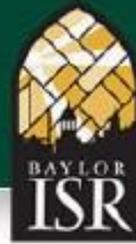




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Homeschooling during COVID sees culture wars flare-up

The growth of homeschooling during the pandemic has encouraged Christian homeschooling leaders and families while opening new fault lines between the Christian orientation of much of the movement and its secular and more liberal newcomers. These new points of division can be seen in an article by Elena Trueba in *Religion and Politics* (September 10, 2020). Estimates on the growth of homeschooling—and not just remote learning—have reached the double digits in many states; the number of families registering to homeschool in Vermont jumped by 75 percent, with states such as Nebraska and North Carolina also showing high growth rates. The premier homeschooling advocacy group Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) predicted as much as a 500 percent increase in homeschooled children this fall. Trueba writes that before the pandemic, homeschoolers were a small but growing population (making up about three percent of American schoolchildren), with data finding they were generally Christian (66 percent). The Christian component in homeschooling was established in the 1970s under such conservative Calvinist figures as R.J. Rushdoony (who was one of the founders of Christian Reconstructionism, which holds that society should be run on biblical teachings) and the evangelical legal activism of Michael Ferris and has become a worldwide movement in recent years.



Trueba adds that new Christian right activism has often been associated with Christian homeschooling and that this connection is fueling conflicts with the more secular homeschooling families that have arrived on the scene since the pandemic. The Christian-oriented HSLDA and state homeschooling associations are targeting these new families leaving traditional schools during the pandemic. The HSLDA has launched a website during specifically addressing mothers to help them manage homeschooling during the pandemic. Trueba focuses on the curricula that the HSLDA and associated organizations recommend to new homeschoolers, which tends toward the conservative Christian side of the spectrum, as found in such publishers as Bob Jones University, Abeka, and the materials from Accelerated Christian

Education (ACE). She argues that the texts are “Christian nationalist,” by which she means that they teach that Christians have to take back the country from secularism. Trueba cites one homeschooling mother and writer who has attended homeschooling meetings and charges that the homeschooling subculture is “embedded with patriarchal and Reconstructionist ideologies.”

(*Religion & Politics*, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2020/09/10/the-pandemic-created-a-surge-in-homeschooling-and-concerns-about-the-movements-christian-culture/>)

New breed of spiritual consultants create new rituals for home and office

The *New York Times* (August 28, 2020) reports that “a new corporate clergy has arisen to formalize the remote work. They go by different names: ritual consultants, sacred designers, soul-centered advertisers. They have degrees from divinity schools. Their business is borrowing from religious tradition to bring spiritual richness to corporate America.” A new kind of “spiritual consultant” is being turned out by today’s seminaries, and those who have chosen this new path have launched for-profit and non-profit agencies, such as the: Sacred Design Lab and the Ritual Design Lab, and Ritualist. These organizations “blend the obscure language of the sacred with the also obscure language of management consulting to provide clients with a range of spiritually inflected services, from architecture to employee training to ritual design. Their larger goal is to soften cruel capitalism, making space for the soul, and to encourage employees to ask if what they are doing is good in a higher sense.”



At the vanguard of the sacred consultant trend are Casper ter Kuile, Angie Thurston and Sue Phillips, who met at Harvard Divinity School and founded the Sacred Design Lab in 2019. They share the view that traditional religious institutions are not working and try to translate old and new rituals and practices for what they consider “soulless” corporate culture. The nonprofit has been consulting on sacred designs for companies such as Pinterest, IDEO and the Obama Foundation. The article adds that Phillips doesn’t see

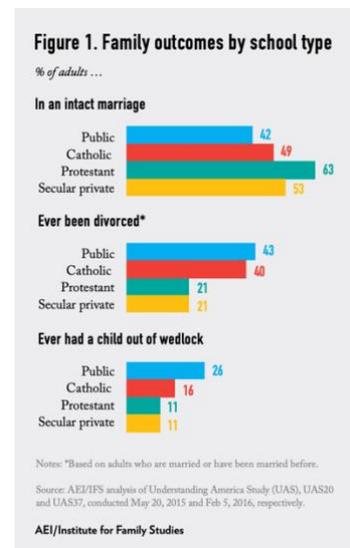
corporations replacing organized religion but it may bring people some of the sense of meaning that they used to derive from congregations. During the pandemic, rituals have been created for virtual meetings (such as beginning each meeting with silence) and other home-based activities. Writer Tara Burton, a critic of some aspects of spiritual consultancy, says, “We risk seeing spirituality as something we can consume, something for us, something for our brand.” Yet, at least some mainstream leaders are open to the new workplace spirituality. The *Times* article notes that the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, helped organize a three day retreat last year with spiritual consultants. The purpose of the retreat was to allow spiritual entrepreneurs to brainstorm with traditional religious leaders.

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **Just as there is a Protestant work ethic, a “Protestant family ethic” has emerged which encourages marriage and family formation, particularly among those who have attended Protestant schools, according to a new study.** The study, conducted by sociologists Albert Cheng, Patrick J. Wolf, Wendy Wang, and W. Bradford Wilcox, looked at how enrollment in Catholic, Protestant, public, and secular private schools is associated with different family outcomes later in life. The researchers analyze national representative data from the Understanding America Study and the National Longitudinal Survey (going from 1997-2018) to understand the link between such outcomes as divorce, marriage, and having children outside of marriage, to the schools the respondents attended. They find that adults who attended Protestant schools are more than twice as likely to be in an intact marriage as those who attended public schools, and among those who have ever married, Protestant school attendees are about 60 percent less likely than public school attendees to have ever divorced. Catholic school attendees are about 30 percent less likely to have had a child out of wedlock than those who attended public schools.

The authors of the study explain the different outcomes from public schools (secular private schools had similar though weaker effects) as stemming from the different “moral ecologies” that these students are enmeshed in, comprising family environments, and different moral views of marriage and sexuality being taught. Public and Catholic schools, for instance, are more likely to stress tolerance and diversity but might avoid family issues to avoid controversy; Protestant schools are more likely to stress the importance of marriage as a good in itself. But the influence of peers and the moral messages they send to each other stood out as the most important factor. For instance, 75 percent of Protestant students said almost none of their peers had sex, compared to 38 percent of Catholic students and 16 percent of public-school students.

(This study can be downloaded at: <http://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-protestant-family-ethic/>)

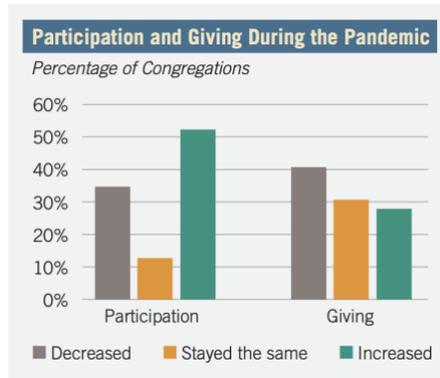


● **A recent survey of congregational leaders across the country by the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving asked congregations about their finances finds more decline among Catholic parishes than Protestant churches.** Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey found a slight majority (52 percent) of congregations reported an increase in participation. Yet at the same time, a plurality of congregations (42 percent) reported a drop in contributions. Giving overall was down 4.4 percent from March to June compared to the same period in 2019 (with the decline in June standing at 6.0 percent). Catholic parishes and small congregations with less than 50 weekly participants reported declines in participation and giving more often than any other groups. In contrast, the annual State of the Plate study of congregational giving (conducted among 1,076 Protestant churches) finds a rise in contributions

after church closings and declines in April, with close to two-thirds reporting by August that giving was either up (22 percent) or steady (42 percent).

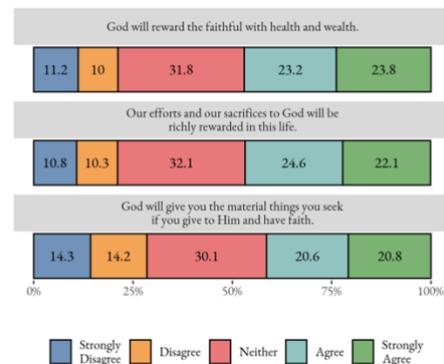
(The Lake Institute study can be downloaded here:

<https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/1805/23791/lake-covid-report2020-2.pdf>)



● **Adherents of the prosperity gospel, which stresses the benefits of health and wealth from faith, are more likely to defy public health initiatives than other believers, according to a study by Paul Djupe and Ryan P. Burge.** Writing in their blog *Religion in Public* (September 24, 2020), the political scientists conducted a survey in late March at the start of the pandemic, looking at the public health dimensions of the prosperity gospel. They find a large plurality, in the low 40 percentile, holding to prosperity gospel beliefs (which they define as holding to both the benefits of faith for health and detrimental effects of unbelief). The survey finds that prosperity gospel beliefs drive up perceptions of threat from the coronavirus, bringing them to the same level as Democrats, but the former is more likely to emphasize the First Amendment and how restrictions during the pandemic are hurting religious freedom and closing churches. The prosperity gospel adherents are also more likely to resist church closures and believe we are living in the end times. Djupe and Burge argue that prosperity gospel adherents tend to “ascribe to an exclusive theology that emphasizes ingroup over outreach to others.” [It should be noted that the large population of prosperity gospel adherents that the researchers find and the generic definition they offer differs from the prosperity theology found in Pentecostal and charismatic churches].

Figure 1 – Distribution of Prosperity Gospel Beliefs



(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2020/09/24/the-prosperity-gospel-of-coronavirus-response/>)

● **Although U.S. teens and their parents may share a common faith, the importance the younger generation attaches to religion is less than their parents might think, according to an analysis of survey data by Pew Research Center.** Most U.S. teens follow their families’

Most parents and teens share a religious identity

Among parents of teens in each religious group, % whose teen identifies as ...

PARENT	TEEN			
	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
Evangelical Protestant	80%	6%	1%	12%
Mainline Protestant	12	55	4	24
Catholic	1	1	81	15
Unaffiliated	2	3	5	86

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

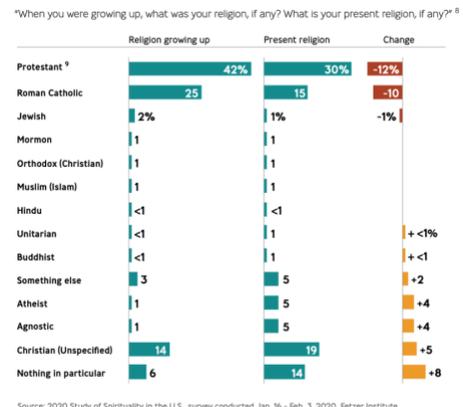
religious affiliation, Protestant parents likely to have teens identifying as Protestants, and Catholic parents mostly having teens who consider themselves co-believers. A large majority of non-affiliated parents also have teens who describe themselves in secular terms. Most teenagers attend religious services about as often as their parents do, with 44 percent saying they go to religious services at about at least once a month. The difference shows up on the importance of religion—far fewer teens (24 percent) than parents (43 percent) say that religion is very important in their lives. The survey also asked both groups to rate the importance of religion in the other family member’s life and were fairly accurate (73 percent for teens and 64 percent for parents).

But “among those who do not agree, parents are far more likely to overestimate the importance of religion to their teen than to underestimate it.” For instance, for parents giving a different answer than their teen does regarding the importance of religion to the teen, 69 percent think religion is more important in the life of their teen than their teen does, with a much smaller percentage underestimating religion’s importance (29 percent). Of the teens, giving a different answer than their parents on this question, 43 percent overestimated it and 55 percent underestimated it.

(The Pew Research Center analysis can be downloaded here:

<https://www.pewforum.org/2020/09/10/u-s-teens-take-after-their-parents-religiously-attend-services-together-and-enjoy-family-rituals/>)

● **A study of the spirituality of Americans finds that the more a person identifies as spiritual, the more likely they are to take civic and political action.** The study, conducted by the Fetzer Institute, used interviews, focus group conversations, and a survey of a cross-section of the U.S., and found that forms of civic and political action resulting from spirituality ranged from volunteering and donating to voting and speaking out on social and political issues. The study found that seven in ten survey respondents said that spirituality is important in their lives. In defining their spirituality, respondents commonly included descriptions of a relationship with God or Jesus, reference to religion in general, or a belief in a higher power. But a significant majority of both spiritual and religious people say they have no doubts that a higher power exists. Over half of people who reported such strong belief feel such a presence at least every day. Some of those who do not believe in a higher power, or have their doubts, still report having this experience of a presence at least once in a while. The study found that 88 percent said they engage in at least one spiritual or religious activity at least once a week,



such as prayer (60 percent), reading (50 percent), art (50 percent), being in nature (41 percent), and religious service (32 percent). While nearly half of respondents said they are part of a religious community, four in five people who are spiritual but not religious are not part of a spiritual or religious community.

(*The Fetzer Study can be downloaded here:* <https://spiritualitystudy.fetzer.org>)

● **Despite the increase in use of public language about the role of religion in Hungary’s identity by its nationalist government, even religious people tend to adapt to secular values in every day life, according to a study in the journal *Social Compass* (online in September, 2020).** Hungarian sociologists Bulcsu Bognar and Zoltan Kmetty use an online quota sample (which aims to correspond to the demographics of a larger population) of 1,000 respondents to represent Internet users between 18 and 65. Respondents were asked about their views on various illegal and “norm-breaking” behaviors, such as cheating on taxes, other forms of corruption, marital infidelity, and homosexuality. The researchers found that religious respondent showed few differences from their secular counterparts; belief in a personal God had no effect on their views on moral behavior in terms of economic activities, with a smaller decline in support of marital fidelity from 2008 findings. While religious believers showed stronger opposition to homosexuality, even that is more in line with the secular view that sexuality is a private matter. The study concludes that Hungary represents a case of “believing without moralizing,” with people upholding (including the government) the Christian roots of Western civilizational discourse while no longer taking Christian beliefs seriously in shaping their ethics.



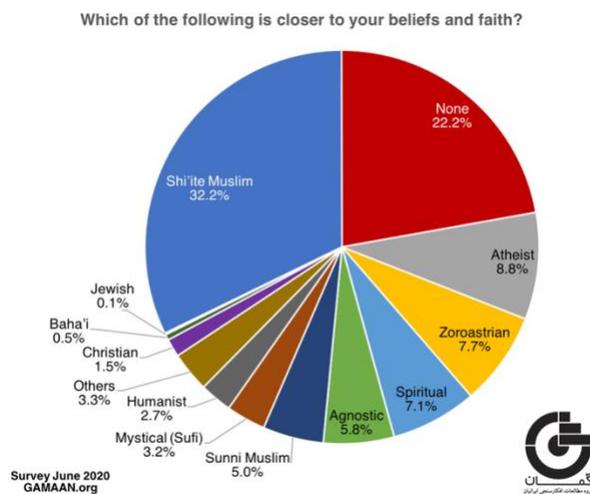
(*Social Compass*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/scp>)

● **A report based on online fieldwork by sociologist Rakib Ehsan among 750 Muslims in the UK finds a pattern of anti-Semitism, particularly among those who are the least integrated in society.** The study, published by the Henry Jackson Society and conducted the Savanta ComRes polling firm, looked at Muslim attitudes toward Jews and Israel, particularly examining perceptions of Jewish control, as well as religions and countries. Muslims are reported to show elevated signs of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel sentiments, especially those lacking strong ties to society, as measured by their friendship networks. Ehsan compares his findings to a poll of anti-Semitism wider British society carried out in 2019 and finds that even those Muslims who were the most integrated still show more anti-Semitism than the British as a whole. Higher levels of formal education did not inoculate Muslim respondents from holding anti-Semitic attitudes and subscribing to conspiracy theories against the Jews.



(The study can be downloaded here: <https://com/polls/henry-jackson-society-british-muslim-attitudes-august-2020/>)

● **A significant percentage of Iranians claim that they have become non-religious or do no longer pray, according to an online survey about Iranians’ attitudes toward religion, conducted in June by the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN).** Conducted by Ammar Maleki (Tilburg University, Netherlands) and Pooyan Tamimi Arab (Utrecht University, Netherlands), the survey is based on answers from a refined sample of 39,981 respondents (out of more than 50 thousand answers), coming from all parts of the country. Respondents were reached using the method of multiple virtual snowball sampling through social media (Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook). The survey finds that 70 percent of Iranians are active on at least one social media platform according to Iranian official figures. Despite the limits of such a method, the mere number of respondents and the professional treatment and weighting of the data mean that the survey can definitely point to trends among literate individuals above the age of 19.



Nearly 9 percent of the respondents identify as atheists, 5.8 percent as agnostics, 2.7 percent as humanists, and an impressive 22 percent as nones; 32 percent are Shiite Muslims, 5 percent Sunni Muslims and 3.2 percent Sufis. There are 1.5 percent Christians and 0.5 percent Bahai, with 7.7 percent identifying as Zoroastrians (very far above the real number of Zoroastrians in the country, but probably allowing people to connect with an Iranian non-Muslim religious legacy). While 41 percent say that their beliefs did not change significantly during their lifetime, 47 percent “reported having transitioned from being religious to non-

religious,” while only 6 percent of previously non-religious people claim to have become religious, and the same percentage to have converted from one religious view to another. Over 27 percent report praying five times a day, as prescribed, while nearly 60 percent say that they do not observe the prescribed prayers. Sixty-eight percent think that religious prescriptions should not be incorporated into legislation, while less than 15 percent believe “that the law should always comply with religious prescriptions.” More than 70 percent think that the State should not provide financial support to any religion. 41 percent think that all beliefs should be allowed to proselytize publicly, 43 percent that no religion should have a right to proselytize in public, and only 4 percent that this should be reserved for Muslims.

(The results of answers to several other questions can be found in the PDF document that can be downloaded from GAMAAN website, <https://gamaan.org>)

Hindus establish presence in Ireland

Ireland does not look like the country that one would spontaneously associate with Hinduism. But the number of Hindus had grown to more than 14,000 by the time of the 2016 census, and representatives of the Hindu community estimate that the number is now somewhere between 20,000 and 25,000 due to immigration. On August 22, what is described by its promoters as “Ireland’s first official Hindu Temple” opened its doors after two decades of efforts, despite adverse circumstances created by COVID-19 (limited number of visitors allowed). Nevertheless,



the new temple expects thousands of Hindus to visit until the end of the year (*Irish Times*, August 22, 2020). Hosting a wide range of deities, the temple is placed under the direction of the Vedic Hindu Cultural Centre Ireland (VHCCI), which is the largest Hindu organization in the country. There have actually already been smaller places of worship in the country, linked to specific Hindu traditions, such as a Vinayaka temple (since 2003) and an ISKCON temple (as early as 1978).

In a chapter on Hinduism in the Republic of Ireland of the newly-published, 2-volumes *Handbook of Hinduism in Europe* (Brill), authors S. Harikrishnan and Sweta Chakraborty report that “Indian community and religious organizations began to be set up in the Republic in the 1970s.” On average, most Hindus in Ireland seem to have been relatively successful in maintaining their religious practices and passing the faith to the next generation, with the experience of being in a different environment heightening “yearnings to hold onto identities that help one relate with the ‘home’ land.” Harikrishnan and Chakraborty report that not all Hindu believers visit temples, since some prefer to practice in front of their own domestic shrines. By necessity, religious practices come to differ in several ways from what they would be in India. The growing number of Hindus in the country may also bring requests for accommodation to specific needs. In January, a prominent, US-based Hindu activist asked the Dublin City Council to develop an area where Hindus living in Ireland could scatter the cremated remains of their dead (*Irish Examiner*, January 10). The request was backed by the VHCCI, although its leaders made clear that they would not press the Council on that issue. There are already several crematoriums where Hindu priests can perform the last rites for the deceased, write Harikrishnan and Chakraborty.

(VHCCI website, <https://hindu.ie>)

Puritans verses pragmatists divide global jihadism

A “civil war” being fought between “global jihadis is intensifying,” writes Mohammad Hafez in the *CTC Sentinel* (September, 2020), the newsletter of the Combatting Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. While al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State share enemies and

ideological commitments, these movements have fragmented under the stress of conflict and territorial retreat. “Rather than close ranks, these salafi-jihadis have accelerated their fratricidal wars in West Africa, Yemen, and Afghanistan. They have turned their attention away from near and far enemies and instead prioritized fighting the nearest enemy of all—each other,” Hafez writes. He contrasts the split between these two factions as being the Islamic State’s puritanical vision of jihadism versus the more pragmatic and populist al-Qa`ida. A recent Yemen-based IS documentary reported five fundamental disagreements emerging between the two movements over establishing an Islamic state, applying Islamic law, rejecting populism, embracing sectarianism, and defending puritanism.



Hafez writes that two issues have become the most divisive: that of collective *takfir* (the act of Muslims declaring other Muslims to be infidels) and its “byproduct of mass civilian atrocities and sectarian targeting.” The second issue involves the Islamic states and the application of strict sharia governance within those states. The Islamic State’s puritanism entails applying what it sees as Islamic law, expunging ritualistic “innovations,” and eschewing alliances with “apostate” parties or states. Such puritanism condemns al-Qaeda for tolerating public blasphemy and working within the confines of civil democratic states, and such “compromising” groups as the Muslim Brotherhood (for cooperating with Christians in Egypt) and the Taliban. Hafez adds that in recent years, the Islamic State has been accusing al-Qa`ida of populist Islamism “that

seeks to *win* the hearts and minds of Muslims rather than *mold* them into believers through the strict application of ‘Islamic’ law.” These factional conflicts serve to weaken jihadism as members waste their resources as they fight each as well as encourage defections. At the same time, the West is now facing two jihadist movements rather than one. They span several regions and that such rivalry may lead them to outbid each other in engaging in violence “to capture a greater share of media coverage, recruits, and financing.”

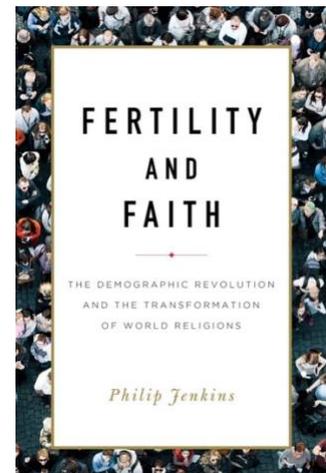
(*CTC Sentinel*, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-crisis-within-jihadism-the-islamic-states-puritanism-vs-al-qaidas-populism/>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ Baylor University historian and prolific author Philip Jenkins’ latest book *Fertility and Faith* (Baylor University Press, \$29.95) plots drastic changes ahead for religious institutions due to a “demographic revolution” of plummeting fertility rates often below replacement rates across much of the globe. Jenkins’ specialty of mining available data and other reports to tease out provocative analysis and forecasts is put to good use as he establishes the intimate connections between fertility trends with changes in religious belief and belonging— that have been too often been ignored by demographers (though there is now an emerging field of religious demography). He argues that the global birth dearth

not only drives down numbers of the potential faithful but also changes patterns of morality and politics that in turn affect religious belief and belonging.

The association (if not causal relationship) between record low fertility and secularization in places like Western Europe and Japan may not be as much as a surprise as the appearance of similar trends in the U.S., Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and their respective religious traditions. He argues that the evidence is piling up that these regions may be following a European trajectory, even forecasting that the 2020s may be for the U.S. in terms of secularization what the 1970s were for Europe. In other cases, such as Islamic countries, Israel, and India, it is not secularization but polarization and a “two-tiered” demographic divide between fertile devout Muslims and slow-growing liberalizers that Jenkins sees developing, with the scale being tipped in favor of the believers. Meanwhile Africa and India’s close connection between high fertility and growing faith communities will have a longer endurance, even if birth rates fall somewhat in the decades ahead. As fertility is about more than births, Jenkins also looks at changes in sexual morality and greater longevity as being of particular challenge to all religions [the book was in press during the Coronavirus outbreak and pandemic, not accounting for how the greater presence of mortality and suffering may reawaken religious concerns.]

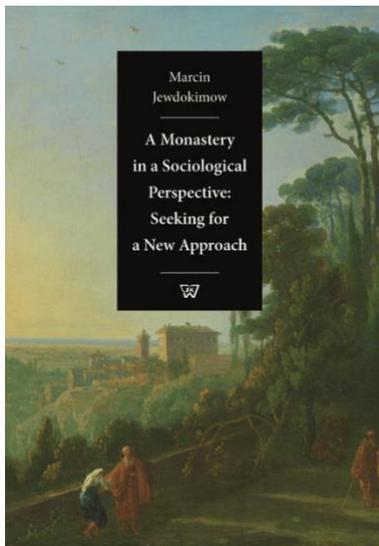


Jenkins acknowledges that fertility dynamics are changing fast and some societies remain a mystery as far as the connections between fertility and faith. China, for instance, shows very low fertility rates due to family size restrictions (though there is a lack of solid data on the country) while there are signs of an upsurge of religion. Jenkins is less of a determinist in his forecasts of religious change and decline due to demographic changes than some proponents of inevitable secularization. He allows how even European cities already show signs of religious vitality due to immigrants and their higher fertility rates, and then provocatively ventures how developments such as climate change may have similar consequences. But Jenkins does conclude that the demographic revolution will be redrawing the religious map. Most of these changes were mapped in his earlier works showing the rising importance of the “global South” in Christianity (and now other religions). But other projected trends include the growth of individualistic (such as those centered on pilgrimage) rather than communal religious movements, more attention to ministry among the elderly, and greater “cross-pollination” between different religions that are now in closer proximity to each other due to immigration.

■ Drawing conclusions about the situation of monastic life on the basis of the number of vocations or the number of members fails to bring the complete picture for understanding the role played by monasteries in a given context, writes Marcin Jewdokimow (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw) in his book *A Monastery in a Sociological Perspective: Seeking for a New Approach*. Originally published in Polish in 2018, the book is now available in English in a revised version (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, 2020; price: Złoty 18). After offering a useful overview of the history of monasticism in the Roman Catholic Church, with a subsection about the history of religious orders in Poland (each chapter offers a focus on Poland beside the overall assessment), the author examines the changes in religious life since the 1970s in quantitative terms. Although not all continents or all countries are affected in the same way, the tendency is clear, especially since the number of Catholics has

continued growing in absolute numbers. The number of religious priests was 148,804 in 1970 and down to 134,142 in 2015, religious brothers from 79,408 to 54,229, and women religious from 1,004,2004 to 670,330. Regarding women religious, the contrasted evolution across continents over the period has been striking: 109 percent growth in Africa, 55 percent declines in Europe and 66 percent declines in North America.

“In regions other than Europe and North and South America, female religious life has been developing,” writes Jewdokimow. The author discusses the various hypotheses for explaining the decline and sees it as a multidimensional process. Moreover, one should keep in mind that new forms of consecrated life have also developed since the mid-1960s. Jewdokimow stresses that the sociology of religious orders should examine those new forms. Chapter 3 deals with sociological studies of religious orders, paying special attention to Max Weber (and to debates around his approach) and to Michel Foucault, before coming to more recent sociological contributions, thus offering a useful overview of sociological literature and interpretations of monasticism, since Jewdokimow is familiar with an impressive range of



research work across the world. The author suggests supplementing the order-centric approach of religious life with a relational approach, i.e. the relations of the monastery with the social environment, thus allowing to understand the significance of the religious order within a given environment. This significance can operate beyond declining numbers. It “can also manifest in an increased interest in religious orders, which is detached from the religious dimension or loosely associated with it, as in the case of monastic products as well as ‘meditative holidays’.”

The final chapter applies this approach by presenting the author’s research on Cistercian monasteries in Poland in relation to tourism, economy, and collective memory. Monasteries and post-monastic buildings do not only perform religious functions, but also partake of a range of non-religious relations: economic, touristic, and cultural, a fact that is recognized by monks themselves, even if it presents challenges as the boundaries of the monastery become permeable for the outside world. The book allows its readers to gain insights in the ways into which monasteries are adjusting to contemporary environments as well as their relations with society. Despite declining numbers, the social vitality of monastic institutions should not be underestimated.

■ Sociologist Weishan Huang’s forthcoming book, *Global Religious Networks from East Asia - Chinese Religious Movement Organizations and Transnational Civil Societies* (Amsterdam University Press, 85 e) is a fascinating comparative study of Chinese-style globalization of Christianity, Buddhism, and other new religious movements. Huang conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in China and Chinese diaspora communities of the charitable Buddhist movement Tzu Chi, the quasi-Buddhist group Falun Gong, the evangelical Christian Herald Crusade and the Local Church movement, and “reform” Buddhist temple expansion. The book, said to be the first single-authored study of these diverse religious expressions in Chinese religions, also relates globalized faiths to new patterns of migration and social movements. Huang identifies a transnational religious “cosmopolitanism” taking shape among members and leaders of these groups that enables these religions to grow in the West while ricocheting back to

China to find new followings (often through their technological sophistication) and even wield considerable social impact in areas such as environmentalism, social welfare and entrepreneurship. In fact, Huang, finds that all of these groups (which she calls “global denominations”) first established their global presence in the U.S. before moving to China.

Huang notes that a process of “Sinicization” is taking place in most of these religious communities (except Fulan Gong, which is still labeled an “evil cult” by the government), often steered by the Chinese Communist Party. But she also finds that their beliefs, practices, and transnational identity can serve as sources of resistance and autonomy in an increasingly constricted society. This tension between these groups and the Chinese government is provocatively spelled out in her case study of Tzu Chi, where business people have clandestinely set up meditation centers in their workplaces when the government cracked down on house meetings, while also being politically valued for the movement’s environmental activism. Huang also provides interesting accounts of how a renewed temple building and restoration campaign that started in China is extending to other countries, often funded by overseas immigrant entrepreneurs, under the aegis of Chinese nationalism. While nationalism and Sinicization have become the new watchwords on China-West relations during the COVID crisis and the Trump era, Huang’s skillful study suggests how transnationalism and globalization will continue to shape Chinese religious communities.

