

## BOOK REVIEW

**Ronald F. Inglehart. *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing it, and What Comes Next?* New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. 203 pp.**

In his last book before his death entitled *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing it, and What Comes Next?*, Ronald Inglehart meticulously explores the wide range of data to analyze what is going on in the religious sphere in this modern age. The book employs data from not only Western countries, but over 100 countries in order to examine the conditions leading to the decline in religiosity and the implications this phenomenon holds for the future. The data convincingly suggests that there is a significant difference between the period from 1981 to 2007 and the period from 2007 to 2019. At glance, both periods seem to belong to the same era called modern period. However, this same era has a significant difference for the decline in religion. Then, what is causing the decline in religiosity between those periods? Inglehart uses two terminologies to explain about the change. The majority shift from "Pro-Fertility Norms" to "Individual-Choice Norms". It appears that Individual-Choice Norms were already in existence long before the period of 1981-2007. Developed nations have gone through the woman's movement, gay-rights movement and having populations with the problem of obesity rather than the problem of hunger. Moreover, it is more understandable to compare with those who had little material possessions and food after the World War II and with those who enjoyed the financial prosperity from 1960s and 70s and onward. However, if looking at the actual political adaptations in same sex marriage for example, it can be seen that Individual-Choice Norms and the new generations who wholeheartedly believe in those norms became more apparent after 2007 and onward.

A well-known sociologist, Peter Berger (1967), once predicted during the 1960s that as secularization advances, religions or religious movements will fade away. However, in 2014, Berger admitted that his prediction was wrong and that the resurgence of religious movements such as the Pentecostal Church plays a significant role in advanced society in the secular age. However, Inglehart's book indicates that

Berger's initial prediction was correct from the analysis of statistics from 2007 to 2019. This new discovery provides a valuable insight into how to see the current state of religions and religiosity as well as the future outlook.

The thoroughness of Inglehart in his presentation of the data collected worldwide is evident in this book. The seriousness which Inglehart, who is the world's most cited political scientist, brings to his work is confirmed by Pippa Norris of Harvard University who closely collaborated with Inglehart to study various contemporary issues, including global religious decline. Norris commented, Inglehart "was a pioneer in expounding bold conjectures about social change which captured the contemporary zeitgeist and then also gathering large-scale cross-national survey data monitoring attitudes, values, and behaviors, to test the comparative evidence for key claims in these social theories." In his last book before his death at the age of 86, Inglehart not only analyzes the decline number of religious followers, but also individual's security and insecurity in high income countries when the majority of people are replaced by new generations and insecurity caused by the collapse of Marxism in the former Soviet Union countries. He demonstrates that the radical shift did not occur suddenly with the collapse of communism in various countries. Instead, the data shows insecurity embraced for decades gradually replaced by individual choice norm as a result of secularization. This lag between insecurity and security contributed to the new phenomenon of the decline witnessed in recent years.

The book displays many credible facts and data. It provides important eye-opening insights and caution for those who continue to hold on to the opinion that the numbers of religious followers will not decrease even in the face of ongoing scientific advancement, and technological development continues to lead civil society. The author layout "Midpoint" to classify to scale in high income countries, and he argues that the time that high-income countries crossed the midpoint was not before 1980s but mostly from 2007 and afterwards. It is arguable that the majority of countries had enough food, material possessions and enough freedom to choose individually before 2006. Having said that the data shows that the majority of the religious mindset has shifted to "less religious" only recently as the countries that surpassed

the midpoint. The survey concerning the situation in the United States shows that the majority of citizens think that God is not so important in their lives. The drastic decline of religion has been happening in those recent years for the first time. These results may startle many people who believe that religion will not decline in secular societies. Scandinavian countries have crossed the midpoint earlier and it also co-relates the era when people in those nations became “less religious” too.

In addition, it is after a decade or so that people in former Soviet Union started to gain security about themselves. In other words, religion was needed for a period of time after the collapse of Marxism, which was replaced by individual choice norm as their economic situation improved. It shows that per capita GDP again co-relates to the decline of religion. There are many figures provided by Inglehart in this study which represent more similarities than differences among different countries in regard to the trend of religious decline.

It is uncertain whether the decline of religion with economic growth is one direction or not. Will religion regain its role as the center of people’s life even though the economic prosperity continues to grow from now on? What is certain is that in this book, Inglehart did not propose his ideas based on subjective thinking. Rather he carefully and objectively analyzed the data showing the sudden decline since 2007 to 2020, which may come as a shock for many readers as well as institutional religious leaders.

I strongly suggest that the reader take a look at the data and facts of the latest religious trends presented and analyzed by the author in order to more accurately understand the changes taking place worldwide in the religious sphere. Considering Inglehart’s presentation will help not only the general public, but also professional scholars and students of social science to gain valuable insights into how many factors of social changes have impacted religion in recent decades.

*Fumihiko Matsumoto, PhD*