

more closely to contemporary Roman Catholic piety. However, it is of interest to note that the Conception of the Mother of God in the AOB is not defined as “Immaculate.” Despite this, some Anglicans may balk at the phraseology of its requests for intercession of the saints, though as Bishop Ray Sutton states in his foreword, these need not be prayed by all.

It is sometimes commented that within the Church of England many Anglo-Catholics have jettisoned Anglican liturgy for the *Novus Ordo*, though it is probable that an even higher proportion pray the Roman Office than celebrate the Roman Mass. It seems this is often due to the Roman Breviary’s relative ease of use while maintaining variety. A wider dissemination of the AOB in the Church of England may be a helpful resource for those who wish for a simple and usable breviary while holding on to the riches of the Anglican inheritance.

The Anglican Office Book is thoroughly catholic in orientation, while also making a practical addition to the Anglican tradition. In this sense it is the best of Anglo-Catholicism: principle in praxis, particular and local, yet according with the teaching and practice of the whole.

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Jim Davis and Michael Graham, *The Great Dechurching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2023. ISBN 978-0310147435 xxiv+247, hbk \$30; also audiobook, Gloze, Kindle, Nook.

While many Anglicans with an evangelically-minded heart seek to call souls to Christ, the reality is that in some mission fields, the greater opportunity is calling souls *back* to Christ.

The Great Dechurching is about why people left (mostly evangelical) churches, which ones might come back, and how to avoid dechurching your own members. The authors estimate that about 40 million American adults (15.5%) have dechurched since the 1990s.

The Great Dechurching is written by two evangelicals with ties to The Gospel Coalition and its late co-founder, Tim Keller. Davis is the lead pastor of a Baptist-leaning Orlando nondenominational church, and Graham is a parishioner and program director for the Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics.

They see dechurching as an inversion of the centuries-long rise of Christianity documented by Finke & Stark's seminal *Churching of America*,² and focus on key reasons why someone might leave a church or even the faith altogether.

Their pastoral hearts have identified both a real problem and also how that problem can be avoided or cured.

They raised private funds to commission two social scientists, Paul Djupe and Ryan Burge, who conducted three rounds of nationwide surveys: a random sample of 1,043 adults, a convenience sample of 4,099 dechurched adults, and another sample of 2,043 dechurched evangelicals. Within the surveys, the key questions are of the form "which of these reasons" explain the respondent's decision to dechurch—or possible willingness to rechurch.

The book defines the dechurched as "as someone who used to go to church at least once per month but now goes less than once a year" (xxii). However, it does not say what qualified a survey respondent as "evangelical," despite more than a dozen scholarly articles this century debating such definition. The authors end their introduction with the caveat "We are pastors, not scholars." It appears neither social scientist helped write the body of their book, most of which is expressed in the first-person plural (although 31 uses of "I" refer to Davis alone). Burge authored five brief sidebars.

As in any multiple-choice survey, the answers are constrained by the available choices, but I found the original data both insightful and persuasive. The core chapters of the book use a machine-learning analysis of the second and third surveys to develop four categories of dechurched evangelicals: cultural Christians, dechurched mainstream evangelicals, exevangelicals, and dechurched people of color (who previously attended a white evangelical church). A fifth category contains a grab-bag of the remaining non-evangelical Christians, described as dechurched Catholics and Mainline Protestants.

When I hosted a video interview with the two Anglican church planters who had strongly recommended the book, they both found such grouping to be very helpful, because they had met representatives of most categories.³ Each chapter uses a fictional composite character to illustrate the category, a summary of the reasons why this category dechurched, and suggestions as to what would (or would not) work to bring them back.

² Roger Finke and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. Rutgers University Press, 2005.

³ See "Can Anglicans Rechurch the Dechurched?" <https://youtu.be/mearGiVRutI>.

As a recovering engineer, social scientist, and not a pastor, I found these five chapters frustrating, particularly the fictionalized portraits (which seemed to be extreme cases and not typical cases). Instead, across all the chapters I saw the challenge of dechuraching and opportunities for rechuraching could be explained as due to weak attraction of the Christian to the faith or a church, or strong repulsion from a specific church or denomination.

Most prominent in the first category are those poorly formed Christians who are not immune to the decline of cultural desirability of Christianity and other societal pressures. By its nature, Anglicanism includes deeper formation through prayer and liturgy, and the presence of Christ in the communion service (rather than a shared memorial meal). The book suggested that many who attended worship performances at large evangelical churches never really felt like they belonged or fit in, validating my own diocese's emphasis on Biblical hospitality and authentic community as central to evangelism today.

The repulsion categories seem almost entirely avoidable. They range from not reaching out to comfort or visit sick parishioners, to the rare but tragic cases of pastoral malpractice or even criminal child sex abuse.

A more common category of repulsion came from political differences with the rector or congregation. As a lifelong resident of the Left Coast, the book seemed to have an undue fixation on transitory political issues, which I'm told has long been a thing for Southern evangelicals. The authors seem to think that an evangelical church needs a "correct" view on key political and social issues, offering attacks on controversial figures that bordered on virtue signaling.

In my experience, at the healthiest Anglican churches you could guess at the rector's political views after six months, but from the pulpit or website you would never know for sure. Rather than a correct position on politics, they espouse *no* position. My liberal mainline Protestant friends were stunned to learn that an Anglican priest might lose his position because provocative political activity is inconsistent with priestly ministry.

Parents are also cautioned about their own role in dechuraching, either by weakly forming their children, or not listening to or showing empathy for their children's views on political or social issues when they differ from their parents.

What can be done? The reality is there is no one-size-fits-all solution for a given Christian or parish, but the closing chapters offer a toolbox of possible alternatives. The most recognizable was creating a liminal space "for people who are between belief and unbelief" (51), a core idea of those Anglicans who follow a Celtic model of evangelism, of "belonging before believing."

While the *Great Dechurching* is not a reference book for healthy Anglican parish life, its questions and observations would help Anglican parishes heal those who are lost and avoid adding to their number. Occasional Prayer #20 in the ACNA prayer book(s) prays that “the lost may be found,” a sentiment that should be part of any parish’s prayers for mission and evangelism.

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