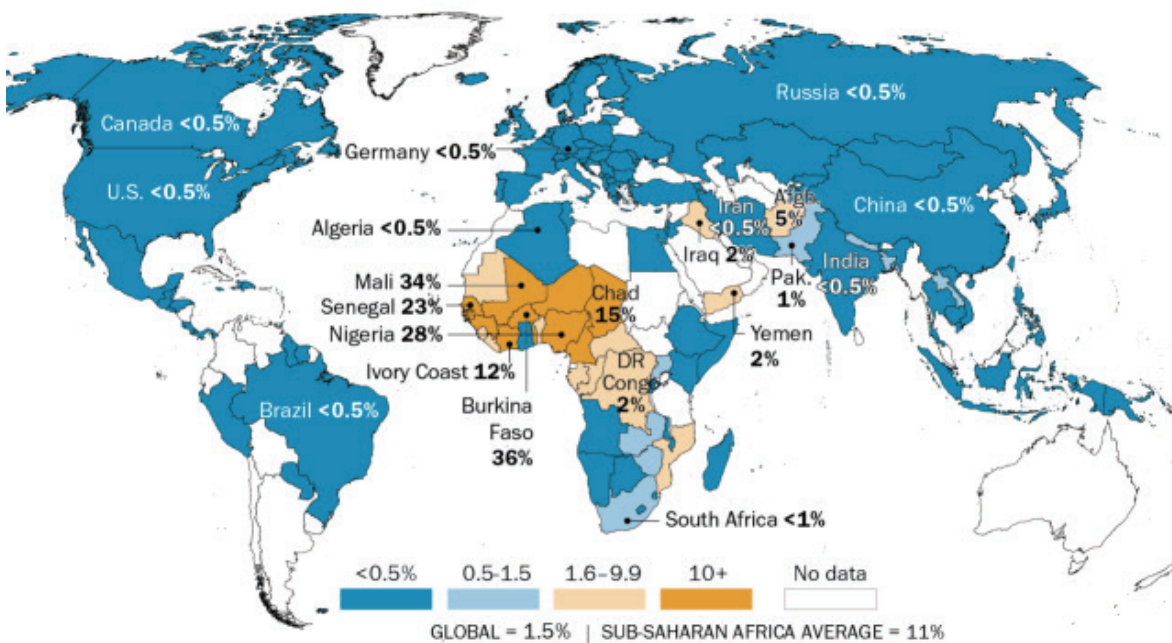
Race/Ethnicity	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018
Anglo	14,231,982	14,864,718	15,077,838	15,065,076	14,725,659	13,908,831	13,331,855
African American	254,961	401,886	574,971	759,311	899,159	873,563	907,420
Asian American	45,888	89,600	104,821	138,790	155,048	155,087	170,093
Hispanic	84,636	129,227	133,017	175,752	205,674	207,494	234,658
Other Ethnic	74,218	101,387	119,212	131,605	150,545	149,789	169,180
Unknown	134,895	61,052					
Grand Total	14,826,580	15,647,870	16,009,859	16,270,534	16,136,085	15,294,764	14,813,206

• **Pew Research Center’s *Fact Tank* blog (December 7) reports that while polygamy is more likely to exist in Muslim-dominated countries, the practice is rare in many of them.** Researcher Stephanie Kramer analyzed 2019 Pew data on polygamy and found it clustered in the West and Central African countries of Burkina Faso (36 percent), Mali (34 percent), and Nigeria (28 percent). In these countries polygamy is legal, at least to some extent. Muslims in Africa are more likely than Christians to live in this type of arrangement (25 percent versus 3 percent), but in some countries practitioners are found among adherents of folk religions and those not identifying with a religion. In Burkina Faso, 45 percent of people who practice folk religions, 40 percent of Muslims, and 24 percent of Christians practice polygamy. Chad is the only country where Christians (21 percent) are more likely than Muslims (10 percent) to live in this type of arrangement.

But in many Muslim-majority countries permitting polygamy, the actual practice is rare. Less than one percent of Muslim men live with more than one wife in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Egypt—all countries where the practice is legal, at least for Muslims. Polygamy is also legal in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and other neighboring countries, but Kramer had limited data on them. She also found religion to have an impact on

Living in polygamous households is very uncommon in most places

% of individuals in polygamous households



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2010-2018 census and survey data. See Methodology for details.
 "Religion and Living Arrangements Around the World"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

how polygamy is permitted and practiced. Polygamous arrangements are not allowed at the federal level in Nigeria, but the prohibition only applies to civil marriages. Twelve northern, Muslim-majority states in the country do sanction these unions as Islamic or customary marriages. In India, Muslim men are allowed to practice polygamy, while men of other faiths are not. However, in countries where polygamy is common, it often is practiced by people of all faiths, as is the case in Gambia, Niger, Mali, Chad, and Burkina Faso. Meanwhile, Kramer cited a recent Gallup poll finding that 20 percent of American adults believe that polygamy is morally acceptable. This acceptance rate has almost tripled (from 7 percent) since the question was first posed in 2003, though it is still among the behaviors that are least accepted.

(*Pew Fact Tank*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/12/07/polygamy-is-rare-around-the-world-and-mostly-confined-to-a-few-regions/>)

Pentecostalism in Chile going mainstream and diversifying

From a stigmatized religion of marginal sectors in Chilean society (where it first appeared in the early 20th century), Pentecostalism is getting redefined as a more legitimate religion by a new generation of Pentecostals, writes Martin Lindhardt (University of Southern Denmark) in *Religion* (October). His research is based on a total of 19 months of fieldwork in Chile between 1999 and 2019. Making up to 80 to 90 percent of Chilean Protestants, Pentecostals had for a long time embraced the stigma of being “poor but spiritually rich,” and maintained an insular, countercultural stance against “the world.” In recent decades, however, as more Pentecostals have gotten access to higher education and received degrees, there have been intensified attempts to present Pentecostalism as a respectable player in the religious field. There is clearly both an educational and a generational dimension. The oppositional stance is not entirely abandoned (as reflected in the persistent criticism of the moral state of Chilean society), but Pentecostals are becoming more churchlike in the sociological meaning of the word. This also leads to a sense that they should have an influence in the world. Still, while Chilean Pentecostals have mostly abandoned apolitical postures, their political mobilization has remained limited. But they do raise their voices on moral issues.

Lindhardt also describes these developments as linked to efforts since the 1990s by evangelical umbrella organizations to attain a legal status on par with Catholicism (a law of religious equality was passed in 1999). At the same time, internally, there are efforts to make Pentecostal practices “more compatible with middle-class sensibilities and less prone to stigmatization.” But Lindhardt observes differences across Pentecostal denominations, since some continue to stick to rules about clothing, hairstyle, and cosmetics for women (and may not have joined umbrella organizations). Many churches have now abandoned street preaching, which used to be associated with Pentecostals and drew ridicule. Other channels of evangelization are explored. A

number of Chilean Pentecostals also now tend to privatize emotions and to emphasize the sermons rather than such physical manifestations as glossolalia or trances—not unlike the preferences of middle-class Pentecostals observed by researchers in other countries for a more quiet form of worship. This has not prevented liveliness per se, but has resulted in new forms among young people, such as services reminiscent of rock concerts, with high quality music and actually blending with secular styles (not something that all older members like). Yet the attempts to redefine Pentecostalism as less countercultural have also led to division across and within denominations. And Lindhardt also notes that diversification has occurred at a point where the growth of Pentecostalism may have reached a saturation point, leading Pentecostals to compete increasingly among themselves.

(*Religion*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rrel20/current>)



Pentecostal church at San Pedro de Atacama, Chile (Paulo JC Nogueira, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons).

Uncertain future for Russian Orthodox Church

Close ties to the current political regime and centralization of the church leadership under Patriarch Kirill are likely to lead to a serious loss of influence for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the long term, writes Oleg Kurzakov, a Russian journalist, teacher and former priest from 2012 to 2017, in *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (December). While the religious freedom of the 1990s changed the situation for the church, it also allowed a variety of religious groups to compete for Russian souls. This soon led the ROC to adopt a protectionist attitude based on the claim that Orthodoxy is one of the fundamentals of Russia. Since the 2000s, the state has been glad to provide support to the ROC in order to fill the ideological void left by the fall of the Soviet regime. But this has given the church a role disproportionate to its real strength—since only a small percentage of the Russian population actually attends church services on a regular basis—and made it dependent on state support for such projects as the construction of very large churches in recent years.

Although the election of Patriarch Kirill in 2009 gave rise to hopes of practical reforms, it instead led to a concentration of power within the patriarchate itself, with the development of a centralized church bureaucracy in an effort to make sure that bishops could not develop their own power base. According to Kurzakov's analysis, what would seem to be a strength is actually a weakness, since it has left little flexibility for dealing with various issues at lower levels and



Source: Orthodox Times.

might ultimately lead to a crisis for the church leadership. Kurzakov also sees a “crisis of traditionalism,” arguing that the attempt to initiate a spiritual renaissance through the imitation of prerevolutionary Russian traditions, although it may have seemed to offer a safe haven to faithful facing the uncertainties of a post-Soviet society, cannot lead to a renewal in church life. But the major threat for the future position of the ROC, according to Kurzakov, remains its strong association with the current political regime. A regime change in Russia could become a disaster for the church, bringing it down to its real level of influence and leaving it unable to play a significant role in society. More immediately, the current difficulties in Russian economic life are already having a strong impact on many parishes. In the long term, the author concludes, the authoritarian models of state and church in Russia are doomed.

(*Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* – Institut G2W, Bederstrasse 76, 8002 Zurich, Switzerland – <https://www.g2w.eu>)

Banned new religious movement reappears in China

The new religious movement, Zhonggong, which was banned in China and supposedly extinguished four years ago, has made a comeback in the country to the consternation of government officials, according to the newsletter *Bitter Winter* (December 25). The movement was started in the 1980s by Zhang Hongbao and was based on Qigong healing and martial arts. Zhang was actually a respected member of the Communist Party and taught his martial arts and healing techniques to government officials, but the party started viewing him as a potential rival. After the Falun Gong movement was outlawed in the late 1990s, all independent Qigong organizations were also banned, and Zhang eventually found asylum in the U.S. and passed away in 2006. The movement was kept alive by a woman named Zhang Xiao, who transplanted the group to Japan and started a clandestine network in China using various names, such as “Oriental Health Cultivation Method.” But Chinese authorities believed they had eradicated the group by 2016.



Source: Dylan Levi King, Twitter - <https://twitter.com/dylanleviking/status/1275656334759821318>

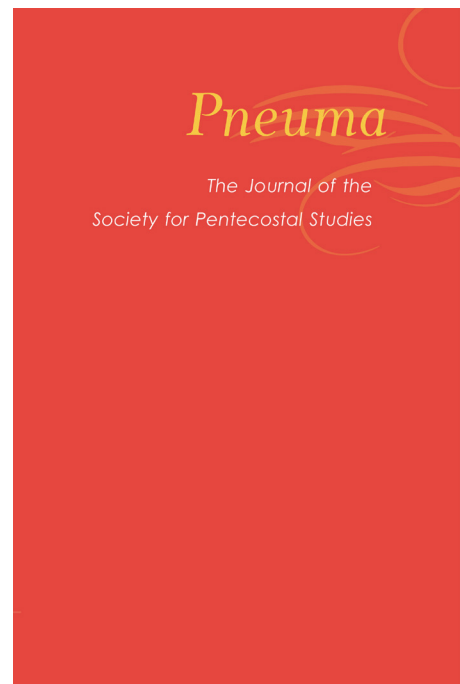
But by the time of the outbreak of Covid-19, Zhang Xiao had launched a popular series of Qigong exercises to target the virus through her network in China. “Originally believed to operate mostly through the Internet, in fact Zhang Xiao’s incarnation of Zhonggong has local

centers in several provinces,” writes Massimo Introvigne. Hundreds of police in the Northern province of Heilongjiang recently surrounded and arrested practitioners doing anti-Covid exercises in public parks. Introvigne notes that the supposed eradication of Zhonggong has been “one of the few ‘success stories’ the specialized agents tell about their long-lasting fight against the *xie jiao* [banned religious movements]. However,” he adds, “it appears that even this ‘success’ was not definitive.”

(*Bitter Winter*, <https://bitterwinter.org/zhonggong-the-cult-that-refused-to-die/>)

Findings & Footnotes

- *Pneuma*, the journal of Pentecostal studies, devotes a double-issue (42) to the futures of charismatic and Pentecostal movements around the world. Although seen as a global religious movement of approximately 400 million adherents, the articles in this issue suggest that the churches in each region are facing particular issues in gaining or maintaining vitality and influence. In his article on North American Pentecostalism, David Daniels writes that the various charismatic and Pentecostal bodies are at the crossroads of extending the culture wars or building on their multiracial and multicultural base to take on a more progressive identity. The article is informed by the racial protests of last spring, though it curiously doesn’t mention the significant Pentecostal support given to President Trump. Other articles identify such issues as the growth of commercialism and the prosperity gospel (in Africa and Australia) and social action (in Latin America, though, again, there is little discussion of conservative and populist forms of activism). An article on European Pentecostalism finds that it has achieved a multicultural reality that much of the continent still struggles with in its secular institutions. *For more information on this issue, visit: <https://brill.com/view/journals/pneu/42/3-4/pneu.42.issue-3-4.xml>.*
- The Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore has started the research blog *CoronAsur*, which seeks to capture in words and images the ritual responses to the pandemic emanating from practitioners and scholars around the world, though focusing on Asia. The premise that the virus has turned out innovations in rituals in a wide range of religious communities animates the blog. The entries suggest that many of these rituals were reworked from previous crises and disasters. For instance, the rituals surrounding the virus in Singapore and Malaysia involving underworld spirits started during the financial crisis of a decade ago. Other rituals were changed by necessity, such as a Zoroastrian burial ceremony that fed the deceased to vultures now cremating the

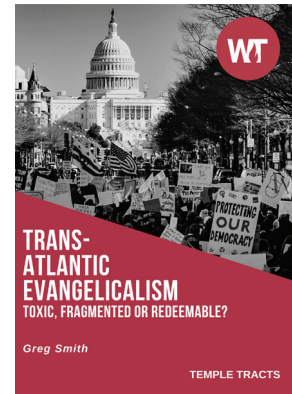


dead out of fear of infection by the virus. The editors report that most virtual representations of rituals have not used more participatory virtual reality technology but rather consist of static representations of solitary rituals performed by priests in the absence of their communities.

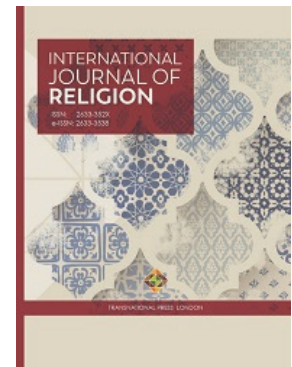
Another theme of the blog covers how the setting of rituals has shifted toward the home. “Mini-mosques” emerged for Eid celebrations and are praised for their intimacy and greater gender inclusivity than traditional mosques. Another subject covered on the blog is the increase in religious conflict and scapegoating (such as Muslims being blamed for spreading Covid in India), but also renewed altruism (as with the Hindu nationalist RSS engaging in relief efforts to other religious groups, and the rescue of Rohingya refugees by the Islamic community in Aceh, Indonesia). Another interesting feature of the blog is its attention to the economic effects of Covid on religious institutions, especially the way the virus has revealed the inequality in the religious sphere, with larger institutions, such as megachurches, adapting to online fundraising while smaller churches and temples struggle to survive. One area the blog is just starting to look at is the matter of those groups that have often been left behind by these ritual adaptations and innovations, such as the elderly, the untouchable caste, the institutionalized, and rural people. *The blog can be visited at: <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/coronasur-home/>*



- Greg Smith of the UK's William Temple Foundation has authored *Trans-Atlantic Evangelicalism*, a comparative report on British evangelicals and their American counterparts, in *Temple Tracts*, a series published by the Foundation. The 30-page report suggests that American and British evangelicals are further apart than at any time in their shared history, mainly due to the influence of populism and the Trump presidency among the former. At the same time, through analysis of surveys, Smith finds that British evangelicals have shifted toward more liberal political positions even as the UK undergoes rapid secularization. To download this study, visit: <https://williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/temple-tracts/>



- *The International Journal of Religion* (IJOR) is a new journal aiming to offer a venue for scholarly discussion on religion in reference to the social sciences and humanities, bringing “policymakers, practitioners, educators, scholars, researchers, and students into...crucial, controversial and topical conversations.” The journal covers religious conflicts associated with terrorism, migration and interethnic dispute, and how religion impacts populism and nationalism. The publishers note that while there are already several academic journals examining religion and related issues in social scientific contexts, few focus on the multiple issues that IJOR does. The first issue does indeed cover a wide range of international religion issues—from culture wars in Korean Protestantism over LGBTQ issues, to a historical treatment of the Nation of Islam and legal issues, to the role of conservative religious dissent in French and Italian populist parties (with the authors finding less in the former and more in the latter). Particularly interesting is a study of ultra-Orthodox Jewish settlements in southern Israel and how settlers are downplaying rabbinical authority. Yet this decline in religious authority does not necessarily mean secularization, as the settlers “believe that their religion requires them to have an independent mind and think for themselves...Even the supposed dissenters...are still connected to the Jewish religion, despite their complete disregard for formal religious authority,” according to the article. For more information on this issue, visit: <https://journals.tplondon.com/ijor>



- *The Journal of Economics, Management and Religion* (JEMAR) is the first academic journal to explore the relationship between economics, management and religion. There has been talk for years of starting a journal on the economics of religion, a subfield receiving considerable attention in recent decades. Most of the editorial board consists of prominent scholars in the economics of religion, so it is likely that much of the new research in this field will find its way into the pages of JEMAR. The first issue includes a study based on an experiment on Facebook designed to measure subjects' altruism and trust towards attendees of a synagogue service, a fitness class, and a local music performance. Secular and religious subjects alike displayed significantly more altruism and trust towards the synagogue attendees than



the attendees of the other two secular venues. Another article based on a panel study of developed countries describes a long-running negative association between church attendance and total factor productivity. For more information, visit: <https://www.worldscientific.com/worldscinet/jemar>

- A newly published book in French, *Églises et Écologie: Une Révolution à Reculons* (Labor et Fides, € 19), which can be translated as “Churches and the Environment: A Reluctant Revolution,” edited by Christophe Monnot and Frédéric Rognon (both at the University of Strasbourg), brings together six other researchers to share their insights on various aspects of the impact of the growing environmental movement on Christian churches, with an emphasis on French-speaking Europe. While churches in Europe have historically been at the forefront of major social innovations, the editors note that they have been lagging behind on environmental issues. There have been a number of significant statements across Christian denominations over the years, from declarations issued by the World Council of Churches (Martin Robra, from the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, devotes a full chapter to this topic) to the formulations of Liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff with his “ecothology of liberation” (as explained in a chapter by Luis Martinez Andrade), or of Pope Francis himself with his encyclical *Laudato si’* (2015). But the practical impact of those statements and of discourses on a theology of creation seems to have remained rather modest for a long time in several countries.

Christophe Monnot
et Frédéric Rognon (éd.)

Églises et écologie

Une révolution à reculons



LABOR ET FIDES

Some scholars suggest that the emphasis on social issues distracted the churches from environmental priorities, while other studies indicate that polarization between progressive and conservative believers around environmental issues may have had a neutralizing effect. In addition, one should note that environmental awareness has not grown at the same pace across different areas, with Northern Europe and Germany being faster to incorporate concerns for the environment in their discourses and practices. Despite early advocates of a green theology, important statements stressing the need to act for the environment (such as the statement, “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” at the WCC Assembly in Vancouver in 1983), and a growing number of local initiatives, a chapter by Christophe Monnot based on cases observed in Switzerland suggests that environmental impulses have often been slowed down by church institutions, although the influence of Christian NGOs sensitive to green issues and of widespread secular trends (e.g., youth movements for the environment) is changing things. However, since European churches are facing pressing challenges with the decline of their social significance, they might be reluctant to add further uncertainties by embracing environmental causes, even as local parishes feel less restraint and documents such as *Laudato si’* encourage a variety of projects.