

shape and significance to 'spirituality' in late modernity and establish agreed-upon concepts for analyzing and discussing them. Only then shall we get others to take our subject seriously.


Galen Watts*

Queen's University, Canada

✉ galen.watts@kuleuven.be

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The Twenty-Something Soul: Understanding the Religious and Secular Lives of American Young Adults, by Tim Clydesdale and Kathleen Garces-Foley, New York, Oxford University Press, 2019, xi + 242 pp., US\$29.95 (hardback), ISBN 978 0 1909 3135 3

Religion among twentysomethings is akin to the polar ice cap: there is plenty of ice now and likely will be for years to come, but the melt rate is rising, and if sustained, the long-term impact will be staggering ... the disaffiliation rate from organized religion is significant, and the long-term impact could be substantial (37).

Tim Clydesdale and Kathleen Garces-Foley set out on an ambitious journey to study the soul of the millennial twentysomethings in their 2019 co-authored book *The Twentysomething Soul: Understanding the Religious and Secular Lives of American Young Adults*. The goal is to understand the religious and secular lives of the approximately 47 million young adults who live in America today. Their agenda is unambiguous; Tim Clydesdale, a sociology professor at the College of New Jersey, and theologian and religious studies scholar Kathleen Garces-Foley of Marymount University in Virginia, insist on redefining and paying tribute to 'America's most truly pluralist generation of adults (184).' In unison, they want to directly dispute well-publicized prognoses of immanent and irredeemable religious decline and predestined secular triumph among twenty-year-olds (184). They reject the stigmatizing labels such as the 'lost generation,' 'boomerang kids,' 'slouching towards adulthood,' or 'least religious generation' (12). The co-authored work aims to reframe the damaging misrepresentation by scholars and media alike by explicitly contextualizing the challenges these Americans face as they journey through their twenties and regularly emphasize the cultural shifts that have transpired during the last half-century (11). Keenly, Clydesdale and Garces-Foley stress the necessity of understanding the impacts of globalization on wages, jobs, the skyrocketing cost of education, as well as cultural changes forged by the sexual revolution, feminism/genderqueer movements, LGBTQ rights, and the inclusion of ethnic and racial diversities in order to understand the role religion plays in their lives. Past generations may have lived according to the underlying assumption that a good American is a religious American, but this dictum no longer applies - and for the better, Clydesdale and Garces-Foley argue. Today, American twentysomethings feel free to embrace religious, spiritual, and secular lives as they see fit (184). However, the pertinent question is to understand how these practical

*Present address: KU, Leuven, Belgium.

postmoderns negotiate the newly gained freedoms and how, in response, twentysomethings navigate the many choices they are facing. The authors' answer is an optimistic one, for now.

Clydesdale and Garces-Foley acknowledge the debate in developmental psychology regarding a possible new formative stage between adolescence and young adulthood and whether it is a global phenomenon or restricted to First World nations (205). The term 'emerging adulthood' was coined by Jefferey Arnett in 2000 and comprised the approximate age range of 18–25 but later expanded to 18–29-year-olds. He characterizes this stage by stressing the importance of identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling of in-between-ness, and a sense of broad possibilities (Arnett 2004). Though agnostic about this new developmental stage's psychological distinction, Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, as a sociologist and religious scholar respectively, agree that the transition into adulthood is changing and warrant extensive research focused specifically on twentysomethings, 20 to 29-year-olds, and their affiliation to religion. The co-authors define the twentysomethings' lives as characterized as significant personal choices imposed in the face of economic uncertainty, with more freedom and more choices than ever before, 'making decisions harder, not easier' (15). The data is collected for four years and generated from the 1,880 young adults surveyed by the National Study of American Twentysomethings (NSAT), the 144 observations, and 234 interviews, finally adding the General Social Survey (GSS) data.

Clydesdale and Garces-Foley give extensive credit to Dean R. Hoge (1937–2008), who conceived the study and founded the *Changing Spirituality of Emerging Adults* (ChangingSEA) research project. It was Hoge who invited Clydesdale, based on his previous book *The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students about Vocation* (2015) and his earlier work on the changing spirituality of emerging adults, and Garces-Foley to join the team documented in her book. Her expertise examines contemporary religious trends in the United States, including young adults and religious congregations, *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission* (2007). The 2008–2013 project's purpose remained focused on young adult 'spiritual hunger', especially Catholics and Protestants; however, the broad scope of the research findings lies in the impressive tripartite scope of the ChangingSEA project (185). Clydesdale directed the first part of the national study. It consists of 15 synthesizing essays by national scholars examining topics related to emerging adult that explored finance, occupations, family and friendships, politics, sexuality, race, and spirituality. Grace-Foley was in charge of all the observations and ethnographic studies at Christian institutions and churches that have successfully maintained their emerging adult membership, four essays on ministry implication authored by Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders, and nine summaries from ethnographic studies (186). The final part, a collaborative effort of researchers, is a national survey conducted in 2013 of 1,880 adults ages 20–29 (NSAT). As discussed in chapter 2, the NSAT aimed to capture responses from 91% of young adult demographic and included (Roman) Catholic, Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, or None, religiously unaffiliated, but excluded the diverse 9% of Americans who are Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, or identify as 'others' (such as Buddhists, Hindus, Orthodox Christians.) Throughout the study, Christians are the main focus and are grouped into three cohorts by the authors: Evangelical Protestants, Mainline Protestants, and (Roman) Catholic. Interestingly, only once the authors started writing did they realize that the research focus was 'too analytically limited' (187), and that those who indicate no affiliation with religion, the so-called 'Nones', are almost equal in size (164). Evangelical Protestant in 2013 counted 30% of American twentysomethings were as unaffiliated Nones accounted for 29%, with Mainline Protestants at 14%, Roman Catholic at 18%, and other religions at 9% (23).

Not primarily aimed at an academic audience, *The Twenty-Something Soul* is based on robust, data-driven research analyses of their data and is intended for professionals interested

in the religious, spiritual, and secular lives of twentysomethings. Its goal is to be 'scholarly yet reader-friendly' with endnotes instead of footnotes (186). They aim to examine religious change across successive cohorts of American twentysomethings in contrast with older American counterparts (37). The authors aim to reach Christian religious leaders and campus and young adult ministers who want to understand the changing social structures affecting church and university life (ix). With their targeted audience in mind, Clydesdale and Garces-Foley attempt to balance the multitude of data points with personal vignettes that illuminate their data (e.g. the discussion of the importance of belief formation during young adulthood found in chapter 1). It is thought-provoking that their mixed-method approach is deliberately structured to lead with qualitative information before presenting their quantitative measurement analysis. Nevertheless, despite great effort to parse and explain in lay terms myriad data points, the reader will need a sound understanding of how to interpret sociological data to keep up with all of the statistical analyses.

Bridging an impressive amount of raw data and personal narratives gleaned from this impressive array of longitudinal studies, in-depth and follow-up interviews, and national surveys, the authors successfully make seven claims about the religious, spiritual, and secular lives of American young adults: (1) twentysomethings demonstrate continuity of beliefs and practices far more than decline; (2) those who worship regularly cluster within young-adult-friendly congregations; (3) the ranks of the religiously unaffiliated are permeable; (4) there are four strategies concerning religious and spiritual life (prioritizing, rejecting, sidelining, and elective, cafeteria-style); (5) spirituality organized in two types: traditional and nontraditional; (6) prioritizing religious and spiritual life correlates significantly with marriage, cohabitation, parenthood, college graduation, employment, voting, community, and social engagement; (7) American twentysomethings are practical and postmodern (16–18).

The United States proves to be an exceptional study as the nation's population maintains belief in God at a high percentage, even though it has great economic security as measured by GDP. This contrasts with the rest of the world, where the inverse is the norm (Fahmy 2018). This trend is also reflected among American twentysomethings, though it varies along with significant regional variations (147). The authors cover this in great depth in chapters 3–5. Here, Clydesdale and Garces-Foley discuss Christian twentysomethings' overall religiousness and how it varies based on the respondents' attachment to religion and how they rate the importance of religion. The authors use a helpful classification of believers who are *active* (attend religious services a couple of times monthly or more and indicate that growth in their spiritual life is 'very' to 'extremely important'); *estranged* (spiritual life is 'not very' or 'not at all important'), and *nominal* (those in-between) (68). With this classification based on their unique data, the specific religious-affiliated cohorts of Catholics, Mainline Protestants, and Evangelicals American twentysomethings are differentiated and discussed in respective chapters (3–5).


The *Twentysomething Soul's* most engaging find is that the unexpected changes of religious lives are not found among the 1 in 4 Americans who have consistently prioritized religious commitment, but with the unaffiliated or 'Nones' (13), the group which is covered in the last two chapters (6–7). The Nones stand out as they do not seek the familiar or social approval of what to believe and where or how to worship. Though Clydesdale and Garces-Foley agree that there is a need for more longitudinal data to devise an accurate typology of change among twentysomething Nones, based on the preliminary data, they suggest breaking down the Nones into four categories of analysis: 1. Unaffiliated Believers (17%), 38% of whom affirm that the Bible is the inspired or literal word of God; 2. Spiritual Eclectics (17%) for whom spiritual growth is the main focus with a pluralistic orientation;

3. Philosophical Secularist (12%) who replace religious dogma with a non-religious belief system based on rationality and empiricism; 4. Indifferent Secularists (54%) who are ambivalent about their secularism (155–156). These four typologies are an essential contribution to the overall research in the fields of sociology of religion, developmental psychology, and psychology of religion, specifically for those who are interested in twentysomethings. They are also helpful for the general population regarding the changing religious landscape in America more broadly. This cohort of young American adults represents a significant difference from previous cohorts, yet the authors note that 1 in 4 believes in God 'as a spiritual force', and another 1 in 4 is 'unsure' (155). The authors' final point is that though these Nones defy religious affiliation and they may have shaken off their cultural shackles with the disappearing stigma for those who choose 'none,' feel free to think and choose freely; simultaneously, they faced uncertainty and social isolation. There is no church for the unsure, nor a social structure to support the ambivalent into adulthood.

In conclusion, Clydesdale and Garces-Foley offer a wealth of granular data on American twentysomethings' religious and secular lives. *The Twentysomething Soul* is written for ministers and leaders in the church on religious affiliated young adults, yet the most significant insights stem from those who do not affiliate with religious institutions and beliefs. What will happen to the Nones in the future will impact our understanding of all religious life in America and for scholars beyond the confines of the church.

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Hester Oberman
University of Arizona, USA
 hoberman@arizona.edu

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