

Vol. 34, No. 2

December 2018

Evangelical overreach in missionizing the “unreached”?

It has been over 40 years since evangelical missionary strategists set out to evangelize what are called “unreached people groups” (UPGs) having no exposure to Christianity, but no discernable progress has been made among more than half of the current UPG population, according to an analysis in the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (35:4). UPGs were first estimated to have comprised some 17,000 population groups having no exposure to mission efforts in their own mother-tongue languages, no Bible translations, and no indigenous worshipping communities. Reaching these UPGs became a common goal among most evangelical bodies over the next four decades, an effort led and strategized by Ralph Winter of Fuller Seminary. R. W. Lewis writes that significant progress was made, with Christian movements being started among a number of these people groups, even some that are still counted as UPGs today, following the definition of having a population that is less than two percent evangelical. But she argues that much of the difficulty in reaching the rest lies in the way these groups have been defined and counted, ignoring the difference “between the UPGs which now have movements established among them and those that still have no movements at all.”

A re-estimation of these populations by a missiology research group known as the Joshua Project distinguished “frontier people groups” (FPGs) as a subset of UPGs showing no sign of movements, on the basis of whether their populations were less than or equal to 0.1 percent Christian. They found that close to 85 percent of all such FPGs were either Muslim or Hindu, while Buddhist groups made up under five percent of the total and all other religions comprised only 11 percent. Even as FPGs account for more than 55 percent of the total population living in UPGs, Lewis notes that about 30 times as many global missionaries currently go to “reached” people groups “to work with existing churches in training and outreach, as go to the unreached people groups (including the FPGs).” She writes that, besides the lack of demographic clarity regarding which groups have and have not been reached by missionaries, the failure to carry out much of the original goal has been due to a move from pioneering to partnering missions and a shift from career missionaries to short-term teams who usually don’t learn the languages to reach UPGs and also tend to partner with already existing churches.

The evangelical vision of reaching unreached people has also been shaken with the recent murder of American missionary John Allen Chau who was attempting to evangelize an unreached and hostile tribe on an Indian island. *The New York Times* (December 2) reports that Chau was “surrounded by like-minded people who believed he was on a divine mission, called by God to minister to uncontacted people. The group that trained Mr. Chau for his mission and others have defended his actions and even hailed him as a martyr.” Evangelical missions specialists argue that Chau’s method of abruptly approaching the tribe without much preparation and knowledge of the tribe’s language and culture was naïve and reckless. Chau was a short-term missionary, but the All Nations mission agency that trained him asserts that he was linguistically prepared and knew the dangers of his plan to reach the tribe. The article reports that the incident has opened up divisions in the evangelical community over the emergence of “risk-taking” missionaries, who are viewed as potential martyrs for their dreams of reaching unreached people with Christianity.

(*International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, <https://www.ijfm.org/>)

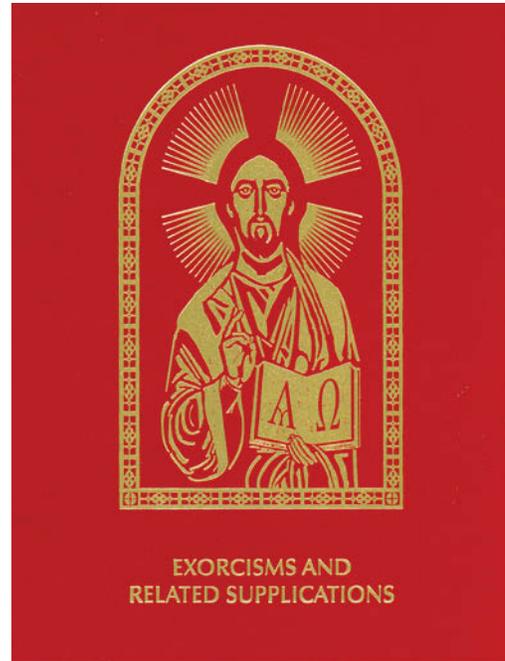


ARTICLES

Exorcism’s growth in U.S. fed by occult interest?

The practice of exorcism in the Catholic Church has been growing worldwide, with the U.S. being no exception, according to a report in *The Atlantic* (December). Both belief in demonic possession

and the use of exorcism by the Catholic Church has been growing in the U.S, as it has in Italy and other Catholic countries [see October 2016 RW]. Although no official figures are kept by the Church on the number of requests and actual rituals of exorcism performed, Mike Mariani writes that the exorcists he interviewed were reportedly “fielding more pleas for help every year.” The Church has been training new exorcists in Chicago, as well as Rome and Manila. Gary Thomas, an exorcist whose ministry was featured in the 2011 movie, *The Rite*, said that while in 2011 the U.S. had fewer than 15 known Catholic exorcists, today there were well over 100. Other priests Mariani interviewed put that number at between 70 and 100. In October of 2017, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops had the handbook containing the rite of exorcism translated into English—the first time since it was standardized in 1614. One exorcist from a Midwestern diocese said that there has been a “whole reclaiming of a ministry that the Church had set aside.”



The reasons for the upsurge have ranged from internal policy and teaching changes within the Church itself—such as a reemphasis of exorcism by Pope Francis—to a corresponding growth of interest in the occult and people’s experiences of sexual abuse, a factor that Mariani stresses. On the latter point, psychologists claim that abusive experiences lead to dissociative mental states that could appear similar to the experience of being possessed. Even the exorcists interviewed said that abuse could serve as a doorway to demons, with Thomas adding that as many as 80 percent of the people who come to him are sexual abuse survivors. But it is the interest in the occult, especially as found in the Millennial generation, that may be driving the most demand for the rite, according to Mariani. The growth of interest and involvement in magic, astrology, and witchcraft has grown at the same time that institutional Christianity has declined. “Today’s increased willingness to believe in the paranormal, then, seems to have begun as a response to secularization before spreading through the culture and landing back on the Church’s doorstep—in the form of people seeking salvation from demons through the Catholic faith’s most mystical ritual.”

Hare Krishna—Western style?

Faced with demographic realities within the movement and looking for new ways to reach Westerners and other people of non-Indian heritage, some members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) are promoting a project for communicating their spiritual message in a way more compatible with Western culture, explained Nicole Karapanagiotis (Rutgers University) at a session of the New Religious Movements Unit at the American Academy

of Religion’s November meeting in Denver, which **RW** attended. Karapanagiotis explained that a number of devotees had become concerned with the demographic shift within ISKCON and the fact that primarily ethnic Indians were now visiting ISKCON temples, seen as a failure to fulfill the founder’s dream of going global. An original disciple of Swami Prabhupada, Hridayananda Das Goswami (Howard J. Resnick, born in 1948 and initiated in 1970), concluded that few Westerners have been joining ISKCON because they feel that they have to embrace an Indian ethnic identity. Thus he developed the idea of extracting the essence of the teachings and offering it in a Western cultural package, involving Western clothes, music (piano and guitar), and food (vegetarian pizzas and salads rather than Indian food). However, while these are considered as variable details, the fundamental precepts of ISKCON are to remain fully applicable—it is stressed that this approach does not in any way dilute the purity of its spiritual tradition. It is also a way of affirming that the essential principles of Krishna Consciousness are not Indian, but rather eternal principles.

The “spiritual project” Krishna West was established by H. D. Goswami in 2013. He is himself a member of the Governing Body Commission (GBC) of ISKCON, the ultimate managing authority for the society, and also one of the initiating gurus. Thus, Krishna West is not a separate group, but a project approved by ISKCON leadership, although there have been some debates about it within the movement. Karapanagiotis described it as a systematic rebranding of ISKCON aimed at attracting Westerners and adjusting to their perceived tastes and existential needs, noting that similar approaches have long since been adopted for other spiritual practices (e.g., various forms of yoga or mindfulness). Still, the funding for such ISKCON programs aimed at attracting



Westerners comes from donors in the Indian community. Krishna West is present in different countries of the world, and Karapanagiotis said that it is enjoying a level of success in some places, for instance in Brazil.

(*Krishna West website*: <http://krishnawest.com/>; *personal website of H. D. Goswami*: <https://www.hdgoswami.com/>)

Tibetan Buddhist movement takes on exclusivist, authoritarian face amidst expansion

A branch of Tibetan Buddhism known as the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) is growing globally as it adapts the Tibetan tradition to a Western audience, but is also attracting mounting criticism for its authoritarian practices, according to an article in the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* (Winter). The NKT is one of the largest Buddhist traditions in England and is growing in the U.S. and globally, with 1,200 centers currently open around the world. In 2018, new temples and centers opened in Boston, Washington, D.C., Fort Lauderdale, Oslo, and Paris. In 2017, the International Kadampa Retreat Center opened near the Grand Canyon in Arizona, with a nearby temple planned to seat close to 1,000 worshipers. Judith Hertog reports that the organization has also recently expanded to Latin American nations and published its unique canon of texts in several languages. On one hand, the NKT has liberalized its monastic order to accommodate Western nuns, cutting



its hundreds of traditional vows to just 10. On the other hand, the movement has not shed centuries-old conflicts and sectarian tendencies that have isolated it from world Buddhism.

The movement's leader, Kelsang Gyatso, is seen as the "sole holder and savior of pure dharma" and the source of all authority, according to the article. "Some [NKT] practitioners are absolutely certain this is the last opportunity to find pure Buddhism in the world, and that everything else is corrupt," says British researcher David Kay. Gyatso and the NKT have criticized the rival Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama and his stance on religious freedom. The two leaders have clashed over the worship of the Dorje Shugden, a deity that the Dalai Lama has called a "malevolent spirit" but to which the NKT is strongly devoted. Critics maintain that the NKT has two sides, appearing welcoming and open to newcomers, but then becoming more restrictive and controlling once practitioners are inside the organization. INFORM, a British group studying new religious movements, finds that the NKT has been able to grow in Britain through shrewd real estate dealings financed by members' donations and construction work. The Buddhist group has regularly tried to silence critics by using British libel laws as a threat. The NKT is viewed as the result of a mysterious process of Gyatso's radicalization from a learned and trusted monk and scholar to a sectarian leader who views himself as an infallible leader and who many followers believe is the third Buddha. The article concludes that the organization and its ideology have thrived "in part because its members are from a social environment in which Buddhism is still new—meaning that they come to the NKT lacking a wider perspective on Buddhist history."

(*Tricycle*, <https://tricycle.org/>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **Whether "intense religion" has decreased or is holding steady in the U.S. has come under debate by sociologists, touching on the wider question of just how exceptional America is on religion.** RW cited an initial article by Landon Schnabel and Sean Bock in *Sociological Science* [see January 2018 RW] where the researchers argued that intense personal religion, marked by frequent church attendance and regular prayer, has persisted since the 1970s, although they found moderate religion to be in decline. In response, demographer David Voas and sociologist Mark Chaves have looked at the data on religious practice and belief in *Sociological Science* (5:694) and concluded that intense religiosity has in fact gradually declined, just as Christianity in general has declined in the U.S.

Voas and Chaves argue that Schnabel and Bock looked at data only since the late 1980s and did not take into account slow declines, used a limited set of indicators, such as self-reported religiosity and certainty of God's existence, and paid insufficient attention to cohort change, which shows each generation more secular than the previous one. Voas and Chaves conclude that the "intensely religious segment of the American population" is shrinking and is another sign that the U.S. is

following in the tracks of Europe in secularizing. In a rejoinder to Voas and Chaves appearing in the same journal issue, Schnabel and Brock maintain that there are non-linear patterns of intense religion since the 1970s (such as an uptick during the Reagan years) that suggest persistence rather than decline. They also criticize Voas and Chaves' failure to include immigrants in their analysis, and find that when such factors are considered intense religion appears "persistent in the United States in a way that makes it an outlier in relation to comparable countries."

(*Sociological Science*, <https://www.sociologicalscience.com>)



● **Although Catholic schools are slowly declining in the U.S., they are still in strong demand, with new research showing that such institutions foster more self-discipline among students than other schools.** Enrollment figures show a 2.3 percent decline from the previous academic year (with 43,448 fewer students). But there are waiting lists to enter Catholic schools in 29.5 percent of these institutions, primarily in suburban areas. Across the nation, 16 new schools opened this year, and more are slated to open in the coming years. And despite competition from charter schools, Catholic schooling shows itself to be distinctive in developing stronger skills of self-discipline and self-control than other schools.

An analysis by Michael Gottfried and Jacob Kirksey of the University of California at Santa Barbara looked at Early Childhood Longitudinal Study data for students in public and private schools—half of which were Catholic schools—and found that students in Catholic educational

institutions were less likely to act out or be disruptive than those in private or public schools. Catholic school students fought, argued, and engaged in other impulsive and disturbing activities less frequently and were more likely to control their tempers, respect others' privacy and accept their fellow students' ideas than students at the other schools. Regardless of racial, gender, and socioeconomic and family immigrant status, as well as initial behavior as rated by kindergarten teachers, Catholic school students exhibited more self-control than their peers in other schools, according to the study cited in the *CARA Report* (Fall) of Georgetown University.

(*CARA Report*, <https://cara.georgetown.edu/publication/the-cara-report/>)



● Many of the studies showing the prosocial effects of meditation are marred by methodological problems, such as bias, suggesting that the practice may have a weak association with such values as compassion and empathy, according to a researcher interviewed in the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* (November). In a 2018 meta-analysis of meditation studies in the open-access journal *Scientific Reports*, researchers found that the methodological quality of these studies on the much-publicized effects of increased compassion, connectedness and empathy, and decreased aggression and prejudice were weak (61 percent of the studies) or moderate (33 percent), with none having a grading of strong. In the *Tricycle* interview, one of the authors of the meta-analysis, Ute Kreplin of Massey University, said that bias was revealed in the fact that many of the researchers were meditation practitioners who tended to run the whole study without trying to minimize experimental bias. There was often no attempt to blind

the analysis so that the person looking at the results did not know which group received the meditation instructions.

While cautious in supporting any of the benefits to meditation claimed in the studies under review, Kreplin did say that they seemed to show an increase in compassion. Yet even here, she said that the results on compassion fell apart when looking at the methodological flaws: “Compassion was supported only when the people used the passive control group—when it was compared to doing nothing—but it wasn’t really supported when it was compared to active control groups [who did something similar to the meditation interventions that were tested]. Also, compassion was supported only when the researcher was part of the intervention team; when we separated out the studies where the researcher didn’t participate, those results fell apart again.”



● **A new survey finds that Jews report greater security and freedom from anti-Semitism in conservative Eastern European countries rather than Western Europe—a pattern that has grown considerably in recent years.** The survey, conducted by the Joint Distribution Committee’s (JDC) International Center for Community Development among 893 Jewish leaders and professionals throughout Europe, found that as much as 96 percent of respondents felt safe, while only four percent felt unsafe, in Eastern European countries. This contrasted sharply with Western European countries, where 76 percent felt safe and 24 percent felt unsafe. The magazine *Commentary* (November 26) cited the JDC report as also showing that “Western European

respondents were more likely to consider anti-Semitism as a threat than were Eastern Europeans, and to report deterioration in the situation from earlier surveys.”

The idea that Eastern European countries, such as Poland, Romania, and Hungary, that are experiencing a wave of populist and conservative—often described as near fascist—governments and political movements provide environments safer from anti-Semitism than more democratic and pluralist Western countries (which would be a reversal of the situation over the past two centuries) is counterintuitive. The report argues that a reason for the new disparity is that violence and hate crimes against Jews in Western Europe come mainly from Muslim anti-Semites rather than from the more traditional right-wing or left-wing sources. In contrast, Eastern Europe has much smaller Muslim populations due to historical and political (often populist) reasons. More speculative (and controversial) is the idea that hostility toward Israel is more widespread in Western than Eastern Europe, which might result in or be associated with higher rates of anti-Semitism.

Yet a study in the Serbian *Politics and Religion Journal* (12:2) finds that there are greater levels of anti-Semitism in the extreme far-right compared to the far-left, though extreme leftists do seem more anti-Semitic than moderate leftists and European Muslims are more anti-Semitic than non-Muslims. In an analysis of data from 20 nations from the 2014 round of the European Social Survey, Jeffrey Cohen of Fordham University focused on support for Jewish immigration as a way of testing for anti-Semitic attitudes. Respondents who identified with leftist politics were more supportive of Jewish immigration than were those who identified with the right. Even if there were signs that anti-Semitism increases among the far-left as compared to moderate leftists, the far-left



is less anti-Semitic than the center and much less anti-Semitic than the right, especially the far-right. “These results suggest the recent European anti-Semitism more closely resembles historical, right-wing European anti-Semitism than the more modern new anti-Semitism, with one exception—European Muslims are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward Jews than non-Muslims.” Cohen’s analysis also suggests that there is less hostility toward Jews than toward Muslims and Roma people in European populations overall.

(*Commentary*, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/anti-semitism/jews-anti-semitism-europe-east-west>; *Politics and Religion Journal*, <https://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/index.php/prj>)

● **Despite claims by adherents that modern Paganism and Satanism are inherently distinct phenomena with little or no common ground, there are clear intersections between the two, writes Ethan Doyle White (University College London) in the newest issue of the *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* (9:2).** While Christianity had seen both as inspired by the devil, contemporary Pagans, starting with Wiccans with their potentially misleading self-description as “witches,” have been eager to reject any such association, or even to deem Satanism to be closer to a Christian heresy than to Paganism, since it profanes Christian symbolism. Satanists, on the other hand, have been less insistent on differentiating themselves from modern Pagans—although instances of contempt for Paganism are not unknown.

Based on three case studies—Wicca, the Temple of Set, and the Order of Nine Angles—White examines how the Pagan and Satanic milieus are “able to intersect with comparative ease in that they both form part of several larger, more expansive milieus active within Western society.” Both are forms of occultism and of the “cultic milieu,” as defined by sociologist Colin Campbell, and they belong to “occulture,” a term used by Christopher Partridge to describe a non-Christian religio-cultural milieu linked to popular culture. Moreover, they are oppositional cultures in relation to Christianity, appropriating what “has been regarded as the antithesis of Christianity.”

A study of Wicca and its history shows that Wicca has built on the ambiguous stereotype of the witch and has effectively taken “the early-modern imagery of Satanic witchcraft,” stripping it of its Satanic elements. While Wicca is not a front for Satanism, refuting any link should be seen as a legitimization strategy. The Temple of Set—which started from a schism within the Church of Satan over the belief that Satan was a real entity and not a metaphor—appears as a part of both the Satanic and the Pagan milieus, revolving “substantially around the figure of a pre-Christian god,” the Egyptian god Set. Founded in Britain, the Order of Nine Angles describes itself as Satanist, but appropriates both Satanic and Pagan elements, to the extent of seeing Wicca as sharing “the same ultimate goal,” and claims lineage from an unbroken pre-Christian past. While the categories of Paganism and Satanism should not be rejected, concludes White, they are “fluid and un-fixed” with no neat divisions. Scholars should be aware of the potential use of such observations by critics of Wicca and emphasize that they cannot be used for associating them with problematic groups, but this should not inhibit scholars from researching the fluidity and intersections of their respective milieus.

(*Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* is an online, subscription-based academic journal on new religious movements, published biannually by Academic Publishing: <https://www.pdcnet.org/asrr/Alternative-Spirituality-and-Religion-Review>)



● **Evangelical Protestants in Britain tend to espouse tolerance and freedom of religion for Muslims, although a segment of them see Islam as a threat to society, according to a survey by Greg Smith (William Temple Foundation) published in the journal *Entangled Religions* (5).** The panel survey was conducted among 1,330 self-described evangelicals living in the UK, recruited through their membership in the Evangelical Alliance and through various social media. Although the sample cannot be taken as representative of evangelicals in the UK, its demographic profile is consistent with that of earlier waves of surveys, with the proportion of repeating panel members being close to 75 percent. The vast majority of respondents held to the exclusivist position that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation (81 percent). When it came to questions about Muslims, the majority held that they should be free to practice their faith, including wearing head scarves and having food products labeled as “halal” or permitted by their faith (57 percent). There was more ambivalence about Muslim influence in society, with 58 percent agreeing that Muslims are “aiming to become the dominant religion in Britain and to impose Islamic rule in this country.” A majority of 87 percent also agreed or strongly agreed that there should be no room for sharia law in the UK. Smith found that Pentecostals and Presbyterians tended to hold the more critical and exclusivist views as compared to Anglican and Free Church evangelicals. Smith concludes that British evangelicals do not conform to the stereotype of conservative evangelicalism being in alliance with the nationalistic religious right as seen in the U.S. and other

nations. But there are signs of division between UK evangelicals who are more open to dialogue and cooperation with Muslims and those who espouse a “Crusader” worldview seeing Muslims as having little place in society.

(*Entangled Religions*, <https://er.ceres.rub.de/index.php/ER/article/view/7343/6515>)



ARTICLES

Islam, states, courts, and the acceleration of secularization in Europe

In a European environment in which Christianity is still present, but where the historical churches have lost their former strength as well as a growing share of young people, decisions by courts and states are contributing to the speed of secularization, writes Olivier Roy in a recent issue of the French monthly *Esprit* (November) devoted to the decline of Christianity in Europe. Roy identifies two trends in legal and judicial decisions across Europe pertaining to religion. On the one hand, there are attempts to create rules for controlling Islam, but they bring consequences for all religions—e.g., as they concern religious signs in public space. On the other hand, there are attempts to affirm a Christian cultural identity in Europe—e.g., to establish Christian symbols in state buildings in Bavaria or ban the building of minarets in Switzerland.

Such moves have to find ways to respect the principles of religious freedom. As Roy remarks, this does not require that they put all religions on an equal footing, but it is mandatory for states and courts to abstain from judging beliefs. Either one has to claim that a ban has nothing to do with religion but only with issues of public safety (e.g., a ban on burqas/niqabs would be justified by their masking effects), or that it applies to all religions equally, effectively moving them out of the

public square (e.g., the French ban on all “ostentatious religious signs” in schools in order to prevent girls from wearing an Islamic veil).

Roy goes on to examine current or recent debates and court cases on banning circumcision, Jewish or Muslim slaughtering of animals, blasphemy, and clergy immunity. For instance, arguments against circumcision for non-medical reasons have not only been about respecting a child’s bodily integrity, but also not limiting his freedom of religious choice through the procedure—implying a view that religion is an individual, optional choice, free from tradition and community. A French company was condemned in 2005 for an advertising parody of da Vinci’s “Last Supper,” not because it offended God, but because it had created suffering for Catholic believers—a response that no longer has to do with the sacred, but with reducing harm and damages. Roy concludes that there is a trend of decisions that actually negate what religions really are and ultimately contribute to the secularization of European societies.

(*Esprit*, 212, Rue Saint Martin, 75003 Paris, France - <https://esprit.presse.fr>)



New wave of Iranian protests fueled by moral, religious concerns and abuses

A new wave of protests and dissent in Iran is different from that of the Green Movement of 2009 in that it is animated more by cultural and religious concerns than strictly political and economic ones, writes Isa Karasioglu in *Anthropology News* (November 1). The latest protests arrived sporadically starting last spring, with tens of thousands of Iranians taking to the streets and heavy police intervention resulting from these incidents. Karasioglu writes that whereas the Green Movement protests were quickly cracked down on, the more recent demonstrations are “more unique and persistent.” While worsening economic conditions, usually involving sanctions, were cited as the main factors in this protest, the author finds that growing uncertainty about the Islamic structure of the regime is fueling a big part of it. The uncertainty relates to the increasing use of

“loopholes” to get around religious strictures. This includes the way that an underground nightlife is flourishing in Iran as well as how the Islamic practice of temporary marriage is rendering sexual activity more common among young Iranians. Because these practices could not exist without the tacit approval of the regime, they “underscore the fluidity of moral rules in Iran.” Yet the moral police are still intervening when a woman goes out without appropriate veiling.

Karasioglu “found that Iranians are angered more by the issue of accountability and the regime’s illicit expenditures than they are by the economy’s worsening condition.” The Islamic practices of zakat (one-fortieth of one’s income distributed as alms) and the hums (half of one’s profit given as alms) constitute the religious root of Iran’s monetary issues, particularly the way these funds intended for charity are going into government coffers. “The lack of accountability and transparency has long put question marks into the minds of Iranians, for the government seems to be the leading beneficiary of the institution of hums.” These concerns about religious corruption were magnified after a scandal broke out in 2013 involving a Turkish citizen of Iranian descent, revealing that business people along with Islamists in Turkey and Iran were involved in smuggling gold for Iranian oil through involvement in fictitious export enterprises. “The convergence of the religion’s anti-corruption teachings and the hypocritical anti-corruption rhetoric of those who apparently exploited the religion for reaching their political goals is likely to have long-term impact,” Karasioglu writes.

(*Anthropology News*, <http://www.anthropology-news.org>)



Western Witchcraft changing in transition to Japan

While definitely not a large movement, Western Witchcraft has attracted Japanese practitioners, reported Eriko Kawanishi (Kyoto University) at a session of the American Academy of Religion meeting in Denver (Nov. 17–20), which **RW** attended. Kawanishi’s research was based on participant observation at several meetings and interviews of 16 practitioners. Western Witchcraft

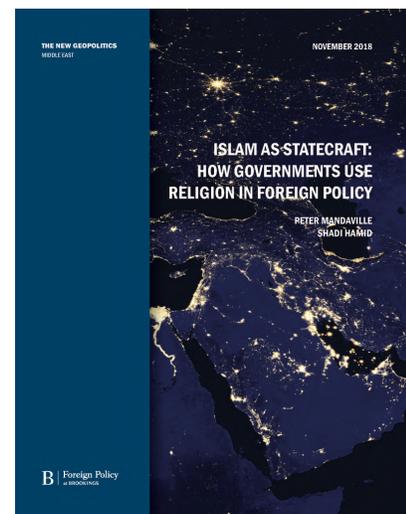
was first imported to Japan through U.S. troops stationed there. The first Wicca groups appeared in the early 1990s, but Western ritual magic had already had a presence since the 1970s. The influential book by Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, was translated and published in Japanese in 1994, and other Western Witchcraft books were translated as well. The influence of Western literature is clear. Some have also been in direct contact with Western witches.

All of Kawanishi's informants had altars at home (with some having two altars, a Wiccan one and a Shinto one) and practiced rituals during their sabbaths. They found ways to relate the Western Pagan festivals to the Japanese calendar, although not everything matched—for instance, she mentioned that ancestors were supposed to return to their homes by mid-August, while the Samhain season had no relation to the Japanese calendar. Regarding deities, while a majority of her interviewees had adopted ones that were Western or Middle Eastern, some had adopted Japanese deities, animals (e.g., the whale), or powers of nature—something not unlike Pagan animists in the West, one member of the audience remarked. More generally, Kawanishi noted that while being an import, the phenomenon of Western Witchcraft in Japan was similar to the flexible processes of localization and syncretism with local practices characterizing contemporary Paganism in other regional contexts.



Findings & Footnotes

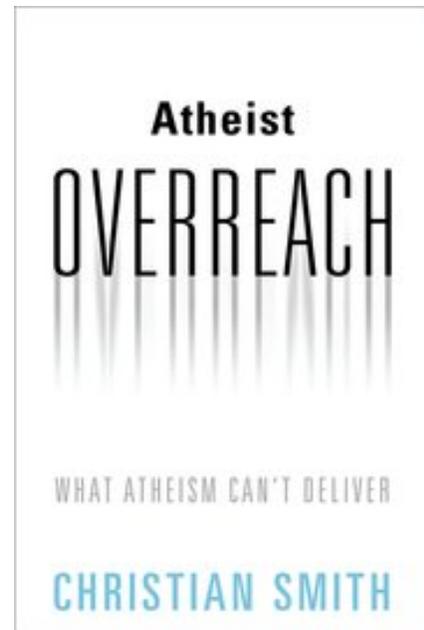
■ The report *Islam as Statecraft* from the Brookings Institution looks closer at the “geopolitics of religious soft power” used by Islamic countries in their foreign policy. Authors Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid write that “soft power,” which means the use of cultural outreach, including religion, in foreign relations and policy, is not confined to Islamic countries (for instance, Russia’s use of Russian Orthodoxy in its foreign relations). But the effort to harness the power of religious symbols for such purposes is especially prevalent in the “context of a post-liberal” world order. The report focuses on Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, with the first two countries using religion as a proxy tool to compete and struggle for hegemony in the Muslim world. The killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was an example of how the Saudi government is pushing back against individuals and movements inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood



that challenge the Saudi monarchy and its form of Islamism. Turkey is building mosques alongside the transportation infrastructure it funds in parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Mandaville and Hamid also complicate the idea that Saudi Arabia is spreading Wahhabi Islam as a main foreign policy objective; rather than the government, it is a whole range of Saudi-connected but unofficial charities that may engage in such proselytism, often bearing little resemblance to Saudi geopolitical designs. In the case of Iran, the report argues that the country is not so much promoting its version of Shi'ite Islam as a foreign policy goal as it is trying to form a resistance culture against American influence that even includes support for Sunni initiatives in countries that are sympathetic to such opposition. Finally, the report looks at how Islamic countries such as Morocco and Jordan emphasize a moderate self-image in foreign policy to gain political legitimacy and status in the world community and to fight against Muslim challengers in their own societies. In a world with less Western and liberal influence, "it may become increasingly possible—and useful—for countries to put a culturally specific spin on liberal economics and to parse their security interests through religion," the authors conclude. To download this report, visit: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FP_20181116_islam_as_statecraft.pdf

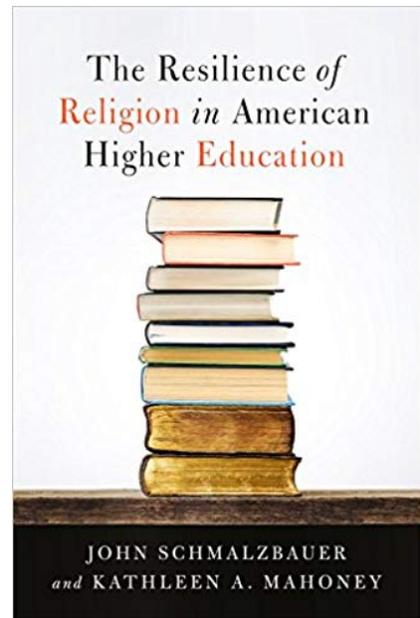
■ *Atheist Overreach: What Atheism Can't Deliver* by Christian Smith (Oxford University Press, \$19.95) is a well-balanced collection of essays seeking to point out certain weak spots in some of the less modest atheist claims with respect to ethics, the relation between science and religion, and finally, the question of whether humans are naturally religious. Smith's first two essays explore what, if any, justification naturalistic atheism can provide for grounding moral behavior in a modern, secular world. He concludes that although individual nonbelievers can be "good without God," the evolutionary worldview promoted by some authors imparts no rational reasons for how enlightened self-interest leads to any sort of larger collective good beyond one's tribe, e.g., universal human rights. In the third essay, looking at the relation between religion and science, he suggests that scientists be more forthright about the limits of the field, specifically in attempts to use science to dispel belief in God. In Smith's view, to do otherwise and proclaim that science can overthrow religious claims is to play sleight of hand with the facts and engage in philosophy, metaphysics, and theology as opposed to science proper.



In the concluding essay, he asserts that although humans are not naturally spiritual and religious, they have a seemingly essential proclivity towards believing in something larger than themselves, be it God or perhaps even science. To the extent that this is the case, the claim that religion in all of its varied forms will inevitably fade and pass away in due time, or via an uptick in collective intelligence, does not hold a lot of empirical weight. Overall, this powerful and perceptive collection of essays is worthy of consideration from those on both sides of the religion-atheist divide. Never engaging in religious apologetics, Smith's book is a call for intellectual honesty, humility, and understanding the limits of

knowledge with respect to what we can and cannot know with certainty at this point in human history irrespective of our individual differences in beliefs. — *Reviewed by Christopher Smith, an Oklahoma-based writer and researcher, and the co-author (with RW's editor) of Atheist Awakening (Oxford University Press).*

■ John Schmalzbauer and Kathleen Mahoney's book *The Resilience of Religion in American Higher Education* (Baylor University Press, \$49.84) looks at the ways religion maintains a strong and even renewed influence in U.S. universities and intellectual life despite a wave of secularization that has weakened traditional religious educational institutions. The authors hold that there has been a "de-privatization" of religion in several ways and through different organizational actors in higher education; the importance of foundations, such as Templeton and Lilly, stands out here as does church and denomination-related organizations that have revamped older ministries and started new ones. Schmalzbauer and Mahoney note that the new public role of religion in higher education is as much about the renewal of the study of religion—as seen in flourishing academic and professional associations (as the Society of Christian Philosophers)—as its practice. The proliferation of evangelical initiatives stands out in the authors' meticulous account of religion on campus; not only have traditional evangelical campus ministries mushroomed and diversified along ethnic lines, but new efforts such as evangelical study centers and niche organizations, such as those specializing in ministry to elite, Ivy League schools, have emerged.

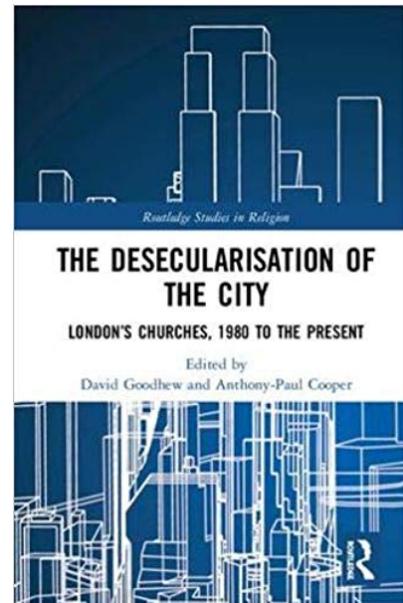


Also notable is the growing presence of Jewish ministries and campus programs as well as world religions' entry onto campus life, ranging from new interfaith efforts to endowed chairs in Sikh and Islamic studies. The mainline and Catholic stories in this portrait of educational revitalization are complicated. Newman Centers and new upstart conservative Catholic ministries such as FOCUS are drawing students, while Church budget cuts to campus programs suggest problems ahead. Mainline bodies have found ways to innovate, such as rerouting ministries through vital congregations near university campuses, while older organizations sponsored by Lutheran, Episcopal, and Presbyterian bodies show less resilience as they are forced to downsize due to drastically reduced memberships—a very different situation than the flourishing mid-1960s.

The same mixed picture extends to historic church colleges: there are new efforts to preserve their distinctive contributions to higher education—thanks to the aforementioned foundation support—even as they wrestle with persistent questions of identity and durability in an era of STEM education. "In the final analysis, efforts to strengthen religious identity of denominational colleges and universities have enjoyed modest success," Schmalzbauer and Mahoney find. But the book ends on a more somber note. The growth of the non-affiliated and signs of stagnation and decline in even conservative religious bodies may eventually spread to a still-vital campus religious life, although the deep secularization of European societies has not led to an accompanying dearth of religion in university life on that continent. The role

of religion in American higher education may ultimately depend on its key stakeholders and the value they place on religious literacy and their own traditions' future, the authors conclude.

■ The growth of religious life in London has often been portrayed as an anomaly in a rapidly secularizing England and Europe, and the new book *The Deseccularization of the City* (Routledge, \$112) does show how the city displays unique religious vitality. But this interdisciplinary book, edited by David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper, argues that London is more than an exception (and other cities in the UK and Europe are showing signs of religious growth); it is a city that, once considered a bellwether of secularization, now serves to show how things can be reversed and how urbanization can be hospitable to religion. The book also extends the argument and research beyond immigrant congregations and religions from the global South and their significant impact on London as a “deseccularized city” to examine religious growth among a whole range of faiths—from Anglican church plants to Russian Orthodox parishes (whose growth is not solely due to immigration).



Demographer Eric Kauffman shows that demographic change has obviously transformed London into a religious city—from an influx of Christians from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to revived black churches—but he notes that there is no obvious link between ethnicity, immigration, and religious vitality to explain the London case; some ethnic religions have not experienced notable growth. The second-generation members of these faiths may also show a decline in religiosity compared to the first generation. But most of the book’s contributors argue that London’s congregations have wielded considerable agency and creativity in drawing and retaining members—perhaps explaining why whites in London show more religious involvement than they do on the national level. Sociologist Grace Davies concludes the volume by considering whether the case of London’s religious vitality is an exception in terms of the evolution of religion in Britain. She points out that this trend underlines how London is no longer so much a European city as a global one (as seen in the growth of megachurches). London, and, increasingly, British religion (and even the flourishing of secularist movements in parts of the city), function in a market system that seems to advantage the urban environment over the rural one; churches in the countryside have been losing members. Davies notes that the religious resurgence in London is not only expressed in growing congregations but a more public role for faith, all of which may travel to other British cities. But she does not think that these developments imply deseccularization, even in London, as much as the emergence of a new “global narrative.”