

**Vol. 33, No. 8****June 2018****FEATURE STORY:****Mainline church activism reviving mission or risking its base?**

While mainline churches in the Trump era see a new opening to renew their social activist mission, the results of this engagement so far have often been as much conflict and congregational divisions as vitality and growth, writes Ian Lovett in the *Wall Street Journal* (May 5). “Political activism is reshaping what it means to go to mainline Protestant churches in the Trump era, with tensions bubbling between parishioners who believe the church should be a force for political change, and those who believe it should be a haven for spiritual renewal.” As some congregations have turned themselves into hubs of activism on issues ranging from immigration to anti-racism, they have seen their numbers increase, especially among young people—once the most alienated segment of the church. Clergy are also seeing a more prominent role for themselves in public life—something they had not witnessed since the 1960s. The resulting mood of alienation and fear of politicizing the churches among more conservative members is acknowledged by the clergy, yet they believe this may be their last chance to have influence and be a force for change.

Lovett adds that the many denominations haven’t yet released membership figures but that there are anecdotal reports of increased church attendance. The United Church of Christ reported a decline in 2017, but at a slower pace than in recent years. Lovett notes that a number of individual congregations in the UCC—including 14 of 18 that were surveyed in the Southwest—said that attendance had increased during the first year of the Trump presidency. Mainline churches in the South are still seeing the fallout from the clash in Charlottesville last summer as well as the ongoing conflict over displaying confederate statues and symbols. Activist clergy say such efforts of resistance are worth the prospect of further decline. Diane Butler-Bass, an Episcopalian author, said that “fights over how and whether to engage politically are ‘taking place in every congregation at this moment.’” Citing the waffling of mainline white churches in the civil-rights era, she said that those churches that took a stand for civil rights often shrank or closed.

But there is the persisting question of whether mainline congregations can draw many committed members who share these liberal activist views in the way that more conservative churches have

drawn the politically active. In the *Religion in Public* blog (May 29), political scientist Ryan Burge looks at figures on frequent attenders across the conservative-moderate-liberal church spectrum and their social and political preferences. Overall, Trump won 83.2 percent of frequent attenders (attending multiple times a week) among white church members. Evangelicals, who voted for Trump in large numbers, have the largest share of frequent attenders, but even frequent attenders identifying themselves as liberal tended to vote for Trump at 14.5 percent, as opposed to six percent for liberal adherents in general. Looking at two fairly typical mainline denominations, Burge finds that frequent attenders in the United Methodist Church were clearly in Trump's camp, while in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America there was no statistical difference in voting preference between frequent attenders and members as a whole. Burge could find "NO instance where the most frequent church attenders were more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton than those who attended at all levels. This is true across racial and educational lines."

(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2018/05/24/searching-for-the-religious-left/>)



## ARTICLES:

### **Evangelical-Catholic alliance shows fissures in the era of Trump and Francis**

Roman Catholics and evangelicals have shared social and political priorities over the past three decades "but now find their agendas diverging in the era of President Trump and Pope Francis," according to a *National Public Radio* report by Tom Gjelten (May 25). In recent decades their shared opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage and common interest in faith-based schools

brought them into a close alliance after a century of polemics and distrust. But this coalition is feeling new pressures largely because of their varied responses to the Trump administration's policies and programs. While Donald Trump had Catholic advisers during his campaign, since taking office he has leaned more on his evangelical base and consulted its leaders, such as Robert Jeffress of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, far more than Catholic leaders. For the Catholic Church, the welfare of immigrants has become a key concern, while at least the evangelical rank-and-file have been more supportive of immigration control (although surveys suggest many Catholics show similar concerns about immigration).

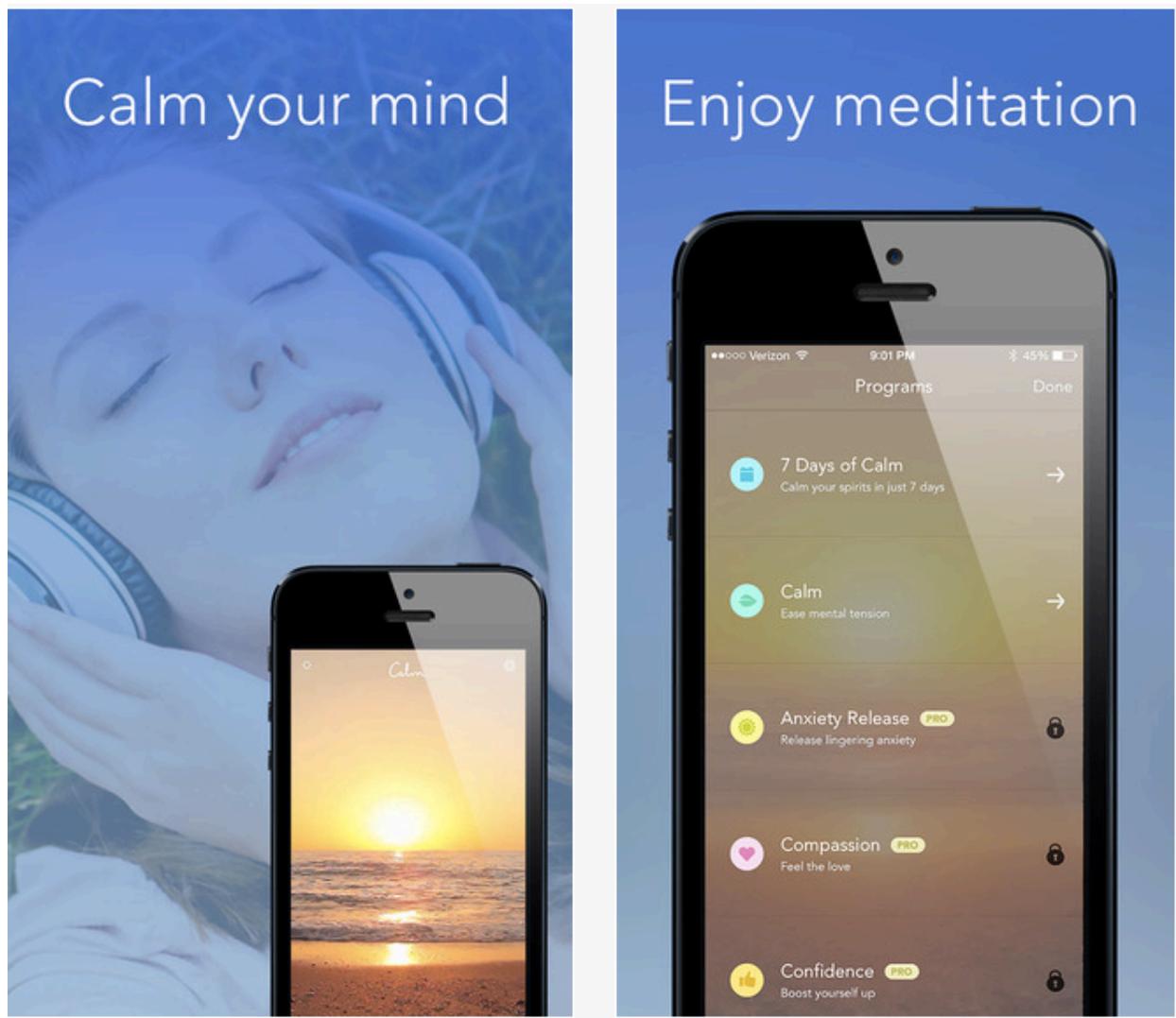
In addition, no Catholic leader endorsed Trump's decision to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel, fearing the impact on a peace process. Gjelten also reports that "there is some evidence that evangelicals may be replacing Catholics as the base of the anti-abortion movement. Since 2010, the states passing new abortion restrictions generally have had smaller Catholic populations. None of the eight most heavily Catholic states in the country have enacted such laws." Trump is not the only figure that is leading to new tensions in the alliance between evangelicals and Catholics. University of North Carolina historian Molly Worthen says that distinct Catholic political priorities have also been highlighted by Pope Francis. "He's become sort of the anti-Trump...He's become this rallying figure for traumatized liberals who are looking for some kind of figure of existential world historical significance who can counteract what they see as the ugliness of the current administration." [It should be noted that conservative Catholics have been the main players in the alliance with evangelicals and that these Catholics are also critical of the papacy of Francis, suggesting that these partnerships may endure, if less so on the national level].

(*National Public Radio*, <https://www.npr.org/2018/05/25/613457429/roman-catholics-and-evangelicals-move-apart-in-their-political-priorities>)



## Designing rituals minus the religion targets “nones”

Rituals, like spirituality itself, are increasingly being separated from their communal and religious contexts and being designed for and in some cases marketed to the non-affiliated (or “nones”). In *The Atlantic* (May 7), Sigal Samuel reports on the work of the Ritual Design Lab in Silicon Valley, where a small team of “interaction designers” is working to generate new rituals for modern life, with an eye to user experience. Using concepts from cognitive and evolutionary psychology, the lab crafts rituals for both individuals and organizations, including such prominent firms as Microsoft. The team’s website offers a Ritual Design Hotline with the message: “You tell us your problem. We will make you a ritual.” A Ritual Inventory invites visitors to add any interesting ritual they have created or witnessed to the lab’s database, and an app, IdeaPop, helps them brainstorm and create their own rituals.



The lab has its roots in Stanford University’s Institute of Design, where its co-founders Kursat Ozenc and Margaret Hagan both teach. In 2015, they proposed a new course on ritual design. To

their surprise, more than 100 mostly secular students signed up. “The new generation, they want bite-size spirituality instead of a whole menu of courses,” says Ozenc. “Design thinking can offer this, because the whole premise of design is human-centeredness. It can help people shape their spirituality based on their needs. Institutionalized religions somehow forget this—that at the center of any religion should be the person.” Ozenc is planning to introduce a project called Pop-Up Prayer, which aims to give urban young professionals a way to pray when they’re on the go by having an organization buy a prayer kit, place it in a room where it’s okay for a visitor to pray, and post an online listing.

The lab is part of a small but growing movement to bring designed spirituality outside of religious auspices. An incubator for “spiritual entrepreneurs” was recently started at Columbia University’s business school. In Europe, a European Ritual Network sprang up three years ago to bring together ritual designers in Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands. There is considerable debate among ritual designers about questions of legitimacy, consumerism, and individualism as they make up rituals that lack the time-tested and communal nature of traditional religious rituals and practices. While some argue for the value of self-created rituals, others are not opposed to outsourcing their creation to experts. Some ritual designers charge people for the rituals they create, but so far, Ritual Design Lab refuses to do so.

(*Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/05/ritual-design-lab-secular-atheist/559535/>)

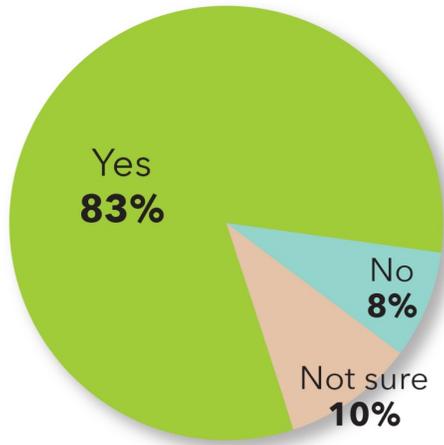
## CURRENT RESEARCH

● **Most Protestant churchgoers define and practice tithing—giving 10 percent of one’s income for religious purposes—in a variety of ways, according to a new survey by LifeWay Research.** About 50 percent of respondents said they could give their tithes to a Christian ministry instead of a church, and one in three said tithes could go to help a person in need, while more than one in six said their funds could go to a secular charity. “For many churchgoers, tithing is just another term for generosity,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. The survey was conducted among 1,010 Americans who attended a Protestant or nondenominational church at least monthly and 1,000 Protestant senior pastors. Pastors were less likely than people in the pews to view tithing as a continuing biblical command, with 83 percent of churchgoers saying tithing was a current requirement and only 72 percent of pastors agreeing.

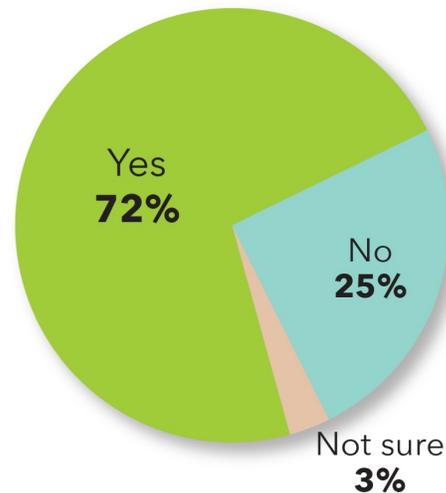
(*LifeWay Research*, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/05/10/churchgoers-say-they-tithe-but-not-always-to-the-church/>)

## Is tithing a biblical command that still applies today?

AMONG AMERICAN CHURCHGOERS



AMONG PROTESTANT PASTORS



Note: Some totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.



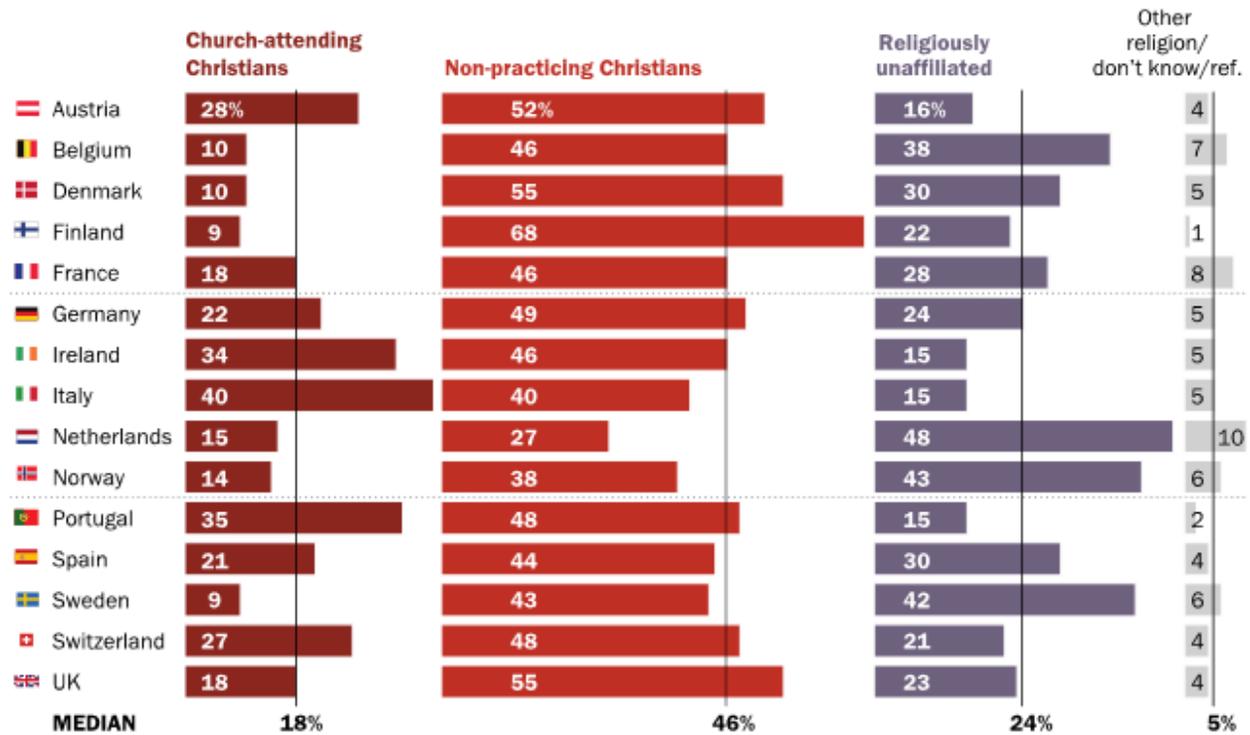
LifeWayResearch.com

● **A new Pew survey finds a higher percentage of Western Europeans identifying as Christian than might be expected from their low levels of religious activity.** Despite the region’s secularization, a median of 71 percent of the 24,599 adults surveyed across 15 countries still identified as Christian, even if a median of only 22 percent said that they attended services at least once a month. Non-practicing Christians made up the largest single group in the survey, with a median share of 46 percent of the population across the region, compared to the non-affiliated, whose median share stood at 24 percent. These non-practicing Christians displayed a mix of religious and social views, some closer to those of their churchgoing neighbors and others to those of the unaffiliated. This enduring level of Christian identity can have political effects as well, for example in the growing debate over Muslim immigration to Europe. “Christian identity remains a meaningful marker in Western Europe, even among those who seldom go to church. It is not just a ‘nominal’ identity devoid of practical importance,” according to the Pew researchers.

(Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/>)

### In most Western European countries, non-practicing Christians are largest group

% who are ...



Note: Church-attending Christians are defined as those who say they attend church at least monthly. Non-practicing Christians are defined as those who attend less often. Other religion/don't know/ref. are mostly Muslim respondents. General population surveys in Western Europe may not fully capture the size of minority populations, such as Muslims. Therefore, these figures may differ from previously published demographic estimates. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Being Christian in Western Europe"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

● **State registration requirements for religious organizations are sharply increasing and are a strong predictor of increased restrictions on religion, particularly for minority faith groups, according to a new study.** Writing in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (online in May), Roger Finke, Jonathan Fox, and Dane Mataic used trend data from three global collections as well as case studies of five nations—France, Russia, China, Azerbaijan, and Austria—to understand the relationship of registration to religious restrictions. They found a dramatic increase in the use of religious registration as well as growing requirements for those registering, and an increase in the number of nations openly discriminating against unregistered groups (for instance, 27 percent of the countries studied had no registration requirement in 1990, but by 2012 this was the case for only 10 percent). The researchers highlighted the consequences of this increased use of registration requirements through the various ways in which their five cases used the registration process to deny religious freedoms, including by using complex and poorly defined procedures and policies, submitting to local religious and cultural pressures, imposing

higher standards for minority religions, and denying privileges and rewards granted to other religions. They also found that the proportion of Muslims was a significant predictor of increased restrictions on minorities, and that government funding of religion increased the restrictions on all faith groups.

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14685906>)



● **The Hadza, a hunter-gatherer tribe from Tanzania, has been considered the least religious people in the world (and, in fact, are hailed by atheists as proving that religion is not a universal trait), but a study in the journal *Religion, Brain & Behavior* (May) suggests that the group’s low rate of religiosity may be a factor in their lack of altruism toward outsiders.** Psychologist Coren Lee Apicella writes that “Anthropologists have described the Hadza as having either no religion or a minimal form of religion since there are no religious structures, leaders, ceremonies, or belief in an afterlife.” In Apicella’s interviews with the Hadza, he did find that many had vague ideas about a deity, such as in describing the sun and the moon as gods. In an experiment to test the group’s altruism toward those outside their camp, he gave tribe members two incentive-based economic games where they rolled dice to decide how to share resources between two people, one from the game-player’s own camp and the other being a Hadza living in a distant camp. Apicella writes that the tribe showed among the highest cross-cultural levels of favoritism (“rule-bending”) toward members in their own camps. This was unexpected since the

Hadza, like most hunter-gatherer groups, have a high degree of egalitarianism, sharing and cooperation between individuals. Apicella concludes that the Hadza lack the incentive to promote the spread of cooperation without a belief in an interventionist and omniscient deity who cares about how people treat each other.

(*Religion, Brain & Behavior*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rbb20/current>)



● **A study of young people who left Western societies to join jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq and their families and friends finds a pattern of individuals experiencing “acute emerging adult identity struggles” that are resolved by religious beliefs of world change and strengthened by small group dynamics and the influence of charismatic leaders.** The study from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue was conducted by Amarnath Amarasingan and Lorne L. Dawson among 43 parents, siblings, and friends of 30 men and women who traveled to Syria and Iraq to join these groups, said to be among the largest of such samples yet studied. Most of the young adults in the sample did not come from dysfunctional homes and were considered “good kids”—if often “strong-willed.” But the reasons why these future fighters left their homes mystified their parents and friends, even though the latter tended to notice changes in their



behavior before their parents did. Nevertheless, nearly three-quarters of the fighters maintained communication with their families and friends, though a few families never received a call from their children once they left. These emerging adults had experiences of marginalization, often related to their religious identity, which served as triggers for radicalization. The researchers conclude that the “choice to become a foreign fighter is the result of a perfect storm of diverse factors operating in somewhat different ways and to different degrees in each case.”

(The study *I Left to be Closer to Allah* can be downloaded at: [http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Families\\_Report.pdf](http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Families_Report.pdf))

## ARTICLES:

### **Catholic Poland charting its own path from Ireland’s liberalization on abortion?**

Ireland’s vote to overturn its constitutional ban on abortion was not only another sign of the country’s weakening Catholic identity but has also been seen as pointing to a pattern that may be followed by another European country, namely Poland, according to the *Wall Street Journal* (May 29). Ireland’s vote on abortion last month “echoed through another Roman Catholic-majority country in Europe, but one where the procedure is



broadly illegal and the subject of a continuing battle,” write Drew Hinshaw and Francis Rocca. “We think that now there will be pressure on Poland to also go in the same direction,” said Rozalia Kielmans Ratynska, a legal analyst at the antiabortion Ordo Iuris Institute. But Poland is already the mirror image of Ireland. “The only outstanding question on abortion in Poland is whether its Catholic and conservative government will succeed in tightening already strict laws regulating the procedure,” even as Poles have widely protested such measures, Rocca and Hinshaw add.

The different directions taken by Poland and Ireland may also show how the Catholic Church itself is divided under the influences of secularism and nationalism and the leadership of a pope who has taken the accent off a confrontational, culture-wars approach. To conservatives’ consternation, Pope Francis made no public statement in the run-up to the Irish referendum. In such an

environment, “countries like Ireland and Poland are left to choose their own paths as they seek to fill pews in countries where populations are stagnating and young people are emigrating to wealthier, but more secular states like the UK.” Because the child sex abuse scandals and the upswing of secular liberalism have eaten away at the Church’s authority in Ireland, clergy conceded that their criticism of the vote would not sway the public, and actually further hurt the Church’s reputation. In contrast, the populism and nationalism of Poland’s ruling Law and Justice Party has reinforced the Church’s positions. Even the state-owned media have criticized the Irish vote as revealing “the once-Catholic Ireland.” Polls show that 56 percent of the Polish public supports existing abortion laws, while nine percent want to tighten them, and 29 percent want to loosen them.

### Church and sports find close harmony in Russia

As the FIFA World Cup is about to start in Russia and attract football aficionados from around the entire world, Regina Elsner (Center for East European and International Studies, Berlin) looks at the way the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is approaching sports from a position quite similar to that of the Russian state—as an important aspect of a healthy lifestyle (even though physical health is not a goal in itself) and as an expression of patriotism. In recent years, the ROC has developed its pastoral work among athletes and sportspeople, as evidenced by a religious service conducted by Patriarch Kirill for the Russian Olympic team upon their return to Moscow in February 2018. The team has its own Orthodox chaplain, since the church sees athletes as believers as well, writes Elsner in the journal *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (April–May).

Before the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014, the ROC published a new edition of the book *Christianity and Sports* by Deacon Filipp Ponomarev. In December 2015, a Patriarchal Commission on sports and related topics was constituted. The World Cup offers a new opportunity for the church to express its views on sports, including their having a clear educational value for young people. Across Russian Orthodox dioceses, sports are seen as a way to interact with youth, but also to prevent



addictions or to rehabilitate addicts. According to Elsner, the church also sees some missionary potential in sports events, at least as an opportunity to acquaint foreign visitors with Russian Orthodox culture. There are also those among Orthodox Christians in Russia who look at sports with suspicion as worship of one’s body and pagan enjoyment incompatible with Christianity. But church officials distance themselves from such attitudes and prefer to emphasize the balance between physical and spiritual health. The emphasis on sports as a contribution to the strengthening of national consciousness has been evident in talks by the Patriarch and other leading ROC figures,

even more so at a time when accusations by international sports organizations regarding doping and corruption among Russian athletes have increased but are often seen as lies or foreign pressure. The church also shows eagerness to promote specifically Russian forms of sports.

(*Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Institut G2W, Birmensdorferstrasse 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland - <https://www.g2w.eu/>)

## Quietist Salafism shows resilience in post-Arab Spring world

Rejecting revolutionary protests as well as jihadism, quietist Salafism has proved until now remarkably resilient and has been able to preserve its position in post-Arab Spring environments, writes Laurent Bonnefoy (Sciences Po, Paris) in the *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* (January–March). The perception that the turmoil starting in 2011 has led to a worse situation than the earlier one may have even made its stand attractive. Initially, the support of quietist Salafis for authoritarian regimes in the atmosphere of protest of the Arab Spring had seemed bound to erode their credibility. Reluctantly breaking with political nonpartisanship, Salafis in several countries entered the political field, sometimes with initial success, as shown by the Al-Nur party in Egypt, although it later lost its impetus. At the same time, sections of Salafism became politicized, and those that didn't were made to feel even more welcome by regimes concerned about protests and opponents.

Quietist Salafi preachers have continued to warn that entering into party politics involves allegiance to democracy and sows discord (*fitna*). Sticking to an apolitical stance, they have capitalized on the failure of democratic transitions and uprisings. They have also denounced jihadism both on doctrinal grounds and based on their assessment that such violence will only bring more harm than benefits to Muslims. The chaos created by the Arab Spring events



has made quietist Salafi preachers look farsighted in retrospect. Obviously, Bonnefoy notes, their apolitical stance has fulfilled a political role—against the 2011 and 2012 revolutionary uprisings, against the Muslim Brotherhood when it was in power in Egypt in 2013 and 2014, and against the Islamic State organization in 2015 and 2016. There has been no radical reorientation among quietist Salafis. However, Bonnefoy concludes by wondering how long and how far grassroots Salafis will support Salafi leaders as political and religious environments change, potentially opening a variety of options.

(*Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 10 rue Monsieur le Prince, 75006 Paris, France - <https://journals.openedition.org/assr/>)

## Changing image of Sufism in Turkey’s religious education program

Previously presented as an historical phenomenon and an instance of reactionary Islam in textbooks used for religious education in Turkey, Sufi orders (*tarikats*) are now described in a positive light, writes Manami Ueno (Kyoto University) in *Turkish Studies* (June). This does not mean that the currently ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is willing to give up state control over the religion, but rather that Sufism is now considered as within the range of what the government sees as acceptable Islam. Sufi orders had been banned by the Turkish authorities under Kemal Atatürk in the 1920s and only managed to survive under other guises. Turkish authorities had also removed religious education, although it was later reintroduced as an elective course. After the military coup of 1980, an approach described as the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” was promoted. A course on Religious Culture and Morals was then made compulsory by the military government in 1982. A comparison of the seven textbooks published between 1983 and 2012 shows how modifications were introduced over time regarding Sufism as well as other topics.

The military government in the 1980s wanted to prevent the influence of “reactionary Islam,” of which Sufi orders were seen as an expression. Sufism was not ignored, and the contributions of Sufi orders in Turkish history were acknowledged, but they were presented as having degenerated in recent centuries, thus justifying their ban and making them a thing of the past. In the 2002 edition, under the government of Bülent Ecevit, the description of Sufism was kept in the textbooks, but references to the orders were removed. The 2008 and 2012 textbooks written under the AKP government not only increased the number of pages about Sufism, but devoted a specific chapter to the topic. While still refraining from



using the word *tarikats*, several “schools of Sufism” were mentioned as active to the present day, with an emphasis on the positive values of Sufism and its being “completely within the scope of standard Islam,” contributing to “the cultural wealth of religion.” Thus, the AKP government has been drawing new lines about what acceptable Islam is and asserting its views on religion. This is also evidenced by the appearance of Alevis (the largest group next to Sunni Muslims in Turkey) in the 2008 textbook, presented as one expression of Sufism—although a number of Alevis have resented it as an attempt at the “Sunnitization” of Alevism.

(*Turkish Studies*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ftur20/current>)

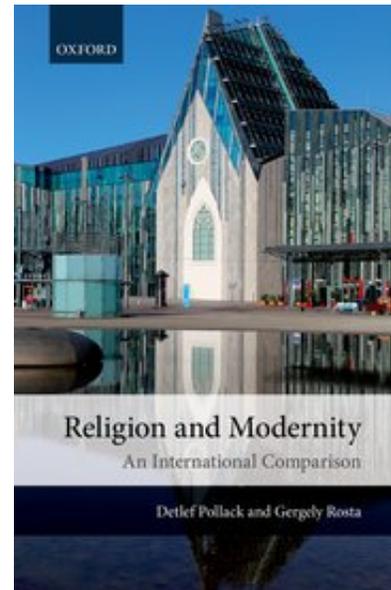
## Findings & Footnotes

■ Placed under the editorship of the well-known and prolific Italian scholar Massimo Introvigne (Center for Studies on New Religions, CESNUR), *Bitter Winter* is a new, free online magazine on religious liberty and human rights in China that was launched in mid-May. Its content is available in English, Chinese and Korean. Concerns about the fate of harshly persecuted new religious movements (NRMs), such as the Church of Almighty God (CAG), seem to have played a role in launching this new website, described as “a cooperative enterprise by scholars, human rights activists, and members of religious organizations persecuted in China.” The CAG has indeed replaced Falun Gong as “public enemy number one” among NRMs in China, Introvigne said to the Italian daily *La Stampa* (May 14). But the content is not limited to such movements. So far, the publication has featured items on the Catholic Church and on Islam.



While information on the obstacles and repression faced by mainline religions in China is often available from other news sources, both secular and religious (e.g. the Catholic news agency Asia News, <http://www.asianews.it/theme-en/China-1.html>), news sources on NRMs in China are less commonly available, unless some spectacular event occurs. Content is limited due to the fact that the website has only been online for a few weeks, but, provided *Bitter Winter* manages to keep up its pace in publishing daily news, it might turn into a useful resource for drawing the attention of scholars or journalists to topics of interest in the field of Chinese NRMs. This is no longer a fringe issue of interest merely to small circles of experts. On the one hand, China has become a country of vibrant religious creativity, some of which is getting exported beyond its own borders. On the other hand, members of movements such as the CAG are fleeing persecution in China and are applying for asylum in Western countries in growing numbers, thus raising questions for agencies dealing with such requests—and there might be similar waves linked to other NRMs in the future. For more information, visit: <https://bitterwinter.org/>

■ *Religion and Modernity: An International Comparison* (Oxford University Press, \$125), by Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosa, represents an ambitious attempt to chart religious change throughout much of the world and develop theories that take these variations and different contexts into account. The book's major case studies serve as examples of different patterns of belief and belonging evident today, though they are mainly from Western and Christian contexts (with the exception of South Korea). West Germany is studied for its moderate level of religious decline and "dechurchification"; the Netherlands as a case of "religion in free fall"; Russia as a case of apparent religious revival; Italy and Poland as European exceptions of religious vitality; and the U.S. and South Korea as outliers to the secular European patterns. Throughout the European case studies, the authors argue that individualized and alternative forms of spirituality and hot spots of evangelical growth are unlikely to compensate for substantial decline in the social significance of religion in these countries. There is little discussion of the revival of nationalist and populist currents in these countries or the growth of Islam and the implications these developments may hold for the social significance of religion.

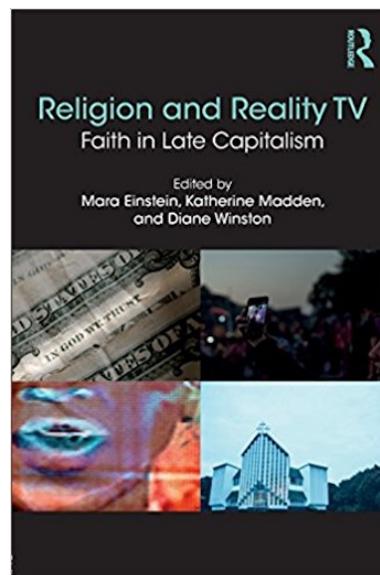


Only in Poland and Italy is there enough of a "sacred canopy" of strong institutions and ingrained beliefs and practices that create religious vitality (and, interestingly, individualized beliefs), and even here there are signs of decline. Pollack and Rosa argue that the American case is more an exception for its relatively high rates of religiosity than—as some social scientists have argued—Europe is for its secularization, but they also see the process of secularization as underway in the U.S. as religion becomes more a source of social division than integration and advancement. They add that if the values of "self-realization, confidence, tolerance, the equality of men and women, preservation of the environment, and moral and sexual freedom" are increased by economic growth in the U.S., "then this also helps to weaken religious ties." The authors stress that they eschew a single universal theory to explain all the changes documented in their book, but they tend to see growing pluralism, autonomy of individuals and spheres of life, and resulting modernization, as pointing to the declining social importance of religion. On the last page, they plainly state that those who reject the secularization thesis ignore empirical data in favor of intellectual fashion.

■ Today's plethora of video media, ranging from streaming TV and cable to You Tube and vlogs, has unintentionally created new opportunities for religious and spiritual expression, and nowhere is this more evident than on reality TV shows, according to the new book *Religion and Reality TV* (Routledge, \$39.95). The book, edited by Mara Einstein, Katherine Madden, and Diane Winston, widens its own scope of interest by also examining shows that are only implicitly religious, ranging from makeover TV shows to *The Apprentice*, seeing them as extolling a new post-recession American civic religion based on capitalism, individualism, self-help and the prosperity gospel (and indeed being a precursor for the religious enthusiasm surrounding Donald Trump). But even setting aside these more interpretive chapters, there

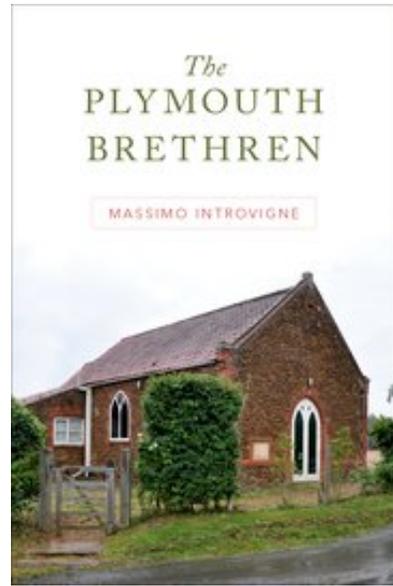
is more than enough to mine from the explicitly religious shows, including *Sister Wives*, *Preachers of L.A.*, *All-American Muslim*, *Answered Prayers*, various shows on the Amish, and several paranormal reality shows.

While much is made by contributors about how these shows are staged along the lines of dominant class, race, and gender divisions, the productions themselves illustrate broader trends in religion and the media. A chapter on “vlogs” of Mormon and evangelical home and family life suggests how reality TV-style media has been domesticated, as these families produce, edit, and distribute these videos on YouTube from their homes to a large fan base, who often interact with the “stars” through social media. The drama and theatrics that are the draw of reality TV are also clearly apparent on religious reality TV, with such shows as *All-American Muslim* whipping up righteous indignation between evangelical and progressive Christians over the cancellation of the show due to supposed Islamophobia. Other chapters look at how Mormon-based polygamy was cast in a respectable “Methodist” manner, hinting at its growing acceptance, and how evangelical themes of deliverance and exorcism are featured in the many reality TV shows about hauntings, as traditional ghosts are now replaced by demons.



■ Massimo Introvigne’s new book *The Plymouth Brethren* (Oxford University Press, \$24.95) looks at an influential movement/denomination with roots in the 19th century that has largely slipped below the radar of many scholars of new religious movements. Recent events and legal cases involving the Brethren and religious freedom, namely their operation of schools around the world and the familiar charges of cult-like behavior and mind control (resulting in the UK challenging the group’s status as a charitable organization in 2012), have pushed this obscure movement into the spotlight. Introvigne, an Italian specialist on new religious movements, makes it clear that even apart from the current controversies, the Brethren have had wide influence beyond their numbers, especially in their emphasis on biblical prophecy (such as teachings of the premillennial return of Christ), as well as their also unheralded social ministries. Introvigne’s work is mainly one of history and taxonomy as he traces and delineates the large and dizzying number of schisms and new formations of Brethren groups over the past century. He argues that Brethren factionalism, often over fine points of doctrine, leadership disputes, and their degree of separation from the world and other Christians, fills “ultrafundamentalist,” “fundamentalist” and “conservative” niches as these groups move between retrenchment and mainstreaming (seen most clearly in the “open Brethren,” who are closely aligned with evangelicals).

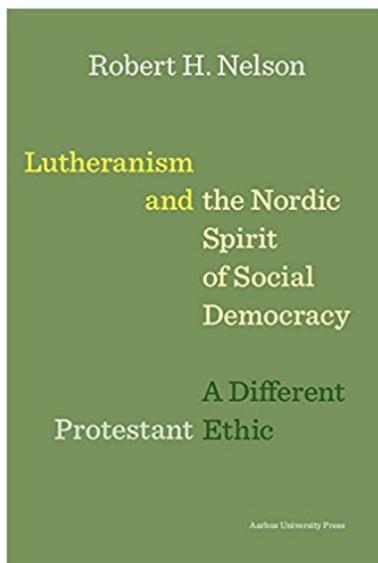
Introvigne devotes the rest of the book to examining why the stricter groups, known as the “exclusive Brethren,” have come under fire in Europe, the UK, and Australia for alleged authoritarian tendencies, sexual abuse, and “mind control” when they have rarely faced such charges in the past. Introvigne argues that the anti-cult movement is facing a crisis as its old targeted movements have either declined (such as the Unification Church) or withstood such attacks (in the case of the Church of Scientology), and that it has therefore sought new culprits, namely such separatists as the Brethren, while aligning itself with liberal secularist groups. So far, the accusations against the Brethren have not been proven, and Introvigne’s own investigation of Brethren schools finds little there that would alarm anyone familiar with conservative Protestant education. He concludes that it is the Brethren’s practice of separation (from “heterodox” believers and “compromisers,” as well non-believers) that will arouse suspicion in societies showing high degrees of openness and relativism, with religious freedom often hanging in the balance in such encounters.



■ Although published in 2017 by a small Danish press (and overlooked by **RW**), American economist Robert Nelson’s *Lutheranism and the Nordic Spirit of Social Democracy* (Aarhus University Press, 240 KR), deserves more attention for its bold attempt to extend Max Weber’s Protestant-ethic thesis beyond the confines of capitalism and Calvinism. Nelson, who is most well known for his writings on the theological and religious meanings in economics and environmentalism, argues that the welfare state in Scandinavia is more the product of an implicit Lutheranism than a secularized, post-Christian culture. He acknowledges that Lutheranism itself has been secularized and liberalized in Nordic countries, but he joins other scholars who have recently been asserting that there is a “Lutheran ethic” that has influenced a whole range of beliefs and practices, involving attitudes toward the poor, work, social solidarity, and governance, that have shaped these societies differently from those with Catholic and Calvinist influence. For instance, Lutheran teachings tended to hold a “critical” attitude toward the poor and poverty, in contrast to the hostile attitude of Calvinism and the affirming stance of Catholicism. This belief created a strong pro-work ethic even while regulating free-market capitalism with ethical standards and moral considerations not seen in Calvinistic countries (and quite different than Weber’s Protestant ethic).

But Nelson’s study stands out in treating “modernized” Lutheranism as still being a significant factor in the contemporary differences between Scandinavia and other countries—a thesis that might surprise

Nordic people themselves. He writes that “despite their outward religious skepticism, the Finnish and other Nordic country majorities of the population are still Lutheran at their core. But their deep Lutheran convictions—often unknown to them—have taken new forms that might be described as a ‘modernized Lutheranism,’ or...perhaps it should be called a ‘secular Lutheranism.’... [This is] a severe modern case of religious confusion, actual Christian belief embedded in and justified by arguments supposedly based in science and sometimes overtly professing an antagonism to Christianity.” This religious confusion might be seen in the fact that although about 80 percent of their incomes go to paying taxes, Scandinavians still show an unusual enthusiasm for work. “If Nordic workers behaved according to the standard economic assumption that rational individuals pursue their self-interest, the economies of Nordic countries might collapse for lack of a labor force,” Nelson writes. He speculates that “rather than being motivated by economic reasons, work in Scandinavia is more like the fulfillment of a religious calling.”



The “less happy” social influence of Lutheranism is reflected in Scandinavians’ deference to authority and in their system of social control, which can be seen in everything from their low speed limits (actually observed by drivers) to their wide acceptance of eugenics in the early 20th century (scientific authority replacing political authority in this case). Nelson concludes that the secularized faith of social democracy that replaced traditional Lutheranism is now fading in the twenty-first century as Nordic solidarity has eroded under globalization and the resulting economic and identity problems. Any attempt to address the “intellectual and religious dimensions of social democracy may require a willingness to come to terms with some of the illusions of social democracy, including its outward rejection of religion (in any explicit form) as a central element of public discourse.”