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Parents take the lead in handing down and talking up the faith

Religion Watch recently interviewed John Jay College sociologist Amy Adamczyk about her research on how parents transmit religious faith to their children. Adamczyk is the co-author, with Christian Smith, of the new book, *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation* (Oxford University Press, \$29.95). The book is based on interviews with religious and non-religious parents as well as analysis of survey research.

RW: One of the striking findings of your book is the importance of religious conversations between religious parents and their children in how the faith is handed down to the next generation. Can you explain this?

Adamczyk: We found that religious conversations between children and their parents were really important for transmitting religious belief. The most successful parents did not compartmentalize religion-related discussions with their children to a certain day of the week or particular activity. Rather, they would make talking with them about their practices and beliefs, what they mean, and why they are important, a normal part of everyday family life. The most effective parents did not try to give their children some sort of sermon or force an artificial conversation. Rather, they would mostly be themselves, regularly talking with their children casually about religion.

Two-way conversations were also an important aspect of this engagement. A lot of parents told us about how their own parents would



sometimes preach to them about religion, which they did not like or find effective in strengthening their own religious beliefs. Rather, the most successful parents gave their children a chance to respond and ask their own questions. These parents would not shut down conversations that questioned religious beliefs or inquired more deeply. Rather, they would actively engage children on their terms and find opportunities to talk with them about religion.

RW: You and your co-author, Christian Smith, look at several parenting styles for passing on the faith and find that a “general authoritative” style is among the most effective. But that is something different than just a strict religious upbringing, right?

Adamczyk: Our research examines four different parenting styles and assesses how they are related to religious transmission. We find that the “authoritative” parenting style is the most successful. You are right that this parenting style includes strict parenting, where parents have clear demands, standards, and expectations. These parents also tend to have a lot of emotional warmth, support, and affection. It is the combination of strictness and warmth that seems to make the style so successful for passing on religious belief. These children know that their parents care deeply for them and hold them to high standards precisely because they love them. They also know that when they fail to meet their parents’ standards, they will encounter consequences, though their parents will never withdraw their love. These parents set clear standards and expectations for religious engagement, while also providing a lot of love and support so children are more inclined to embrace their parents’ religious beliefs. “Authoritative” parenting also results in children feeling more comfortable engaging their parents in religion-related discussions and asking questions.

The other parenting styles, which are not as successful for transmitting religious belief, include the “authoritarian” style, where parents are more cold and distant, and also demanding and strict. Parents who have a “permissive” style tend to offer a lot of closeness and empathy, but have many fewer boundaries or expectations than the others. Finally, parents who are classified as “passive” do not exhibit much affection, warmth, clear expectations, or standards. They often do not have much sense of what is happening with their children and are mostly disengaged.



RW: But these parenting styles are not necessarily tied to specific religious traditions?

Adamczyk: Regardless of the religious tradition, we found that parents who tended to have an “authoritative” style were more successful at transmitting their religious beliefs, whatever they were. In addition to all of the religious parents we interviewed, we also talked with two dozen parents who were not very religious or identified as atheist or agnostic. We also assessed survey findings for parents with various levels of religious belief. We found similar patterns, whereby children who experienced “authoritative” parenting and had less religious parents were less likely to become religious later in life and more likely to have a similar lack of religious belief as their own parents. In other words, parents with an “authoritative” style tended to be more successful in passing on their religious or nonreligious beliefs, regardless of what they were.

RW: Another key finding of the book is how parents don’t have high confidence in their congregations playing a big role in forming their children’s faith. What do you think is behind this development? Is it the growth of religious individualism or helicopter parenting?

Adamczyk: We thought this finding was really interesting and may be especially useful for congregations as they think about how to better support families. Even as most parents today are working full-time, we know that they spend as much, if not more, time with their children than they did 40 years ago. Most of the parents we spoke to wanted to be involved in every aspect of their children’s lives. They saw themselves as coordinating all of the influences that they wanted to shape their kid, including religion-related forces. Indeed, we interviewed very few parents who felt that religious congregations were primarily responsible for instilling religious belief in their children.

While congregations were not seen as having the primary influence, parents still saw them as providing a lot of value. Congregations can sponsor events that children want to attend, making it easier for parents to get them involved with religion. They often include fellow adherents who can look out for their kids when parents are absent or can offer an alternative adult perspective. Additionally, congregations can help channel children into networks with similarly religious peers. Finally, they provide a formal religious education. Before dropping their children off for religious instruction (e.g., Sunday School or Bible study), some parents told us that they would tell their children, “I am going to ask you what you learned afterwards.” For these parents, religious classes provided an additional opportunity to talk with their children about religion, as well as a formal religious education.

RW: Peer networks, especially through social media, have been seen as assuming importance in teen religion, but you find parenting is still important, even for older children?

Adamczyk: Throughout our interviews we found that parents tended to have the most important influence on their children’s religious development, clearly larger than their peers. While we

interviewed parents with children of all different ages, whenever possible we tried to recruit those who had older children, as these parents tended to have a more realistic perspective about the challenges of transmitting religion. Even for older children, parents still had the most profound effect.

Additionally, for the parents we interviewed, the extent to which their own parents created a positive religious experience was huge for the intergenerational transmission of religious belief. Eighty percent of the parents we interviewed said that they were shaped (in both good and bad ways) by the religion-related experiences enacted by their own parents, and 70 percent of them were following the religion in which they were raised. Chris Smith, my coauthor on the book, also found in his separate research on adolescents and young people that parents had a major influence. At times it may seem like peers have a greater role, and they do have an effect. But all of the findings point to parents having an outsized influence on the transmission of religious belief.

RW: Immigrant parents often have difficulties passing on the faith to the second generation undergoing Americanization. How are they doing in this regard, considering the above dynamics?

Adamczyk: Like the others we interviewed, immigrant parents strongly wanted to pass on their religious beliefs. But, to do so, they often had to work harder in a range of different ways. Depending on their specific religion and where they lived, one major challenge was finding a nearby congregation that they enjoyed and that provided the desired culture for their children. For immigrants who are Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim, these communities are not prevalent and in some parts of the United States can be difficult to locate. So these parents often had to physically drive further to connect with them, and they had less congregational choice than American Protestants and Catholics. We also interviewed dozens of Hispanic parents, most of whom are Catholic and recent immigrants. They, too, would sometimes struggle with finding a congregation that they really liked and that offered Spanish religious services.

Immigrant parents also tended to worry more about their children finding friends with a similar religious background. They were anxious about their children feeling particularly odd or strange because of their minority religion, which was a concern shared by some Mormon and conservative Protestant parents as well. Immigrant parents were also contending with a very different culture than the one in which they were raised, though a lot of the non-immigrant parents we interviewed also felt that things had changed substantially from their own youth. For some immigrant parents, the children's grandparents were a significant source of support, not only in helping to raise their children, but also in passing on various religious traditions.

RW: How do you think the older children of the religious parents will do in passing on their faiths to their children? Will they follow the parenting styles that they were raised with?

Adamczyk: There would be good reason to think that once the children that were discussed in our book grow up, if they adopt an “authoritative” parenting style, mixing strictness with lots of love and support, and if they try to have open, two-way discussions about religion, they will be likely to pass down their own beliefs, whatever they may be. Additionally, it is important that parents are authentic and realistic about their beliefs as well. We interviewed a lot of parents who only wanted to pass down a moderate level of religious belief and did not want to “overdo it.” Of course with the transmission process there are no guarantees, and other experiences and situations (e.g., parents divorcing, parents supporting two different religions, challenges in finding a similarly minded religious congregation) may disrupt parents’ best efforts.

Former evangelicals find trauma and media spotlight

Ex-evangelicals are becoming a recognizable and influential social movement with its own political and psychological critique of evangelicalism. “After Trump was elected, many young evangelicals began to leave their churches altogether,” writes Stephanie Russell-Kraft in *The New Republic* (March 23). “The same year Trump won, former conservative evangelical Blake Chastain created the #exvangelical Twitter hashtag, which went viral and became a loose social movement of former evangelicals speaking publicly about leaving their faith communities.” One narrative that unites these ex-evangelicals is that they have experienced some sort of trauma. The trauma often referred to is similar to “brainwashing,” as Laura Anderson, an ex-evangelical leader and licensed therapist, put it, pointing to “doctrines taught over and over and over with consequences that are eternal and terrifying.” In 2019, she and fellow therapist Brian Peck started the Religious Trauma Institute, which seeks to develop resources for mental health professionals to recognize and work with survivors of such trauma. Peck said he



Source: <https://skyboundcounseling.com/religious-trauma/>

and Anderson want religious trauma to be considered a type of complex post-traumatic stress disorder, “because that allows us to be taken seriously.”

The self-help therapeutic nature of the current ex-evangelical movement has its roots back in the 1980s with the formation of Fundamentalists Anonymous. Kraft notes that in 1993 psychologist Marlene Winell published *Leaving the Fold*, a self-help book for former Christian fundamentalists deciding to forsake their religion. Winell coined the term “religious trauma syndrome,” defining it as “the condition experienced by people who are struggling with leaving an authoritarian, dogmatic religion and coping with the damage of indoctrination.” Like Fundamentalists Anonymous, which emerged during the rise of the Moral Majority in the 1980s, the current movement of ex-evangelicals is shaped by and engaged in politics in the Trump and post-Trump era. Kraft cites political scientist Paul A. Djupe, who estimates that just over 20 percent of American evangelicals, or eight million people, left their churches between 2016 and 2020. “It’s a pretty sizable number, and of course they’re really loud on Twitter,” Djupe said.

Anderson and Peck stressed that the Religious Trauma Institute is not anti-theist, and Peck is concerned that religious trauma syndrome has been co-opted by the atheist movement seeking to discredit religion. Yet ex-evangelicals are often called on by the media, especially such outlets as Religion News Service, and secular critics to critique evangelicalism and its political implications. This was clearly seen in the coverage of the recent Atlanta shootings, where ex-evangelical critics were widely quoted about the role of evangelical “purity culture” in the suspect’s desire to rid himself of temptation and his “sex addiction” by killing the women at the massage parlors. The ex-evangelical movement also dovetails with evangelical “deconstructionists,” mainly academics (often based in evangelical colleges) who seek to critique the conservative gender norms and alleged racist complicity of evangelicalism past and present. The trend is led by such books as Jemar Tisby’s history of white Christian racism, *Color of Compromise*, and Kristin Du Mez’s book, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, and has led to the formation of book clubs by liberal evangelicals and ex-evangelicals to discuss these issues, reports the *Denver Register* (March 30).

(*New Republic*, <https://newrepublic.com/article/161772/can-religion-give-ptsd>)

Violence against Asians drives new Korean church activism

Recent acts of racial violence, particularly the allegedly anti-Asian killing spree in Atlanta, have led the largely evangelical and quietistic Korean churches to become politically involved, reports *Politico* (March 27). Up until recently, Korean churches were strongly against bringing politics and political protests into the church. The change is most evident in the activism of the Korean community of Atlanta, where the mass murder of largely Korean victims took place mid-March. “Religious leaders are at the forefront of this nascent movement, agitating for change. And as they look to harness Korean American electoral power in the Atlanta suburbs, their turn toward



Source: <https://pres-outlook.org/2017/07/understanding-korean-american-churches/>

activism could have lasting implications in a state roiled by rapid demographic upheaval,” writes Catherine Kim. Pastor Han Byung-chul of the Korean Central Presbyterian Church of Atlanta recently formed a local group to oppose Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) hate with 11 other religious leaders. A Korean Methodist pastor in Marietta, Georgia, said that the issue was “not about specific politicians or political parties. We want an overarching understanding that we need to create a society where immigrants and Asians aren’t discriminated against.” Most of the changes being sought by these activists involve enacting policies to better track and prosecute hate crimes against Asians.

The activism of Korean churches has expanded nationwide, with Pastor Choi Byung-ho, president of the National Caucus of Korean Presbyterian Churches, sending out instructions encouraging pastors around the U.S. to incorporate anti-racism messages into their sermons. The president of the Korean United Methodist churches issued a statement condemning both hate crimes and the way politicians have used Asian Americans as scapegoats during the pandemic. Additionally, Kim writes, the new activism among pastors is “bridging the generational gap in civic participation for the community. Young second- and third-generation Korean Americans are mingling with older first-generation immigrants at protests against racial discrimination.” Another repercussion of the new wave of Korean church activism is that it may turn Korean Americans more toward Democratic voting. The small-business, conservative ethic of first-generation immigrants has tended to align them more with Republicans (though less so among younger generations), but that may change, with 63 percent of Korean Americans saying in a

recent survey that they thought Democrats did a better job at addressing racism than Republicans.

(*Politico*, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/03/27/atlanta-shooting-korean-churches>)

Younger ethnic evangelicals consider pulling up stakes from white-led churches?

Segments of second- and third-generation Asian and Latino evangelicals are exiting their white and multiethnic megachurches and returning to their respective ethnic congregations, reports *Christianity Today* magazine (March). Erin Chan Ding writes that these younger ethnic evangelicals feel disillusioned with white-led churches, often megachurches, for lacking cultural understanding. Although no figures are provided as to the size of this exodus, she adds that as these ethnic evangelicals raise their own children they are having second thoughts about staying in those churches and not having their traditions and heritage passed on. The article cites a recent study of megachurches that found that while 58 percent were multiracial, 94 percent were pastored by whites. Sociologist Michael Emerson says that according to his research such disillusioned ethnic evangelicals either join multiethnic congregations led by pastors of color or



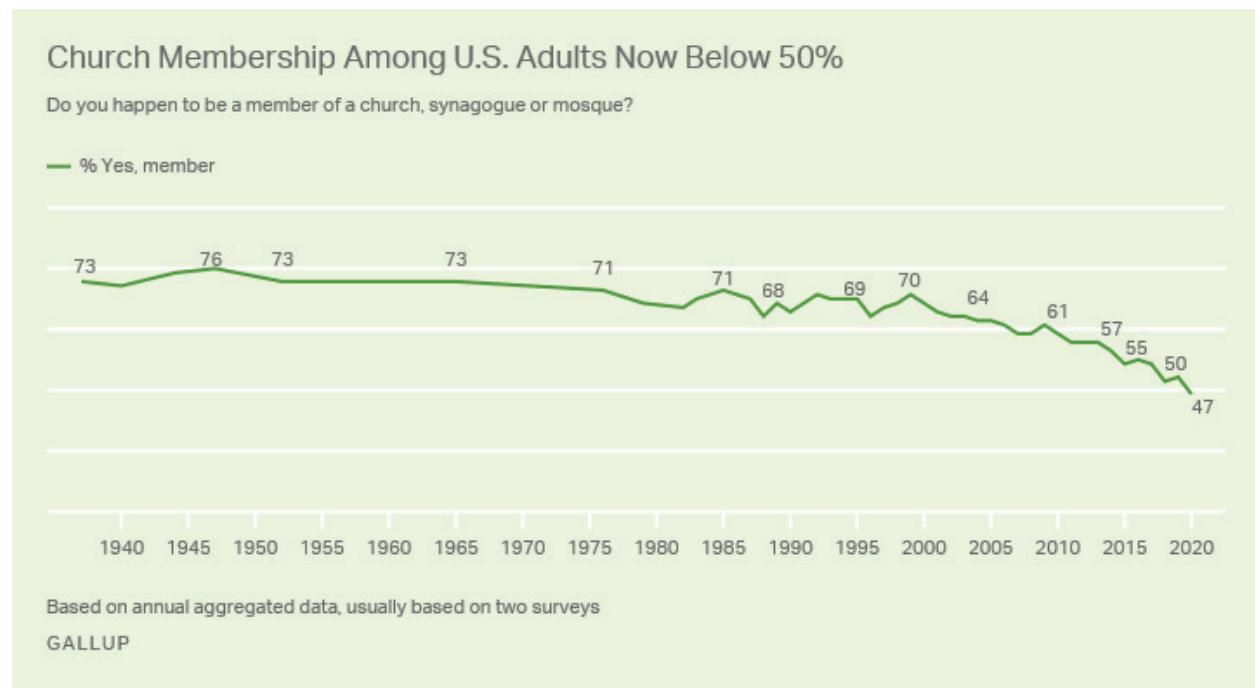
Source: <https://cure.mccormick.edu/?p=1287>

drop out of organized religion altogether. But Ding adds that multiracial congregations are seen as “emotionally-draining” and uncomfortable for some Christians who thrive in more culturally homogeneous churches. Emerson and other observers note that multiracial congregations with ethnically diverse pastors and leaders who create space for different groups seem to be the most effective in keeping ethnic members.

(*Christianity Today*, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)

CURRENT RESEARCH

- **A new Gallup Poll finds that for the first time since it began collecting data on church membership in the late 1930s, fewer than half of Americans say they belong to a religious congregation.** The new survey finds that 47 percent of Americans now say they belong to a house of worship, decreasing from 70 percent in the mid-1990s and 50 percent in 2019. The decline is part of a trend of declining congregational membership since the 1990s, according to Gallup data. When Gallup first started measuring church membership in 1937, nearly three-quarters of the population reported membership in a congregation. Since that time, membership remained at about 70 percent until falling rates accelerated in the late 2000s.



- **Only eight percent of former Mormons list “the church’s strong culture of political conservatism” as one of their main reasons for leaving, and it is not very high on the list, according to a recent study.** Compiling available social science data, Jana Riess and Benjamin R. Knoll observe in their study published in the *Mormon Studies Review* (Vol. 8) that religious

reasons come out at the top of listed explanations for leaving the church, with former members no longer believing in Mormon faith and values, though political factors may get mixed in among those lists. They find many of the political views of a majority of former Mormons to not be dramatically different from those of active ones, although less conservative on average, showing some level of correlation.

It is also true that a substantially smaller percentage of former Mormons belong to the Republican Party compared to current members of the church (with a difference of 20 percentage points). They might, however, be described as “not so much liberal as less conservative, on average.” Some issues appear to matter more to some groups. For instance, younger respondents mentioned LGBT issues quite frequently among their reasons for leaving, and women of all generations showed dissatisfaction about women’s role, while this issue was ranked much lower by male former members. Former Mormons appear rather conservative when it comes to limiting the role of government, but they differ significantly from active members on social issues, especially homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and abortion.

(*Mormon Studies Review*, <https://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/msr.html>)



Mormons for Marriage Equality, June 30, 2013 (Quinn Dombrowski, Berkeley - Creative Commons, Wikipedia).

● **Conservative religious groups and leaders are increasingly facing censure by big tech companies, according to a report by the Napa Legal Institute.** So far this year, religious groups and figures have been silenced by tech companies at a rate of about one a week, according to the study by the conservative institute cited in the *Wall Street Journal* (March 29). LifeSiteNews, a prolife religious news website, had its YouTube channel permanently banned by Google, which



deleted all its videos. Google justified its action as a response to Covid-19 misinformation, though it would not tell the site which video had offended its standards. Google had flagged LifeSiteNews for a video of an American Catholic bishop criticizing vaccines developed with fetal cells. In January, Bishop Kevin Doran of Ireland was removed from Twitter after he criticized assisted suicide laws. The company reversed its decision after public opposition. In January, Twitter blocked a post by the Daily Citizen, a site run by the evangelical group Focus on the Family, suspending its account. The reason given was that a tweet challenged the “underlying premise of transgenderism.”

Twitter also suspended *Catholic World Report*, though it later admitted it had erred. Meanwhile, Amazon banned Ryan Anderson, head of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, over his book criticizing transgenderism, *When Harry Became Sally*. Books from specific publishers are targets of such restrictions, such as Catholic TAN Books. The publisher currently cannot advertise books by authors Paul Kengor and Carrie Gress, who wrote a book on “rescuing the culture from toxic femininity.” Facebook banned ads for Kimberly Cook’s anti-feminist book, *Motherhood Redeemed*. The report notes that when posts are removed, ads are blocked, and accounts are banned, public pushback and media criticism often lead tech companies to rethink their actions.

● **What is called “Covid fundamentalism,” meaning resistance to public health measures during the pandemic for religious reasons, has not been strongly evident in churches and denominations in Eastern and Central Europe, according to a recent study.** Recent reports have suggested that some Eastern Orthodox churches, especially in Russia and Greece, have been less compliant with government lockdowns and other precautions concerning Covid-19, often persisting in offering communion to members and keeping monasteries and churches open. But the study of churches in Eastern and Central Europe, with a special focus on Ukraine, conducted by Vita Tytarenko and Iryna Bogachevska and published in the journal *Occasional*

Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe (February), found that such “fundamentalism” did not become widespread among these churches.

While in analyzing the reactions of different Christian churches in the region the researchers did find a segment of believers who disagreed with lockdown restrictions, there was found to be no “direct correlation between the manifestations of ‘COVID fundamentalism’ and the level of religiosity of the population of the analyzed countries...” It was difficult to

make generalizations about each country because of their religious pluralism, but conspiracy theories, such as denying the virus and claiming it was used as an anti-Christian plot, tended to find a hearing among conservative circles of Eastern Orthodox believers. Conspiracies about the dangers of modernism for Orthodoxy have circulated since the fall of communism, and Covid-19 suspicions fit into this mindset.

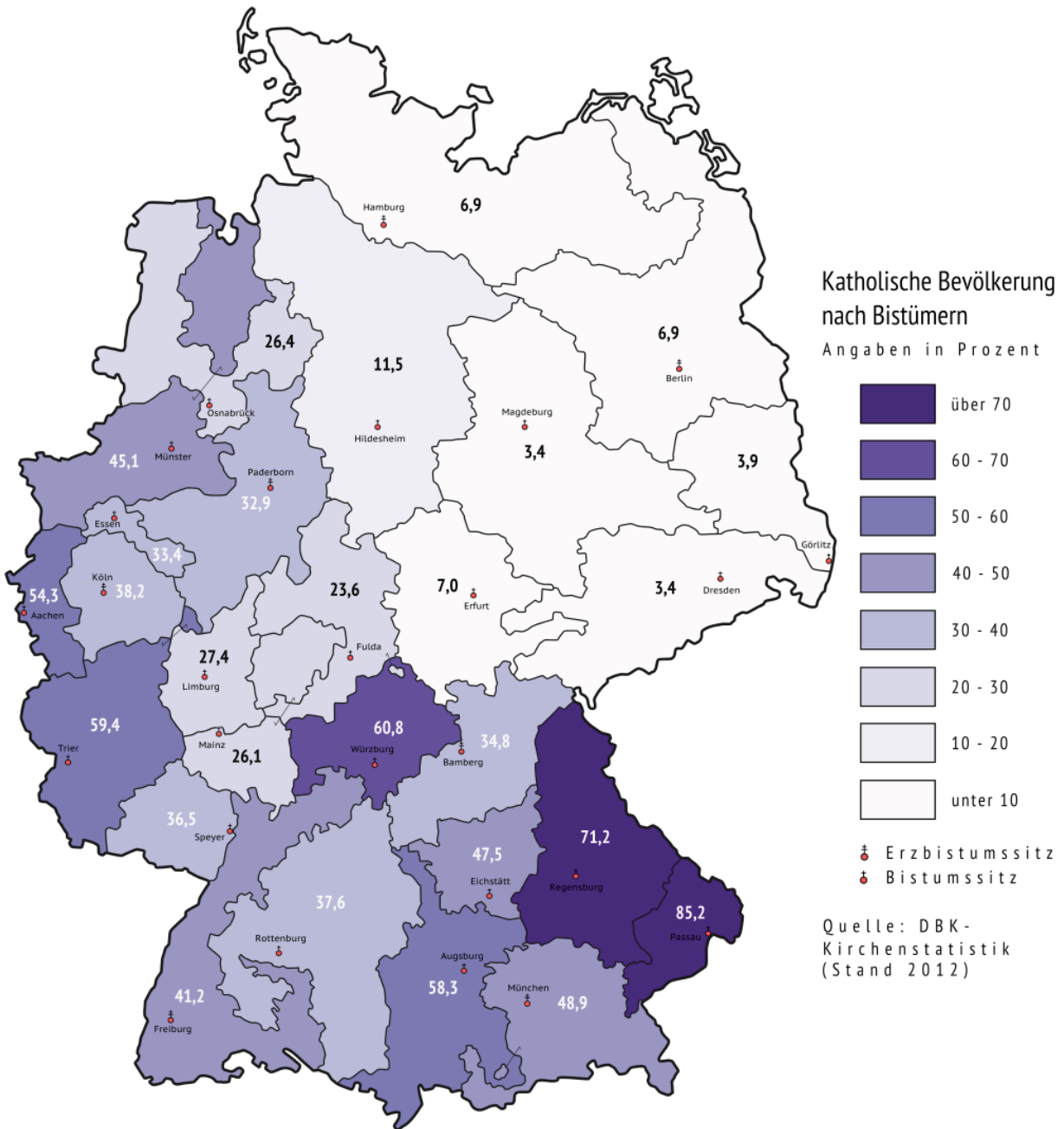
(*Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss1/4/>)



Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/1098358215>
(Creative Commons)

German Catholics ratchet up liberal reforms—raising specter of schism?

The Catholic church in Germany is drawing scrutiny and criticism from the Vatican for its liberal reform agenda, particularly over the issue of blessing same-sex unions. Catholicism in Germany and in other German-speaking lands, such as Austria, has long been a bastion of progressive church reform initiatives, but church leaders’ latest pronouncements have made observers wonder if a schism might be developing in the church. On the news service *Religion Unplugged* (March 1), Clemente Risi reports that German bishops have brought church reform back to the forefront of their agenda after years of struggle with the clergy sex abuse crisis and the challenges of secularism and church membership decline. In February, a German bishop wrote a column defending his support for a book of blessings and rites for gay unions. The bishop, Peter Kohlgraf of Mainz, also said Catholics who are gay should not be expected to live a chaste life. The book of blessings, entitled *Couples, Rites, Church*, is published by a publishing house affiliated with the Archdiocese of Paderborn, and carries a foreword by Bishop Ludger Schepers, an auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of Essen. “Kohlgraf is the latest in a series of German prelates publicly calling for changes in the church’s stance on homosexuality. There have also been similar appeals in neighboring Austria,” Risi writes.



Percentage of Roman Catholics in Germany, 2012 (Alexander Altenhof, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_catholics_germany_2012_de.svg)

In 2020, Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops' conference, called for changes to the section on same-sex marriage in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Other issues raised during the 2020 meeting of the conference included women in leadership and intercommunion with Protestants. In late February, the conference elected a woman for the first time as its head administrator, and then appointed Beate Gilles, a 50-year-old female theologian, as general

secretary. At that time Bätzing also announced he would continue to give Holy Communion to Protestants who asked for it. The concern about the German church's blessing of same-sex unions, whether overt or tacit, was the immediate occasion for the Vatican's statement rejecting such blessings, writes theologian Robert Imbelli on the blog of *First Things* magazine (March 19). But the wider context of the Vatican's concern about the German church is the so-called "Synodal Path" underway there. Preliminary documents of the Synodal Path, which consists of a series of conferences to discuss theological and organizational issues, have "raised widespread concern that what is in the offing is not the development of doctrine, but the relativizing and undermining of doctrine. And this coheres all too closely with the therapeutic ethos that characterizes much of Western Catholicism," Imbelli writes.

Brazil's soft power draws on conservative religious arsenal

Brazil has increasingly used religion in wielding its "soft power" in much of the world, most recently in a conservative Christian direction under populist President Jair Bolsonaro, according to political scientists Guilherme Casarões and Amy Erica Smith. As part of a series of lectures on the use of religious soft power sponsored by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World



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Affairs at Georgetown University, Casarões and Smith spoke at a late-February Zoom webinar, attended by **RW**. Brazil has been the quintessential soft power country, lacking in military and economic strength but using diplomacy to play the role of a “middle power” based on such values as universalism, development, and multilateralism. In the last decade, Brazil has brought religion into its use of soft power to construct a national identity and to build political coalitions at home and abroad. This use of religion in foreign policy was seen in the previous government of Lula as he used religious themes to build ties to other Latin American nations and to serve as an “honest broker” in negotiations between Palestinians and Israel, while stressing religious pluralism.

Bolsonaro has reintroduced the idea of Brazil as a Christian country in foreign policy, although he has been careful to avoid pitting evangelicals and Catholics against each other. While Brazil’s Catholic bishops have expressed mild opposition to him (he himself is Catholic, although he was rebaptized by evangelicals during a trip to Israel), they realize that many Catholics support Bolsonaro. Making common cause with other conservative Christian countries, such as Poland and Hungary, the government has also been active in efforts to defend the traditional family at home and abroad and participated in religious freedom coalitions with the Trump administration. Such Christian soft power was seen in the establishment of the National Association of Evangelical Jurors at the United Nations, according to Casarões and Smith, in opposition to gender identity policies. Bolsonaro’s use of soft power can also reach into inter-church affairs. He has recently inserted himself into a dispute between pastors of Brazil’s Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and a branch of the church in Angola. Casarões said that Brazil’s religious right and its use of soft power is “not going anywhere;” there is at least 30 percent of the population who will believe in Brazil as a godly nation even when Bolsonaro passes from the scene. While it might be in Bolsonaro’s interest to get closer to the U.S. under the Biden administration, “he will find criticism from supporters who believe Biden is a socialist,” Casarões concluded.

Prosperity gospel morphs into a practical-minded prosperity ethic in the Philippines

There is a new “prosperity ethic” emerging in the Philippines, stressing upward mobility and practical skills in attaining wealth, that is eclipsing the older prosperity gospel among charismatics and Pentecostals, write Erron Medina and Jayeel Cornelio in *Pneuma* (43:1). The prosperity gospel, stressing “health and wealth” based on tithing and faith, has been widespread in charismatic and Pentecostal churches worldwide. In the Philippines, American-based prosperity teachings have been imported through such churches as the Assemblies of God, but have also been spread by indigenous charismatic movements such as El Shaddai. In studying the writings and teachings of two of the most popular Filipino authors and preachers, the evangelical Chinkee Tan and Catholic charismatic Bo Sanchez, the researchers find a noticeable shift away



Eugenio Isabelo Tomas Reyes Sanchez Jr. , known as Bo Sanchez, founder of the Light of Jesus Family (<https://steemit.com/steemit/@namranna/bo-sanchez-kerygma-conference-kcon-and-why-you-should-attend-it>).

from traditional prosperity gospel themes of tithing and faith to the concepts of “believing right,” “thinking right,” and “doing it right.” Medina and Cornelio write that these teachings emphasize the practical aspects of attaining wealth by espousing upward mobility and drawing on biblical principles.

This change corresponds with the recent economic history of the Philippines. While El Shaddai ministered to the poor with its faith-based message, Sanchez and Tan “have taken the prosperity gospel to the next level by targeting the aspirational middle class with a religious message that banks not only on faith but also on financial management skills.” They write that Sanchez and Tan are “among the ranks of the new prophets of capital, who, while troubled by the harshness of poverty, nevertheless place the burden back on the individual to navigate their lives and economic fortunes...While promising hope in a God who blesses, the prosperity ethic also calls upon individuals to seal their very aspirations by changing their ways.” They conclude that given Sanchez and Tan’s influence in the charismatic world, “their contributions need to be considered seriously in understanding the prosperity gospel not just in the global South but around the world.”

(*Pneuma*, <https://brill.com/view/journals/pneu/43/1/pneu.43.issue-1.xml>)

Religious movements and the limits of uniformity: the case of Tablighi Jamaat

An organized religious movement under a central authority, with strict and specific instructions for the daily lives of its members, Tablighi Jamaat's (TJ) apparent homogeneity actually hides a level of internal diversity, writes Aminah Mohammad-Arif (Center for South Asian Studies, CNRS-EHESS, Paris) in the *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* (January–March). Her observations are based on research she conducted over 10 years in the cosmopolitan city of Bangalore, India, among followers of TJ, an Islamic revivalist movement, who experience their adherence to the movement as a clear conversion experience with a “before” and “after.” Launched in Delhi in the 1920s, TJ is generally seen as a uniform movement, targeting nominal Muslims in order to encourage them to imitate the practices of the Prophet and his first companions. At first sight, the uniformity is evident in similar ways of dressing in Islamic attire and in an emphasis on the strict observance of rites as well as practices encompassing all aspects



Tablighi Jamaat Mosque in Montasik District, Aceh Besar Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia, May 23, 2013 (Si Gam, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jamaah_Tabligh.JPG).

of daily life. However, deeper discussions with members reveal that turning to TJ did not involve changes to the same extent for all of them. While some have stopped watching television or movies and listening to music, some still enjoy listening to music or watching cricket. None were content to read only literature published by TJ, despite the anti-intellectual posture of the movement, and most also looked for information on Islam from other sources.

Despite the movement's insistence that members should only focus on preaching the true message of Islam, some members express concern with and involvement in social issues. Despite the encouragement to stay out of politics (a point on which the movement has adopted a softer, more neutral stance in recent years), some vote, even for non-Muslim candidates who seem to be working for the common good. All the young people whom Mohammad-Arif met manifested some degree of politicization as members of a Muslim minority in Indian society.

Mohammad-Arif remarks that while all her respondents identified themselves as Tablighi, "none of them fit the Tablighi mold as conceived by its leadership and reflected in the movement's speeches and literature." To some extent, each of them showed autonomy in reframing (some of) the teachings of the movement according to their own subjectivities—something to which the religious plurality experienced in India may also have contributed.

(*Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 14 cours des Humanités, 93322 Aubervilliers Cedex, France; <https://journals.openedition.org/assr/>)

New wave of repression of clerics reflects China's blueprint for eradicating Tibetan Buddhism

A new report by the International Campaign for Tibet documents how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has recently focused on harshly repressing clerics as the key to repressing Tibetans as a people. Writing in the newsletter *Bitter Winter* (March 25), Marco Respinti cites the report, *Party Above Buddhism: China's Surveillance and Control of Tibetan Monasteries and Nunneries*, as confirming that the aim of the Communist Party is "replacing religion and cultural identity in the hearts and minds of Tibetans—harassing their bodies and spirits when it fails." Respinti adds that the report documents with figures and examples how Tibetans still loom large among the list of those most persecuted under the CCP, including the Muslim Uyghurs, the single most persecuted people in China, and the Church of Almighty God (CAG), the single most persecuted religious movement there. "Buddhist monks and nuns form the single largest group assailed by the government of China for their persistent resistance against the state's destruction of Tibetan culture and identity," according to the report. It goes on to state that the CCP persecutes Tibetan clerics through massive surveillance, with the excuse of maintaining "stability," even if preemptively. According to the latest data available, published in the CCP's *China Daily*, in September 2015, 6,575 cadres from different levels in the party and government hierarchy worked in the 1,787 monasteries in the Tibetan region. That "means three, sometimes four party



Wonderlane from Seattle, USA, CC BY 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

officials, i.e., spies, hecklers and harassers per monastery, disturbing and controlling religious practice and daily life.”

The report frames these facts and figures within the larger context of President Xi Jinping’s strategy of sinicization, which equates being “authentically” Chinese with obedience to Communist rule. Sinicization is now under the auspices of the United Front Work Department (UFWD). The report adds that “[a]lthough the UFWD always played an important role in Tibet policy in the past, especially since the establishment of its seventh bureau dealing with Tibetan affairs in 2005, this structural change gave an arm of the CCP even more power and significance in overseeing the implementation of the policies in Tibet and in particular controlling the monastic community. This is also confirmed by the tripling of the budget for the UFWD in the [Tibet Autonomous Region] in the past five years.” In recent years, the UFWD has been manufacturing a fake “monastic community compliant to the doctrine of a one-party state,” by means of which “the authenticity of Tibetan Buddhism is profoundly being attacked and diluted.” The report is pessimistic about Tibetan Buddhism’s survival, as the CCP is effectively, though slowly, eroding the development and transmission of the religion’s traditions, canon, and rules.

(*Bitter Winter*, <https://bitterwinter.org/diluting-tibetan-buddhism-to-cancel-an-entire-people/>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ The *Journal of CESNUR*, a publication of the Center for the Study of New Religions, devotes its March/April issue to the Plymouth Brethren and the changes this small but influential conservative Christian movement has undergone recently. The Brethren fall into two main groupings, the “exclusive” and the “open” Brethren (who are largely integrated within world evangelicalism), but the issue focuses on the former, especially since they have been at the center of so much contention. The exclusive Brethren’s longtime separatism from other Christians and society and their charismatic leadership, traced historically in several articles, have fueled allegations of cult-like secrecy and abuse, while their recent foray into politics, especially in Australia and New Zealand, has given them a reputation of being power hungry and hypocritical (since members don’t vote).

Most of the articles in this issue suggest that the negative public responses that the exclusive Brethren have faced—whether valid or not—are leading to a change of approach. Although long involved in charitable activities, the Brethren have engaged in more visible acts of social service, such as in Australia during last year’s extensive fires and in the face of disasters in the UK. Another article by Steve Knowles looks at how the exclusive Brethren have gradually adapted computer technology to their own separatist purposes. Knowles analyzes the highly restricted publication *Ministry* (which only members are allowed to read) and finds that although once restricted from using such “evil” technology, the large segment of members who are small business owners compelled the leadership to make concessions, both for pragmatic reasons and also as a way to maintain internal communication and separatism. *This issue can be downloaded at: <https://cesnur.net/>*

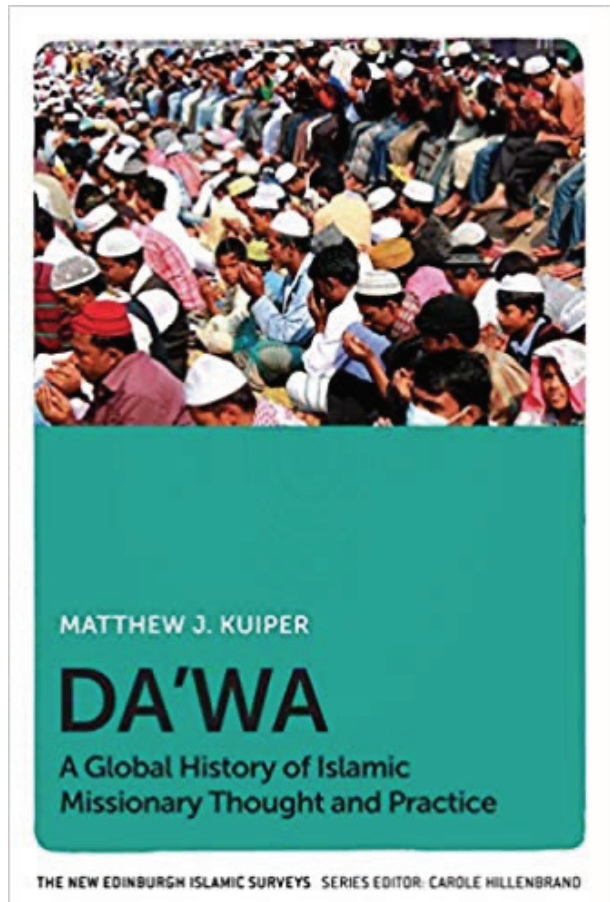
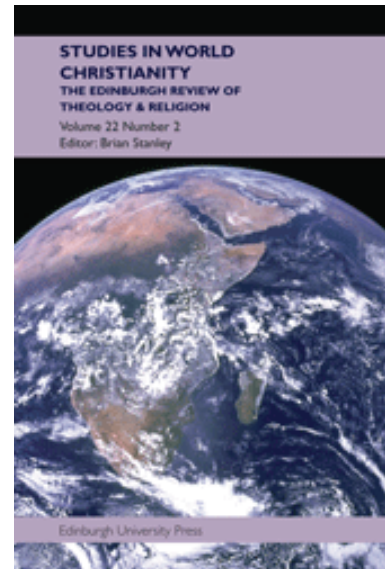
■ The *Journal Studies in World Christianity* continues its in-depth treatment of Covid-19’s effects on churches around the world [see January 2021 *RW*], this time devoting its March issue to how the pandemic has led Christians to negotiate their relationships to their respective societies. Of particular interest is an article on the Chinese Christian community in Britain and how it has experienced anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. The Chinese congregations offer a sense of refuge for Asians who have experienced such abuse, yet these churches have also gained a national sense of mission to re-evangelize Britain since the pandemic. At the same time, there is more tension between Chinese Christian subgroups, especially with the growing divisions around Hong Kong and mainland China. Other articles highlight the conflicts between biomedical health and faith healing. The introduction by the



editors notes that in sub-Saharan African countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo there is the widespread belief that Covid-19 demands a spiritual response rather than a solely medical one, suggesting that “public health approaches have often effectively restricted the social capacity of churches to support pandemic measures.” *For more information on this issue, visit: <https://www.euppublishing.com/toc/swc/27/1>.*

■ An Arabic word meaning “inviting,” “calling,” or “summoning,” *da’wa* is understood today as missionary invitation, i.e., missionary efforts “on behalf of Islam or particular varieties of Islam.” It includes both “external *da’wa*” directed to inviting non-Muslims to embrace Islam and “internal *da’wa*” aiming at reviving fellow Muslims. In a new, readable and information-packed book, *Da’wa: A Global History of Islamic Missionary Thought and Practice* (Edinburgh University Press, paperback \$29.95, hardcover \$120), Matthew J. Kuiper (Missouri State University) offers an overview of the evolution of missionary efforts throughout the history of Islam, thus helping to understand how Islam became a global religion. The author takes care to contextualize the developments under consideration. In the modern era, Islamic *da’wa* efforts have been prompted to a significant extent by religious competitors. While pre-modern *da’wa* efforts often were ad hoc initiatives, a trend of organizing and institutionalizing *da’wa* through “para-mosque” organizations has been increasingly present in later periods.

This becomes quite clear in the last chapter, which presents a survey of the second phase of modern *da’wa*, from 1950 to 2020, the period coinciding with post-colonial modern Islamic history. In addition to earlier movements such as the successful Tablighi Jamaat and its imitators, or *da’wa* organizations inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood or by Jamaat-e-Islami, the activities of charismatic Muslim preachers have been another leading cause of the founding of new non-state *da’wa* organizations, eager to use all modern technologies available, Kuiper notes. He cites examples such as the networks inspired by Fethullah Gülen from Turkey, the Islamic Propagation Center International founded by the late Ahmed Deedat in South Africa, and the very popular Egyptian preacher Amr Khaled. Muslim



migration has also stimulated *da'wa* initiatives of all kinds.

Such efforts can go beyond *da'wa* in the strict sense. Kuiper remarks that there has been a proliferation of Muslim-initiated humanitarian programs since the 1970s and 1980s, and among them a number that have been added to the agenda of *da'wa* organizations. State-sponsored *da'wa* efforts may also be part of a country's foreign policy, such as the variety of projects that have been a channel for Saudi influence in countries such as Indonesia. While similar Saudi efforts have promoted a Salafi and anti-Sufi line in African countries, one should not forget that African Sufi brotherhoods remain active with their own *da'wa*. In Turkey, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), seeking to keep Islam under secular governmental control, has approached *da'wa* as a way to make Turks at home and abroad more Muslim. Today, *da'wa* organizations number in the thousands, Kuiper concludes, being both extremely widespread and extremely diverse in their approaches toward Islam.

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

Mochers Magazine, a new Jewish men's lifestyle publication in the New York-New Jersey area, suggests how consumerism has found a place in the Orthodox community. Mochers seeks to help observant Jews, who are "Conservadox, Modern Orthodox or Yeshivish," make the best use of their free time, with "premium content by experts in their fields about the rewards that come after a hard week of work and learning." Mochers promotes "good wine with Shabbat and Yom Tov meals," and promises that "top specialists in design will show you how to create and furnish places in your home for working and relaxing. Stylists will guide you in choosing the right clothing, from suits to sweats." The magazine's publishing group, Altchies Media Group, said in a statement that "women have magazines they read that help them feel a connection to the Jewish community, but there's nothing similar representing the average Yosef in regards to things other than business." Mochers' publishers say its approach is to highlight "affordable consumption," an approach that someone who is paying tuition for several children in yeshiva can appreciate. (Source: *Jewish Link*, February 4).

