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Religious revival or reversal emerging from the pandemic?

The unpredictable course of the coronavirus pandemic at this stage makes it difficult to know its long-term effects on religious institutions and communities. In the short-term, it's obvious that the virus and the various social and political responses to it have rapidly reshuffled the communal practices of religious groups, most notably seen in the rapid adaptation and expansion of online services. While several countries are about to relax measures imposed for containing the spread of the virus, its consequences will impact the churches for a longer time, reports RW associate editor Jean-François Mayer on our partner website *Religioscope* (April 26, 2020).

While experts hold different views about consequences and even discuss a possible spike in religiosity once the crisis is over, as one can see by reading a conversation on the website of the UK-based Centre for Geopolitics, Mayer argues for a contextualized assessment and focuses on Western countries. The pandemic has come at a time when historical churches have not been on the rise in the West. Due to preexisting trends in less frequent participation even by those who are still practicing, the inability for



people to attend physical worship during a more or less extended period of time is likely both to strengthen the resolve of the strong believers to persevere and to accelerate the decline in religious participation among the less convinced ones, who will have become accustomed to not going to church on Sunday. Fr. Bill Grimm, a Maryknoll missionary living in Japan, expects that “the most noticeable change will be a large reduction in the size of communities,” although some will manage much better (*La Croix International*, April 23, 2020).

In many countries facing the pandemic, funerals have only remained possible with the attendance of a handful of close relatives at best. In the most secularized Western countries, funerals are one of the rare opportunities for priests and pastors to address audiences they do not reach otherwise. While the consequences cannot yet be evaluated, this episode might well leave traces, especially

since restrictions—even with some relaxations—might well extend for a longer period. Economic consequences will also be felt by churches, since the suspension of public worship means that collections can no longer be conducted in the usual way. Moreover, when public worship resumes—with restrictions at a first stage—older people, who have been constantly warned to be cautious, might well delay attending, which will also mean decreased income for congregations. And expected economic hardships as well as rising joblessness will leave some believers with limited financial resources. As public worship resumes, there will be limitations in several countries to the number of people allowed to gather at the same time. Possibly for months, they will be required to keep physical distance among each other. This will have an impact especially on those churches gathering in packed places, but also more generally on community experience.

(“Will the COVID-19 pandemic lead to a global spike in religiosity?”

<https://centreforgeopolitics.org/will-covid-19-make-people-more-religious/>;

“Analyse : les Églises chrétiennes face au coronavirus — bilan intermédiaire et perspectives

<https://www.religion.info/2020/04/26/analyse-les-eglises-chretiennes-face-au-coronavirus-bilan-intermediaire-et-perspectives/>)

Religious gatherings spreading the faith and the coronavirus?



Due to the (mostly unintentional) role of some religious groups as super-propagators of the virus (along with secular types of gathering), religious meetings—especially large ones—are being seen as potential sources of trouble. When it comes to individual attitudes and practices toward social distancing, there is not a great difference between those from various religious and non-religious groups. A survey conducted among a national sample of 2006 individuals by the polling company Morning Consult (conducted March 17-20), finds that the religious were even more likely to practice social distancing. Eighty two percent of evangelicals and 89 percent of religious non-Protestant/Catholics practiced social distancing, compared to agnostics at 78 percent and atheists at 80 percent. But a study in the online magazine *Quillette* (April 23, 2020) raises the interesting question of how religious gatherings may have served as “superspreaders” of CV-19. Superspreaders are those people, groups, or places that are more likely to pass on the virus through their practices of gathering large numbers of other people in close contact, often marked by singing or shouting. Jonathan Kay created a data base of superspreader events in 28 countries, though he acknowledges that the information was limited in several countries.

Kay finds that many of the superspreader events comprised gatherings of highly mobile and high-income people (such as those on ski trips), but of the 54 superspreaders in the data base, “no fewer than nine were linked to religious services or missionary work. This includes massive gatherings, such as February’s weeklong Christian Open Door prayer meeting in Mulhouse, France, which has been linked to an astounding 2,500 cases, and a massive Tablighi Jamaat Islami event in Lahore that attracted a quarter million people [and in other Indian cities].” The

religious superspreading events also included smaller gatherings, such as proselytizing efforts in rural Punjab villages and a religious meeting in a Calgary, Canada home. Kay notes that most of the world's religions were represented in his list, but the virus does seem to prey on emotion-filled and intimate meetings with collective prayer, something that Tablighi and the French Christian prayer meetings had in common.

Specific outbreaks of the virus that have been limited to specific religious groups can be explained by their strong in-group ties. This can be seen in how the outbreak of the virus in the Navajo Indian country of Arizona was first spread from religious ceremonies that brought thousands of tribe members together. The Hasidic Jewish communities may not be superspreaders since members don't regularly interact with outsiders, but this movement has seen heavy losses from the virus. *The Jerusalem Post* (April 22, 2020) reports that Hasidic leaders in the New York area disregarded public health calls to quarantine, holding mass funerals of rabbis and Purim celebrations until late March. With now over 300 deaths and thousands contracting the virus, including the grand rabbi of the Satmar Hasidic community of Brooklyn, the Hasidic communities are largely abiding the quarantine. But the community, especially in Brooklyn, will face hard winds of financial decline from the lockdown, since it depends on sales from the Passover season to sustain itself.

The Church of God in Christ, the country's biggest African American Pentecostal denomination, has suffered extensive losses in leadership, with at least a dozen to up to 30 bishops and prominent clergy dying of covid-19, according to the *Washington Post* (April 19, 2020). Michelle Boorstein reports that the deaths of leaders in states including Michigan, New York and Mississippi are in regions where both the church is strong and where the coronavirus has hit hard. She adds that local health officials say specific outbreaks that led to the deaths appeared to stem from conferences, typically held in February and March, and funerals held within the denomination. Anthea Butler of the University of Pennsylvania says that this crisis will "upend the axis of leadership in a way they may need to think about, including how do we put in younger people." Because black institutions are susceptible to the impact of the coronavirus, as it has disproportionately affected African Americans, the "ecosystem of black church life will likely change...It's showing the inequities of health disparities and economic disparities in the black community," she adds.

(*Morning Consult*, <https://morningconsult.com>; *Quillette*, <https://quillette.com/2020/04/23/covid-19-superspreader-events-in-28-countries-critical-patterns-and-lessons>; *Jerusalem Post*, <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/How-New-York-hassidic-communities-have-been-buffed-by-coronavirus-624896?>)

Culture wars intensify over easing restrictions on congregations in pandemic

Seemingly practical and public health issues such as lockdowns and decisions to ease restrictions on religious institutions during the coronavirus crisis have been enlisted into the protracted culture wars between religious conservatives and progressive and secular critics. The protests to

open society back up during state-directed lockups does not have a large religious component. But a segment of conservative Christians pressing to keep their churches open was seen as part of the same phenomenon (and even linked globally to a figure such as Jair Bolsonaro, president of Brazil). This is most clearly seen in a *New York Times* article by Katherine Stewart (March 27, 2020) where she ties “Christian nationalists,” a term recently used to identify the religious right, to science denial as seen when some megachurch pastors’ attempted to keep their congregations open while claiming divine protection from the virus. Stewart makes the connection between these pastors to Donald Trump’s evangelical advisors and supporters, such as Jerry Falwell Jr. (who also kept his Liberty University open at the start of the quarantine) as well as to Trump appointees, such as Ben Carson and Alex Azar of the Department of Public Health, who, she writes, mismanaged the response to the spread of the virus. Stewart concludes that these Christian nationalists and politicians share a commitment to privatization and conservative Christian policy that hampers a science-based response to the pandemic.



In the conservative e-newsletter *Public Discourse* (April 13, 2020), Steven Wedgworth notes that the title of Stewart’s article was originally “The Road to Coronavirus Hell was Paved by Evangelicals,” but was quickly changed and broadened to reference the “New Christian Right.” But the author argues that such critics continue to use conservative Christians as scapegoats. He adds that the attack by Stewart, which is “one of a burgeoning cottage industry of works on ‘Christian nationalism,’” is continuous with previous critiques of the “threat” of theocratic Christian Dominionism of the 1990s and early 2000s, aside from the new focus on Donald Trump and the use of political theory on nationalism. But Stewart didn’t explain how the incidents involving these megachurches are related to nationalism, nor did she show how political questions regarding strategies to deal with the societal implications of the pandemic can be answered strictly through science, Wedgworth concludes.

A *CNN* analysis (April 14, 2020) notes that the conflicts about giving religious institutions exemptions from stay-at-home orders fall along party lines and is another example of a gridlock existing between Americans on social policy questions. Ronald Brownstein writes that the “restrictions on gathering have unnerved some advocacy groups, who see them as potential harbingers of further constraints on religious freedom as American society grows more secular.” Meanwhile, on the blog *Religion in Public* (April 20, 2020), political scientist Paul Djupe reports on a field survey of evangelicals he and colleagues conducted in late March and found that “On balance, [evangelicals] do not support defiance [regarding lockdowns involving closing churches]” more than non-evangelicals. Yet he adds that defiance is “much higher for evangelicals when the state has no restrictions *and* when religious gatherings are prohibited by

the state.” That “embattled” stance is not evident among non-evangelicals who reject an attitude of defiance to state orders regardless of state restrictions.”

(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2020/04/18/evangelical-defiance-against-the-states/>)

Jewish home-based rituals adapting and changing during pandemic

American Jews are modifying long-standing rituals in the age of coronavirus and quarantines, when the community elements on which those traditions rely are out of reach, reports the online magazine *Ozy* (April 8, 2020). From home-based bar mitzvahs to online funerals, “We’ve broken every norm there is,” said Jonathan Jaffe, a Reform rabbi in suburban New York. The Rabbinical Assembly and the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has given their support to remote “minyans” — traditionally a quorum of at least 10 Jewish people who need to gather in order to



pray. Carly Stern reports that other congregations have held online services and cooking classes to prepare for Passover, while other Jews are adapting mourning, burial and funeral practices. The tradition of “sitting Shiva,” a traditional week-long mourning period, usually marked by eating, embraces, laughter and storytelling, must be done through a screen.

These shifts are “spawning an unlikely contradiction. On the one hand, they’re dismantling the tight-knit community aspect of religion. Rituals done in isolation make it harder to foster engagement,” Stern writes. “How do you sustain any sense of community ... if you’re sitting alone at home looking into a computer screen?” Jaffe asks. But she adds these changes are also causing an increase in participation among nonobservant Jews. “People are more connected to the community than I’ve ever seen before in my life,” another rabbi adds, noting that those who rarely come to synagogue are attending e-

services. While some wonder if these innovations could spark a revival of at-home-based Judaism among the non-affiliated Jews, the rabbis Stern interviewed are asking if these changes will be merely temporary. The participation uptick could also subside when stay-at-home orders are rescinded. “I don’t know if half the synagogue’s going to need to resign because they can’t afford to pay dues,” one rabbi said.

(*Ozy*, <https://www.ozy.com/the-new-and-the-next/online-seders-and-virtual-bnai-mitzvahs-is-the-virus-changing-judaism/300012/>)

Yoga's psychological turn coincides with the isolation and stress of quarantine

Yoga has long adapted to different cultural contexts and situations, and the current pandemic is likely to accent those forms of yoga that relate to mental health and spiritual solace, writes Shreena Niketa Gandhi in the online religion magazine *The Revealer* (April 7, 2020). The speed at which yoga studios moved to offer virtual yoga sessions to fit this moment of social isolation is “reflective of the ever-changing nature of yoga,” she writes. The growing popularity of new therapeutic forms of yoga dealing with trauma and other emotions take the emphasis off “how the body will look and function after doing yoga, and more about what a person is dealing with mentally in the present moment. [This] may be especially important with the isolating shift Americans are currently experiencing,” Gandhi writes.

“Trauma yoga” was developed to deal with people suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and for that reason instructors do not touch practitioners—something that might be suitable with social distancing, even though its effects may not be translatable to online usage. “Rage yoga” involves people expressing their negative emotions, encouraging cursing and even making obscene gestures, and has found a following in 14 American cities. Although this kind of yoga may be suitable for people confined for weeks and even months to vent their anger and achieve a “zen” state, as one teacher claimed, it is communal in nature and could be a challenge to adapt online. Another flourishing yoga movement until very recently, known as “goat yoga,” has definitely been postponed during the quarantine, since it requires the presence of goats to enhance the spiritual and natural elements of the practice.

(*The Revealer*, <https://therevealer.org/trauma-yoga-goat-yoga-and-other-yoga-trends-in-an-age-of-social-isolation/>)



Religious left doldrums intensify even in resistance?

Claims of the resurgence of the religious left during the Trump presidency have circulated far and wide, but recent research suggests that any such religious-political revival is limited and that it is more the secular left that is showing the most vitality. In the journal *Sociology of Religion* (81:2), sociologists Joseph O. Baker and Gerardo Marti analyze data from the General Social Survey, the Public Religion Research Institute, and the National Congregations Study and find

that not only is the constituency of the religious left shrinking but there also has been a disengagement in such political activity in the last decade. Baker and Marti also did a textual analysis of media coverage of the religious left and found that stories with mentions of the “religious left” occurred more times in 2019 than any previous year. Much of the religious left’s decline in constituency is related to the shrinkage of mainline Protestantism and the rapid rise of the non-affiliated. In looking at voting behavior of Americans who are politically and religiously liberal, the authors found that they were just as likely to self-report voting compared to religiously and political Americans in 2004, but since then their voting rates have dropped significantly. Since 2008, it has been the secular left that has been ascendant, most closely tracking the growth of religious right voting and activism. Baker and Marti do find evidence of increased mobilization of the religious left over time when looking at congregations. But they caution that only a small percentage of congregations are politically liberal (according to reports by clergy).

In an article in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (online in April, 2020), Laura Krill focuses on the micro level of congregational involvement in religious left causes, finding that liberal churches’ commitment to inclusivity may be in tension with providing a religious basis for such activism. Krill studied a church participating in Moral Mondays, a coalition of congregations in North Carolina involved in social justice issues, such as strengthening the social safety net. The congregation engages in a “blessing” of activists at the conclusion of Sunday services, with congregants being expected to stand and recite this prayer. The researcher finds that, while church leaders may not be aware of it, congregants feel that such a blessing of activism threatens the church’s inclusive stance. While the congregants strongly supported such activism, which included the arrest of the pastor during a protest, in interviews they became uncomfortable with linking or providing religious justification of it through these blessings.

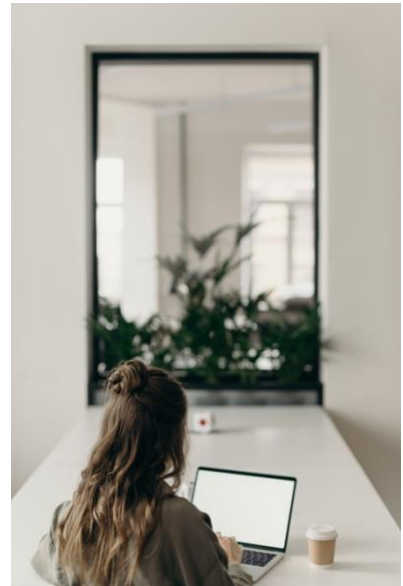
Such wariness is likely due to the fact that congregants do not want to give the impression that Moral Mondays is the only church-approved form of social activism. But the Krill also argues that making such a unified and public stance in church for this cause violates the congregants’ commitment to inclusivity and to religious individualism, which distinguishes them from religious conservatives. She concludes that “these findings suggest that liberal Protestants are likely engaged in advocacy and work in the public sphere, but they are not using a liberal religious perspective to motivate that involvement. Individuals can decide to act on their own religious commitments, but religious beliefs and convictions are questioned when they require congregant participation.”



(*Sociology of Religion*, <https://academic.oup.com/socrel>; *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14685906>?)

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **A new study of young adults finds that while they feel a strong sense of isolation during the coronavirus pandemic, many report an increase of faith, with a fairly large number saying they are actually developing new religious practices.** Scholarly studies of religion and the coronavirus pandemic will likely weigh down journals for years to come, but the few appearing so far have mainly been issued by research institutes and polling companies. Such is the case with the Springtide Research Institute’s study, “Belonging: Reconnecting America’s Loneliest Generation,” surveying 1,000 young people between 18-25. The survey found that 35 percent of respondents said they are experiencing an increase of faith during the pandemic and 46 percent have developed new religious practices. At the same time, these young adults report that even if they participate in streaming religious services, 50 percent said they feel little connection to religious institutions and have few people to talk with about their feelings of isolation and questions about faith.



(The study can be downloaded at: <https://www.springtideresearch.org/belonging/>)

● **About half of Americans (49 percent) believe the Bible should have at least “some” influence on U.S. laws, with about a quarter saying it should have “a great deal” of influence, according to a Pew Research survey.** Among U.S. Christians, two-thirds (68 percent) want to see biblical influence in the U.S. on some laws, with evangelical Protestants being the most supportive (89 percent). Those most likely to be against biblical influence on U.S. laws are religiously unaffiliated Americans, also known as religious “nones,” who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.” Roughly three-quarters in this group say the Bible should hold little to no influence, particularly atheists. Two-thirds of U.S. Jews also think the Bible should have not much or no influence on laws.

(Pew Research, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/13/half-of-americans-say-bible-should-influence-u-s-laws-including-28-who-favor-it-over-the-will-of-the-people/>)



● **The growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is no longer what it used to be, but specific reasons can be identified, writes Emma Penrod in *Religion Unplugged* (April 20, 2020).** LDS annual growth has declined to 1.5 percent in 2019. New believers are still converting, but birthrates inside the church have been decreasing and are seen

as the major reason for slower growth. Due to a higher than average number of children in Mormon families, births used to contribute to growth, since two thirds to three quarters of the children born in the Church used to remain active once adults. However, this is reported to be changing, since retention rate has fallen to 46 percent. In former times, according to scholar and journalist Jana Riess, a number of young Mormons would drop out and later come back to the Church, but the rates of those following that pattern have lowered—something common across religious denominations these days. Children raised by those young people will mostly never join the Church.

Still the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has some hope to be able to counteract the trends. According to scholars interviewed by Penrod, one significant strength remains the community spirit offered by the church through its local units. According to Patrick Mason (Utah State University), keeping strong local communities alive is “the number one thing the church can do to maintain itself, because there are fewer and fewer places in the world where people find authentic communities. If they can find that, it will compensate for a host of other issues.” Half of the 400 new local congregations opened last year are located in the U.S. There are also indications of church efforts toward decentralization, as evidenced by the fact that it has given up “its standardized hymnbook in favor of regional hymnals designed to reflect local languages and musical customs.” Conversions to the Church outside the US continue to be significant, with a quarter million more members in 2019. Brazil may on its way to register more new members than the US. At a time when the potential growth of the church may well be tied to its progress outside of North America, its ability to open to diverse cultural perspectives might well hold the key to its future, Matthew Boewman (Claremont Graduate University) concludes.



(*Religion Unplugged* - <https://religionunplugged.com>)

● **The recent shift of Jews from the Labour Party to the Conservative Party is far from a one-time occurrence, but rather is part of a long-term trend, according to a study by Andrew Barclay of the University of Manchester in the journal *Politics and Religion* (online in April, 2020).** Britain’s Jews have historically been associated with the left and particularly the Labour Party, but allegations of anti-Semitism in the party and especially its candidate Jeremy Corbin, who had climbed to power since 2015, was seen to be a deciding factor for Jewish support for the Conservative or (Tory) party in the recent elections. Using data from the British Election Study and other representative surveys of the Jewish population in Britain, Barclay finds that the initial decrease in Labour support predated the recent



controversies and goes back before the 2015 election cycle when it was perceived that issues of protection and security of Jews as a minority group as well as concerns for Israel were better addressed by the Conservative Party.

(*Politics and Religion*, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-religion>)

The Islamic State eyes renewal during coronavirus pandemic

For the Islamic State (IS), the coronavirus pandemic is a “godsend,” and an act of divine intervention at a time when the terrorist movement had reached its lowest ebb, reports Michael Knights in *Politico* (April 4, 2020). He cites the IS’ newsletter, Al-Naba, which called coronavirus “God’s torment” upon the “Crusader nations,” and urged fighters to take advantage of the disruption caused by the virus. In many ways, the Islamic State is quite well suited for operations during a pandemic, as its cells are isolated, “avoiding the risk of contamination by performing extreme social distancing long before the rest of us. Its leadership issued early instructions to its cadres to limit their exposure to the virus—from the CDC-approved recommendations (washing hands and ‘covering up’ coughs and sneezes) to Koranic verses involving lions and leprosy.”

Knights adds that IS members are somewhat self-contained, living in remote hideouts and underground shelters, drawing on caches of food and water while running their electronic devices with solar battery chargers. “In every sense of the phrase, the thousands of members of this millenarian terrorist cult are the ultimate doomsday preppers. On the ground, there have been small signs of Islamic State recovery at the tactical level, probably due to the cessation of counterinsurgency operations targeting them. Left to operate without pressure, the IS growing more active at the local level, which was the way the movement sought to build its version of the Islamic caliphate village by village. But while the pandemic has accelerated the withdraw of the U.S. from Iraq, in “places as diverse as Yemen, Somalia, Mali and Syria, the U.S. Special Operations Command has employed quiet partnerships with local special forces and paramilitary proxies to take on terrorist cells in a more targeted and effective manner than the large-scale train-and-equip program that appears to be eroding in Iraq.”

(*Politico*,
[https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/04/08/how-the-islamic-state-feeds-on-coronavirus-175192?](https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/04/08/how-the-islamic-state-feeds-on-coronavirus-175192?hpid=hp-top-story%3A-islamic-state-feeds-on-coronavirus%3Ahomepage%2Fstory))



Saudi influence transforming local Islam in Indonesia?

In recent decades, the role of Islam has become increasingly strong in Indonesia, and it has adopted more assertive views, in large part thanks to the flow of Saudi money and charities promoting Salafi interpretations of Islam in the country, writes Krithika Varagur in *The Guardian* (April 16, 2020). Initial efforts go back to the 1960s. The combination of aid and proselytization for a Saudi type of Islam has proved effective. Although Indonesia is officially a multifaith nation, conservative Islamic trends have influenced its Islamic majority toward increasingly asserting the place of Islam. Such views have been promoted by clerics with longstanding ties to Saudi Arabia and who often have received their education there or at Saudi-supported institutions. This type of Islam has not merely been propagated by the Saudi government, but also by a variety of Saudi international actors or businessmen, including the Muslim World League. Those efforts are far from having been coordinated and have not been immune to contradictions (e.g. supporting both groups with links to radical Islam and counterextremism initiatives). But a lot of money was invested into Saudi proselytization efforts, and “while investments peaked in absolute terms at least a decade ago, as they did in most of the Muslim world, their effects continue to reverberate.” One of the consequences of the spread of Saudi-style Islam has also been a rise in religious intolerance, targeting Christians, but also Shia and Ahmadi Muslims, seen as heretical understandings of Islam.



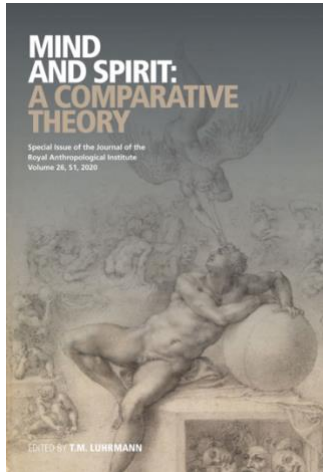
Some institutions initially funded by Saudi money are under the control of Indonesians, while other ones—such as Lipia University—are staffed by Saudis. Saudi funding has now decreased in absolute terms, with the Philippines now their main target in South-East Asia. But Saudi-promoted Islam has grown to such an extent that, even with no Saudis left in the country, “there would still be a vibrant Salafi ecosystem in place,” Varagur writes. The current Saudi ambassador in the country emphasizes that all activities today are conducted “at the request of Indonesian Muslim groups,” and suggests that Saudi interests are now a combination of Islamic affairs, cultural diplomacy and economic interests. While a few years will be needed in order to assess how far the shift has gone, Varagur also draws attention to the fact that one should be aware how Saudi soft power is evolving.

Findings & Footnotes

■ The April issue of the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* features an interesting interchange between psychology, anthropology, and religion relating to how people experience the relationship between their minds and gods and spirits, using charismatic and Pentecostal congregations as its case studies. The special issue reports on the findings of the Mind and Spirit project, a Templeton-funded initiative based at Stanford University and headed by anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann, which brings together an interdisciplinary team to study spiritual experiences in Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the U.S., China, Ghana, Thailand, and Vanatu/Oceania. Although these churches have obvious similarities, they belong to societies that have different conceptions of mind that bear on their conceptions of God and spiritual experience. One finding is that the “more a person imagines the mind-world boundary as porous (permeable), the more they report a vivid, near-sensory experiences of invisible others.” For instance, the American Pentecostals rarely reported—or were hesitant to report—that they heard the voice of God, while there was more of a tendency to do so in Ghana. Luhrmann adds that the project hopes to show that “different ways of representing human-world relationships shape something so basic as sensory evidence.” For more information on this issue, visit: <https://raonline.library.wiley.com/journal/14679655>

■ It is unusual when a secular social science journal devotes a special issue to a sociologist of religion, but David Martin, who died last year, was an unusual sociologist who specialized in religion. The journal *Society* (April, 2020) convened a symposium, asking several contributors from different disciplines about the achievement and relevance of Martin’s work and the result is a fascinating collection of articles that extend his work in such areas as Pentecostalism in Latin America, secularization, British religion, the religious elements in art, music, and poetry, and the relation between theology and sociology. Anglican theologian Martyn Percy expands on Martin’s treatment of secularization by looking at how and why cathedrals in the Church of England show a steady growth in attendance even while parishes are showing a sharp drop in members.

Percy argues that cathedrals don’t show the “high threshold-high rewards” dynamic of strict churches; in fact, he adds that the inclusive and low threshold (or cost) of cathedral attendance, stressing contemplation and solitude rather than activity and community, can serve to “sacralize civic life.” In another article, Martin’s long-time colleague Grace Davie updates his pioneering study of Pentecostalism in Latin America and the revival of religion in Eastern Europe, noting that the growth of populism in the latter region is a new dynamic that has to be accounted for. Bernice Martin explores her late husband’s last project on resilient Christian elements in the arts and literature, noting how he remained a critic to the end of the idea that secularization means an inevitable loss of religious vitality in all aspects of society. For more information on this issue, visit: <https://www.springer.com/journal/12115>



■ The new book *High on God* (Oxford University Press, \$24.95), by James K. Wellman Jr., Katie E. Corcoran, and Kate J. Stockly, blends sociological theory on the emotions with in-depth research on 12 contemporary megachurches. The interviewees expressed the widespread feeling among interviewees that they had experienced a spiritual “high” in their participation in megachurches. These emotions are linked to the charisma of the pastor but also stem from the contagious nature of the commitment and enthusiasm that members pass on to each other during worship and in such activities as small groups and service programs. Most the book presents a fairly positive picture of megachurches, with the authors viewing them as centers of community life and emotional and social support (especially in relation to families). The charge that megachurches are sources of religious right activism is not borne out in the authors’ research. The “parochial cosmopolitan” culture of most megachurches tend to focus on the “core issues of salvation; growing each person’s character; building communities of healthy, happy marriages and families,” and outreach to the community. While members may join Christian right organizations or vote for Donald Trump, the churches themselves don’t address contentious political issues in their public life. Even the prosperity teachings of some of these churches do not always signal clergy fraud and members’ gullibility as the authors find that people take what they need from such teachings and balance it with common sense.

But in the final chapters of the book, Wellman, Corcoran, and Stockly make the case for the “dark side” of megachurches. In fact, it is the charismatic nature of megachurch leadership that enables both pro-social and negative behavior in these congregations. Using statistics and case studies of 56 megachurches that have experienced leadership scandals, usually involving financial mismanagement, and abuse of a spiritual, emotional, or sexual nature (most recently at the flagship Willow Creek Church), the authors argue that it is especially the “soft patriarchalism” of these congregations that enable their male leaders to wield their power and charismatic appeal on female members. These scandals unleash the obverse of the positive spiritual energy that megachurches typically generate, leading to discord and cynicism among members.

