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FEATURE STORY:
Buddhism in the West at a crossroads and facing competition?


Buddhism in the West continues to see the rise of new figures and movements, though not all are acknowledging their Buddhist roots, according to a roundtable discussion of scholars and practitioners in the Fall issue of French magazine *Ultréia*!. Some of these assessments differed between France and America. Philippe Cornu, an academic and a teacher of Buddhism, notes how successful mindfulness has become in various circles while often rejecting its Buddhist roots. While some might see this popularity as a proof of Buddhism's success in the West, Cornu is not so sure. Appropriating elements of Buddhism while ignoring that they are part of a wider spiritual path shows how many often do not take Buddhism as a whole but rather reduce it to small pieces, such as techniques for well-being and advice for daily life. The potential for narcissism in this approach is a far echo from the Buddhist message as a path to liberation from conditioned existence, associated with compassion and altruism, Cornu adds. The original medical applications of mindfulness in the late 1970s were a way of using Buddhist techniques to help patients, while more recent uses rather tend to stress efficiency in one's professional life. Benefits are obvious, but a pinch of spirituality in daily life cannot be equated with a spiritual path. Such uses of

Buddhism in the West make it difficult at this point to foresee what its future could be, Cornu concludes.

A teacher of Zen, Eric Rommeluère, is aware that Zen Buddhism has mutated through its history and has been influenced by different environments and historical events. The propagation of Zen Buddhism in the West is largely the consequence of a decision by monks to relieve themselves of their priestly duties in Japanese society and diaspora for the sake of teaching international audiences. Initially, Zen attracted people who had been influenced by the views of the counterculture. These days, Rommeluère adds, this association is no longer the case, to the extent that Zen Buddhism has sometimes become diluted into mainstream culture. As with other Buddhist schools, the success of mindfulness techniques presents a challenge. Fewer people are willing to commit themselves for retreats lasting for several months, and seminars of a short duration are preferred. In France, at least, Rommeluère is not so sure about the future of Buddhism—especially Zen— as the competition from mindfulness challenges it.

Fabrice Midal, the founder of the Ecole Occidentale de Méditation (Western School of Meditation), concurs only in part with the other contributors. While he sees ritualism (sometimes conjoined with nationalism) often overwhelming Asian Buddhism, and Buddhism in France remaining as an “exotic” import despite its many centers, Buddhism in the U.S. has become quite vibrant. According to him, this success is partly due to the ability of Buddhism in America to connect with local legacies such as Transcendentalism, thus managing to become part of American history. Due to an American approach toward religion that differs from French secularism, Buddhism has also become a legitimate subject at U.S. universities, and more American Buddhists have been able to engage in productive academic careers in Buddhist studies. Consistent with other features of American religious life, the community life of Buddhist groups is also stronger than in a country such as France. Various types of engaged Buddhism have also flourished in America (e.g. social action by Bernie Glassman’s Zen Peacemakers). Far from seeing new meditative approaches as a threat to Buddhism—though he does not deny they may degenerate into tools for stress management—Midal is nonetheless convinced that these new forms will finally prove to be the best way for preserving the Buddhist tradition.

(Ultreia!, <http://revue-ultreia.com>)

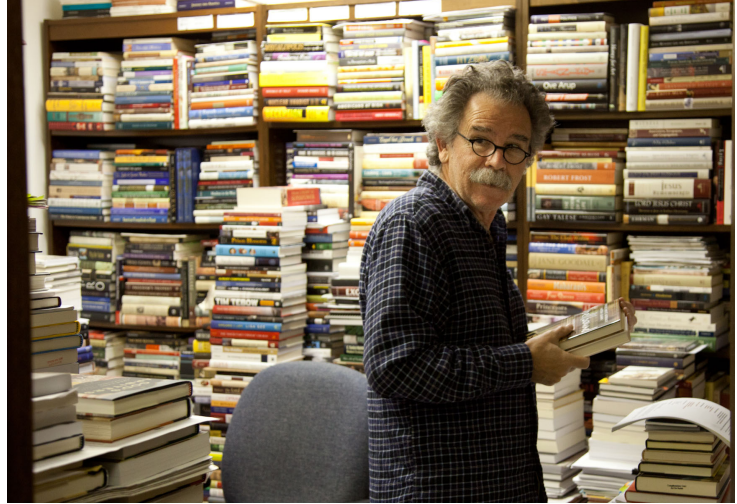
ARTICLES:

‘Evangelical knowledge class’ loses outlets but finds broader influence

The recent loss of the magazine *Books & Culture* and of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals (ISAE) due to lack of funding has been a setback for evangelical intellectuals and scholars, but they are spreading their influence outside of their own institutional channels, writes John Schmalzbauer in *Comment* magazine (January 12). Evangelicals widely lamented the closing of *Books & Culture* at the end of 2016 as ending a 21-year era of publishing the leading literary and scholarly lights of conservative Protestantism, often with participation and recognition by other Christians and secular critics. The publication reflected the growing evangelical engagement in the arts and scholarship and came out just at the time that evangelical scholars were despairing

and writing about “the scandal of the evangelical mind.” The magazine faced the same lack of funding from evangelical philanthropists that closed the ISAE two years earlier. Historian Michael Hamilton says that the closing of the ISAE “may indicate that in the future, serious evangelical scholars may continue to depend on non-evangelical support for their work....”

Several other intellectual-oriented evangelical periodicals have also ceased publishing in recent years, such as the *Wittenburg Door* and *The Other Side*. But Schmalzbauer is convinced the “evangelical knowledge class is here to stay.” There are new book blogs and publications, such as the *Englewood Review of Books*. It is likely that evangelical writers and other intellectuals will ply their trade in like-minded if more ecumenical outlets, such as the conservative *First Things* (building on the growing evangelical-Catholic alliance), and



more toward the mainline and evangelical left, the *Christian Century* and *Sojourners* magazines. Schmalzbauer notes that *Books & Culture* had a uniquely wide theological and political breadth, with its editor John Wilson strongly avoiding culture war rhetoric—something that seems to be in short supply “in an age of polemics and partisanship and gotcha-journalism.”

(*Comment Magazine*, <https://www.cardus.ca/comment>)

Southern gospel singing schools see their own revival

The revival of Southern gospel singing schools is rivaling the Sacred Harp singing schools that have flourished among more secular Americans, writes Brooks Blevins in the journal *Southern Cultures* (Winter). Both kinds of singing schools train laypeople to sing hymns and other traditional sacred music based on shape notes, which replace standard round notes with shaped ones that correspond with tones or pitches on the musical scale. The gospel singing schools first started in post-Civil War America but became concentrated in the South. They tend to stress their Christian identity and are not very open to religious outsiders, whereas secular academics and the media studied and promoted the acapella Sacred Harp schools, which middle-class Americans with little connection to southern Christianity attend. Interestingly, this divide between the two types of schools has theological roots. The Sacred Harp schools are based on the Primitive Baptist tradition, which is strongly Calvinistic and against evangelism (believing conversion is God’s work), thus allowing those of different or no faith to participate without facing “witnessing” and pressure to convert.

In contrast, the gospel singing schools come from the broad evangelical tradition of Southern Baptists and Pentecostals, and “even if the proselytizing isn’t overt, the evangelizing tone of the songs, prayers, and stage banter remind the visitor that her soul is a subject of communal concern,”

Blevins writes. The rise of Contemporary Christian Music during the 1970s and 1980s



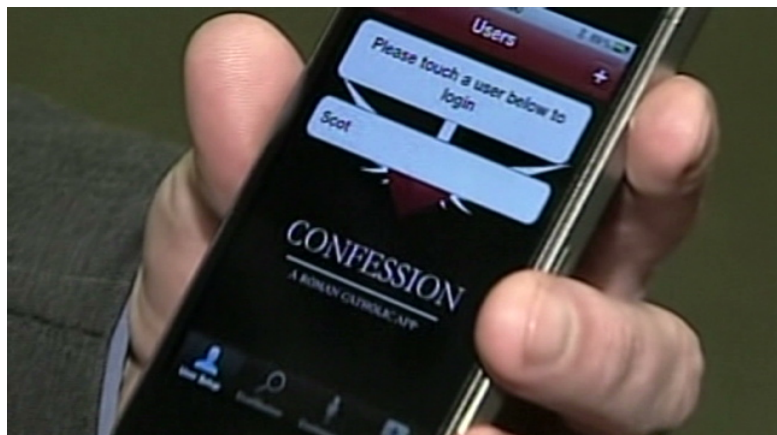
overshadowed the gospel singing schools, but they have made an unexpected rebound in recent decades. Of the 18 schools in the Southern U.S., only three were in existence during the Reagan era; no fewer than eight were founded in the current century, with two traditional gospel music publishing companies recently started. Blevins concludes that the gospel music schools' revival is a sign that Southern evangelicals and fundamentalists, known for their "eager adaptability and

disregard for the past" are gaining a historical consciousness, even as it reveals an anxiety about sustaining a conservative Protestant culture in contemporary America.

(*Southern Cultures*, <http://www.southerncultures.org>)

Mobile apps for confession aiding or challenging church authority?

Users of mobile apps for practicing the Catholic ritual of confession find the experience authentic and affirmative of their faith, although they are in many cases replacing the authority of the priest with "algorithmic automation," according to a study in the *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* (11). The study, conducted by Sasha A. Q. Scott, studied the use of such popular confessional apps, including *Confession*, *iConfess*, *Mea Culpa*, and *The Confession App*, analyzing the developers' descriptions as well as user comments between 2015–2016, totaling 311 comments across all the platforms. These apps are not meant to be substitutes for the actual rite of confession and are approved (in one case even receiving the imprimatur of a bishop) as aids to practicing the sacrament. The apps serve as reminders and classifiers of sins for the penitent and provide a step-by-step guide of what to do inside the confessional, even providing the functions of absolution and penance. While church officials warn that the apps should not encourage a "confession via iPhone...this is exactly what users are reporting themselves as doing. It would seem that the legitimacy bestowed by official endorsement is important in user adoption of these platforms, but has less impact [on] how they then use them in their own personalized practices," Scott writes. "Having



performed the sacrament using *The Confession App*, there appears on screen a button titled ‘Erase My Sins’. Once pushed, the user is rewarded with the notification ‘Your sins have been erased’.” Scott does not indicate how many users take this priest-less approach.

She finds that the reviews of these apps were overwhelmingly positive, with users reporting a reduction in anxiety that is often associated with the fear of forgetting one’s sins while in the confessional. Users also report satisfaction at keeping an accurate, cumulative record of sins. Scott finds that a common theme in the reviews is the broad appeal the apps have in personalizing the ritual—from new converts to the faith to those who have been active for many years to the young who are especially adept at this technology to lapsed Catholics seeking an accessible way to reconnect with the church. Most of the negative comments concerned technical issues. Scott also finds that the users single out the developers for specific praise, seeing them in some cases as a channel of grace. Because these apps have received church approval, even developed in cooperation with clergy and bishops, they are widely seen as authentic to the faith, adding to user satisfaction. But the “algorithmic agency” in such apps, even if it is just for cataloging and classifying sins to examine one’s conscience, may be replacing the authority of the church and priest and is becoming part of the ethical and moral dimensions of everyday life, Scott concludes.

(*Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*,
<http://heiup.uniheidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/index>)

Current Research

● **Even as American politics is embroiled over what has been called the “Muslim ban” in immigration, Americans have increasingly become more accepting of Muslim people, according to surveys from the Brookings Institution and Public Religion Research Center.**

Surveys conducted during the election year “reveal extraordinary, progressive and unexpected shifts that cannot be explained by events during that year,” according to the *Brookings* blog. Attitudes toward Muslim people became progressively more favorable from 53 percent in



November of 2015 to 70 percent in October 2016. Even attitudes toward Islam (though generally more unfavorable than attitudes toward Muslims) showed improvement, with favorable views

increasing from 37 percent in November of 2015 to 49 percent in October 2016—the highest level since 9/11. Some factors cited that may be behind this rapid shift are party politics; almost all the shifts came from Democrats and independents, not Republicans. Writer Shibley Telhami argues that Democrats significantly shifted in their attitudes about Muslims to challenge what was seen as the opposite view in the “dominant narrative” of then Republican candidate Donald Trump.

(*Brookings*, <https://www.brookings.edu>)

● **A study of British youth who are religiously non-affiliated finds a spectrum of views running from theism to atheism but also a fluidity that suggests that respondents might presents themselves differently in various contexts.** The study draws on the Youth On Religion survey, which was conducted among 10,000 13- to 17-year-olds, along with an additional qualitative study of 157 teens aged 17 to 18. In the *Journal of Youth Studies* (December), researchers Nicola Madge and Peter J. Hemming find that of the 20 percent of British youth reporting no religion, only half said they did not believe in God. The largest subgroup (25.3 percent) of the remainder said they were unsure of the existence of God; another 5.3 percent expressed belief in some form of a higher power. Ten percent said they believed some of the time, 6.1 percent believe with some doubts, and only 2.5 percent are sure of the existence of God. A smaller but still noteworthy 7.2 percent of those believing in God sometimes and 24.2 percent of those sure of God’s existence attended services. Madge and Hemming also found considerable fluidity in their religious practices depending on where they were and whom they were with. For instance, participants would present themselves differently when with friends than with families and members of their nominal faiths.

(*Journal of Youth Studies*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjys20/current>)



● **While there are signs of Jewish migration from Europe to Israel, there has not been an exodus of Jews leaving the continent over the concern of anti-Semitism and their future, according to a recent study of six European countries.** The survey, conducted by the Institute of Jewish Policy Research, found

that while there is an increase in Jewish migration, especially from France, Belgium, and Italy, levels of migration in Britain, Germany, and Sweden have not significantly increased, according to a report in *The Guardian* (January 12). The reality of a Jewish exodus, which is defined as the migration of 30 percent or more of the Jewish population, has not been approached, with only four percent of Jews from Belgium and France leaving for Israel between 2010 and 2015. The proportions leaving from the U.K., Germany, and Sweden were between 0.6 percent and 1.7 percent.



● **A recent rise in the number of reported atheists in Greece is taking place mainly among those raised in nominally Greek Orthodox homes who during their process of “deconversion” move away from an anti-Orthodox stance toward a more “positive atheist” identity, according to a recent study.** In *NSRN Online* (January 16), the blog of the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network, Greek sociologist Alexandros Sakellariou notes that back in 2006, atheists registered at a low two percent of the population in Greece. But a recent survey found that while 81.4 percent are still Orthodox Christians, 14.7 percent claimed to be atheist.

Sakellariou conducted qualitative interviews with 63 self-identified atheists and found that only a few were raised in secular families. Most grew up where Greek Orthodoxy was the predominant religion, although respondents tended to characterize their families as nominal or below average in practice. They frequently framed “their prior religious identity as something forced upon them

by the family rather than a genuine religious belief,” he adds. The process of deconversion was gradual, usually occurring in adolescence or childhood and before their twenties. While some cited science and technological advancements as their main belief, most say they now “worship freedom,” even if in metaphorical sense, Sakellariou writes. But after an initial stage of holding anti-Orthodox attitudes, they “moved towards a positive formation of an atheist identity.”

(NSRN Online, <https://nsrn.net/category/nsrn-blog>)



ARTICLES:

A split over competition for Brazil’s conservative Catholics

A bitter split within the conservative Brazilian (and international) Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) organization shows a move toward stricter forms of contemporary Catholicism, but also how different organizations cater to different niches in Brazil’s religious market, writes Massimo Introvigne (Center for Studies on New Religions, CESNUR) in a special issue of the *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* (7:2, 2016) on Roman Catholic new religious movements. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira (1908–1995) founded the TFP in Brazil in 1960. It had a core of male celibate full-time members and was active both religiously and politically. Associated with the traditionalist Catholic milieu and disavowed in 1985 by the Brazilian Bishops’ Conference, TFP refused, however, to follow traditionalists when they proceeded with the consecration of bishops and thus broke with Rome. At the death of Corrêa de Oliveira in 1995, the TFP found itself in an ecclesiastical environment that had become more open toward groups in the strict niches of the religious market. But the founder’s death also provoked a break within the movement over its very nature, which had been a matter of internal debate. Some leaders wanted it to become a religious order or society and created the Heralds of the Gospel while managing to keep the (now lesser used) TFP label for them to use in Brazil, even as others have kept the name in other countries.

The Heralds of the Gospel have grown very rapidly, Introvigne writes. They have thousands of celibate members in nearly 80 countries, and several of their leaders have been ordained as priests. They focus on religious activities and support the statements and speeches of Pope Francis. On the other hand, the old TFP, led by a group of eight older members (the *fundadores*, founding members), also with an international following, seems to be increasingly disturbed by Pope Francis's statements—while still declaring their submission to him. They remain active in political campaigns on issues dear to them. According to Introvigne's analysis, the continuers of the old-style TFP are filling the strict (and ultra-strict) niche of the religious market, while the Heralds of the Gospel attract people belonging to the moderate-conservative niche, which gives them access to a much larger audience. In Brazil, Introvigne concludes, both play a role in the restructuring of the intra-Catholic religious market.



(The *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* is a subscription-based online journal, <https://www.pdcnet.org/asrr/Alternative-Spirituality-and-Religion-Review>)

Islamic exorcism follows in the trail of refugees in Europe

The flood of refugees from the Middle East into Europe is raising concern about the mental health and adjustment of these newcomers, leading to the growth of Islamic healing and even exorcism practices and groups, reports *America* magazine (January 2). There has been a reported rise in mental health issues among the approximately 10 million immigrants coming into Europe. Writer Erik Raschke notes that a 2008 study linked mental illness to immigration. Focusing on the Netherlands, he notes that immigrants living in white Dutch neighborhoods were more than twice as likely to have forms of schizophrenia. While immigrants are finding it difficult to find mental health treatment, “practices of exorcism related to Islam are growing in popularity.... Though not all Muslims recognize exorcisms as part of their faith...clinics that prescribe so-called Islamic remedies are sprouting up around Europe. Examples of such remedies are *hijama*, a traditional method of cupping and bloodletting, and *ruqya*, a ritual that includes recitation of the Quran,” Raschke writes.

These practices are also increasing in Islamic countries, so much so that conservative political parties are trying to ban them. In the Netherlands, the exorcists claim that many of the mental health problems are actually the work of jinns or demons. Other organizations blend Islamic remedies with Western methods, such as the Parnassus Group. Patients at this clinic see it as a last resort for their mental distress, and the therapists and doctors see “jinn possession as both a psychological problem and a social, spiritual and cultural ailment.... While it may seem eccentric or absurd to some, a jinn exorcism coupled with mental health therapy can be far more effective, not to mention cheaper, than years of antidepressants on their own,” Raschke concludes.

(America, 106 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019-3803)



Public Catholicism emerges during France’s election season

A more public form of Catholicism has arrived in France that may seem unexpected in this secular country but has actually been developing for decades, writes Samuel Gregg in *First Things* magazine (February). The emergence of popular presidential candidate Francois Fillon, a devout Catholic with conservative views on abortion and euthanasia, has galvanized young and politically active Catholics, even forcing secular candidates, such as Nicholas Sarkozy, to appeal to the faithful. It is unusual for politicians to embrace Catholicism openly, but the concern over Islamic expansions, most notably the murder of a priest by two extremists last summer, has ignited concerns about national identity and its relation to Catholicism. Gregg adds that Fillon realizes that appealing to fellow Catholics can put him over rivals such as the National Front’s Marine Le Pen, who has recently taken a more secular approach on such issues as abortion.

These shifts have been long in the making, starting with the papacy of John Paul II and his appointment of Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger to Paris, according to Gregg. Lustiger’s dynamic leadership and orthodox approach inspired a generation of priests, some of whom are now bishops. These bishops come from elite, educated backgrounds and are not hesitant to challenge secular



influence. Lay Catholics, some of whom are convert-intellectuals, have been behind such movements as *Le Manif pour tous*, which led a nationwide protest against the Socialist government’s legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013. Gregg adds that there are other currents in the French church, including a traditionalist party, and general “low energy” in other quarters.

“Still, something has changed in French Catholicism. It is alive in a way one does not see in neighboring Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland,” Gregg concludes.

(*First Things*, 35 E. 21st St., New York, NY 10010)

Crimea falls in line on Russian restriction and management of religion

Since Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, much of the region today reflects Russian religious dynamics, including increased restrictions on minority religions, according to the *East-West Church & Ministry Report* (Winter). Roman Lunkin writes that since Crimea became subject to Russia, the “new order” has consisted of “copying Russian federal support for Orthodox churches of the Moscow Patriarchate (MP), manipulation of Islam and its leaders, and restrictions on most Protestant church development. Security measures have included the deportation of certain evangelical and Muslim leaders, church searches, and the liquidation of religious groups already banned in Russia, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir.” He adds that as many church leaders have moved to Ukraine, those who have stayed behind feel left alone to face the authorities. “Ties between Crimean and Ukrainian believers have been broken as the latter have accused those who have remained in Crimea of ‘collaborating’ with Russian ‘occupation authorities.’”

Among the Orthodox churches, the Moscow Patriarchate has flourished, and even the Simferopol and Crimean Bishop Lazarus, who criticized Crimea joining Russia, now collaborates with Russian authorities with no reservations. Orthodox jurisdictions other than the MP have not fared as well since the annexation of Crimea. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate (UOCKP) struggles to hold on in the region, with Russian authorities and police transferring some parishes to the MP, including the threatened transfer of the St. Vladimir and Princess Cathedral in



Simferopol. Russian authorities are hesitant to liquidate the UOCKP in Crimea since that may lead the church to do the same for MP churches in Ukraine. The Catholic churches—including Eastern rite—in Crimea have not felt much pressure from Russian authorities, possibly because the centralized structure of the church with its base in the Vatican allows its parishes “more ably [to] put forward their claims than has been the case with the peninsula’s smaller, decentralized religious communities,” Lunkin writes.

(*East-West Church & Ministry Report*, Asbury University, One Macklem Dr., Wilmore, KY 40390)

Roma embrace of evangelical Christianity far from mimicry

A strong Pentecostal movement has been growing among the Roma people for more than a decade, but the suspicion still follows the group that they are pursuing this faith for economic gain. A recent study suggests otherwise. The Roma people are believed to have pursued what is called “extrinsic religion” throughout their still mysterious history—adapting to different faiths was a form of mimicry to gain social acceptance. In the journal *Religion in Society in East and Central Europe* (December), Hungarian researchers Gellert Gyetvai and Zoltan Rajki look at history and their own research on Hungarian Roma and find that the Romany evangelicalism “produces radical changes in Roma lifestyle and thinking, rooted in intrinsic religiosity.” A popular historical view is that the Roma have not had a religion for most of their history, but the researchers find that “Romany stories, songs, and most of the myths that can generally be found in ethnographic collections usually have some Christian roots.”

To test this finding, they conducted a study of historical texts and their own survey of Roma churches in Hungary from 2012–2014. They find that early on, there were Roma groups who “were religiously integrated with religiously committed attitudes.” There may have been mimicry, but there was also intrinsic religiosity (believing in a religion for its own sake). The latter tendency was the strongest in their study of 705 Roma Christians in 27 denominations, finding that 91.6 percent of the population prays every day, with little difference between the genders. In contrast, the rate of Hungarians who rarely pray is up to one-third among both genders. Almost two-thirds (65.5 percent) of Roma respondents say they read the Bible daily compared to only



two percent of Hungarians. Based on a social distance scale, where respondents rate how much they allow sacred figures in their lives, more than two-thirds of Roma answered in a deeply religious way, and another 18.6 percent also answered within the favorable category. In an open-ended question about changes in their lives after joining the church, almost 99 percent of Romanians reported some change, especially in the area of lifestyle and behavior (48.9 percent). After their conversion, Romanians distinguish between “good Roma” and “bad Roma,” with the former being converted and the latter unconverted.

(*Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, <http://rascee.net/index.php/rascee>)

Christian conversions growing among Syrian refugees in Lebanon

The phenomenon of converting to Christianity is taking place among the waves of Syrian refugees arriving in Lebanon, reports *The Telegraph* newspaper of Britain (January 30). “Hundreds of Muslim refugees living in Lebanon have been baptized in the past year alone,” Josie Ensor writes. The flood of refugees in the country is reported to be at a crisis stage, which is linked to the uptick of conversions. “Some say they converted to benefit from the generous aid distributed by Christian charities, others to help their asylum applications to Europe, the United States, Canada and elsewhere,” Ensor adds.



Whatever is driving the conversions, Lebanon, unlike Syria, has a sizeable Christian population and a growing number of evangelical churches, “which began springing up across the country in response to the crisis over the border.” Some charities accuse the evangelical churches of

exploiting the refugees' situation by pressuring them to convert, Ensor writes. Christian aid workers and leaders deny the charge that these refugees are "rice Christians"—a pejorative term used to describe people who convert for material rather than religious benefits—and say these conversions are voluntary and costly for these new Syrian Christians. One pastor reports that he has received many threatening calls for encouraging apostasy from the friends and relatives of those he has baptized.

Findings & Footnotes

■ The way that church music assumes a central place in how Christians identify with their churches is nowhere more evident than in charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity—a fact borne out in the fascinating new book *The Spirit of Praise* (Penn State University Press, \$32.95), edited by Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong. "Praise and worship" music has become far more than the beginning part of a worship service for Pentecostals; today this type of contemporary Christian music is represented by brands and movements spanning the globe and adapted by a wide range of believers. The contributors document the diversity of styles and uses of this music, including a chapter on Australia's aboriginal Christian music, which forms a bridge between indigenous traditions (surrounding the myth of songlines) and the white Pentecostal traditions.

Another chapter on Australia looks at how its popular Hillsong music coming from a megachurch movement by that name is standardized and thus strongly unifying as it has circulated throughout the world from its Australian base. Other contributions look at how the CCM repertoire has made its way into the Gospel music tradition of black churches, bringing it into contact with churches of other ethnicities,



and the growth of neo-Pentecostal churches and music among the Navajo Nation in the American Southwest, with its music's effectiveness due to its similarity with the repetitive and "soaking" quality of native chants and songs. In the conclusion, Amos Yong argues that both homogenization and diversity take place through the globalized circulation of praise and worship music, adding that this two-way pattern may increasingly be evident in the theological reflection and teachings that accompany it in world Pentecostalism.

■ *Alevis in Europe* (Routledge, \$136), edited by Tozun Issa, looks at a movement in Turkey and Europe that often gets lost in the glare of attention on orthodox Islam. The origins of the Alevis and whether they are strictly a religion, a way of life, or an ethnicity are disputed. Most followers claim they are a distinct faith from Islam, since they do not practice the five pillars of Islam, nor do they go to a mosque, though they venerate Ali, the cousin of Muhammad, and other Muslim "saints." Alevism has changed from a strongly communal orientation to a more secularized and urban Turkish identity in the 20th century. The contributors note that the core of the diverse movement has shifted from embracing a more leftist ideology to a "religious reorientation" in recent years, partly as a response to the Islamic revival. The Alevi emigration to Europe, covered in the second half of the book, has brought more changes to the movement, not least the loss of the "dede," the communal sacred leader, and the establishment of cemevi, places of worship replacing home-based worship.

Alevi growth and concentration in Germany has hastened their religious revival, often as a way to differentiate themselves from Turkish Muslim immigrants. The movement has gained wide acceptance, with Germany recognizing Alevis as a model community. A study on Alevis in England (largely from Kurdish backgrounds) finds that they have their strongest differences with Sunni Muslims, with the former stressing gender equality and progressive political views. Another chapter looks at how Alevis have become a transnational community, forming organizations and media that span the Turkish-European borders, and pressing both their European countries and Turkey to recognize them as a legitimate faith community.

