

“Post-religious right” makes its debut in American politics

Irreligious and secular elements are taking control of the American political right, according to recent reports. While the recent Supreme Court rulings on abortion and church-state issues suggest the continuing relevance of religion to conservative activism, Nate Hochman argues in the *New York Times* (June 5) that they are more like a “last gasp,” as social conservatism has trumped religious conservatism on a whole host of issues—from the battle over Critical Race Theory to transgender instruction in public schools. “Rather than invocations of Scripture, the right’s appeal is a defense of a broader, beleaguered American way of life,” Hochman writes. “The upshot is that this new politics has the capacity to expand the Republican tent. It appeals to a wide range of Americans, many of whom have been put off by the old conservatism’s explicitly religious sheen and don’t quite see themselves as Republicans yet.” Veteran Christian Right leaders have misgivings about the new coalition, claiming that ignoring or deriding faith-based concerns will alienate the religious base of the right. But the typical Republicans of recent years can be more accurately described as “Middle American radicals”—non-college educated whites with a “populist hostility to elite pieties,” more nationalistic and hostile to free trade and immigration than was the case with conservatives imbued with “Christianity’s universalist ideals.”

In *Politico* (June 14), Patrick Brown reports on how the religiously based “compassionate conservatism” promoted by George W. Bush often failed to deliver the changes and policies it promised, while the more secular right championed by Donald Trump has found more success. Brown cites a recent Pew poll, finding that only 48 percent of Republicans thought it was somewhat or very important to be Christian to be considered a true American, down from 63 percent in 2016. “As America secularizes, the conservative movement is secularizing with it, and broadening its appeal in the process,” Brown writes. He adds that “It’s no coincidence that Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who eagerly picked culture war fights with major corporations, is among the most popular Republicans in the country. Glenn Youngkin won in blue Virginia in part from a parent-fueled backlash to Democratic governance. Neither has sought to align themselves explicitly with the religious right.” In the conservative *Washington Examiner* (June 15), political



Source: Glenn Youngkin, May 2021 | Flickr.

analyst Michael Barone writes that the “post-religious right” may have an opening, as liberal and leftist activists and organizations engage in infighting over generational issues involving identity politics. He concludes, “The longer view? More culture wars, probably, with some unexpected outcomes. And maybe some wistful yearning for Christianity’s universalist ideals.”

Jewish left leaving behind religion?

A religious “commitment gap” between liberal and conservative Jews is increasingly defined by politics and raising questions about the future of the Jewish left, write political scientist Samuel Abrams and historian Jack Wertheimer in *Tablet* magazine (June 24). The authors cite recent research suggesting that politics is driving religious identity more than religious beliefs are influencing political commitments, with conservatives showing higher rates of religiosity than liberals on measures like belief in God and weekly religious service attendance. While Abrams and Wertheimer note that the influence of politics on Jewish identity may be more complicated, since being Jewish is not only about identification with a religious tradition but also an ethnic identity and the Jewish State of Israel, they point out that, like politically conservative Christians, Jewish conservatives also tend to have stronger religious beliefs and participation in institutional religion than liberals. Political ideology tends to correlate with how Jews think about the role of



Jews protest the Trump travel ban at San Francisco International Airport, January 29, 2016 (source: Kenneth Lu | Flickr).

faith in society, with 69 percent of politically liberal Jews believing religion is more problematic than helpful, compared to just 15 percent of Jewish conservatives and 54 percent of moderates.

Abrams and Wertheimer are careful to add that the data do not suggest a causal order to this trend. “We do not know if liberals become more distant from Judaism and the Jewish people, or whether those who are Jewishly distant migrated to the liberal camp.” While not writing off liberal Jews and their influence in Judaism, the authors see such trends as the valorizing of social justice and universalism over Jewish particularism, including support for Israel, as intensifying the commitment gap. They argue that the growth of identity politics and “wokeness” among liberal Jews has exacerbated this tendency, as features such as sexual orientation, gender and disability get more attention than ancestral culture and ethnic and religious solidarity. While observing that the Jewish left’s legacy of “neo-Hasidism,” Havurah fellowships, Jewish feminism, significant settlement in Israel, and mass demonstrations in support of Jewish causes has been largely eclipsed by the indifference of Jewish liberals today, Abrams and Wertheimer do not rule out the possibility that such indifference could give way to a return to religion and particularism, perhaps driven by the growth of antisemitism.

(*Tablet*, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/whatever-happened-to-the-pro-jewish-left>)

Small Orthodox church gets big attention in American politics

A historic yet small Russian Orthodox body has recently been taking center stage in debates ranging from Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine to the religious leanings of the far right in the U.S. There have been recent media and scholarly reports holding that recent converts to the Russian Orthodox Church in the U.S. have taken a turn to the far right, though the evidence for such a trend is shaky at best, writes Mikel Hill in the *Hedgehog Review*. For example, last month (May 10) National Public Radio (May 10) reported on how the small Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) has drawn far-right, white supremacist converts who venerate Czarist Russia and are sympathetic to Vladimir Putin. Much of the new interest in this small corner of Eastern Orthodoxy, which was founded by exiles from communist Russia, has been stirred not only by Putin's use of Russian Orthodoxy but by the research and subsequent controversial new book by Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, *Between Heaven and Russia*, which looks at a ROCOR community in West Virginia. Riccardi-Swartz finds a growing "Reactive Orthodoxy" with an affinity for "strong patriarchal leaders, and the escape to an idealized Christian society" that is fundamentally anti-democratic and monarchic.

But Hill points out that the flow of converts in general to ROCOR has been minimal, with a demographic study in 2020 finding that the church had actually lost adherents since 2010. Riccardi-Swartz's claim that Orthodoxy has a high proportion of male members is not backed up with evidence, adding to the lack of quantitative and demographic data in her localized study confined to a small area of Appalachia. The author herself reports that she received several complaints from subjects claiming that they were misrepresented. Hill also criticizes the bias of the study. "For the most damning positions—fascism, transphobia, and white supremacy—supposedly held by many in her study, she supplies no concrete evidence. In fact, statements consistently contradict the study's conclusions. The parish priest in Wayne [West Virginia] told two persons holding white supremacist sympathies to renounce their views or leave the church as 'ROCOR does not subscribe to hate beliefs or actions.'"

While politics is purported to be the motivating factor in ROCOR conversions, Riccardi-Swartz relates that "numerous times" people would tell her they "don't like to talk about politics." Her case for the radicalization of ROCOR converts was in fact largely based on statements from social media and unaffiliated websites. Meanwhile, in *Public Orthodoxy* (July 1), the blog of the Orthodox Christian Study Center, theologian Robert Saler defends Riccardi-Swartz's work, writing that much of the controversy over her book has been based on a confusion of her anthropological method of study with the methods of sociology and journalism. Saler argues that the author's small sample and "thick descriptions" of the interactions and discourse of the group she observed are all part of the anthropological trade. He adds that Riccardi-Swartz was transparent with readers and her subjects about the non-representative and qualitative nature of her work. Meanwhile, however small and apolitical the ROCOR is, as the main representative of



Source: Eastern American Diocese, ROCOR.

Russian Orthodoxy in the West, the church has taken center stage in the political arguments about Putin's invasion of Ukraine and how Eastern Orthodox churches should respond to the crisis.

So far, the hierarchy of ROCOR has taken no position on cutting ties with the Moscow Patriarchate, although they have criticized the invasion. At a mid-June Women's Orthodoxy and War Conference that **RW** attended in Sea Cliff, NY, lawyer and long-time ROCOR member Lena Zezulin said that the church body was about evenly split on whether to retain ties with the Moscow Patriarchate. Zezulin, who is actively trying to help rescind the church's 2007 decision to enter into an act of canonical communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, said that the church's ties with Moscow identified it with the position of the Russian government on Ukraine, "bringing ROCOR disrepute throughout the world...[and also] creating dissent within the parishes that include a multi-ethnic flock." She argued that the 2007 agreement was suspect since the Moscow Patriarchate and Putin (who actually attended the 2007 ceremony) had intentionally used ROCOR to establish a Russian Orthodox social and political presence in Western countries. Zezulin added that Russian Orthodox clergy and seminarians had entered the U.S. and taken positions in ROCOR institutions "without necessarily receiving proper vetting from ROCOR

authorities,” and that there were funds sent from Russia for ROCOR activities that were unaccounted for.

(*Hedgehog Review*, <https://hedgehogreview.com/web-features/thr/posts/what-is-going-on-with-american-converts-to-russian-orthodoxy>)

Korean clergy, scholars assess second-generation Korean Americans’ silent exodus

The precarious future of the second generation of Korean American Christians came in for scrutiny at the second annual conference of the Korean Diaspora Institute (KDI), which was held in early June at Sandy Cove Ministries in Maryland. KDI is a non-profit organization founded by mostly Methodist Korean American ministers. The conference, which **RW** attended, dealt with the topics of the Korean American diaspora, the future of the second-generation Korean American church, which is reported to be part of a “silent exodus” from congregations, and the preservation of Korean culture by the Korean American church. The conference began with a presentation by Kwon Su Kyung, a visiting professor from Koryo seminary in Korea, who spoke about the Bible’s description of the diaspora of God’s people as a blessing and how that applied to Korean Americans. He said that the Korean American church had to do its best to share God’s blessing with all members of the American community rather than merely seeking to achieve worldly success in the United States, putting forth an interpretation of diaspora in the Bible that disputed many Korean Americans’ concerns.

Yang Sung Il, head pastor of Arizona Cross church, argued that the decline of the second-generation Christian membership was due to the lack of church leaders and the diminishing role of the Korean immigrant church for second-generation Korean Americans. However, given the popularity of Korean pop culture (like the dance-pop band, BTS, movies, TV dramas) and well-known corporate brand names like Samsung, Kia, and Hyundai, he said that second-generation Korean Americans have gained more confidence in being Korean American and that this new ethnic pride may make them more interested in the Korean church. Other second-generation Korean American pastors shared his concern and analysis and pledged to create a growing spiritual community in America. They proposed building an English ministry (EM) network to accommodate the shortage of EM ministers.

Meanwhile, Min Pyong Gap, a Queens College (NY) sociologist, spoke about differences in how second-generation Korean Protestants and Indian Hindu immigrants were able to preserve ethnic culture. He argued that the domestic religious practices of Hinduism enabled the preservation of Indian culture better than the practices of Korean Protestants, who could find nothing in common between Korean culture and their faiths. Min added that the undemocratic organization and management of the first-generation Korean immigrant church had influenced the “silent exodus” of second-generation Korean Americans. Several participants questioned the caste system’s



Source: Christian Reformed Church.

negative culture, which still plays a vital role in the public (Hindu Temple) and private spheres (dating websites) of Indian immigrants in America. —By *K.T. Chun, a New Jersey-based sociologist and researcher*

Spiritual coaching finds niche market among female would-be entrepreneurs

Spiritual coaching is becoming more distinct from the life-coaching industry it originated from, filling a niche for female alternative religious professionals, writes Molly Worthen in the *New York Times* (June 3). Spiritual coaches are part of the life-coaching industry, which became an established profession in the 1990s by combining self-help psychology, positive thinking and insights from the business-school world of leadership studies. Professional associations such as the International Coaching Federation offer accreditation and oversight, though “anyone can call herself a life coach,” Worthen writes. “Over the past generation, life coaching has split into a dozen subdisciplines, almost all of them dominated by women. Women account for 75 percent of coach practitioners in North America, according to a 2019 study by the federation.” One reason for the demographic imbalance is that many coaches come from female-dominated caring professions, such as nursing. Women let down by traditional support systems may also find the sustenance they need in a coach. And of all the kinds of coaches, spiritual coaching “seems to feature the starkest gender imbalance of any coaching field,” Worthen adds. Spiritual coaches usually offer a mix of one-on-one counseling and group coaching, as well as certification programs for aspiring coaches.



Source: PxHere.

Drea Guinto, who runs the California-based Soul Flow Co., offers a lifetime-access group coaching [program](#) for \$3,333, aimed at what she calls “soul-preneurs” who are “ambitious” yet “also spiritual” and seeking to launch their own businesses. Worthen writes that spiritual coaches face an “extra dose of mistrust because they base their claim to transform lives and careers not just on self-taught psychology and dubious certifications but also on supernatural beliefs and ritual [from astrological readings to Reiki] that they swear have worked for them.” She adds that attention to “unseen forces in the universe—especially the divine feminine—is partly a means for these coaches to counter the machismo that dominates American entrepreneurial culture.” Many spiritual coaches target female would-be entrepreneurs with spiritually based business accelerator programs promising both prosperity and fulfillment. “Part of it is strategy,” Guinto says, “but I come more from the point of view of consciousness—what wants to be birthed through me—versus a more capitalistic, masculine approach to business.”

Complex ecumenical landscape greets upcoming WCC assembly

An assessment of the current challenges for ecumenical relations ahead of the next assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) points out that the field of ecumenism has become more diverse and complex, with denominational boundaries losing significance and new divisions

appearing within religious bodies, in part due to social and ethical disputes. Writing in the June issue of *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Jennifer Wasmuth (Göttingen University, Germany) and Frank Zeeb (Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, France) note that the assembly, which will gather in Karlsruhe, Germany, in late August and early September, will also be addressing the war in Ukraine, deliberating on demands that the membership of the Russian Orthodox Church be revoked or at least suspended due to statements by the Patriarch of Moscow.

Wasmuth and Zeeb write that, as the significance of religious borders has weakened, issues of dogma no longer appear to be as divisive as they used to be as identity markers, at least in the daily lives of many Christian congregations. New dividing lines have formed around specific themes such as female ordinations or same-sex blessings, leading not only to divisions within



Source: *La Stampa*.

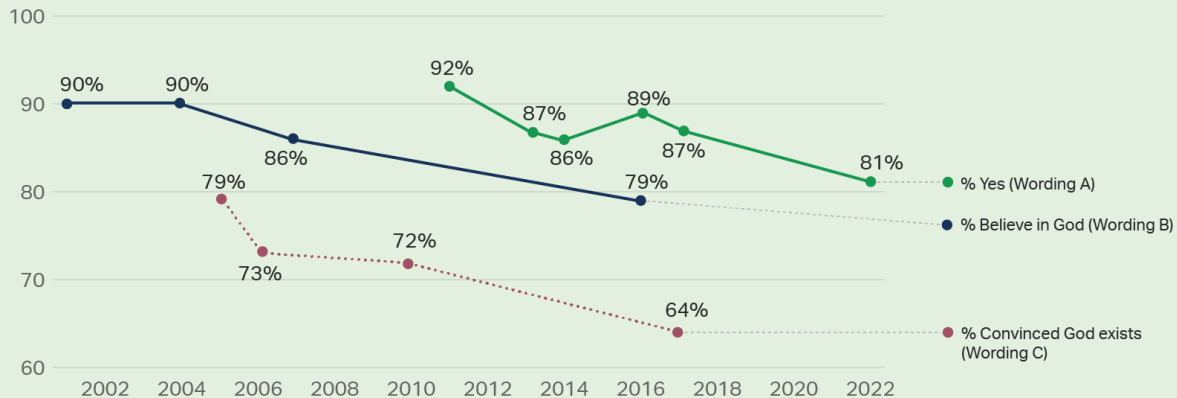
churches and across denominations, but also to new relations between groups from different denominations (e.g., around the advocacy of “traditional Christian values”). Such denominational weakening is also reflected in the “charismatization” of religious practices crossing denominational borders. While the meaning of such developments for ecumenism still needs to be further assessed, Wasmuth and Zeeb suggest that these trends should not merely be seen as hurdles, pointing to how they might offer new possibilities. For instance, skepticism from the global South might be welcomed from a “postcolonial perspective” open to themes and goals that are not exclusively set according to Western criteria. In a situation that might seem more confusing than it used to be, it would also be advisable to examine how far what is happening in the West (such as the declining significance of denominational boundaries) applies in the same way to other contexts.

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

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **Americans’ belief in God has dipped to a new low, according to Gallup poll results.** While a large, 81 percent majority of Americans still say they believe in God, that number represents a

What Percentage of Americans Believe in God?



Question wordings:

A: Do you believe in God?

B: For each of the items I'm going to read you, please tell me whether it is something you believe in, something you're not sure about, or something you don't believe in. What about God?

C: Which comes closest to describing you: you are convinced that God exists; you think God probably exists, but you have a little doubt; you think God probably exists, but you have a lot of doubt; you think God probably does not exist, but you are not sure; or, you are convinced that God does not exist?

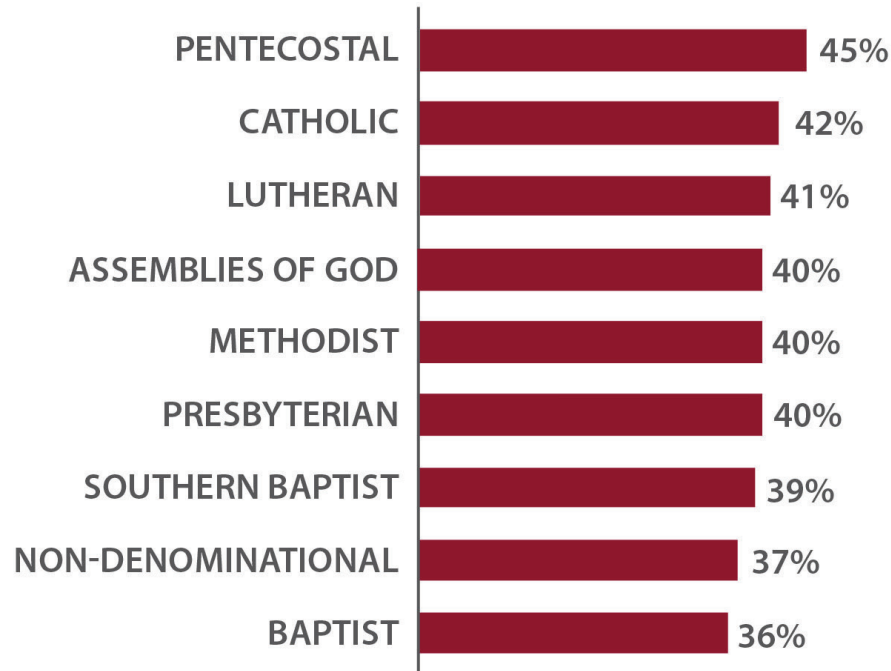
GALLUP

six-point dip from the 87 percent rate of belief consistently reported from 2013 to 2017. Over 90 percent of Americans had said they believed in God from 1944 to 2011, and that number had stabilized at a high of 98 percent from 1944 through the 1960s. About 17 percent of American adults told Gallup that they do not believe in God, while the remaining 2 percent said they were unsure. The Gallup Values and Beliefs poll also found that the decrease in theism has been driven by young adults and those on the political left. Both groups' belief in God has decreased by 10 percent or more compared to the 2013–2017 average for their demographics. Again, while the poll marks a notable change in belief in God, a sizable majority of Americans still say they have faith. However, recent polls have shown an even sharper decline in adherence and belief in traditional religious structures.

● **While Americans tend not to rule out a church based on its denomination, Pentecostalism is a major exception, a new survey by Lifeway Research suggests.** According to *Christianity Today* (June 7), the survey asked respondents to rate nine denominational terms—Assemblies of God, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, and nondenominational—and found that more ruled out Pentecostal than any other denomination. Just over half of the respondents (51 percent) agreed that a church with Pentecostal in its name would lower their interest in attending, while for each of the other denominations in the study, most said that a specific religious label in the name of a church was not an automatic deterrent for them. The study suggested that Americans are most open to nondenominational and Baptist churches. One in three respondents said that a church described

AMERICANS WHO AGREE:

“When I see a church named the following, I assume it is not for me.”



LifeWayResearch.com

as nondenominational was not for them, while 43 percent said the same about a church with Baptist in its name. These findings line up with a 2014 phone survey by Lifeway Research which also found Baptist and nondenominational churches to be among those Americans were most open to and Pentecostal churches those they were open to the least.

(*Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/june/nondenominational-pentecostal-baptist-church-names-lifeway-.html>)

● **Minority religious groups lack representation at most colleges and universities across the U.S., a new study finds.** As reported in the online magazine *The Conversation* (June 6), researchers Jonathan Coley, Dhruba Das, and Gary Adler analyzed the databases of student organizations maintained by 1,953 colleges and universities across the country. They “found that Muslim student groups are located at only 28 percent of U.S. colleges and universities, while Jewish student groups are at just 25 percent of U.S. colleges and universities. Additionally, Buddhist and Hindu student groups are each represented at 5 percent of colleges and universities. And 66 percent of U.S. colleges and universities lack any type of minority religious student



Source: Scroll.in.

group.” Using U.S. Department of Education data to look at the characteristics of colleges and universities that are home to one or more minority religious student groups, the researchers found that schools with large endowments and other financial resources tend to have more such groups than schools with fewer resources, which is partly due to wealthier schools employing more student affairs professionals, who support student organizations on campus. As might be expected, schools with larger student bodies were also found to have more minority religious student groups.

(*The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/2-3-of-us-colleges-and-universities-lack-student-groups-for-muslims-jews-hindus-or-buddhists-183076>)

● **The 2021 Australian census results show a significant decline in religious affiliation, with the proportion of people choosing “no religion” increasing from 29.6 percent in 2016 to 38.4 percent in 2021, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (June 29) reports.** The rise of nine percentage points since 2016 is the single largest increase between censuses for people choosing no religion. Anglicans now represent only 9.8 percent of the population in Australia, with Catholicism continuing to be the largest church at 20 percent. Hindus and Muslims continue to rise, but only make up a small percentage of the



Source: ‘The Wee Flea’.

population. Hindus grew to 684,002 people, or 2.7 percent of the population, while Muslims grew to 813,392 people, which is 3.2 percent of the population.

Nicaragua raises heat on persecution of Catholics

The Catholic Church is facing increased repression in Nicaragua, leading to new resistance efforts by the hierarchy as well as a growing exile community in the U.S. that is taking up the fight for religious freedom. Writing in *The Pillar* (June 28), Edgar Beltrán Notes that things have changed dramatically since the time when Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega attempted to appease the church, even having a Catholic wedding with his longtime partner, Rosario Murillo, shortly before he was elected in 2007. In 2010, Ortega drove forward constitutional changes that allowed him to run indefinitely as president, and in 2018 he faced widespread protests due to a lack of free elections and a serious economic crisis. The church tried to serve as a mediator, an effort which backfired as Catholic officials faced even more “distrust from the Ortega regime, [which] turned the church into a political scapegoat,” even claiming that it took part in an attempted coup. The church’s support and sheltering of protesting students from a Managua university in July 2018 was another factor in the wave of repression that has now reached its highest point since the turbulent 1980s. “The last few months have seen a jailed priest and many



Source: Archdiocese of Miami.

more exiled, a Catholic TV station shuttered by the government, and numerous attacks on churches, priests, and bishops in Nicaragua,” Beltrán writes.

Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa has recently started fasting and urging a prayer movement to protest against government persecution. Father Harving Padilla is another one of the most critical voices of the Nicaraguan regime within the church. The parish priest of the San Juan Bautista parish spent over two weeks completely locked up within his church, claiming he was under “parish arrest.” Beltrán describes how the protest movement has taken on a spatial dimension, as the political and religious persecution has had the predictable effect of exile. Thousands of Nicaraguans have fled the country in the past few years due to political persecution and the dire economic conditions there. In 2021 and 2022 alone, over 160,000 Nicaraguans arrived in the U.S. Many of them have chosen Miami as their final destination because it already has a large *nica* community that now surpasses 120,000 people. Beltrán writes that “many of them know which is the first place they will go to after they arrive: Saint Agatha Church, in Miami, which has become the spiritual heart of the Nicaraguan exile in the U.S. Hundreds of Nicaraguans gather in the Church every Sunday—while a few thousand[] do so by streaming—to listen to the homilies of Bishop Silvio Báez,” who recently fled to Miami after government harassment.

(*The Pillar*, <https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/catholic-persecution-and-nicaraguas>)

Christian online influencers gain following in German-speaking countries

The pandemic’s encouragement of social media use has also impacted the field of religious communication and given online Christian influencers a stronger role among people under 40, writes Anna Neumaier (Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany) in the most recent issue of the *Zeitschrift für Religion und Weltanschauung* (May-June). The article focuses on German-speaking “Christfluencers,” who, while being unable to claim the millions of followers garnered by secular celebrities reaching beyond their linguistic and religious boundaries, are usually able to claim thousands or tens of thousands and attain the status of more accessible “micro-celebrities.” These online influencers come from



a variety of denominational backgrounds and range from progressive to conservative on social issues. How to live a Christian life is a frequent topic, but they may also deal with religious practices or convey a religious message while dealing with more general themes of generational interest, from fashion to environmental concerns.

Pointing to Danish scholar Stieg Hjarvard's observation that media are agents of religious change, Neumaier characterizes Christian influencers as an example of religious institutions' increasing adaptation to the ways and style of the media. Moreover, these influencers have proven to be well adapted to the decreasing relevance of denominational differences in European countries, most often presenting themselves simply as Christians rather than emphasizing any specific denominational orientation. In addition, while not being "official experts" within their own religious context, they nevertheless become role models for lived religiosity, pointing to a way of gaining influence that is quite different indeed from the way it is attained in traditional churches.

(*Zeitschrift für Religion und Weltanschauung* is the new, and now bimonthly, main title of the former *Materialdienst der Evangelischen Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen*: <http://www.ezw-berlin.de/publikationen/zeitschrift-fuer-religion-und-weltanschauung/>)

“Orthodox Belt” in Russia tracks loyalty to traditionalist values and Putin

An “Orthodox Belt,” running across central and southern Russia and the Volga region, has and will likely continue to form a firm base of loyalty to the Kremlin and Vladimir Putin as well as conservative and traditionalist values, according to researchers Andrey Shcherbak and Maria Ukhvatova. Writing in the journal *Nationalities Papers* (online in June), the researchers point out



Vladimir Putin celebrates Christmas with orthodox Christians in St Petersburg, January 2019 (source: Presidential Press and Information Office).

that the regional base of support for Putin and his traditionalist campaign has often been overlooked by social scientists. Constructing an index of religiosity on the regional level, they are able to locate an Orthodox Belt that is also associated with Kremlin loyalty as shown in voting behavior between 2011 and 2018. Two key regions in the Orthodox Belt, Lipetsk and Tambov, which rank among the highest in Orthodox and Kremlin loyalty, both show a combination of grassroots activism and higher-up coalitions between church and state.

The diocese of Lipetsk has vast influence in many areas of society, signing agreements with the regional departments of justice, healthcare, and culture, and partnering with the region's several educational institutions, while the diocese of Tambov is a leader in pro-life activities in the region and the introduction of Orthodox instruction in schools. But the making of the Orthodox Belt relies not only on grassroots initiatives but also top-down command, with the Russian Orthodox Church building partnerships with regional authorities but not with church NGOs and activist groups. Ironically, the Orthodox Belt includes the same regions that were part of the so-called "Red Belt" that had showed the strongest Communist loyalty. Shcherbak and Ukhvatova are uncertain how the Orthodox Belt will affect Russian politics after Covid's weakening of churches and do not mention the impact of Putin's invasion of Ukraine on this trend.

(*Nationalities Papers*, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/nationalities-papers>)

Even without Moscow influence, Ukraine's Orthodox divisions remain

While the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) has cut most ties with the Moscow Patriarchate since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, any possibility of a merger or even closer relations with the already independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) might be far off due to cultural and liturgical differences between the two church bodies, writes Nadieszda Kizenko in the blog *Public Orthodoxy* (June 21). Before the war, many in both the UOC and the OCU shared the desire for a canonical church in the local tradition, but their liturgical approaches reflected different interpretations of what that meant. "The OCU's plurality of liturgical expression, its multiple translations of Ukrainian, and its greater ecumenical initiatives, meant more liturgical experimentation, like incorporating Patriarch Bartholomew's 'ecological molieben' into the Church New Year...The OCU's attitude to the past was selective (in the sense of being focused on one narrative of Ukrainian history) and their attitude to the future expansive. With less emphasis on external forms like head-coverings for women, and a less hierarchical clergy-laity relationship, the OCU seemed to be evolving in the overall direction of UAOC in 1917–18, the Paris Exarchate in the 1920s–1950s, the OCA in the 1960s–1970s, or (in its emphasis on nation-building and secular memory culture) the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church."

"By contrast, the UOC's overall liturgical practice before the war was conservative, emphasizing ceremony and hierarchy. The UOC's attitude to the past was inclusive in the sense of having a diversity of narratives (Rus, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian empire, and the



Source: Warsaw Institute.

USSR), their attitude to the present conservatism, and their attitude to the future cautious. Clerics shared the desire of their flocks for a ‘sacral’ atmosphere and for conveying the sense that liturgy is a link to the past as well as to the living body of Christ. In this sense they could be compared to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America (with its maintenance of liturgical Greek), the Estonian Orthodox Church in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, or the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.” Before the invasion, neither the UOC nor the OCU could be seen as an embodiment of either pure tradition or innovation, or could claim to speak for the “true” Ukraine. But both sides may now be “coming closer to a coherent Ukrainian liturgical narrative.” The most potentially charged holidays relating to Ukrainian identity, such as the feasts of St. Olha, St. Volodymyr, and Ss. Borys and Gleb, may be an indicator of whether “celebrating the same rites might be one way of signaling unity. And perhaps engaging the war and its ghastly effects in liturgy may bring about a rapprochement that would not [have] been possible otherwise.”

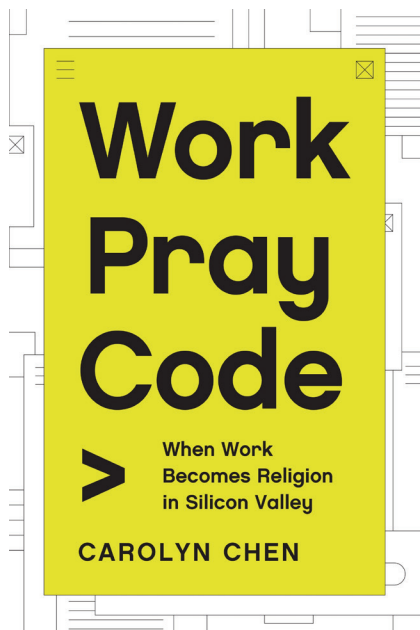
(*Public Orthodoxy*, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/06/21/lex-orandi-lex-credendi-ukraine-and-the-second-sunday-of-pentecost-in-uoc-and-ocu-liturgies/>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ Carolyn Chen’s new book *Work, Pray, Code* (Princeton University Press, \$27.95) looks at a fairly old trend—the way companies have attempted to bring spirituality into the workplace—in a fresh and provocative way, as she argues that the workplace and work itself is replacing religion for many American hi-tech professionals. The book, based on in-depth interviews with high-tech workers in Silicon Valley and observation of their work lives, finds that while non-affiliation has risen fastest in places like the San Francisco Bay Area that have large high-skilled populations, such professionals haven’t abandoned religion: “work has become a spiritual practice that inspired religious fervor. People are not ‘selling their souls’ at work. Rather, *work is where they find their souls.*” Thus Chen’s book challenges Max Weber’s classic thesis that work and capitalism disenchant people and society, although she does note that religion as work changes both traditional companies and society and the nature of faith and spirituality. As work has expanded to cover more aspects of people’s lives and also become more enjoyable—at least for higher-level professionals—it has taken on religious aspects, especially in the hands of management consultants who have increasingly used the concepts of “family” and “community” and spoken of the company as serving a meaningful higher goal.

In economic terms, companies and work crowd out the resource-intensive social demands of religion. What are called “human capital clusters,” geographical areas where highly skilled professionals gravitate, have created their own cultures and institutions—from coffee shops to yoga studios—where competition with religious institutions is greatest. At the same time, religion is moving into the workplace, most notably meditation techniques from Buddhist and Hindu sources. Chen’s interviews reveal that many Silicon Valley professionals (especially engineers) don’t have a crisis of faith so much as they quietly put religion off to one corner of their lives or neglect it because of negative peer pressure, professional busyness, and the move away from their hometowns. Chen finds a secularizing effect of moving to Silicon Valley among both domestic “tech migrants” and South Asian immigrants. Even those who maintain religious involvement find it difficult due to the more secular environment of the San Francisco Bay Area. Yet Chen notes that older people with families and traditionally religious people are distinct from the 70 percent of her respondents she calls “true believers” in their work, in that they find alternative sources of meaning outside of their jobs.

But the pressure to succeed amid the high rate of failure among start-ups in Silicon Valley as well as the way work is invested with more meaning than that found in most other kinds of jobs (leading to another kind of crisis of faith) also push workers to find support and belonging in their companies—what Chen calls “work conversions.” This is also where the infusion of spiritual techniques and teachings into workplaces (as well as many other perks) assumes importance, as many managers see them as a form of self-care as well as making for happier workers. While workers deride open use of the term “spirituality,”



“behind closed doors with me, many corporate managers said that spirituality is an important—if not the most important—dimension of the work they do,” Chen writes. They even used terms like “helping people connect to self and Universe,” “awakening mystery,” and “sneaking in spirituality,” even if in public they would say “unleashing your potential.” The executive coaching industry has come to specialize in integrating spirituality into workplace learning, development, and human resources, often using the language of overcoming workplace alienation by developing one’s “authentic self” and seeking work as a “spiritual journey.” Chen writes that while these ideas complement the instrumental approach that hi-tech workers take to their lives and professions, such use of spiritual traditions shapes them to accommodate productivity and performance over mysticism. In particular, the ethnic and religious dimensions of Buddhism are papered over to make the spirituality more scientific and secular, with meditation teachers having to make significant trade-offs to continue their work.. The book concludes with the sober observation that as workplaces increasingly draw social, spiritual and communal energies, they can deplete the energy people usually devote to other social institutions, including organized religion, that have traditionally been sources of life fulfillment and social betterment.

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

1) National conservatism is seen as an intellectual outgrowth of the nationalist and populist presidency of Donald Trump, but the religious positions of the fledgling movement have not been spelled out. That changed, however, with the recent issuing of a manifesto for the movement. The document features such MAGA faithful as Charlie Kirk of Turning Point USA, Julie Kelly of *American Greatness*, and the Manhattan Institute’s Chris Rufo, but also former establishment conservatives such as Roger Kimball, the Hoover Institution’s Victor Davis Hanson, and retired Vanderbilt University political science and law professor Carol Swain. The manifesto, or **statement of principles**, issued in June by Yozam Hazony’s Edmund Burke Institute and co-drafted by the *American Conservative*’s Rod Dreher and *First Things* editor Rusty Reno, advocates for the “traditional family, built around a lifelong bond between a man and a woman,” and a strong role for “public religion.” The document calls for a biblically based orientation “to the political traditions of the nation, to public morals, to the defense of the weak, and to the recognition of things rightly regarded as sacred.” It asserts that in a country like the U.S., where a “Christian majority exists, public life should be rooted in Christianity and its moral vision, which should be honored by the state and other institutions both public and private.”

Yet the manifesto makes room for Jews and other religious minorities, who are to be “protected in the observance of their own traditions, in the free governance of their communal institutions, and in all

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matters pertaining to the rearing and education of their children. Adult individuals should be protected from religious or ideological coercion in their private lives and in their homes.” The preamble of the document expresses an interest in “discourse and collaboration with movements akin to our own in India, Japan, and other non-Western nations,” even while Abrahamic monotheism is viewed as the only “enduring foundation for viable nationhood.” Although formally linked to national conservatism, the manifesto did not include the “integralists,” a small group of conservative intellectuals pressing for a Roman Catholic role in political life, such as Sohrab Ahmari, Patrick Deneen, Gladden Pappin, and Adrian Vermeule. (Source: *The Bulwark*, June 22)

2) herchurch, formerly known as Ebenezer Lutheran Church in San Francisco, “is an emerging, liberating feminist congregation in the Christian-Lutheran denomination,” more precisely the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The congregation, long a center of controversy in the ELCA, has recently become more explicitly pagan (while retaining its Lutheran affiliation), celebrating the divine feminine while the church building has been turned purple in order to honor the Goddess, to be in solidarity with women and all persons who are oppressed and denied equal rights, and to advocate for marriage rights for all people. Herchurch, once the mother church of Swedish Lutherans on the West Coast, could be described as “Christopagan,” and one of the priestesses, who offers astrological readings, is introduced as the “resident witch.” While herchurch represents an obvious target for critics of the ELCA such as blogger Dan Skogen, who has written some 30 articles about the congregation on his site *Exposing the ELCA* (<https://www.exposingtheelca.com>), it is not alone in the understanding that some pagan expressions might be associated with the Christian tradition. (Source: *Zeitschrift für Religion und Weltanschauung*, May-June)

