

In Others' Words

Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, websites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase.

Two Surveys of Religion with Surprising Results

Don't miss two articles that interpret sociological and religious data obtained in recent surveys of religion. The first, "[Face and the Loss of Reputation in the Korean Protestant Church](#)," was published in 2020 in the open access missiological journal *Missio Dei*. Authors Shin-Ho Choi and Michael Rynkiewicz look at religious identity in South Korea, but instead of simply focusing on individual identity, they draw on "a more corporate concept known in the business world as 'Reputation Theory.'" This theory informs their discussion of their own survey of the growth or stagnation of religious life in South Korea. And if you're interested in honor and shame, the entire issue 11 of *Missio Dei* is worth a read.

The second article, entitled "[Pew: What India's Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and More Think About Religion](#)," was published in *Christianity Today* (June 29, 2021) and is the most extensive PEW survey of Indian religions in decades. Some have faulted the Pew survey for representing urban values more than rural values, or for not portraying accurately the extreme religious and political polarization that has taken place in the past few years.

John Dayal, a Delhi-based Christian political analyst and co-founder and past secretary general of the All India Christian Council, credited the report for its "good coverage of cultural issues"... But he also said the report failed to fully capture the "extreme polarization" caused by the recent election campaigns of Hindu nationalists and the resulting Islamophobia which "now permeates all aspects of national intuitional and public life." Tensions over [increasing](#) Hindu nationalism in India have caused the nation to [climb](#) the Open Doors' persecution index in recent years. Open Doors now ranks India at [No. 10](#) on its 2021 World Watch List of the 50 countries where it's hardest to be a Christian. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom recommends India be [added](#) to the State Department's list of Countries of Particular Concern. Pew itself calculates that India has the [highest](#) level of social hostilities regarding religion among the world's 25 most-populous countries, as well as one of the higher levels of government restrictions. Yet Pew found that most Indians value religious pluralism and tolerance and feel very free to practice their faith..."

For the complete findings of the PEW survey, see "[Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation](#)."

A Different Look at Islam from Inside

An inquiry into a possible Muslim Enlightenment comes from a new book called *Reopening Muslim Minds* by Turkish author Mustafa Akyol. In an excellent *Christianity Today* interview (June 21, 2021) with Todd Johnson of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Akyol speaks candidly about Qur'anic interpretations that have become more fundamentalist and narrow in the centuries since the emergence of Islam. The interview, entitled "[Reopening Muslim Minds to Freedom and Tolerance](#)" (June 21, 2021), had some surprising admissions: a mention of the Armenian genocide, and a condemnation of the persecution of Christian populations in the Middle East. Not to be missed!

One Year Anniversary of Beirut Blast

One year ago on August 4, a horrific explosion rocked Beirut, killing 200 people and wounding thousands of others. According to Reuters,

The chemicals arrived on a Russian-leased cargo ship that made an unscheduled stop in Beirut in 2013. An FBI report seen by Reuters last week estimated around 552 tonnes of ammonium nitrate exploded, far less than the 2,754 tonnes that arrived.

No one seems to know "who brought in the explosives . . . , who allowed for their unloading and storage, who removed quantities of it and where it was sent" ("[Lebanese Demand Justice on Port Blast Anniversary](#)"). See also the poignant lament written by Brent Hamoud of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in the [IMES blog](#) entitled "Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit: Sifting Through the Rubble of the Beirut Blast One Year On."

Ethiopian Evangelicals Divided as Civil War and Famine Worsen

With the major supply road into the rebel Ethiopian province of Tigray now even more tightly blocked by the Ethiopian government, [severe famine looks inevitable](#). The U.N. says it needs 100 trucks traveling twice a day to prevent almost certain catastrophic famine for the Tigrayan people. In July 2021, only one truck convoy of 50 trucks made it through once. (See the July 31 article in the *New York Times* entitled, "[This Ethiopian Road is a Lifeline for Millions. Now it's Blocked](#)." See also the July 1, Issue Brief, Refugees International, entitled "[The Cruellest of Fates: Famine in the Time of War in Tigray](#).") Ethiopian evangelicals number over 20 million (19% of the population) but find themselves increasingly divided—and ambivalent. The current prime minister, who took power in 2018, is himself a Pentecostal believer. In 2019, he won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work towards ending the war with Eritrea. Ironically, according to some, he initiated

and is promulgating this current civil war. (See “Ethiopian Christians Take Sides Over Tigray Crisis,” *Christianity Today*, July 6, 2021.) For a good explanation of the roots of this conflict, see a November 5 article in the *New York Times* entitled “Why is Ethiopia at War with Itself?”

Forced Mass Sterilization of (Muslim) Uyghur Women

The Economist published the results of a trip to Xinjiang by their correspondent “Chaguan” on June 26, 2021 in an article entitled “**Ferocious Birth-control Policies in Xinjiang are Racially Targeted.**” The official government position is that the startling and sharp reduction in Uyghur births from 2014 to the present is the result of “spontaneous agreement to sterilization” on the part of tens of thousands of Uyghur women. Western journalists suggesting otherwise are “engaging in slander.” However, *The Economist* notes the following:

By 2017 the [Bachu] county’s birth rate had fallen from 19 to 13 per thousand, a highly unusual drop in just three years. Astonishingly, in 2019 Bachu reported a birth rate of 4.15 per thousand people. That is one of the lowest birth rates anywhere in the world, and a decline rarely seen even in wartime.

The Fall of Afghanistan

Taliban Strategy

After twenty years of US and NATO war on terror in Afghanistan, the entire country has fallen to the Taliban in a rapid series of military strikes, the result of a brilliant strategy of negotiated surrenders, **targeted assassinations**, and threats of wholesale massacres. The *New York Times* noted that:

The Taliban committees take advantage of a defining characteristic of Afghan wars: Fighters and commanders regularly switch sides, cut deals, negotiate surrenders and cultivate village elders for influence with local residents. The current conflict is really dozens of local wars. These are intimate struggles, where brothers and cousins battle one another and commanders on each side cajole, threaten and negotiate by cellphone. (“**A Wave of Afghan Surrenders to the Taliban Picks Up Speed,**” *New York Times*, May 27, 2021)

Saad Mohseni, the co-owner of the Afghan TOLO News, told the *New York Times*:

Their outreach was fantastic. Their planning was very good. They managed the element of surprise. They capitalized on intratribal, ethnic, religious and ideological differences to win over people. And they made the most of peoples’ frustrations with the government.

See “**Collapse and Conquest: The Taliban Strategy that Seized Afghanistan,**” *New York Times*, August 18, 2021.

Despite offering amnesty to all, Afghans who worked for the government and US military as interpreters or in other capacities, are being **hunted down** using captured extensive payroll lists and **biometric data bases**. See “**Before the Taliban Took**

Afghanistan, They Took the Internet,” *Atlantic Council*, August 26, 2021. Targeted assassinations of prominent Afghans escalated sharply—**more than 700 in 2020 alone**—and more than half occurred in the last three months of 2020 after the Peace Talks began. Acts of terror designed to cause mass surrender of Afghan troops were greatly facilitated by **the freeing of more than 5000 radical jihadists** (many of whom were foreigners) from prison. The Taliban has reaped the benefit of billions of dollars of **military equipment left behind** in haste—conservative estimates place it between **eighteen to twenty-four billion dollars’** worth. Will this treasure trove make the formation of a terrorist nation state almost inevitable? See the article in *The New Yorker* “**Afghanistan, Again, Becomes the Cradle for Jihadism—and Al-Qaeda**” (August 26, 2021). For an historical account of the rise of the Taliban, see “**Who Are the Taliban?**” *BBC News*, August 18, 2021. Don’t miss the excellent article in *The New Yorker* by a journalist who was himself kidnapped in 2002 by Sirajuddin Haqqani, the newly appointed Minister of the Interior for the Taliban “government” and head of the **Haqqani Network**. See “**Biden’s Chaotic Withdrawal from Afghanistan is Complete**” (*The New Yorker*, August 30, 2021).

Evacuations: Too Little, Too Late

US and western allies were able to evacuate more than 124,000 by August 31 in a two-week heroic air lift. Hundreds of US citizens, other foreigners, and more than **150,000 Afghan allies were left behind**. But veterans, private citizens, government officials, **journalists**, and relief agencies from multiple countries rallied to pull off herculean rescues. Most had personal ties to their translators and interpreters. Check out the remarkable story, “**Just One More’: Inside the Massive Military Community Effort to Save Afghans**” (*Military Times*, August 27, 2021).

The Sudden Collapse of the Afghan Army

For insight into why the Afghan military crumbled so quickly in the face of the Taliban advance, see a very perceptive article in the *Intelligencer* of *New York Magazine*, August 17, 2021 entitled “**Why Afghanistan’s Security Forces Suddenly Collapsed.**” And for an insightful analysis of the impact of corruption on Afghanistan’s government, see the August 28 article in *The Economist*, “**The Afghan Government was Undone by its own Corruption.**”

In Afghanistan, “from your birth certificate to your death certificate and whatever comes in between, somehow you have to bribe,” says Ahmad Shah Katawazai, a former Afghan diplomat.... Officials often buy their posts and must extort kickbacks to recoup their investment. Mr. Katawazai says it can cost \$100,000 to become a district police chief. Officials’ main goal becomes extorting revenue to distribute to their families and patronage networks... By the end the country

was so corrupt that governors cut deals with jihadists... Why then, when it invaded Afghanistan decades later, did America fail to take corruption seriously? One answer is that political thinkers are only now doing so. Scholars such as Francis Fukuyama, a political scientist, see [corruption](#) as a throwback to pre-modern governments where power is based on personal ties rather than institutions. In this way South Vietnam and Afghanistan resemble mafias or the feudal states of medieval Europe. States like these lack the cohesion needed to beat a disciplined insurgency such as the Vietnamese communists or the Taliban.

Urban vs. Rural Viewpoints

Two articles that are very well worth reading give two very different viewpoints. The first one is the tragic story of an urban (Kabul) Hazara extended family of many brothers, all of whom worked for different US military or NGO organizations. (See [“After Airport Bombing, an Afghan Family Buries a Father, and Hope,”](#) *New York Times*, August 27, 2021). The second is an even more disturbing article entitled [“The Other Afghan Women,”](#) *The New Yorker*, September 6, 2021. Knowing that 70% of Afghans live far outside the cities, the author, Anand Gopal, spent the summer of 2021 in Helmand Province, by then already occupied by the Taliban. His intention was to interview rural women. Gopal himself was one of a few journalists who had embedded with the Taliban at the start of the war. What emerges is a tragic tale of war lord Amir Dado, the brutal Ninety-Third Division, and how these vicious Afghan militias became allies of the Americans. Gopal is also the author of a 2015 Pulitzer-Prize finalist book entitled *No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes*.

Who is Most at Risk under the New Taliban?

Implications for human rights, humanitarian concerns, religious and ethnic persecutions are vast. The UN estimates [14 million people](#) are on the edge of starvation right now because of a prolonged drought, a surge in the coronavirus, and a likely economic collapse. See [“A Million Afghan Children Could Die in ‘Most Perilous Hour,’ UN Warns,”](#) *The New York Times*, September 13, 2021.

[Afghan Hazara](#), who make up nine percent of the population (over 4 million) are Shi'a Muslims. Systematically persecuted for being “heretics” for generations, a [Hazara girls' school was bombed](#) by ISIS in May 2021, killing over 90 girls ages 12–18 and a [maternity hospital](#) in a Hazara community in Kabul the year before. A powerful warning of the [risk of genocide for the Hazara](#) comes from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum:

“Even before recent events, Afghanistan ranked second highest in the world for risk of a new onset of mass killing of civilians, according to the Museum and Dartmouth College’s [Early Warning Project](#). The recent developments have

heightened that risk exponentially,” said Naomi Kikoler, the director of the Museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide.

Christianity Today published a moving testimony of an Afghan pastor in the US who is in touch daily with many other [Afghan Christians](#) in Afghanistan. The son of an imam, and a Hazara himself, his story highlights the fact that many Afghan Christians are Hazara. See [“My Heart is Broken: An Afghan Pastor Grapples with the US Withdrawal,”](#) *Christianity Today*, August 20, 2021.

Women face a particularly threatening future. Girls and women have had twenty years of education. [Women-owned businesses](#) number 57,000 and have created 130,000 jobs. Close to [30% of the Afghan parliament](#) was female, but the new government has appointed no women. (See [“Hardliners Get Key Posts in New Taliban Government,”](#) *BBC*, September 7, 2021.) One Afghan woman educator wrote a moving appeal:

Educated girls are the ones who will pry the fingers of extremism from Afghanistan’s throat.... Don’t look away from Afghan girls.... Educated girls grow to become educated women, and educated women will not allow their children to become terrorists. The secret to a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is no secret at all: It is educated girls. ([“I Founded a Boarding School for Girls in Afghanistan. Don’t Look Away from Us,”](#) in the *Washington Post*, September 1, 2021)

Comparisons with Britain’s First Afghan War

For an excellent historical perspective going back 170 years, don’t miss William Dalrymple’s essay comparing Britain’s First Afghan War 1839–1842 with this current debacle ([“Afghanistan Always Defeats the West,”](#) by William Dalrymple for *Unherd*, August 28, 2021.)

If the First Afghan War helped consolidate the Afghan State, the question now is whether our current failed Western intervention will contribute to its demise. Afghanistan has changed beyond all recognition in the last twenty years. The cities have grown, people travel much more widely, thousands of women have been educated. Television, the internet and an ebullient media have opened many minds. It is impossible in such circumstances to predict the fate of the divided state of Afghanistan under renewed Taliban rule... For the truth is that in the last millennia there had been only very brief moments of strong central control when the different Afghan tribes have acknowledged the authority of a single ruler, and still briefer moments of anything approaching a unified political system. Afghanistan has always been less a state than a kaleidoscope of competing tribal principalities governed through maliks or vakils, in each of which allegiance was entirely personal, to be negotiated and won over rather than taken for granted. **IJFM**