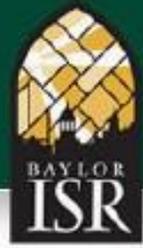




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Jewish voters divided and energized by Trump

Whatever the results of the 2020 presidential elections, the voting behavior of American Jews shows both continuities and change under the presidency of Donald Trump, according to reports. In his blog *Spiritual Politics* (October 22, 2020), Mark Silk reports that Jewish voting patterns have changed little since 2016, even as President Trump made his support of Israel an important part of his campaign. In that year, Jewish voters chose Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump by 71 percent to 24 percent. Current surveys find that 75 percent say they'll vote for Joe Biden and 22 percent for Trump, according to a survey released this week by the American Jewish Committee. Silk notes a similar pattern in the swing states of Florida and Pennsylvania, where Jews make up 3-4% of the voting population.

Trump's moving of the American Embassy to Jerusalem, his abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal, and his notably pro-Israel peace plan was partly based on the hope for a modest shift in his favor among Jewish voters. But Silk adds that the lack of response to such initiatives shows that for "American Jews, Israel is not a partisan issue." He cites the AJC survey as showing that while 59 percent of respondents say that being connected to Israel is "very important" or "somewhat important" to their identity, Israel drew less than five percent support on a listing of "the most important issue" in the campaign. Silk concludes that it may be the case that Trump's pro-Israel behavior might have attracted some Jewish electoral support. In the AJC survey, 42 percent said Trump would be better at strengthening U.S.-Israel ties than Biden (though 54 percent thought Biden would be better.) Yet the growth in anti-Semitic rhetoric and violence on the right has shocked the American Jewish community and they perceive as too tolerant of his far-right supporters.

The embrace of Republicanism by much of the Orthodox community has only intensified in the last four years, according to an article in the Jewish online magazine, the *Tablet* (October 12, 2020). While Orthodox Jewish voting patterns four years ago were not uniformly for Trump, affection for the president "almost seems to be expected among Orthodox Jews. Most Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) communities were already voting deeply red in 2016, but now support for Trump, and the excusing of his deeply immoral behavior and other shortcomings, have grown typical of modern Orthodox communities as well. The trend toward voting more Republican was

several decades old, but there is something new afoot: a cultural norm, in some synagogues an *expectation*, that anyone with common sense is a Trump supporter,” writes Joshua Shanes. There are Trump skeptics in Orthodox synagogues, particularly in New York, and in liberal college towns, but Shanes finds only one such synagogue where he lives in Greater Chicago. He adds, “Across the country, I fear my experience is typical. Indeed, it feels to me like what we are seeing is the evangelicalization of Orthodox Judaism...”



Modern orthodoxy has shifted to the right in recent years while ultra-Orthodoxy has become more engaged in society, suggesting that these old divisions are collapsing. Shanes argues that “both camps of Orthodoxy have followed parts of evangelical Christianity in coalescing around an ethnonationalist identity, one that views the political right and its ultranationalist worldview, in America and in Israel, as a religious foundation united against the threat of the cultural left. For these swaths of the Orthodox

world, support for Trump and the right generally is no longer a political choice separate from Torah. For many, Orthodoxy has fused with a Christianity that is now less a faith tradition than a nationalist civil religion, deeply connected with the Republican Party in general and now Donald Trump in particular.” The alliance with evangelicals has led to stricter stands against abortion and immigration than has been the case for much of historical Judaism and it has turned these nationalistic Jews to non-Jewish concerns, such as gun rights. In such coalitions, “Haredi Jews who were once anti-Zionist, or non-Zionist, have united with evangelicals and the modern Orthodox to support a territorial maximalism in Israel,” Shanes adds.

(*The Tablet*, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/belief/articles/evangelicalization-orthodox-jews>)

Let Us Worship—A new, post-COVID Jesus movement?

Revival gatherings led by evangelical worship leader Sean Feucht across the country have gathered thousands of Christians and are seen by some as fueling “a new Jesus Movement,” write Meagan Clark and Haeven Gibbons in *Religion Unplugged* (October 24, 2020). The writers hasten to add that the audience for the group Let Us Worship looks quite different from that of the spiritual seekers of long-gone hippie times. Still, some participants see the current revival as something similar for our days, and Feucht himself claims to “want that in my generation.” Feucht has close relationships with the popular Pentecostal Bethel Church in California, but is no longer a member of its staff, and unsuccessfully ran for Congress as a Republican last year. Coming at a time of civil unrest and COVID-related restrictions, the gatherings are called “worship protest” at those places (e.g. Seattle) where outdoor gatherings have not been permitted. “Feucht has built himself into a symbol of the enormous frustration felt by some

religious Americans...over Covid regulations,” writes Julia Duin in a portrait of the musician and missionary in *Politico* (October 25, 2020). Clark and Gibbons remark that there have been similar outdoor gatherings aiming at a revival by less prominent ministries and capitalizing on the current hardships at other places across the country in recent months.

Feucht is eager to denounce current restrictions and has launched an online petition on his website, stating that “States across America... have shut down church services and even outlawed singing in church.” He charges that “Instagram and Twitter is censoring Christian voices every single day.” In late October, Feucht led three days of prayer, fasting, street ministry and worship in Washington D.C. Clark and Gibbons analyze the movement as an answer to several issues, beside the protest against restrictions and the emphasis on religious freedom even in times of pandemic. Quoting from a recent Barna survey, they note that a very high percentage of Christian Millennials had stopped participating in church online during the pandemic last Spring, partly because they do not feel attracted by a passive church experience, and that this may accelerate a decline of Christianity in the young generation in the US. There is also a perceived need for the church to evolve at a critical time and calls for a revival seems to be popular these days.



(Sean Feucht's website is: <https://www.seanfeucht.com>)

Exodus of progressive black church members over activism and COVID concerns?

The combined effect of the pandemic and its toll on African-Americans and the recent protests over racial violence in law enforcement has alienated a segment of black members from their more conservative churches as they seek spiritual fulfillment elsewhere, writes Dara T. Mathis in the *Atlantic* (October 11, 2020). “Many black parishioners, especially those at multiracial institutions, bristle when they hear rhetoric from church leaders that ignores how health inequities and racism are affecting the black community right now. Others are hurt by their church’s conspicuous silence on these issues,” she writes. Mathis adds that it is too early to put numbers on this “exodus,” but she notes that the dissenting congregants she interviewed had similar stories of disenchantment. They report being distressed by the clergy’s insensitivity to how COVID has adversely affected the black community as they press for the reopening of churches and in-person participation. At the same time, these dissatisfied members find that their congregations don’t address racism and more often stress racial reconciliation that calls for improving black-white relations on an individual basis.

Mathis writes that other churches and clergy “might hesitate to endorse Black Lives Matter, because of ideological differences with the national organization and its founders. But black parishioners’ desire for recognition doesn’t mean they’re ideologically aligned with the national group— they just want to know that their congregation values them.” Most of this discomfort for these black Christians have been with non-denominational multi-ethnic churches, which they value for their contemporary culture and worship that seeks racial harmony. But they have also criticized historic black churches for ignoring congregants’ health and other needs in recent months and for their “clinging to attendance as a barometer of faithfulness even during the pandemic,” Mathis writes. Others she interviewed criticize how older black clergy tend to be more conservative, criticizing looting and ignoring the importance of the recent protests. Such



disenchanted members have taken advantage of their time away from their congregations and the proliferation of online services during the pandemic to investigate how other churches have approached these contentious issues. Most of the church members Mathis spoke with are optimistic about joining another fellowship after they leave their churches. As one woman told her, she is certain that her next church will be one where the “pastor has no problem saying ‘Black Lives Matter’.”

(*The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/10/why-black-parishioners-are-leaving-churches/616588/>)

Pandemic causes mission disruption and end-times speculation in LDS

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) has seen the greatest impact of the pandemic on its mission force and the growth of home-based worship, reports the *Salt Lake Tribune* (October 1, 2020). The church cohort that was probably the most disrupted was the 60,000 young people who serve as missionaries around the world, as their practice of door-to-door missions were restricted. Eventually, the missionaries adapted their work to online formats. The article cites the work of BYU professor Christine Blythe and her research team who interviewed and collected more than 600 stories from across the globe on changes in the LDS during the pandemic. Early on, the church authorized members to have sacrament meetings in



their homes if they had a “worthy male priesthood holder” to officiate. “Some families are blessing the sacrament in their PJs, others are in full Sunday dress...Some have made makeshift podiums and use hand-carved wood trays; others use medicine cups, shot glasses, or their grandmother’s china,” Blythe said.

“Worshipping at home has been particularly difficult on single and widowed women who do not have men to perform the ordinance, or where women are the only members in their family,” writes Peggy Fletcher Stack. The geographical boundaries that define Mormon wards or congregations were diminished by church closures and new boundaries have been established around family. “Families living in diverse cities, states and even countries are coming together to have services virtually,” Blythe adds. Many interviewees shared their belief that such the institutional changes as the unveiling in October 2018 of “home-centered, church-supported” worship — were “revelatory and in preparation for the pandemic.” Some viewed the virus as a “dry run” for the apocalypse to see how well Latter-day Saints have followed instructions about food storage and other preparations.

(*Salt Lake Tribune*, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2020/09/30/how-coronavirus-has/>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **The most recent wave of the New Congregations Study (NCS) finds that the trend toward informal and more enthusiastic forms worship shows no signs of plateauing while the ethnic diversity of American congregations has increased significantly, with the percentage of all-white congregations decreasing.** The newest NCS results, compared with earlier waves of the survey, were published in articles by Mark Chaves (along with Kevin Dougherty, Michael Emerson, Kraig Beyerlin, Joseph Rosso, and Anna Holleman) in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (online in October). The increasing popularity of contemporary and



enthusiastic services (especially music) was seen across the board, but the trend is particularly evident in white congregations in line with prominent megachurches, and networks, but also in Catholic and mainline churches. In 1998, 72 percent of main services followed a written order, 53 percent used an organ, and 54 percent had a choir. By 2018, 66 percent used a written order, 47 percent used an organ, and 46 percent had a choir. Related to this development is growth in the use of technology, such as video projection and more recently the use of smart phones (one-third used smart phones in the most recent survey).

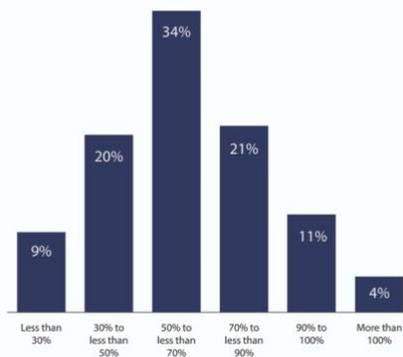
On racial diversity, the NCS study found that there are now more congregations in which no one racial or ethnic group comprises more than 80 percent of the people (going from six percent in 1998 to 16 percent in 2018-2019). The increase in diversity was seen in mainline and evangelical churches. In

1998, only one in 100 mainline churches met the threshold of having no group with an 80 percent representation in congregations; today it is one in 10 that reached that point. For evangelicals, only seven percent of congregations had this measure of diversity in 1998 while 22 percent do in 2018-2019. Leadership in all of these churches have likewise become more diverse. Sixteen percent of these diverse congregations had black clergy in 2018-19 compared to just four percent in 1998. On politics, the new survey finds a continuing growth of mobilization on social and political issues. This is especially the case with black churches, which experienced a surge in activism since 2012. Going somewhat against the popular storyline, liberal congregations mobilizing on political issues (such as on immigration) have grown faster than conservative congregation mobilization (though there are more politically conservative congregations overall). The researchers found an unexpectedly large minority of congregations (17 percent) that would endorse a political candidate if it did not risk their tax-exempt status.

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

● **While a large majority of U.S. Protestant churches say they are holding in-person services, many churchgoers have yet to attend in the numbers they did before the pandemic struck, according to a survey from Nashville-based *LifeWay Research*.** It is found that 87 percent of Protestant pastors in the U.S. say their church met in person in September, while 13 percent did not hold such services. The survey found that one in 10 churches say their attendance

Few churches back to pre-COVID attendance
 What is the September worship service attendance compared to February worship service attendance?
 Among U.S. Protestant pastors



Note: Respondents were asked their church's average in-person worship service attendance on a typical weekend for the months of February 2020 and September 2020. The percentages are taken from a comparison of those two numbers for churches that met physically in September 2020.

in September was less than 30 percent of what it was in February before COVID arrived in the U.S. Another 20 percent say attendance was between 30 percent and less than 50 percent of what it was. The survey found that one-third of clergy (34 percent) say it has reached 50 percent to less than 70 percent of previous levels. For only one in five pastors, attendance is between 70 percent to less than 90 percent. The researchers estimate that more than 1 in 10 churches are still not meeting in person for any type of worship service. Mainline pastors (31 percent) are more likely than evangelical pastors (7 percent) to say they did not physically gather in September. Methodists (22 percent) and Presbyterian/Reformed (23 percent) are more likely to say they did not meet in person than Lutherans (12 percent), pastors in the Restorationist movement (10

percent) or Baptists (9 percent). The report notes that social distancing may be easier in churches, as most pastors find that their congregations have less than 70 percent of their pre-COVID attendees.

(*This study can be downloaded here:* <https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/10/20/few-churches-back-to-pre-covid-attendance-levels/>)

● **Official membership statistics do not necessarily provide a reliable way of quantifying size, but membership data may either overstate or underestimate the numbers, write Ronald Lawson (Queens College) and G. Kenneth Xydias in an attempt at reassessing the number of Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Review of Religious Research, (September, 2020).** While many researchers are aware of such issues, the article not only provides fresh insights based on a comparison between official data of each group and census from 54 countries (complemented by data from five surveys for the US), but offers a comparative approach between those three dynamic, missionary-minded religious organizations. In 2017, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints claimed 16,118,169 members (increase 1.5 percent), the Seventh-day Adventists 20,727,347 members (increase 3.6 percent) and the Jehovah’s Witnesses 8,242,992 “publishers” on average (increase 1.4 percent). As the name for the third group suggests, the way of counting differs from one group to another. Witnesses only count those active in witnessing.

Mormons count baptized members and also most children in active Mormon families. Adventists count only baptized members, but not children, although they would have been dedicated in church ceremonies as infants. Comparing official data and census data from 54 countries around the world compiled by Lawson and Xydias shows the Mormon official data to be greatly inflated, since those identifying as Mormons are less than one-third of those on official rolls. This may be due to the high attrition rate among new converts (especially in the developing world) and the impact of secularization in the West. As expected, since the organization does not count children, official census shows a ratio of 1.34 to 1 in comparison with Adventist data, but given the large number of unbaptized children in developing countries, this shows the official data still to be exaggerated. Regarding the Witnesses, there are twice more people claiming to be Witnesses than those counted as “publishers”, which cannot only be explained by unbaptized children, but also by not yet baptized adults who already see themselves as Witnesses, by free riders who adopt a Witness identity without becoming publishers, and by lapsed or unactive Witnesses still identifying as such.



The organizations have been aware of those issues. In the early 2000s, the Adventists conducted an audit and cleaning of its rolls, leading to the removal of nearly half of those listed in some countries. The LDS Church headquarters have asked that the newly baptized believers should only be listed as members after about one month if still present, and efforts have been made for reclaiming inactive members. Regarding the Witnesses, only “publishers” are fully considered as such, but they also provide the total attendance at the yearly Memorial of Christ’s death, which comes closer to the total of those having some kind of connection to the organization. Depending upon adjustment methods used, Lawson and Xydias come to an estimate of between 6.6 million and 10.3 million Mormons for 2017, more than 27 million Adventists, and more than 17 million Witnesses. Such figures thus include active members, their children, and those self-identifying themselves as belonging to that religious

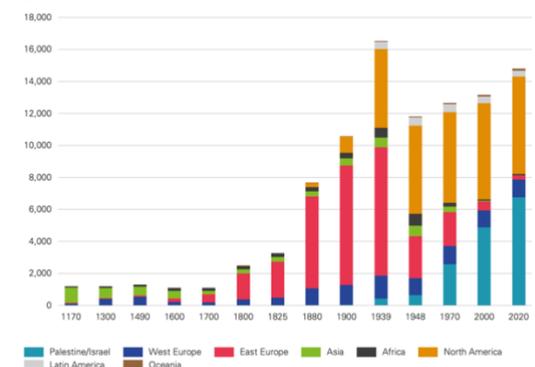
culture or sphere without necessarily being active in some way. The authors stress that “variation in attrition has had a major impact on the growth rates of all three groups.”

(*Review of Religious Research*, <https://www.springer.com/journal/13644>)

● **Between 1970 and 2020, Europe lost 59 percent of its Jewish population, and the proportion of world Jewry living in Europe today is almost identical to the proportion living in Europe 900 years ago, according to a study authored by Daniel Staetsky and Sergio DellaPergola, that was released by the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research on October 21.** Covering one thousand years of European Jewish history, the 84-page long report is presented as “the most comprehensive analysis of European Jewish demography today.” The self-understanding of the essence of Jewish identity differs from one European country to another, which has an impact on the assessment of Jewish demography and may lead to different numbers in going from one source to another. According to the 2018 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey on Jewish perceptions of antisemitism, 61 percent of Jews in the UK see religion as the prime component of their identity, but only 9 percent of Hungarian Jews would see it in the same way (while 54 percent of them answered that it is Jewish culture).

Whatever slight variations this might imply, the demographic changes in the Jewish population of Europe have been dramatic. During the Middle Ages and the early modern era, the Jewish population stagnated around one million. There was an impressive rise during the 19th century, culminating in a high range figure of 16.5 million on the eve of WWII. Europe (including Jewish emigration from Europe to North America) was the primary factor for such a growth. The tragic events of the war brought the global Jewish population down to 11 million and a strong diminution of the share of European Jews. In 1939, 58 percent of the Jews lived in Europe (50 percent in Eastern Europe and 8 percent in Western Europe). “By 1945 the European share of world Jewry had fallen to 35 percent, and it fell further to 26 percent in 1970 and to 9 percent in 2020.” This post-WWII decline took place mostly in Eastern Europe, “whose share of the global total diminished from 26 percent in 1945 to 17 percent in 1970 to 2 percent in 2020.” Between 1970 and 2020, there was thus a drastic decline of 85 percent in Eastern Europe, due to the emigration of 1.8 million Jews, with 1 million of them going to Israel.

Figure 3. World Jewish population by major geographical areas, 1170–2020, thousands



Source: DellaPergola, 2001, cit.; DellaPergola, S. 2021. World Jewish Population 2020, in A. Dasthefsky and I. Shekshin (eds.) *American Jewish Year Book 2020*. Cham: Springer (forthcoming).

Although there will no longer be such large numbers of migrants in the future, surveys show that a percentage of the Jewish population in each European country considers migration to Israel or elsewhere, and the trend has been rising during the past five years. While a majority of European Jews are not planning to migrate, the percentage of those who do is bound to have an impact and cannot be compensated for by immigration. Moreover, an aging process is taking place—more than 40 percent of the Jews in

Germany are above the age of 65. Conversions to Judaism are taking place (in part through marriage), but it is impossible to assess how far this can make up for the numbers of people leaving Judaism. “Today, European Jewry amounts to about 1.3 million, with two in three people living in one of three countries – France, the United Kingdom or Germany.” The authors stress that “the absolute number of Jews counts more than the relative percentage of Jews in a country.” They hypothesize that a minimal numerical threshold of viability and performance of 8,000 Jews should allow them to organize sufficient services for supporting community life.

(The report, titled, *Jews in Europe at the turn of the Millennium: Population trends and estimates*, can be downloaded from <https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=17623>).

African Pentecostals adapt healing practices to secular contexts

Pentecostal healing practices in Africa and in the African diaspora are being adapted to different contexts and are becoming more individualized, according to an article in the *International Bulletin of Mission Research* (online in October, 2020). The study of eight Pentecostal churches and their healing practices was conducted in Kampala, Nairobi, Cape Town, and London in such denominations and networks as Heaven on Earth International Ministries, Revival Church, Pentecostal Universal Church and the Gospel Harvest Church of London. Researchers Robert Kuloba Wabyanga, Herietta Nyamnjoh, and Abel Ugba, find that these congregations both



reenact centuries-old healing rituals informed by indigenous sources as well as “creatively reinventing” these practices in the face of pluralism, competition, and secularism. They found that these congregation may still use material objects and mediators to enact healing, but they have revamped them to new circumstances. A Pentecostal Church of Uganda congregation uses fire and burning meat to simulate African sacrificial rituals. The congregation in Capetown runs a communion service that draws on Anglican and Catholic elements, such as the use of the Eucharistic prayer, while teaching that Christ’s body and blood have healing efficacy.

Churches are moving toward a “word-based impartation of knowledge that empowers individual Christians to heal themselves,” which is especially practiced in the London congregations. Such self-healing refers to Christians receiving a supernatural “word of knowledge” about their conditions and engage in prayer. In places where there is hostility to public religious practices, such as the laying on of hands for the healing of the sick, self-healing is new way to express the faith. Wabyanga, Nyamnjoh, and Uba add that “Many have found innovative ways to practice their beliefs and simultaneously to resist and respect the secular laws of the larger society.” By enabling people to engage in self-healing, these churches stress that the gift of healing is available to all, providing greater opportunities to lay ministry.

(*International Bulletin of Mission Research*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ibm>)

An anti-cult revival in France after three terrorist attacks?

Two recent attacks, barely a month apart, by Islamic extremists has intensified France’s struggle with political Islam, but it may also be reviving the government’s controversial campaign against “cults,” according to new religious movement specialists. After the attacks in October, one involving the beheading of a teacher accused of blasphemy by his killers, President Macron publicly stepped up his campaign against political Islamism, taking measures to deport at least 200 individuals who were considered a radical threat by security forces would now be deported from France. Macron also announced a new law as a measure against radical Islam. The provision focuses on Islam, but also can be used to target other religious movements, writes Massimo Introvigne in a release from his center on new religions, *CESNUR* (October 11). A draft of the law announces the “end of home schooling” in general, “except in cases justified by medical conditions.” Introvigne writes that this provision will target a number of Christian communities along with the Muslims.

He adds that the draft also “explains that places of worship will be put under increasing surveillance and ‘preserved [...] from the diffusion of ideas and statements hostile to the laws of the Republic.’ Again, the law cannot target Muslims only for obvious constitutional reasons. What about a priest or pastor criticizing abortion or same-sex marriage, which are part of the laws of the French Republic, but also claiming that certain ‘laws of the Republic’ penalize the poor and the immigrants?” Introvigne writes that there is also a provision that allows religious and other associations to be dissolved in case of “attacks on personal dignity” and the “use of psychological or physical pressures.” In light of France’s anti-cult history, he argues that the provision will be used against groups labeled as “cults,” and that a term such as “psychological pressures” is reminiscent of the old idea of “brainwashing.” Last year, the official French anti-cult mission MIVILUDES was moved from being an independent structure under the Prime Minister to becoming a part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ anti-radicalization system.



(*CESNUR*, <https://www.cesnur.org/2020/law-against-separatism-in-france.htm?>)

China tightens grip on Hong Kong, dividing its Christian community

As China gains new influence in Hong Kong, religious groups find themselves divided about the future of and prospects for religious freedom in the former British colony. Amidst protests that have engulfed the city, China introduced a security law in the summer that monitors and

punishes “subversive” activity. The Christian community had experienced divisions over their role in the protests, with activists wanting churches to take a more public role while official church bodies and congregations were concerned about becoming politicized and identifying with one side in the conflict. The *South China Morning Post* (October 9, 2020) reports that the concerns about the new law and the encroachment of China on church life have been strong enough for pastors to censure and self-censure their social media and even sermons. Writer Danny Mok reports that other Christians and clergy have decided to leave the city for the West. A part of the law ruling against sedition and collusion particularly concerns clergy who have strong ties to Christian organizations and denominations in the U.S. and Europe.

Attempts to resist China’s influence in Hong Kong could be seen in the Hong Kong 2020 Gospel Declaration, which called for the church to “reject the falsehood” of China’s totalitarian regime and to speak out about its deceptions. But Mok reports that the two pastors who organized the declaration have since left Hong Kong. Forty clerics and laypeople from the Methodist Church also issued joint statement last May opposing the law, and a group of 100 Anglicans protested against their leader, Canon Peter Koon Ho-ming, who counseled clergy not to be alarmed or anxious about the new measures. But now the tendency is more to avoid politics rather than be confrontational. *The Hong Kong Free Press* (October 8, 2020) reports that Catholics are not any less divided than Protestants. “Many churches have Beijing loyalist congregations and city leader Carrie Lam is herself a devout Catholic,” writes Su Xinqi. Shortly before the new security law was unveiled, Beijing’s Liaison Office in Hong Kong gathered more than 50 religious leaders to give their blessings to it, including from acting Catholic leader Cardinal John Tong. In two recent letters, Tong criticized clergy for “inciting hatred” by discussing politics in sermons and warned that people sympathetic to the democracy protests were damaging social harmony, Xinqi reports. Tong is in a delicate position as the Vatican and Beijing are preparing to renew a historic deal on the appointment of bishops in China, where Catholics are divided between a patriotic church and those loyal to Rome.



Uncertain prospects for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

The arrest of the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mahmoud Ezzat, in late August in Cairo has sparked a succession crisis, write the editors of *European Eye on Radicalization* (October 2,

2020). At the helm of the Islamist movement for the past seven years, after the hard repression by Egyptian authorities that started in 2013, Ezzat was considered as a hardliner and had possibly been living abroad during part of that time (*European Eye on Radicalization*, August 30, 2020). The new Supreme Guide, Ibrahim Munir, has been running the international organization of the Brotherhood for a number of years. His choice as a new leader has apparently not been well-accepted by younger members, who tend to see exiled leaders as pawns of foreign powers. There have even been accusations that he had betrayed Ezzat to the Egyptian security services. The exiled leaders are getting financial support from Qatar and Turkey—both in competition with Arab countries such as Egypt. Earlier this month, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi reiterated that he rejects any reconciliation with the Brotherhood (*Middle East Monitor*, October 12).

While it might be tempting to turn to violent actions against the Egyptian government both for Brotherhood leaders—in order to gain legitimacy and to show that the movement keep means of pressure—and for their foreign supporters, it should be kept in mind that the Brotherhood in

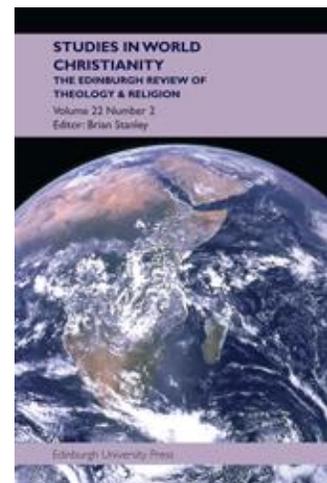


Egypt has lost much of its operational capacities due to the crackdown experienced in recent years. It is no longer possible for its members to organize large demonstrations or to gather significant popular support, as failed attempts after Ezzat's arrest have shown. Moreover, the Brotherhood leaders do not want to risk being designed as a terrorist organization by the US government. There are also voices advocating for a ban of the Brotherhood in the UK (*Arab News*,

October 20), and the Brotherhood would certainly not want to compromise its presence in Europe. What cannot be excluded, according to the EER editors, is that more radical splinter groups come out from a much weakened Brotherhood in Egypt, thus repeating the scenario that had already taken place after years of repression there in the 1970s.

Findings & Footnotes

■ By now, new research on the COVID crisis is making its way into journals and soon into books—just when the reading public and probably many journalists are suffering from “pandemic fatigue.” But for a comparative understanding of how churches in the global South have responded to the crisis, the current issue (26.3) of the journal *Studies in World Christianity* has brought together several fascinating articles on the subject. The editorial notes how the pandemic arrived during major Christian holy days and required rapid and innovative responses on the part of churches with limited resources to keep in touch with the faithful. The first article by Adam Mohr sets the tone by examining world Christianity and to the



Spanish flu of 1918, with “revival” breaking out among an “anti-medicine” church movement in Africa with roots in Philadelphia. The different postures of the churches in relation to their governments are examined in many of the articles.

The article on the churches response in Singapore shows how they were largely compliant with government health mandates, showing their good citizenship but also hindering their role as a critical voice regarding the state’s lapses in dealing with the pandemic. In the Philippines, the sacramental role of the Catholic Church and the poverty of the people and their lack of access to technology made the practice of “spiritual communion” central, as the Monstrance containing the communion elements was paraded through its communities. In Cambodia, the online observance of Christian services during lockdown led to less religious conflict between Buddhists and Christians. A concluding article looks at the way doctrinal positions were put to the test during the pandemic—from the nature of ecclesial authority and the sacraments, as well as the new dilemma of balancing in-person and online ministries when the latter draws more crowds and attention.

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On/File: A Continuing Record of Groups, Movements, Events, and People Impacting Contemporary Religion

The recent formation of the Patriot Church network illustrates the intense support a large segment of evangelical world has given to Donald Trump that may outlast his presidency if he loses the election. The Patriot Church was founded on the weekend of September 11 by Ken Peters, a pastor in Spokane, Washington, to galvanize evangelicals around the Trump agenda. One of the reasons he started the group was his disturbance at evangelical leaders, such as the pastor and theologian John Piper, who has criticized the strong identification with Trump and his brand of nationalism by many evangelicals. The services stress the importance of patriotism and Christian right politics along with Christian commitment and condemns the Democrats and the political left in general for disloyalty and subverting the nation. So far, the non-denominational congregations only number up to four—two near Liberty University in Virginia, one in Knoxville, Tenn., and the other in Spokane, but more are reported to be in formation. The services show many of the features of non-denominational worship, while the sermons carry a stronger political edge. Members and leaders uphold pro-gun rights, religious freedom under perceived restrictions and even persecution of Christians, especially during the pandemic, and the importance of defeating of the Democrats. Members (including the sister of conservative political leader Newt Gingrich) say they were drawn to the churches for their outspoken stances compared with the evangelical churches they attended. The health precautions taken during the pandemic, such as wearing face masks, are often condemned and ridiculed. Peters is quick to disassociate his network from the larger patriotic movement based on white supremacy and separatism. (Source: Washington Post, October 26, 2020)

