
THE GLOBAL SOUTH, CHRISTIANITY, AND SECULARIZATION: INSIDER AND OUTSIDER PERSPECTIVES*

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Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018)

The basic character and historic role of Islam, Germany, socialism, and the Republican Party are widely debated by men and women who are not Muslims, not Germans, not socialists, and not Republicans. Christianity is different. Professing Christians have a remarkably tight hold on academic as well as popular understandings of what contemporary Christianity is. Even Christianity's critics usually speak within a frame offered by people who identify with it. Yet this religion is too extensive and consequential a presence in today's world to be understood only in the terms set by insiders. Even to call the Christian project a "religion" flatters the self-conception of its apologists and immediately structures any analysis of it.

A world-historical event now in progress challenges the assumptions of this insider-dominated discussion and creates new openings for outsiders as well as insiders. The rapid growth in the global South of a great variety of religious practices claiming biblical warrant makes it harder to agree on the boundaries of Christianity and its role in contemporary life. "Christians of the Global South have forced Americans," writes Molly Worthen, "to confront" coreligionists who "care more about warding off witches or insuring the fate of unbaptized ancestors than in combating the fiends of secularism."¹ Many Christians in Lagos and São Paulo

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1 Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York, 2012), 263. Worthen is primarily concerned with how evangelicals have dealt with the conflicting claims to spiritual authority of an "inerrant" Scripture and of modern,

are comfortable with exorcism, faith healing, and immediate, vividly interactive communication with the divine. Dreams like Daniel's are current today, not safely distant in the ancient Mediterranean cradle of the faith. Amid this diversification, Protestant and Catholic leaders in the United States and Europe have a strong incentive to count as part of the Body of Christ every soul who professes the faith. The greater the magnitude and momentum of Christianity, the more cultural and political authority can be claimed in its name and the less credibility attaches to narratives of secularization. Christianity in decline? No, just look at the global South! And who's winning there? Not the learned liberals, but the Pentecostals! Does the future of Christianity belong to them?

Weaponizing the Christianity of the global South against secularists and liberal Christians impedes efforts to achieve an empirically grounded and conceptually clear understanding of the secularization process and of the diverse phenomena now found under the sign of Christianity. Prominently at issue is not only sound scholarship, but also the distribution of the symbolic capital of Christianity. Christians of the North Atlantic West who uncritically accept all versions of Christianity in the global South are moving that capital increasingly into conservative hands.² African bishops espouse doctrines long since regarded as anachronistic and obscurantist by most European and American divines, yet still defended by conservatives who welcome new allies. The authority to speak for Christianity then shifts away from the Enlightenment-influenced Protestants and Catholics who have fought hard to get it. The more Christianity comes to be defined by the global South and by the American evangelicals who have found a political champion in Donald Trump, the more marginal becomes the standard-issue liberal Protestantism for which Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are poster children, and the more on the defensive become those beleaguered evangelical leaders who do struggle against Trump. All Americans have a stake

Enlightenment-inspired rationality, but she also attends to the potentially disruptive force of a third claimant, "the Holy Spirit," and notes how this third authority gained support when evangelicals achieved intimacy with Christians of the global South.

- 2 Just how American evangelical identity with the Christians of the global South generates highly conservative perspectives is shown by Melani McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of Evangelicals* (New York, 2018). Working in Africa and the Middle East, American evangelicals adopt "enchanted" views of the world, reversing the anti-supernatural tendencies of the modern North Atlantic West, and they internalize the persona of the persecuted victim, strongly reinforcing the belief that Christians in the United States are victims of a secular conspiracy. McAlister's book is the most well-documented and carefully developed explanation of the impact on American evangelicals of sustained experience in the Christianity of the global South. McAlister also shows in impressive detail the genuine assistance that many evangelical missionaries and service workers provide for impecunious and victimized peoples in Africa and the Middle East.

in how Christianity is constructed and deployed, and the world has a stake in the direction taken by the United States. At issue, further, is the standing of Christianity in modern debates about cognitive plausibility. So Christianity turns out to be just what Richard Dawkins and the other New Atheists have said it was all along: more like witchcraft and superstition than not? Less directly at issue, but also in play, is just what obligations the rich peoples of the world owe to the poor, and exactly where the Christian project informs those obligations.

To speak of a “project” rather than a religion is to recognize Christianity as an enterprise of human beings not necessarily different in kind from other cultural movements. The purchasing power of the label “religion” is increasingly contested. Scholars have explained how unhelpful and even distorting this Europe-generated category can be when applied to Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, and indeed the whole panoply of cultural complexes that nineteenth-century Westerners started calling the World’s Great Religions.³ We need to remember, too, that in the contemporary United States, any enterprise gains a polemical advantage if it can be recognized as religious. Recent disputes over “religious liberty” have made the First Amendment of the US Constitution something of a trap: if you can label some action you want to take an expression of your religious faith, you are potentially guaranteed its “free exercise,” even if it entails the opportunity to limit the civil rights of other Americans. As Cecile Laborde argues, the commitments that get called religious are not so different from secular ones like environmentalism or veganism, which can define an individual’s life no less totally than Catholicism or Methodism or Islam.⁴ To classify Christianity as a religion is to endow Christians with a political resource, and to place their critics under suspicion of being intolerant.

All the more is this true when Christianity is given a nonwhite face. A Kenyan bishop blessed Sarah Palin in her own Assembly of God church in 2008, praying that the vice presidential candidate be safe from witches. Watching the YouTube video of this ceremony, millions of American and European Christians wondered just how inclusive their own religion had become. Some wondered whether even asking that question of themselves might be racist.⁵ Do skeptics who find

3 Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions; Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, 2005), is a helpful study of the movement to classify a wide range of cultural traditions as religions.

4 Cecile Laborde, *Liberalism’s Religion* (Cambridge, MA, 2017), is perhaps the most sustained theoretical critique of the notion that religion requires special protection under the law. For a discerning discussion of Laborde see Michael Ignatieff, “Making Room for God,” *New York Review of Books*, 28 June 2018, 59–60.

5 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwkb9_zB2Pg. See also, as an example of the discussion inspired by this incident, “YouTube Videos Draw Attention to Palin’s Faith,” *New York Times*, 24 Oct. 2008.

witchcraft and faith healing problematic when practiced by white Americans become racist if they find them problematic as practiced by Africans?

Outsiders and insiders alike know that internal diversity is not new to Christianity. Traditionally, Catholics and many kinds of Protestants challenged the authenticity of each other's faith. But when learned or popular voices have addressed Christianity in the singular they have almost always referred to something embracing virtually all sides of these classic sectarian quarrels. Calvinists, Lutherans, Wesleyans, Anabaptists, and countless smaller confessions and sects were all included, as well as Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox. In the twentieth century the new Pentecostalism of the United States was recognized as Christian, too, despite the widespread feeling (voiced by Calvin himself and many later theologians) that glossolalia, while functional in the early years of the Christian movement, was no longer necessary and should not be encouraged. But in Nigeria, Uganda, Brazil, India, and other scattered countries glossolalia was more common. The Holy Spirit was bursting out all over the place in decidedly novel company and without the carefully developed institutional frames the missionaries had favored. This was far from universal: many of "new" Christians of the global South created no tensions with the "older" churches of the United States and Europe.⁶ But the Masowe Apostolic Church of Zimbabwe declared that there was no reason to study the Bible at all other than to learn from it how to access the Holy Spirit by themselves.⁷

Not to worry, leading spokespersons for Christianity have hastened to explain. Christian identity remains what it always has been. What is happening is just a "seismic shift" by which Christianity's geographic and social location has moved from the North Atlantic West to Africa, and also to Latin America and parts of Asia. In recent decades "Christianity simultaneously entered its most substantial

6 In this essay I am attending especially to the features of global South Christianity that present challenges for Christians of the North Atlantic West, but the diversity of religious ideas and practices in the global South includes many strains compatible with those popular in the United States and Europe. For examples of this continuity see the essays collected in Dana L. Robert, ed., *African Christian Biography* (Boston, 2018).

7 On this group see Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church* (Berkeley, 2007). That a study of such a group would appear in an academic press's series on "Christianity" is a sign of how accepting secular scholars are of Christian self-definition. An excellent introduction to the varieties of Pentecostalism in Africa is a collection of essays by scholars based in Africa, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States: Afe Adogame, ed., *Who Is Afraid of the Holy Ghost? Pentecostalism and Globalization in Africa and Beyond* (Trenton, NJ, 2011). For a cautious exploration of how the novel religious practices of the global South can look to American evangelical scholars see Robert Priest, Thomas Campbell, and Bradford A. Mullen, "Missiologial Syncretism: The New Animistic Paradigm," in Edward Roman, ed., *Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues* (Pasadena, 1995), 9–87.

recession and received its most substantial accession,” writes the Scottish historian Andrew F. Walls. The relative secularization of the West is balanced by the growth of Christianity in “the non-Western world, notably sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of Asia.”⁸

The most influential purveyor of this reassurance is the Baylor University historian Philip Jenkins. Christianity is as strong as ever, according to Jenkins, if only you look beyond our own little tribe. Jenkins’s *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, now in its third edition, has developed and popularized the notion that an African-centered Christendom of the future amounts to a “Third Church,” comparable in scope, power, and historical significance to the Roman Catholic Church and to the family of churches authorized by the Protestant Reformation. While this Third Church looks very different from the two older, well-established churches, it is just possible, Jenkins speculates, that the newer Christianity is the more authentic. In the global South we may see Christianity “not just for what it is but what it was in its origins.” Nowadays “it may be that it is only in the newer churches that the Bible can be read with any authenticity and immediacy, and that the Old Christendom should listen attentively to Southern voices.” This new dispensation is “no mirror image” of Northern models, Jenkins explains: “It is a truly new and developing entity,” although exactly how different from Catholicism and Protestantism “remains to be seen.”⁹

This confidence in Christian continuity mixed with uncertainty about its actual shape dominates the latest and most sophisticated study of “global Christianity,” Brian Stanley’s *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*. Stanley invites extended attention on account of his record as one of the world’s most accomplished and respected students of Protestant missions. His new book is an ambitious effort to analyze the full panorama of ideas and behavior understood

8 Andrew F. Walls, “Cross-cultural Encounters and the Shift to World Christianity,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 81 (Summer 2003), 112–16.

9 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (3rd edn, New York, 2011), 270, 273. This book is a highly informative guide to a vast expanse of religious activities in the global South, which Jenkins engages in a searching, respectful spirit. Yet Jenkins appears to impose implicitly more boundaries on the topic than he acknowledges. At no time in this book, for example, does he discuss one of Africa’s most famous and influential Christians, Emmanuel Eni. A Nigerian charismatic preacher, Eni claimed to have been involved in evil spirits until brought out of their company when he personally met Jesus Christ himself. Eni’s book, *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*, has been reprinted many times and carries the imprimatur of the Nairobi-based consortium African Independent Churches. For a helpful analysis of Eni and his following see Brigit Meyer, “Delivered from the Powers of Darkness: Confessions of Satanic Riches in Christian Ghana,” *Africa* 65/2 (1995), 236–255, esp. 242 (the story of Eni’s work with the devil and his eventual salvation “is known everywhere”).

to be Christian. It is by far the most probing and fair-minded interpretation yet written of the topic. Stanley is no less determined than Jenkins to do empirical justice to his subject, including the sometimes polygamous, homophobic, and witchcraft-respecting elements in the Third Church.

Stanley, who describes himself as a “British evangelical,” goes a bit farther than Jenkins in opening himself and his readers to the question “whether Christianity has converted indigenous religionists or whether indigenous religious and cultural perspectives . . . have succeeded in converting Christianity.” These “perspectives,” Stanley is quick to add, are “white North American” as well as “African, Asian, [and] Latin American” (366). The link between Sarah Palin’s Pentecostal congregation and the African bishop matters, big-time. Stanley’s uncertainty about the direction of causation—where is Christianity its own agent, and where might it have been subverted by foreign agents?—is inspired not only by what he sees in Africa, but also by what he sees in some American churches. In those churches, the least educated of evangelicals have long practiced faith healing, exorcism, and speaking in tongues. The flourishing of “their kind of religion” in the global South increases their own standing in the faith’s informal polity.

Amid these contentions, which carry higher stakes for insiders than they commonly acknowledge, what might outsiders see that stake holders in a flourishing, unified Christianity are less likely to recognize? A revealing hint is dropped by the insider Stanley himself.

While describing the Rwanda genocide of 1994 as carried out and defended by local Christians, Stanley recognizes the temptation to regard Christianity “as a reservoir of ideas and symbols which can be used to support a wide variety of actions.” Most Christians will resist this temptation because this view challenges “any idea that Christianity offers a distinctive moral dynamic to society as a whole.” But Stanley’s own excellent account of the Rwandan genocide would seem to support this demystified view of Christianity. He regrets that the overwhelming majority of the local Anglican clergy supported the killing of more ten percent of the Rwandan population “by appeal to Old Testament precedents such as Samson’s slaughter of the Philistines,” but they did just that (154, 169). Stanley’s unflinching analysis of how Belgian imperial officials, Catholic missionaries, and Protestant churchmen created the setting for the Hutu–Tutsi conflict and enabled its resulting slaughters is consistent with today’s scholarship in postcolonial studies. Stanley is honest enough to acknowledge that Christianity contributed virtually no “moral dynamic” of its own in Rwanda.

If outsiders are less likely than insiders to assume that Christianity is a consistently focused project that can be expected to have a wholesome ethical influence, outsiders are also less likely to downplay the significance of the raw supernaturalism that is so much more abundant in the Third Church than in the first two. This difference is a matter of degree, but a Minnesota Lutheran pastor

who reported having just returned from a long walk with the Apostle Paul is more likely to be referred to counseling than would his Ugandan counterpart. A multitude of studies of American religion show that individuals are often drawn to Catholic and Protestant churches for reasons other than mystic connection to the divine. A major role of churches is to sustain communities, providing individuals and families with intimacy and belonging. A very large portion of the Americans who remain affiliated with Catholic or Protestant churches keep the supernatural origins of their faith too distant to disrupt a daily life given its structure by other authorities and interests.¹⁰ American assemblies of Methodists do not witness public efforts by their own bishops to exorcize “homosexual demons” from their own clergy. Exactly this happened in 1998 at the Anglican Communion’s Lambeth Conference when a Nigerian bishop performed this rite on an unwilling British priest. When an Episcopal bishop from the United States complained at this same conclave that some of the African Christians were close to “superstition” and “witchcraft,” he was promptly humiliated and forced to apologize.¹¹

Yet this striking difference in the place of the supernatural is almost always ignored when the global South is mobilized to refute narratives of secularization. The flourishing of Christianity there is by far the most widely cited bit of evidence that the human species has entered a “post-secular” era. Jenkins confidently throws “global Christianity” in the faces of “secular, American liberals” who just don’t get it. Stanley returns so often to the question of secularization that I believe it fair to regard it as the driving preoccupation of his analysis of global Christianity. “Perhaps the most important integrating narrative of this book,” he explains at the outset, is Christianity’s “bold challenge to the serene faith of secular self-belief” (10).¹²

Lost or only grudgingly and inadequately acknowledged amid this apparent discrediting of a secularization narrative is an empirical reality that outsiders can comfortably affirm: the *social location for the appeal of supernaturalist ideas and practices has continued to be exactly where predicted by classic secularization theory*. And it was the supernatural, after all, that was long invoked to establish the authority of churches and of prelates and of faith-affirming rulers. If religion did not have a supernatural core, there would have been much less

10 Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, 2010).

11 There are many accounts of this tense and portentous meeting of the Anglican Communion; see e.g. Stephen Bates, *A Church at War: Anglicans and Homosexuality* (London, 2004), esp. 37.

12 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, esp. 11–12; see also Stanley, 8, 79–82, 86–8, 91–105, 111–15, 119–26, and 360–61.

point in measuring the scope of its ordinance. It was supernaturalism that defined religion for its Enlightenment critics. According to classic secularization theory, belief in supernatural authority and deference to institutions claiming to speak for that authority are most likely to diminish when four conditions have come into existence: (1) literacy and scientific knowledge are widespread, (2) physical insecurity has been sharply reduced by technology and military peace, (3) democratic political institutions have empowered a larger segment of the citizenry, and (4) populations have moved from homogeneous rural communities to diverse urban environments. Only the last of these conditions is remotely common in the global South today. Moreover, within the United States, Pentecostalism mostly flourishes where some of these conditions—notably a high level of education—do not exist either. Jenkins is surely correct that in the eyes of “the poor and persecuted” in many areas of the globe, “the book of Revelation looks like true prophecy on an epic scale.” If you live in a dictatorship in Africa, “the image of the government as Antichrist is not a bizarre religious fantasy but a convincing piece of political analysis.”¹³

Some secularization theorists did overreach in assuming that the process of social, political, and cultural modernization was universal and inevitable, and in supposing that all religions were more like Christianity than they are, or ever have been.¹⁴ The very concept of secularization, many critics have observed, flows more narrowly out of the history of Christianity than many social theorists have allowed. The religion–secular binary itself, recent writers have complained, impedes an accurate and sympathetic understanding of Islam.¹⁵ But if we avoid these mistakes and focus simply on the core issue—the appeal of supernaturalism in relation to Christianity—we find that secularization theory still works remarkably well. Religious affiliation of any kind has long since dropped in most of Europe, and more recently in the United States, especially within scientifically literate, urban populations.¹⁶

13 Jenkins, *The New Christendom*, 275.

14 For a probing critique of these failings see J. C. D. Clark, “Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a Grand Narrative,” *Historical Journal* 55/1 (March 2012), 161–94.

15 For a lucid, critical commentary on the substantial body of literature created by Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and others complaining of the prejudicial consequences of the secular–religious dichotomy see Jean L. Cohen, “On the Genealogy and Legitimacy of the Secular State: Bockenforde and the Asadians,” *Constellations* 25/2 (2018), 207–24.

16 A number of credible surveys have found that by the second decade of the twenty-first century, between one-fifth and one-quarter of Americans professed no religious affiliation, although they gave a great variety of answers to survey questions about religious belief and “spiritual” orientation. See e.g. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/the-factors-driving-the-growth-of-religious-nones-in-the-u-s. For an overview of the most relevant

Stanley avoids almost totally the diminished credibility of supernatural agencies in the North Atlantic West. He is correct that when churches lose their hold on a public it is more often the result of indifference than of antireligious campaigns by secular regimes, but he then devotes many pages to the failure of such regimes in France and the Soviet Union. He may be correct, further, to conclude that the acceleration of religious indifference in France since the 1960s was in large part a response to the Catholic Church's reactionary teachings on sex and gender. Yet Stanley attends hardly at all to the long history of varieties of Enlightenment-style religious skepticism that produced official secularism in both France and Russia, and that made it easier for French women and men of recent decades to pull away from a church that held to politically anachronistic doctrines. The vaunted secularity of the Scandinavian countries, moreover, does not really count, Stanley explains, because the populace never achieved the level of religiosity required for a secularization story to make sense. Perhaps "the majority of Danes and Swedes *never* became Christians at a level more profound than that of formal collective adherence" (100, 111, italics in original).

Stanley's analysis of the United States is yet more evasive. The much-discussed decline of the Catholics and the "mainline" ecumenical denominations has been "largely, and perhaps even entirely, offset by the absolute growth in conservative Protestant denominations" and the new "charismatic renewal movements." Offset? So secularization has not proceeded very far? Here, Stanley offers a local version of Walls's "seismic shift" noted above, whereby Christian identity remains intact but has simply moved its location. Christianity has a "chameleon-like capacity" to change while remaining the same, he explains. Stanley further minimizes secularization in the United States by citing survey data of 2001 showing that 14 percent of Americans claimed to have no religion, when a widely publicized study of 2012 reported more than 20 percent, with the percentage increasing every year. Most remarkably, Stanley refers to the secularity of "American universities and the media" without offering any explanation for why individuals well educated in the liberal arts and natural sciences are the least responsive to supernaturalism (117, 121, 124.).¹⁷

of the social-scientific studies, and for a more extensively argued defense of classic secularization theory, see David A. Hollinger, "Christianity and Its American Fate: Where History Interrogates Secularization Theory," in Joel Isaac, James T. Kloppenberg, Michael O'Brien, and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *The Worlds of American Intellectual History* (New York, 2016), 280–303.

17 For the Pew study of 2012 see www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise-new-report-finds-one-in-five-adults-have-no-religious-affiliation. This study also found that 32 percent of Americans under the age of thirty declared no religious affiliation.

While Stanley evades the power of classic secularization theory to explain both the rise of Christianity in the global South and its decline in the North Atlantic West, he is forthright about the drift of an ostensibly unified Christianity toward “ideologies of individual enrichment.” He is at pains to hold American as well as African, Asian, and Latin American churches responsible for this narrowing of the Gospel. But his evidence is heavily from the global South. In Africa and Latin America since the 1980s, Stanley observes, “Pentecostal Christianity was in danger of becoming . . . focused almost entirely on the individual and unashamedly yoked to the ideology of capitalism.” It is exactly this popularity of “the prosperity gospel” that most inspires Stanley’s admission of uncertainty, noted above, “whether Christianity has converted indigenous religionists or whether indigenous religious and cultural perspectives . . . have succeeded in converting Christianity.” On the final page of *World Christianity*, Stanley acknowledges that the “fabric of Christian doctrine and spirituality” has in many places been “fundamentally redesigned in the interests of the pursuit of individual material prosperity.” The “most serious challenge” for the twenty-first century “looks likely to be” the willingness of “some sections of the church in both northern and southern hemispheres to accommodate the faith to ideologies of individual enrichment” (311, 366).

Stanley is obviously right to identify the United States as a significant site for the transformations that worry him, but he underestimates the historic link between capitalist ideology and conservative Protestantism. Generations of evangelical leaders have enabled exactly what Stanley most laments: individual profiteering at the expense of solidarity. Fundamentalists of the 1920s and 1930s were closely associated with pro-business interests, as was the broader alliance of evangelicals that solidified in the 1940s. The New Deal was represented as the Antichrist long before the African Christians studied by Jenkins and Stanley began to see their own governments in these biblical terms. Recent scholarship has called attention to the ease with which New Deal-hating business interests exploited the highly individualist tradition of the evangelical salvation narrative to win the political support of fundamentalists and eventually funded *Christianity Today*, Fuller Theological Seminary, and other key evangelical institutions. “How Corporate America Invented Christian America,” the subtitle of one of these works, may be hyperbolic, but the evidence is overwhelming.¹⁸

18 Kevin Kruse, *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York, 2015); Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2014); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York, 2012); Darren Dochuk, “Fighting for the Fundamentalists: Lyman Stewart and the Protestant Politics of Oil,” in Andrew Preston, Bruce J. Shulman, and Julian E. Zelizer,

The community-sensitive, human-brotherhood themes in Christianity that Stanley most respects have been advanced by some evangelicals, but more consistently and with greater public effect by left-wing Catholics and by the liberal, ecumenical, “mainline” Protestants about whom Stanley says remarkably little.¹⁹ The liberal Protestants also had their business allies, most importantly the Rockefeller family, but the progressive causes advanced by the Rockefellers found no substantial counterpart on the evangelical side of the great ecumenical–evangelical divide. The many versions of “the prosperity gospel” coincide much more frequently with evangelical than with ecumenical engagements.²⁰ Stanley does note that the ecumenical denominations were much more responsive than their evangelical rivals to the claims of women for a more complete humanity, and that the same pattern was repeated with regard to same-sex relationships. But Stanley, who declares that Christianity’s “greatest challenge” in the twentieth century was “the repeated subversion of Christian ethics” by a series of compromises with “racial supremacy” (366), never comes to grips with the huge gap between ecumenical and evangelical responses to Jim Crow racism from the 1940s through the 1960s. He correctly summarizes the anti-racist, pro-human-rights activism of the ecumenical leadership during those years and later, but he fails to sufficiently confront the vigorous opposition from evangelical leaders who disparaged such “meddling in politics,” attacked ecumenical pastors and seminarians as communist sympathizers, and called on black people to be patient while white racists worked to “change their hearts.”

In his most explicit discussion of the ecumenical–evangelical divide, Stanley comes close to admitting that his heart is with the mainliners and their secular allies: “The mainline denominations estimated the prevailing sentiment to be one of radical humanism and commitment to human rights, whereas the conservatives judged the public preference to be for free market forms of highly individualized programs for self-betterment. Quite simply, the liberals got it wrong and the conservatives got it right.” But getting it “right” for church membership growth is exactly what Stanley tells us is “wrong” for ideal Christianity. The evangelical victory led to the abandoning of national and global

eds., *Faithful Republic: Religion and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia, 2015), 40–55; Sarah Ruth Hammond, *God’s Businessmen: Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War* (Chicago, 2017).

19 Many works emphasize these themes in ecumenical Protestantism, including two books of my own, David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton, 2013); and Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, 2017).

20 For this remarkable feature of American religious life see Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York, 2013).

responsibility in favor of “a narrower focus on the well-being of the individual and the Christian family” (119–20). The liberals lost the struggle to keep their numbers high and thus diminished their claim to represent Christianity in the public sphere, but those liberals, in alliance with secular post-Protestants, continued to advance the more socially responsible causes that Stanley apparently appreciates. That Stanley is not fully sure of his own direction is suggested, further, by his having chosen to focus at the end of his inquiry on an issue obviously distant from the “bold challenge to the serene faith of secular self-belief” he announced as his integrating theme. Although he identifies secularists as his chief intellectual opponents, Stanley’s most powerful passages of moral witness condemn self-serving capitalists, petty and grand.

The first priority is to “liberate the captives,” theologian Harvey Cox concluded his famous manifesto, *The Secular City*, in 1965, and he was not referring exclusively to Christian captives.²¹ Cox himself soon moved away from the radicalism of his famous treatise. But his prophetic advocacy of progressive goals, his resolute critique of supernaturalism, and his eager pursuit of allies outside the community of faith are all more relevant than ever to debates about the destiny of the Christian project. In an era of increasing Islamophobia in the United States, a Christians-first approach to the global South threatens to entrap Americans in a narrow vision of what their role in the world might be. Already the government of the United States has altered its aid programs to meet evangelical moral prescriptions and is under increasing pressure to prioritize, over other injustices abroad, the persecution of Christians. And there is no reason to believe that the peoples of the global South will be better off if the Christian project as pursued in the North Atlantic West takes intellectually obscurantist turns, rendering modern standards of cognitive plausibility suspect.

If outsiders have collegial advice for believers like Stanley, it might be to let the Third Church develop under its own historic circumstances, and to refrain from using the Christianity of the global South as a weapon against liberals and secularists. The most positive features of the engagement with the Christians of the global South are the attempted repudiation of the colonial past and the search for a genuinely fraternal relationship. But the faithful of the North Atlantic West can still take pride in the versions of the Christian project that have flourished in partnership with the Enlightenment. And they can make common cause with secularists in exploring just how the rich peoples of the world can attend to the needs of the poor. Stanley and many other insiders devoted to human fraternity

21 Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York, 1965), 268.

are slow to realize that some of their best allies are found outside the community of faith, among those he ungenerously patronizes for the “serene faith of secular self-belief.” Christianity has more than its share of serenity and self-centeredness, as Stanley himself well shows. The cause of global justice should engage us all.