

Liberalism and religious pluralism contested among conservative religious thinkers

The value of liberalism and religious pluralism in American society is coming under sharp debate in conservative religious and political circles, according to the online magazine *Quillette* (June 11). Cathy Young reports that the controversy over liberalism boiled over recently in a feud between *New York Post* op-ed editor Sohrab Ahmari and *National Review* writer David French, when the former questioned the conciliatory stance of French, who is an evangelical, on culture-war issues. Ahmari, a Catholic who is a supporter of Donald Trump, criticized French, a “never Trumper,” for adhering to the values of individual autonomy and civil engagement rather than militantly fighting for moral values and the establishment of the “Highest Good” in American public life. That last idea has suggested to critics that Ahmari would favor government support of Christianity and even Catholicism, although he denies that charge. Ahmari sees the presidency of Donald Trump as furthering the fight against secular progressivism in Trump’s drive for greater national identity and solidarity. Young writes that this debate is not just about strategy among conservatives but rather highlights a trend among them to question the very notion of political liberalism.



Sohrab Ahmari

The most well-known exponent of this position is University of Notre Dame political philosopher Patrick Deneen, who argues that such foundational American values as Enlightenment liberalism and individualism should be considered a failed experiment given the moral decline of the country. Young adds that this has raised the charge that Deneen and



David French

company support “integralism,” which advocates a greater subordination of the state to the church, which in this case would mean the Catholic Church (Deneen refutes this charge). Integralism has found a new hearing in the pages of conservative religious publications such as *First Things* and among such Catholic thinkers as Harvard law professor Adrian Vermeule, University of Dallas political scientist Gladden Pappin, and philosopher Thomas Pink.

According to Young, while the anti-liberal trend is not limited to conservative Catholics, “it does appear to be strongly linked to religious traditionalism,” with orthodox Jewish political scientist Yoram Hazony arguing in the pages of *First Things* for a similar political vision. Hazony is more supportive of American constitutionalism, although the conservative democracy he proposes would give a prominent public role to a nation’s majority religion (though offering “wide toleration” of other religious views). Young links the new friendliness to integralist ideas and criticism of political liberalism among religious conservatives to the nationalist and populist movements and governments in Europe, especially Poland and Hungary, which have given a greater role to Christianity in public life.

(*Quillette*, <https://quillette.com/2019/06/11/the-rise-of-the-illiberal-right/>)

Cryptocurrency driving new religious entrepreneurs

The emergence of cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology is inspiring religious entrepreneurs to assist existing religious organizations or create new decentralized religions, writes Michael McKinley in *America* magazine (June 24). Blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, constitute a kind of currency without intrinsic value or physical form, one that exists only as ethereal data and has no central bank to guarantee its value. That blockchains guarantee a permanent record without a central authority and cannot be undone but only added to has appealed to those with democratic aspirations for this technology. Because it is also based on the trust and belief of the user, the technology's affinity with religion is becoming recognized by entrepreneurs. Last year, cryptocurrency entrepreneur Matt Liston and artist Avery Singer launched a cryptocurrency-based religion known as 0xOmega at New York's New Museum. The plan is that believers will contribute to the new faith in either traditional cash or cryptocurrency, which will then be converted to cyber tokens that become the currency of the religion that believers can accrue through "spiritual work." "In looking at religion through this technical lens," Liston said, "I discovered...religions are essentially coordination tools. They allow humans, as a society, to coordinate toward a common utility."

Inspired by the concept of the "Omega Point" developed by theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., Liston plans to digitize 0xOmega's religious texts and have users update them as they democratically push toward a cosmic endpoint. At the launch Liston and Singer already



released hard copies of a founding document about the new religion (which they asked people not to upload publicly until the religion was active online) and a sacred symbol that could be translated into tokens. Liston also hopes that 0xOmega could “do good in the world,” beyond providing a mechanism to specify and spread its beliefs, by allowing followers to express their faith through donating to charitable causes. Ethereum, which is the cryptocurrency platform from which 0xOmega will launch, has in the past been used to create the “Jesus Coin” in a satiric attempt to “decentralize Jesus,” and the company Lotos is working on an Ethereum token aligned with Buddhism. Blossom Financial’s Smart Sukuk offers Halal cryptocurrency options to Muslims. Although the plans for a new blockchain religion may seem like science fiction, existing religious groups are already using the technology. McKinley reports how Catholic Blockchain, a startup company in Austin, TX, is using the technology to help the Catholic Church better manage its sacramental records and facilitate “investment in church property in a way that could be used to generate income for both the church and investors, Catholic or not.” Co-founder Devin Rose sees the technology’s advantages not only for record storage and revenue through “smart contracts,” but also for financial transparency. “On the blockchain it would be very clear where church money is being invested,” he said.

(*America*, <https://www.americamagazine.org/>)

Clergy engaging in denominational switching in unstable church environment

Denominational switching has long been fairly common among Protestant lay people, but more recently the trend is also evident among clergy. A report in *Baptist News Global* (June 19) finds that clergy, especially in the moderate and liberal offshoots of the Southern Baptist Convention, such as the Alliance for Baptists, have searched for greener pastures in more liberal denominations, such as the United Church of Christ. “Experts report a growing trend of denominational swapping among clergy,” writes Jeff Brumley. Baptist historian Bill Leonard notes that the trend is not completely new, as there have been notable instances throughout church history of clergy transitioning to other denominations, but he believes such switching is picking up, driven by economic, social and theological considerations, such as promoting women in ministry and LGBTQ inclusion. “As denominations have declined and become more rigid and doctrinaire, people have gone looking for opportunities in denominations that seem more compatible,” Leonard says. He adds that there are also generational shifts. “This generation is looking around,” he says. “More people are open to [switching] in part because younger generations of ministers weren’t necessarily raised in the old denominational loyalty.”

Denominational switching is taking place particularly among women ministers and church leaders; anecdotal evidence suggests female ministers are leaving moderate Baptist churches in significant numbers, Brumley writes. “Based on conversations I have had, I would say Baptists... (Southern, CBF, American) have lost hundreds if not thousands of women ministers in the past 40 years,” said Pam Durso, executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry. Aside from women and Baptists, such departures are said to be flourishing across multiple denominations. “I would

say it is much more frequent now than it was 10 years ago, whether it's leaving the Baptist church or someone coming into the Baptist church," says William Vanderbloemen, founder and CEO of Vanderbloemen, an agency that conducts executive pastor searches for churches. He adds that religious organizations are increasingly searching outside traditional circles for qualified pastoral leadership, as it becomes "harder and harder to say we have to have someone from our own family." Differences in denominational style, theological bent and priorities can be a challenge for switchers. One switcher clergyman, Alan Rudnick, an American Baptist minister, served a Presbyterian church during his time in seminary and toward the end of his studies was contacted about an opportunity at a United Methodist congregation by a recruiter who he called a "religious headhunter." Rudnick said that today's church climate made it more necessary for clergy to be aware of opportunities outside of their current denominational contexts. "Churches are declining and closing," he said. "To stay within one's own denomination can be very self-limiting."

(*Baptist News Global*, <https://baptistnews.com/article/switching-denominations-why-some-baptist-ministers-are-leaving/>)



The post-charismatic success of Kundalini Yoga

Kundalini Yoga has become a trend among fashionistas, as evidenced by a number of articles appearing in popular women's magazines, writes Julie Rambal in the Swiss daily *Le Temps* (June 19). Not everybody is enthusiastic, though, since the practice has reportedly led some followers to introduce significant changes into their way of life. The success of Kundalini Yoga is part of a wider and lasting interest in yoga in its various guises. Yoga has grown into a huge market, with its festivals, magazines, and even tourism industry, with popular yoga retreats existing in such places as Bali in Indonesia and Rishikesh in India. While yoga may be used primarily as a physical practice, it also attracts people looking for answers to key questions about life and for a spiritual path, for instance at a time of personal crisis.

Self-described as the “yoga of awareness,” Kundalini Yoga had been conceptualized and promoted by the late Yogi Bhaajan (1929–2004). Yogi Bhaajan had launched 3HO (Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization) in the late 1960s, associating Kundalini Yoga with Sikhism while playing to the New Age mood. Elements drawn from Sikhism are present in Kundalini Yoga practice, which also emphasizes breathing exercises. 3HO members also started various successful businesses, including the well-known Yogi Tea and Akal Security companies. The reports of the current interest in Kundalini Yoga within some circles 15 years after the death of Yogi Bhaajan shows the potential of spiritual practices to prosper and attract new followers after the initial charismatic figure is no more, even in such contexts as the crowded yoga market.



Reforms initiated by Pope Francis seen as far-reaching, with no way back

While many Catholics are frustrated with the apparent lack of implementation of Pope Francis' promised reforms, substantial reforms have in fact already begun to be put in place step by step and will be hard to undo, writes Robert Mickens in *La Croix International* (June 28). A “systematic deconstruction of the Roman Curia’s longstanding function as the universal Church’s central (i.e., centralizing) bureaucracy” has been undertaken, while more authority is being entrusted to bishops and national or regional bishops’ conferences. The curia is meant to become an institution serving the pope and the bishops. But Pope Francis is aware that such changes will take time. Thus he is doing his best to ensure that the initiated reforms cannot be reversed.

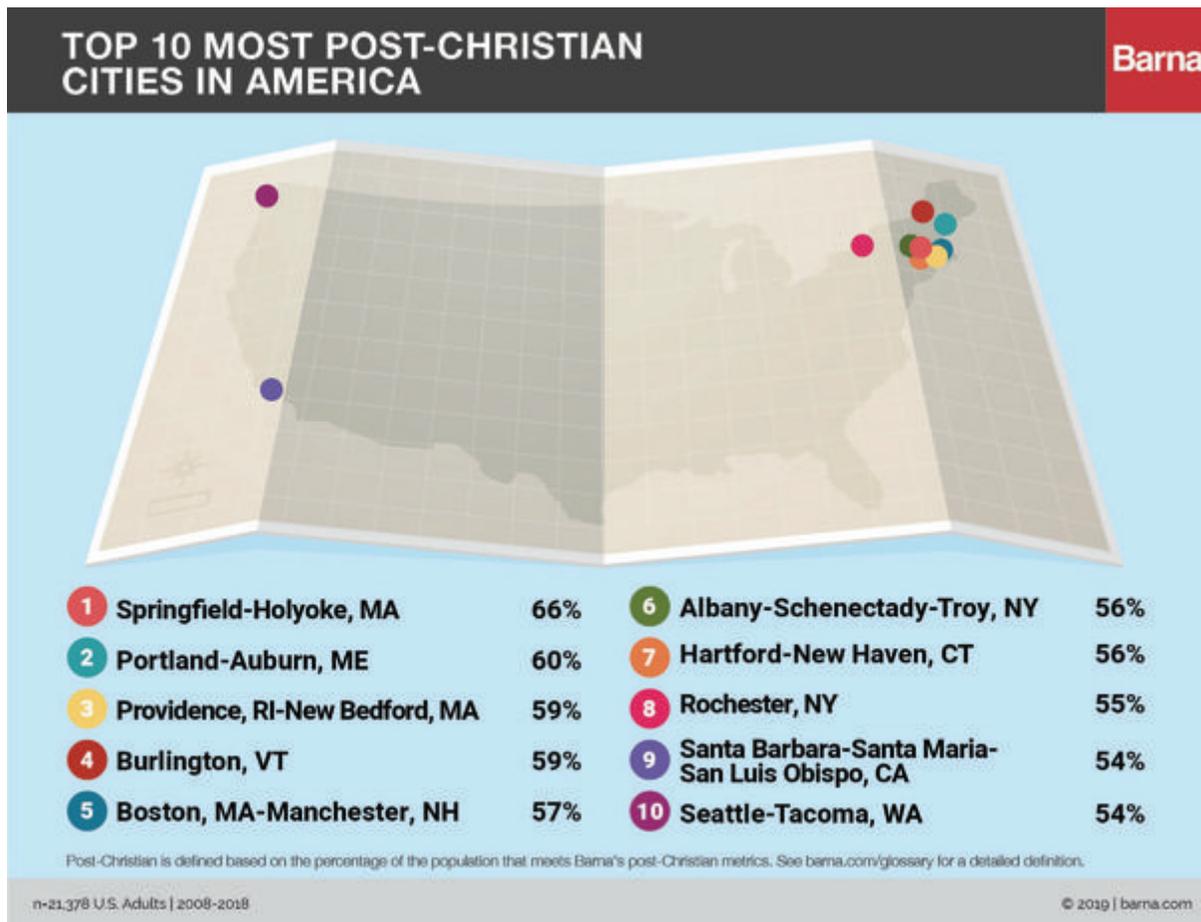
While it is true that the Council of Cardinals in charge of preparing a draft for a new apostolic constitution that would reform the church’s central offices has not yet completed its work, Mickens reports that well-informed observers expect that draft to be ready by 2020, while some still believe that an earlier delivery might be possible. A version of the draft is already being circulated to all dicasteries as well as to episcopal conferences. Some indications about deep changes have already been provided, explains Nicolas Senèze in an article published on the same day in *La Croix International*. For instance, women should be able in the future to take up the highest positions in the curia. “The sacrament of holy orders will no longer be required for positions of responsibility, only baptism,” said Bishop Marcello Semeraro of Albano, Secretary of the Council of Cardinals, on June 27. The reform of the curia—something that had been desired by the cardinals who elected Pope Francis—has been used by the pope to set into motion more wide-ranging reforms impacting the entire Catholic Church. According to Mickens, the Eurocentric model is to be abandoned, along with the idea of Christendom that is now seen as belonging to the past. This means looking for new ways to proclaim the Gospel in new environments. This transformation is rooted in the vision of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) for bringing the church into the modern world.



CURRENT RESEARCH

• The research group Barna has just issued its list of the most “post-Christian” cities in America, with those in the Northeast region and particularly New England reaching the top. The top eight cities on the list are all in this region, reports *Relevant* magazine (June 7). The Springfield-Holyoke area of Massachusetts, the Portland-Auburn region of Maine, Providence, Rhode Island, Burlington, Vermont, and Boston make up the top five. Santa Barbara-Santa Maria-San Luis Obispo in California and Washington’s Seattle-Tacoma were the only non-Northeast cities in the top 10. The criteria Barna used to determine whether cities fit into the “post-Christian” category included whether people in the city had read the Bible in the last week (87 percent of people in Springfield-Holyoke had not), attended church in the last week (65 percent in Springfield-Holyoke had not), ever made a commitment to Jesus (60 percent did not in Springfield-Holyoke), prayed to God in the last week (a no from 47 percent in Springfield-Holyoke), and disagreed that faith is important in their lives (41 percent of Springfield-Holyoke residents). “Interestingly, when asked if they ‘do not believe in God,’ the top city on the list (you guessed it, Springfield-Holyoke) only had 11 percent of those asked confirm they were atheist.”

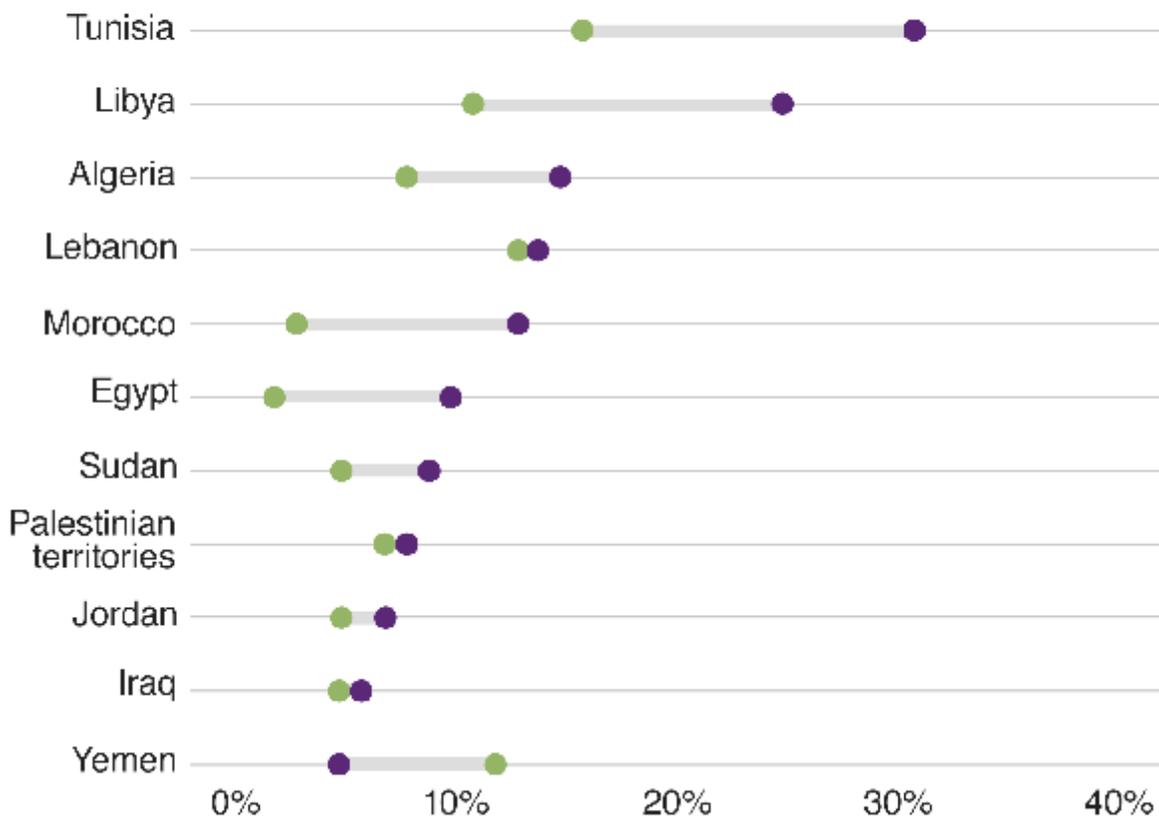
(*Relevant*, <https://relevantmagazine.com/current/here-are-the-most-post-christian-cities-in-america/>)



• **Arabs are increasingly saying they are no longer religious, according to the largest and most in-depth survey undertaken of the Middle East and North Africa.** The finding is one of several others on how Arabs feel about a wide range of issues, from women’s rights and migration to security and sexuality. The Arab Barometer research network interviewed more than 25,000 people for the survey across 10 countries and the Palestinian territories between late 2018 and spring 2019. A *BBC* report on this research (June 24) states that the number of people across the region identifying as “not religious” has risen from 8 percent to 13 percent since 2013, with the rise being greatest among those under 30, among whom 18 percent identify as not religious. While only Yemen saw a fall in this category, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco saw the highest increases, with Tunisia going from about 15 to 30 percent claiming to be non-religious. In Egypt, the percentage rose from about 2 to 10 percent. In Lebanon, the Palestinian territories and Iraq, the non-religious population remained stable.

Rise of the non-religious

Proportion of people who said they were not religious in
2013 and **2018-19**



Source: Arab Barometer



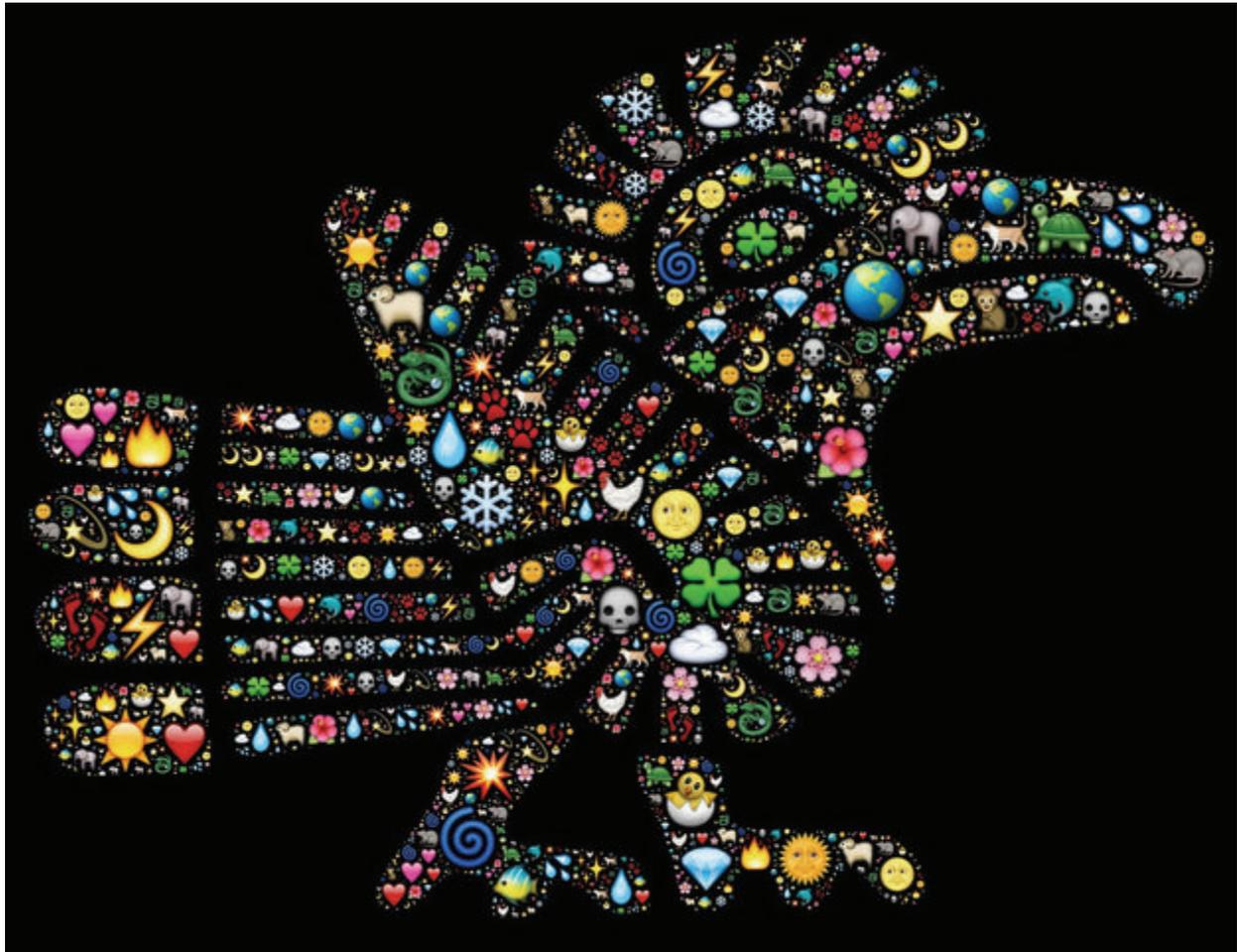
Students of Mexico's religions find a patchwork of new colors

When one remembers Graham Greene's portrayal of Mexico's religious landscape, one might think of grayish and sad, old musty churches. In that view, faith is seen as moving mountains among those suffering poverty and despair. However, the last 30 years have completely challenged that image. The country is now living through a huge transformation, a blending and remaking of religious practices and associations. According to recent government-issued data, there are 35 religious associations currently registered in the country. Although many of them are Catholic of some sort, evangelical Protestants are well represented, with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Hare Krishnas being important minorities. Other expressions, such as Mexicanists and Fidencists (the former a religion based on pre-Columbian deities and the latter a group based on the teachings of a faith healer) are gaining momentum in contemporary Mexico. Research interests have been mirroring the country's increasing religious diversity, concerned with religious conversion and hybridization as well as new evangelization patterns. RIFREM, the Research Network on Religious Phenomena in Mexico (Red de Investigadores del Fenómeno Religioso en México), is a national network of students and researchers devoted to the study of religion that held its twenty-second annual congress in mid-June. RIFREM was born in 1998 as a regional effort to understand religious phenomena in a country where academic Marxism and strong political secularism had marginalized religious studies for decades. In 2004, the network became a national one.

In 2018 RIFREM had over 300 members from national universities and research centers, as well as from some foreign universities. In its national congress, PhD students and seasoned scholars present work along with their younger peers working on their Master's theses or BA projects. The congress venue selected this year was the small town of Creel, a tiny place in the Tarahumara region in the northern state of Chihuahua. Creel was an important site of missionary activity in the early seventeenth century and continues to bear witness to Jesuit evangelization efforts in the region. At the congress, scholars from all over the country gathered to discuss new trends in evangelization and new religious expressions and movements. From discussions of Shia Islamic communities in Mexico City to architecture and secularization, the growing importance of Protestant churches to the evangelical presence in society, the general atmosphere was of a vibrant, thriving research community in a country that is no longer fully Catholic but where Catholicism still resonates strongly. Relics and online (Catholic) devotions, current disputes on religion, gender, and sexuality, transnational perspectives on Mexican Catholicism, religious tourism, and religion in conflict zones were among the most interesting topics discussed at the gathering.

Even the government of President López Obrador came under scrutiny at the RIFREM congress. A panel on Obrador, politics, and religion prompted interesting debates on the thorny issue of the role of religion in the public sphere, a nearly taboo topic in Mexico. The issue arose after Obrador invited representatives of several evangelical churches to visit him at the Palacio Nacional, sparking a national debate on secularism and the limits that should exist on the relations between the government, states, and churches. Other topics showed the strength of

more classic scholarship, such as new trends in education and evangelization, secularization, religious materiality in everyday life, and spirituality and wellbeing. Opening the conference was José Casanova of Georgetown University, who challenged scholars about the usual meaning given to globalization and linked it to premodern religious enterprises, mainly those of the Society of Jesus. RIFREM 2019 was charged with some of the more pressing issues Mexico faces and scholars took on the task of discussing religious practices in violent contexts, migratory processes, and other transformations in a country which, religiously speaking, is anything but grey. —By *Marisol Lopez Menendez*, who is a professor of sociology at *Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City*.



Religion found to offer political resource in secularized societies

High religiosity is not a prerequisite for the successful use of religious arguments, and even very secularized Western societies can sometimes find religious arguments convincing, writes Petr Kratochvíl (Institute of International Relations, Prague) in *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* (Spring). Especially in populist discourses, religious arguments can become tools of

identity construction. The article examines three cases in the Czech Republic, one of the most secularized countries in the world, with only one-fifth of the population considering themselves as believers (according to the country's 2011 census). Although Czechs hold very liberal views on issues such as same-sex marriage (62 percent in favor) and legal abortion (84 percent supportive), and while there is no sign of a return to more religiosity, religious arguments have found ways to come back into political debates as a consequence of the migration crisis (although there are few Muslims in the Czech Republic). In 2015, after previous failed attempts, Good Friday was made a public holiday. Its Christian nature was stressed in identitarian terms in the official memorandum, “against the onslaught of other identities,” gaining widespread support even from a majority of Communist MPs.

In 2017, when a German retail chain airbrushed the crosses from the top of an Orthodox church it used in its packaging for a line of Greek food, there was a strong and prolonged backlash in the Czech Republic, with few voices daring to offer a secularist interpretation and defend the company. The discussion showed a strong link between anger at the removed crosses and fears of Islamization with the presence of Islamic symbols in the country's public square—although Muslims had nothing to do with the controversy. Finally, discourse and sentiment have spread (thanks to the churches among other actors) advocating the acceptance of Christian refugees rather than other ones, clearly presuming that their Christianity would make them easier to integrate, and making Christianity an element of broad identity rather than belief or behavior. (Finally, even non-European Christian refugees were considered with reluctance.) Thus religion



can be used in secular societies for defining one's identity, provided key actors raise the issue as not only religious but also cultural, "thus bridging the religious-secular cleavage that is usually rather deep in secular societies." Kratochvíl argues that the less a society knows about religion ("our own" or the other's), the easier it is to make general claims about it in terms of civilization. Such uses of religion do not prevent continuing secularization.

(*The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, P.O. Box 12205, Arlington, VA 22219-2205, www.tandfonline.com/rfia)

Middle Eastern Christian migrants replacing one minority status for another?

Middle Eastern Christians migrating to the West are facing the challenge of moving from being a minority in predominantly Muslim societies to a minority in post-Christian countries, leading to feelings of isolation and separateness from their host populations, according to a study by Fiona McCallum published in the *Journal of Church and State* (Spring). In the study, consisting of in-depth interviews with 50 active members of congregations and six focus groups at sites in London and Scotland, McCallum found that Middle Eastern Christians often expressed surprise that the UK was so secular, especially since they believed they were leaving behind their minority status in their home country to become part of a Christian majority in the West. Early on in their move to the UK, the respondents were in contact with British churches, since they tend to rent already established church buildings, and noticed the thinning ranks of white Christians attending these congregations. While there was a steady supply of church buildings



for these immigrant congregations to rent, the low level of churchgoing by native British caused trepidation that they had exchanged one minority status for another.

In the Middle East, political secularism has been valued by minority Christian communities for providing them with tolerance and a measure of autonomy from Islamic regimes. But McCallum reports that these Christians tend to see such secularism in the UK in a negative light, as giving rights to minorities, from Muslims to the LGBTQ community, while disregarding their own faith and culture. “The view that the United Kingdom is a hostile environment for people who openly identify as Christians is one shared by Middle Eastern Christians when discussing their narratives of political secularism at the political level,” she adds. Similar to the patterns found in studies of young Muslims in Europe, second-generation Middle Eastern Christians tend to affiliate with their religious identity first before ethnicity and race. In fact, the Christians McCallum studied tended to adopt a subcultural lifestyle in the UK similar to that which they had in the Middle East, focusing life around family and the church. While a few may have had ties with Christian student associations and other groups, these communities were marked by an “internal focus on strengthening the community by meeting the needs of their youth through communal, primarily church auspices...[in an effort to] counteract any contradictory ideas and values associated with the British secular society....”

(*Journal of Church and State*, <https://academic.oup.com/jcs>)

Ukraine’s new Orthodox Church independent from Russia but not its own government?

While the Orthodox Church of Ukraine has emerged on the world stage as the legitimate and canonical church supported by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, at home the new church faces old rivalries as well as the perception that it is receiving inappropriate support from the government, writes Katherine Younger in *IWMpost* (Spring/Summer), the publication of the Vienna-based Institute for Human Sciences. Last January, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) was freed from longtime Russian control when Constantinople agreed to give it canonical status. Shortly afterwards, the OCU replaced two churches that had been established parts of the Ukrainian religious landscape but not recognized by the global Orthodox community. Yet the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is still going strong, with nearly twice as many parishes as the OCU. Fewer than five percent of the Moscow Patriarchate churches have opted to join the OCU, and they are usually in the western and central part of Ukraine. More troubling to observers, however, is the way that the new OCU and Ukraine’s government have been referring to new ties between church and state, conflicting with Ukraine’s longtime support for church-state separation going back to its independence.

Younger writes that one of Ukraine’s strengths was widely held to be its view that the church was not linked to the state, as in the Russian case, but to the people. This resulted in greater religious pluralism in Ukraine than in its surrounding countries with state-sponsored churches. But



political discourse in Ukraine has taken on a pro-OCU strain, especially evident in the reelection campaign of former president Petro Poroshenko, who spoke of the OCU's independence being crucial for the Ukrainian state's own independence and national security. The head of the OCU, Metropolitan Epifanii, echoed such sentiments, saying "Without a unified, nationally independent Orthodox church, we cannot build a strong, powerful, European, independent Ukrainian state." To add to the church's potential problems, the OCU's pursuit of independence (known as "autocephaly") became associated not only with the state but specifically with Poroshenko's failed campaign. This has been leading to "popular enthusiasm [about the independence of the OCU] giving way to mistrust and apathy" among

the public, according to Younger. She

concludes that in order to "consolidate its internationally recognized status as the sole legitimate Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the OCU hierarchy will have to figure out a way to overcome this perception" of too close an association between the church and the state.

(*IWMpost*, Spittelauer Lände 3, 1090 Vienna, Austria, <https://www.iwm.at/publications/iwmpost/>)

Bastion of Islamic orthodoxy in Egypt struggles in more critical and competitive environment

Cairo's Al-Azhar University, considered the guardian of Islamic orthodoxy, has retained its independence in the face of the authoritarian government of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, but the venerable institution is facing new competition from neighboring countries and newly established schools of Islamic learning across the Muslim world, writes James Dorsey in *Relioscope* (June 17), an international news service on religion and sister publication of **RW**. Al-Sisi gained world attention when he charged that Al-Azhar was promoting extremism through

its curriculum and attempted to introduce legislation to moderate its course, such as by enhancing the government's role in appointing officials to the university's leadership. The proposals were alarming enough to mobilize Al-Azhar's supporters to defeat the legislation. But the incident did prod university officials to curb anti-pluralistic and intolerant statements by some faculty members as well as set up an online monitoring system to track militant statements on social media. Officials and scholars are still being criticized, however, for allowing extremist sentiment and literature in the university's libraries and coursework. Al-Azhar also continues to issue statements and take actions that appear sympathetic to radicalism, such as demanding the closure of a TV show that advocated the purging of canonical texts promoting violence and suspending a professor for promoting atheism because he used books authored by liberals.

Dorsey adds that complementing these issues is al-Sisi's view of his own role as a guardian of Islamic orthodoxy, evident for example in his argument in a study he wrote some years ago at the U.S. War College that Middle Eastern democracy needed to be informed by an Islamic principle of "obedience to a ruler who consults his subjects." Al-Azhar's resistance to al-Sisi's reform efforts is reinforced by its concern about growing competition from Saudi, Jordanian, and Turkish institutions. The university is also challenged by the growth of Islamic studies programs at European and American universities, even if these programs are not immune from producing extremists also, according to Dorsey. Al-Sisi has apparently learned a lesson from trying to reform Al-Azhar and is now training male and female imams for a newly established International Awqaf Academy, which is attached to the presidency rather than Al-Azhar. The new

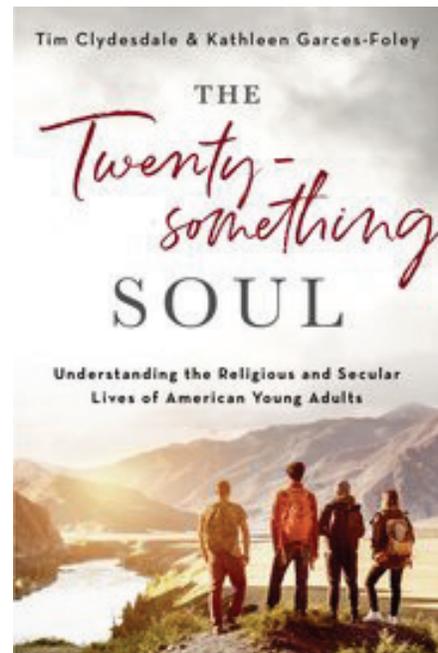


school will offer religious subjects as well as such disciplines as sociology, psychology, and politics. The president has also instructed his religious affairs ministry to write standardized sermons for all mosque preachers. Dorsey notes that Al-Azhar and al-Sisi are surrounded by Islamic clerics who have been influenced by Saudi Islam (and funding) and, more recently, by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which promotes a quietist form of Islam similar to that of the Saudis while opposing its ultra-conservatism. Dorsey concludes that changing “Al-Azhar’s definition of itself and the way it translates that into its teachings and activities is likely to be a long drawn-out struggle.”

(*Relioscope*, <https://english.religion.info/2019/06/18/egypt-al-azhar-struggles-to-balance-politics-and-tradition/>)

Findings & Footnotes

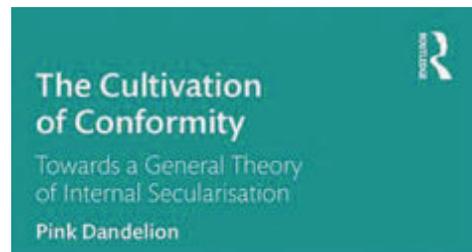
- *Twentysomething Soul* (Oxford University Press, \$29.95) looks beyond the barrage of research and reporting on non-affiliated young Americans to also examine those who have a strong attachment to their congregations and faith. These “active affiliated” Christian young adults are not as unusual as one might think, argue authors Timothy Clydesdale of the College of New Jersey and Kathleen Garces-Foley of Marymount University; they find that the number of Christian adherents among twentysomethings is larger than the population of the state of Texas (at 26.5 million). There are about 10 million twentysomethings who are regular churchgoers and actively practice their faith—more than the population of New York City (at 11.3 million). About six out of 10 American twentysomethings affiliate with Catholic and Protestant traditions, while three out of 10 do not affiliate with a religion. The book is based on a national survey of 1,880 twentysomethings in 2013, as well as 200 in-depth interviews with young adults active in Catholic and evangelical and mainline Protestant congregations across the country. [It should be noted that **RW’s** editor was one of the interviewers in this phase of the research.]



Clydesdale and Garces-Foley place Christian twentysomethings in “Active” to “Nominal” to “Estranged” categories, although Catholics, evangelicals, and mainline Protestants show different proportions of such tendencies. Greater percentages of mainline Protestant and Catholic respondents fit the nominal identity than the active one, meaning that they value their religious backgrounds and intend to invest more in them in the future, but currently participate only on occasion. But the evangelical difference stands out—47 percent are active, 50 percent nominal, and only three percent are estranged. Clydesdale and Garces-Foley note that the proportion of active evangelicals is more than twice the proportion of

active mainliners or active Catholics, while the proportion of estranged evangelicals is at least six times smaller than the proportion of estranged mainliners and Catholics. A strong sense of community, pastoral leadership (especially good preaching), and finding a “critical mass” of fellow young adults filling the pews were among the commonalities drawing twentysomethings to churches (with the Catholic young adults stressing the Eucharist and mainline Protestants valuing social justice efforts). The book also does a good job of showing the struggle involved in finding a compatible church, especially among Catholics and mainline Protestants; Catholics often patched together what Clydesdale and Garces-Foley call a “trans-parish,” a network consisting of diocesan-wide events and programs and campus organizations. While twentysomethings are said to be “spiritual but not religious,” the young adults we read about in the book have managed to combine a spiritual life with religious practice. Most of the affiliated twentysomethings held traditional Christian understandings of spirituality, but there was also the unusual finding that the active Christian young adults were more likely to hold to non-traditional forms of spirituality than even their non-affiliated counterparts. This may be due to the fact that these twentysomethings extend their spirituality to everyday life, including nature, art, and music.

■ *The Cultivation of Conformity* (Routledge, \$39.95), by Pink Dandelion, concerns itself with the way that religious organizations experience internal secularization, even as their beliefs and practices escape from them and can influence the wider society. Dandelion, a specialist on Quakerism, uses the Society of Friends as his main case study to examine the way that this interaction between secularizing and religious forces takes place. The Quaker case, particularly in Britain, presents some unique features that address the question of internal secularization. It is a liberal body that has significantly reduced its tensions with the surrounding society, losing a large percentage of its cradle membership (especially after the 1990s), yet it has continued to attract converts, which seems to fly in the face of secularization theories. Dandelion traces the shift in Quakerism, from world rejection (as suggested in the practice of forming a “hedge” between the Quakers and society) to a stance both affirming and challenging the world, early on in the group’s history; the tendency toward assimilation into society was evident in the mid-1600s. This trend has intensified to the point where non-Christians have played an increasing role in the Society of Friends, leading to a debate about whether belief in God is necessary to be a Quaker. [See the April/May 2019 issue of **RW** for more on this subject.]



Dandelion argues that Quaker practices and lifestyles, such as pacifism and silent worship, have been maintained while Christian beliefs and creedal statements have been discarded. On one hand, Dandelion finds that “even as a very permissive religious group in the twentieth century, Quakerism has defied

secularization theory by continuing to offer distinctive practices and forms, such as silent worship and voteless decision-making, which have buoyed recruitment.” Yet the author concludes that internal secularization has still taken place in the way that Quaker and non-Quaker values are aligned and religious identity is privatized and individualized to avoid disharmony outside of Quaker settings—a pattern actually encouraged by the inflow of non-Christian converts. Dandelion concludes that the pattern of internal secularization extends beyond Quakerism, which may fare better in the way it makes space for “expressive individualism” to flourish. In most cases, however, “it is not that the threat to transcendent religion is coming from without but from within religious organizations on a popular level.”

■ In recent years, social scientists of all stripes have turned their attention to “happiness studies,” although they have often neglected to look at the religious dimensions of happiness in a sustained way. That limitation is addressed in the recent book *Regimes of Happiness* (Anthem, \$115; e-book \$30.36), edited by Yuri Contreras-Vejar, Joanna Tice Jen, and Bryan S. Turner. While the anthology also addresses neglected philosophical aspects and meanings of happiness, the contributors often return to the religious sources of the idea of happiness, both throughout history and in the present day. What the editors and contributors mean by “regimes of happiness” is the way that happiness or human fulfillment, in its various different meanings, is shaped by different political, religious, and secular practices and institutions.

RW readers will be particularly interested in the chapters on evangelical conceptions of happiness, as found in popular devotional writings, and how they can be adapted to different political views and agendas (as illustrated in the evangelical advisors President Trump has assembled around himself), and the different conception of happiness in Vietnam, where ancestor veneration is linked to well-being—a practice being upended by the pursuit of wealth-generating consumerist lifestyles (which is also reflected in Vietnamese happiness studies). Turner concludes that happiness studies, using the measurements of wealth and health, and the way they have been put to use by governments and policy specialists, have largely marginalized religion. But modern regimes of happiness remain fragmented and unstable, based on secular values of individualism, self-autonomy, and enjoyment, suggesting that there is “no, and perhaps never can be, a definitive answer to ‘what is happiness.’”

