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FEATURE STORY:

“Trump effect” pushes American Muslims into political fray

Far from shying away from politics, American Muslims have been compelled onto the political stage by the new pressures and conflicts surrounding Islam in the Trump era, though the shape and outcome of such involvement remain unclear. In a presentation at the late-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which **RW** attended, Brie Laskota of the University of California noted a “Trump effect” reflected in Muslims running for political office. Policies such as the travel ban targeting Muslim nations and the more general anti-Islamic rhetoric have led American Muslims in three directions: to feel overwhelmed, to keep their heads down and ignore such challenges, or to engage more deeply in civic life. The spate of Muslim candidates running for local and national offices suggests that the third option is being embraced in much of the Islamic community. Laskota said that 90 Muslims ran for office in the last year, with 49 remaining as post-primary candidates. As **RW** goes to press following the midterm elections, two Muslim women have been elected to Congress for the first time—Minnesota’s Ilhan Omar and Michigan’s Rashida Tlaib. Another Muslim to win in the House elections was Democratic Rep. André D. Carson in Indiana.

Laskota said that the stage had been set for such political activity 20 years earlier through such networks as the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute, the Council on American Islamic Affairs (CAIR), and secular efforts as the New Leaders Project. The new Muslim politicians share an alienation from what they regard as Republican extremism, with the main division being between centrist and leftist progressives. Among the Muslim community in general, “voting is seen as obligatory, much more than usual, [although] if there are no returns [from such political involvement] the Muslim community may become more isolationist,” Laskota concluded. An article in the journal *Politics and Religion* (online October) echoes Laskota’s research in showing how Muslims have responded to spikes in anti-Muslim discrimination since 2016 by mobilizing in interest groups on issues such as Islamophobia and citizenship rights. Targeting Muslims as “the other” in American society has “provided Muslim American interest groups with a number of unintended opportunities through which they have been able to present themselves as official

representatives of the American Muslim community,” writes Emily Cury of Northeastern University.

But how much does the current wave of political activism reflect the religious teachings and concerns of the American Muslim community? In *First Things* magazine (November), Paul Rowan Brian writes that there is “a fault line running through the American Muslim experience: strategic alliances between Muslim organizations and the social justice left that violate socially conservative beliefs of actual Muslims attending their events and contributing funds.” This tension was demonstrated in the summer of 2017 at the Islamic Society of North America’s annual conference, when a table set up by Muslims for Progressive Values and the Human Life Campaign was removed after an attendee complained about the pro-LGBT advocacy of these groups. American Muslims have found the most acceptance from the left, particularly on issues like Palestinian foreign policy and civil rights, but that may be changing as divisions between young American Muslims and these liberal elements grow. “An increasing number of voices, from Hamza Yusuf to Sherman Jackson, Omar Suleiman, and Zaid Shakir, have defined a new and tenuous place for American Muslims: largely accordant with the left’s positions on race, foreign policy, the environment, and workers’ rights, but upholding the socially conservative beliefs of Islam in opposition to feminism, the LGBT lifestyle, libertinism, or fanatical individualism.”

(*First Things*, [https:// www.firstthings.com/](https://www.firstthings.com/))



ARTICLES

Women leaders, theologians in Eastern Orthodoxy see gains, setbacks

Women in Eastern Orthodoxy are making slow but steady gains in church leadership, thanks to their involvement on the Internet and social media, although this development is uneven across Orthodox churches worldwide and still not receiving an official stamp of approval. That was the conclusion of scholars, women religious, and activists at an October conference on women in Orthodoxy in New York. The conference, which was sponsored by the Center for Orthodox Studies at Fordham University, demonstrated how the gains of women in church leadership are quite varied according to ethnic and church traditions. Donna Rizk Asdourian, a fellow at the Fordham center, a Coptic activist, and one of the first Coptic women to attend an Orthodox seminary, said that new priorities of survival amidst persecution in Egypt and of preserving ethnic traditions have meant a step backward for women trying to gain access to theological training in Coptic Orthodoxy. While one woman has been ordained as a deacon in the Coptic church, the practice is not officially accepted. Some parts of the church are also resisting the use of altar girls, and while women are allowed to sing in choirs in the Armenian and Syrian churches, they are prohibited from joining Coptic church choirs, according to Asdourian.

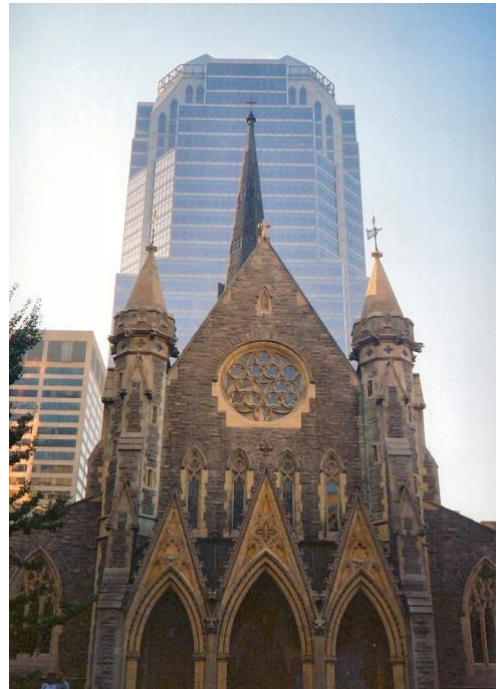


The other Orthodox churches, including the Russian and Greek traditions, are experiencing more change. Ann Bezzerides of Hellenic College reported that in Greek Orthodox churches the trend of women's involvement in ministry is clear. As priests find it more difficult to handle spiritual and religious needs in parishes, they are calling for more lay involvement, including from women. The most significant development of women in leadership roles may be due to the growth of

Orthodox women bloggers and podcasters. Sister Vassa Larin, an Orthodox nun who runs a popular podcast, said there has been a “rapid change in vocations” and resulting ministries through the Internet, which has allowed women to gain new access to Orthodox theology and to teach online. Women are now teaching theology and that often includes serving in “pastoral capacities,” even if church leaders state that women should not be doing pastoral work. “It’s impossible not to be pastoral in teaching theology.” But Larin added that the situation for women wanting to teach theology in Orthodox seminaries is not bright. While there are more Orthodox women studying theology today, they should be prepared not to be able to use their educations professionally. She said that even the move to ordain women deacons in some Orthodox churches lacks the support to ensure its regular practice. “It should not depend on the character of every priest. It should be in the structure beyond the whims of priests and bishops.” Citing a recent study of the Russian Orthodox Church, Larin said, “When women are tolerated in one parish but not in another, competition starts over these positions.”

Churches embrace social entrepreneurship and the sacred task of business

“Tentmaking” ministries that bring social entrepreneurship into congregational life are finding a growing reception among a wide range of denominations and churches, as they popularize the idea that business is a spiritual calling and signal a shift away from worship as the main function of churches, according to Thad Austin of Indiana University. Austin, who presented a paper at the late-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which **RW** attended, said that the trend of social entrepreneurial congregations has largely gone under the radar of scholarship. To amend that situation, he studied 39 congregations and 44 church leaders throughout the U.S. engaged in tentmaking ministries (56 percent of which were mainline Protestant, 33 percent evangelical, and seven percent black church). He found that common among these churches of widely diverse theological orientations and shapes and sizes—from megachurches to small congregations attached to businesses—was the view that business was a sacred task.



Another pattern was that the business space of the congregations, whose enterprises ranged from real estate to retail, community development, restaurants or coffee houses, often overshadowed the worship space, being seen as a space where real ministry and spiritual fellowship took place. “The business transaction creates a relationship, not just the sale,” Austin said. These churches

challenged the dominant business sustainability model, as they regularly lost money but managed to survive. A segment of these social entrepreneurial churches saw their business arms as a tool for evangelization in their communities, but for others it was more a matter of extending their presence into the surrounding area or building or improving community connections. Austin cited the case of Enterprise Church, a congregation in the South that is based around a building business and restaurant where the donations go to serving the community.

IRS's auditing of religious groups drops sharply under political, church influence

The Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) attempt to monitor and penalize congregations and denominations that are seen as violating their tax exempt status by engaging in politics and other financially unethical practices has declined sharply in recent years, particularly due to the influence of prosperity ministries and Republican dominance in Congress, according to research by Dusty Hoesly of the University of California at Santa Barbara. In a paper presented at the late-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Hoesly noted that IRS regulation of religion has shifted over the decades, with new religious movements, such as Scientology and the Unification Church, and mail-order churches, such as the Universal Life Church, receiving the most scrutiny.

The financial abuses of prosperity ministries from the 1980s to 2012 began another round of church audits, ending only when the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, an effort to self-regulate financial abuse among ministries, increasingly served as a shield for prosperity ministries against being audited. The number of audits dropped from about 17 per year after 2001 to only 3 audits per year between 2009 and 2015. Although current figures were not accessible, Hoesly said that the low number of audits has likely continued, especially since the 2015 scandal showing the IRS targeting specific political groups and the Republican attempts, under President Donald Trump, to strike down the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits churches from endorsing political candidates.



CURRENT RESEARCH

● **The large number of “invisible congregations,” often based in denominations not recognized by official religious censuses, makes a difference when looking at religious growth and decline, according to J. Gordon Melton of Baylor University.** Melton, who presented a paper at the October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, said that most denominational membership statistics are based on 250 religious bodies counted in the Religious Congregations Membership Study (RCMS) and exclude the 850 other denominations that he has found throughout the U.S. In 2018 there are close to 1,200 denominations, and many of them are growing or have attained large memberships that are not accounted for in official figures for religious bodies. These denominations include the Anglican Church in North America, a split-off from the Episcopal Church that has a membership of 350,000, and even older excluded groups such as the fundamentalist Baptist Bible Fellowship. Melton tested his thesis by counting congregations in three Texas counties using RCMS data and then adding data from other directories and from his own visits.



He found that 25 percent of congregations had gone unreported, which if reported would have increased the religious membership figures in these counties from 60 to 75 percent. He found the same range of congregation sizes as reported in the RCMS data, ranging from megachurches to house churches. Most of these missing congregations were evangelical and Pentecostal in background, with a number coming from Asian and Hispanic denominations. He also found that many of these groups may have shared building space with several other congregations. Counting these invisible congregations matters since it can make religious affiliation jump from a slight majority (60 percent) to a “super majority” (75 percent). Melton concluded that, considering that 85 percent of the American population was non-affiliated at the founding of the nation, the current

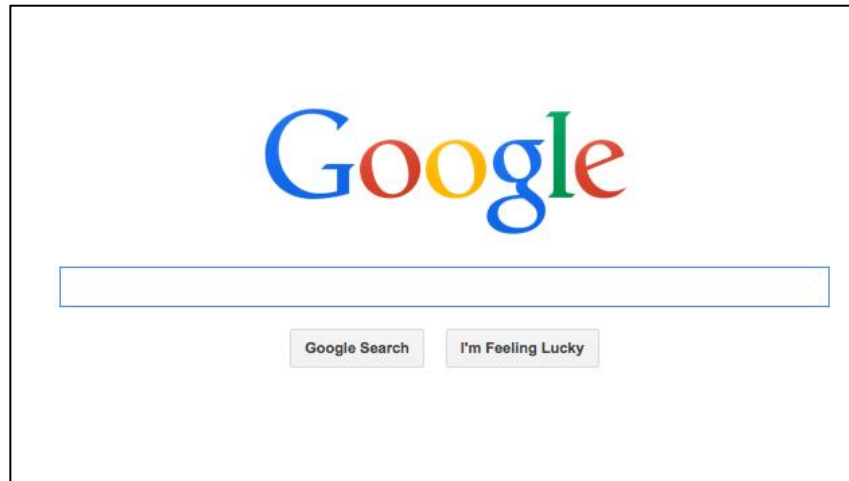
“none” rate of about 22 percent does not suggest religious decline. Although some denominations may have reached a saturation point, the creation and growth of these invisible churches and denominations “make up for the declines in the larger bodies.”

● **Religious belonging and even attendance matter less in the higher fertility rates of conservative Protestants, while religious belief is becoming more important, according to a study by Sam Perry and Cyrus Schleifer of the University of Oklahoma.** In a presentation at the late-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the researchers looked at the relationship between fertility rates and religious membership, beliefs, and practices from 1972 to 2016. They found a declining fertility advantage among evangelicals over other Christians—from a six percent difference in 1972 to less than one percent by 2016. Regular and even monthly attendance matters less in its association with higher fertility rates for evangelicals than for other traditions. Monthly attendance matters more for mainline Protestants and Catholics, associated with stable and, in the case of Catholics, even increased birth rates. Perry and Schleifer conclude that religious tradition has declined in its ability to predict higher fertility, with the early 2000s being the last time that evangelical identity mattered for higher birth rates. Today it is beliefs, such as biblical literalism, that tend to be associated with higher fertility for evangelicals.



● **Popular Google search terms are shifting from institutional religion to spirituality and non-religion, including atheism, according to a paper presented at the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Las Vegas.** George Haywood of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, looked at 70 terms involving religion and spirituality searched for between 2004 and 2018, finding that terms relating to Christianity were the most popular in Google searches up until 2005, after which world religions gained in popularity. Less likely to be searched now are institutional terms, such as “churches,” “houses of worship,” “temples,” and “mosques,” while terms such as “spirit,” “soul,” and “God” remain popular. In keeping with the trend of religious

individualism, in the last five years “horoscopes” and “mindfulness” have become popular search terms. Terms such as “atheism” and “agnosticism” have also climbed in popularity.

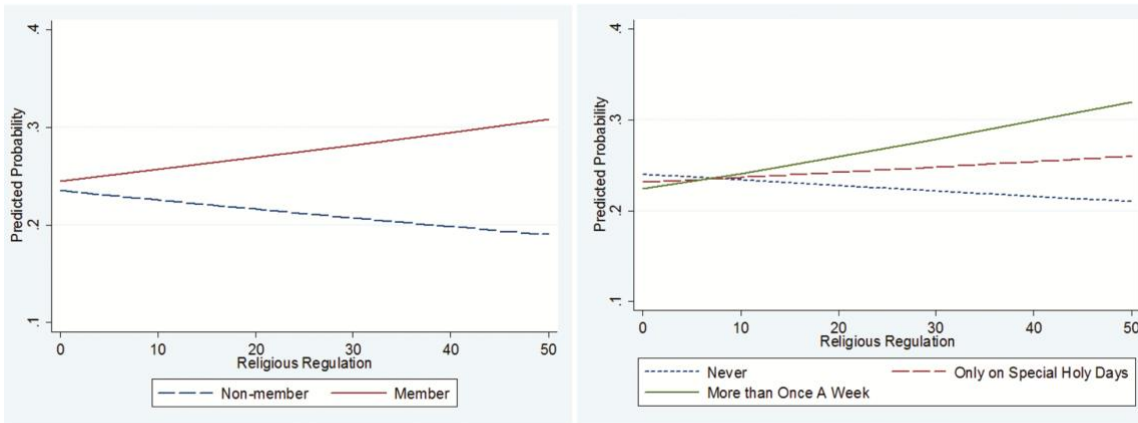


● **The number of Christian refugees coming to the United States from the countries where Christians are most persecuted has dropped sharply during the Trump administration, according to an analysis by Matthew Soerens of World Relief, an evangelical Christian organization.** The number of Christian refugees admitted to the U.S. from countries noted for their persecution dropped by nearly 79 percent between fiscal years 2016 and 2018. A total of 1,215 Christian refugees were welcomed from those countries in fiscal 2018, down from 5,731 in fiscal 2016, former President Obama’s last full year in office. The total number of Christian refugees from all countries admitted since 2016 declined by about 57 percent, according to the analysis. Soerens based his analysis on numbers from the U.S. State Department’s Refugee Processing Center, focusing on 11 countries where Christians are said to face the most persecution: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Iran, and India, according to *Christianity Today* magazine (September 18).



● **A recent study based on data from 45 countries finds that active members of faith groups are more likely to participate in public protests than non-members and non-attenders.** In his blog *Ahead of the Trend* (October 15), David Briggs reports that the likelihood of engaging in public protests by religious individuals is strongest in countries that are the least democratic. Religious members living in countries where religious freedoms are fully respected were nine percent more likely to engage in protests than nonmembers. But it was found that religious participants were more than 140 percent more likely to protest than nonmembers and people who never attend services in countries with the highest levels of restrictions. The study was conducted by sociologists Yun Lu, of Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, and Fenggang Yang, of Purdue University, and was based on data from the sixth wave of the World Values Surveys conducted between 2010 and 2014, the 2011 Freedom Index created by Freedom House, and the Religion and State Project, Round 2 data, comprising nearly 60,000 respondents.

(*Ahead of the Trend*, <http://blogs.thearda.com/trend/uncategorized/global-study-religion-more-amphetamine-than-opiate-in-protest-movements/>)



"MODERATING EFFECTS OF RELIGIOUS RESTRICTION INDEX ON THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION INDICATORS AND PROTEST PARTICIPATION"

● **The second generation of Muslim immigrants in Europe shows a low rate of attendance at mosques and an expressive faith that lays claim to a Muslim identity while being unschooled in many Islamic teachings, according to a study presented at the late-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.** At the conference attended by RW, Roberta Ricucci of the University of Torino reported on the findings of the study, which was based on an online survey conducted in London, Berlin, Torino, Valencia, and Lisbon among second- and 1.5-generation Muslims (those who were born in largely Islamic countries and moved to Europe when they were young). Ricucci found that this younger generation identifies with Islam and claims to follow the religion even while being unfamiliar with many Islamic concepts and teachings, such as Sharia and Islamic finance, holding a “strategic” faith that stresses compromise and fitting in with society.

In Italy, Ricucci was surprised to find that a growing number of these young Muslims say they are atheist—a trend that includes younger generations in other faith groups. On the local level these younger Muslims are developing partnerships with other religious groups and minorities, although there is less activity on the national level because they are so regionally concentrated. In public they also tend to promote an active “lay citizenship” that stresses their shared social rights with others rather than their Muslim identity.



● **A cross-national study of “fundamentalism” in eight Muslim-majority nations finds that this diffuse movement is strongest in countries where religious diversity is restricted and where there is greater state regulation of religion.** The study, conducted by Mansoor Moaddel and Stuart Karabenick and published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (September), is based on a survey of a random sample of 23,000 respondents from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Turkey conducted from 2011 to 2016. Moaddel and Karabenick constructed a scale of fundamentalism based on literal interpretation of the Koran or Bible (depending on the faith of respondents), strong disciplinarian images of God, and the perceived comprehensiveness of respondents’ faith. They found that the key factors behind the growth of fundamentalism on the national level revolve around religious unfreedom and monopoly of religious institutions, while on the individual level this tendency “doesn’t appear to be a reaction against modernity per se,” and may even be related to conceptions of modernity where religion is seen to foster development. Fundamentalists were also marked by “fatalism,” outgroup hostility (as shown in the belief in conspiracies), and less reliance on diverse sources of information.

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14685906>)



● **One of the first studies of its kind among Muslims finds that there is a positive relationship between religiosity and marital fertility.** The study, conducted by Jona Schellekens and A'as Atrash and appearing in the journal *Demographic Research* (October 24), notes that the mounting evidence that religious couples tend to have an above-average preference for children has come from research among Christian and Jewish populations. Schellekens and Atrash add that the few studies of Muslim fertility have not controlled for marital duration, making it unclear to what extent the relationship is a result of early marriage or opposition to family planning among more religious women. The researchers used survey data from Palestinian Muslims in Israel, based on an objective measure of religiosity, adherence to all the Five Pillars of Islam. Schellekens and Atrash found that the completed fertility of women born in the 1950s and adhering to all Five Pillars of Islam for age at marriage the differences remained. (*Demographic Research*, <https://www.demographic-research.org/>) was 5.9 births compared to 5.0 births among less religious women, and that when controlling for age at marriage the differences remained.



ARTICLES

“Conservative ecumenism” about Christian unity or politics?

The time has come to look beyond classical ecumenism vs. anti-ecumenism and to pay attention to the emergence since the late 20th century of conservative Christian alliances to defend traditional values. So writes Andrey Shishkov (Saints Cyril and Methodius Institute of the Moscow Patriarchate) in the opening article of an issue of *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (October) devoted to developments in ecumenical relations, with a special focus on the Orthodox world. Last year Shishkov had already developed such views in an article translated into English, “Two Ecumenisms: Conservative Christian Alliances as a New Form of Ecumenical Cooperation” (*State, Religion and Church*, 4(2), 2017, available online). The key issue is to assess if those alliances can be seen as an expression of ecumenism, understood as a movement toward Christian unity, and not merely as cooperation between Christians. According to Shishkov, while the understanding of ecumenism as a movement toward Christian unity became normative in the 1960s and 1970s, there are other ways to understand such unity, more in the direction of a common witness and practical, interconfessional efforts.

In fact, writes Shishkov, faced with the non-fulfillment of hopes of reaching visible unity within a foreseeable future, views of an interconfessional ecumenism have become dominant within the ecumenical movement since the 1990s. But while classical ecumenism tended politically to the liberal side, conservative ecumenism leans toward the political right. In contrast with anti-ecumenists, who tend to see their own confessional views as the only valid Christianity, conservative ecumenists acknowledge the existence of



Christians beyond their own confessional borders. On the other hand, in contrast with classical ecumenists, their goal is not sharing a common Eucharist. They rather see themselves as engaged together in a common culture-war front—whatever dogmatic differences there may be—and not in a struggle for a purity of faith. An example would be the 2009 Manhattan Declaration, and more generally the pro-life movements. Other contributors to the issue agree that Shishkov identifies some real developments, but dispute that the label of “conservative ecumenism” is appropriate for describing conservative Christian alliances that are rather of a political and cultural nature, raising questions about how one defines what ecumenism is.

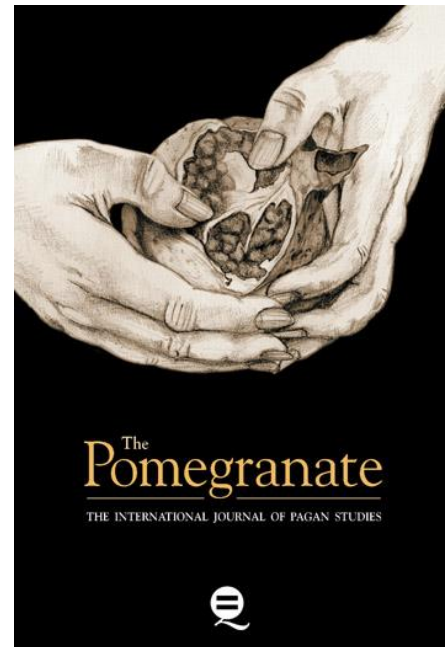
They suggest that describing classical ecumenism as a whole as “progressive” and “liberal” is an oversimplification, that one cannot reduce ecumenism to a search for organizational unity, and that classical ecumenism cannot be limited to the World Council of Churches (WCC). Regina Elsner

(Center for East European and International Studies, Berlin) writes that the search for unity has always gone along with practical efforts. She adds that ecumenism describes a variety of attitudes and is used with different nuances in different languages, and that one can question if every interconfessional activity should be described as “ecumenical.” Moreover, she notes that supporters of what Shishkov calls “conservative ecumenism” tend to avoid describing themselves as “ecumenists,” if only for fear of irritating anti-ecumenists in their own churches who might otherwise support some of their efforts to promote conservative values. Using the expression “conservative ecumenism” as a label for conservative Christian alliances forgets the ecclesiological core of ecumenism that cannot be reduced to conservative and liberal categories. “Christian civilization” and “Christian moral values” are not sufficient for an ecclesiological foundation, stresses Jennifer Wasmuth (Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg). From a slightly different angle, Will Cohen (University of Scranton) writes that none of the three “camps” are free from political factors, but also that none of them can be merely described as politics masquerading as theology.

(*Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Institut G2W, Birmensdorferstrasse 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland; <https://www.g2w.eu/>)

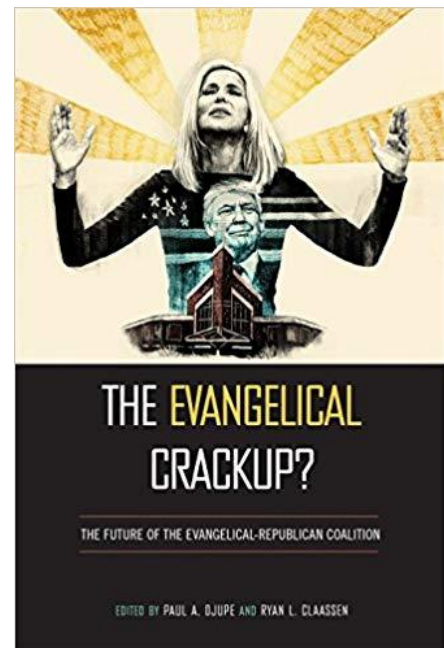
Findings & Footnotes

■ A thorough overview of the state of Neopaganism in an age of nationalist populism is featured in the current issue of the pagan studies journal *Pomegranate* (20:1), particularly in the lead article by Michael Strmiska. The rise of far-right and nationalist parties and leaders throughout Europe, Russia, and the U.S. has led many observers to include Neopagans in the drive to recover national—and in some cases, ethnic—identity and to support restrictions against immigration. But Strmiska notes that the situation is more complicated than that. While there are Neopagan groups that share the nationalist tendencies of these parties and leaders, Neopaganism emerged in de-Christianized, pluralistic and secularized societies, and even if Neopagans share similar ideas about recovering national and ethnic identity, they oppose the associated attempt to revive Christian roots, as has characterized the nationalist projects in Hungary, Russia, and Poland. Strmiska reports that already some Neopagan groups in Putin’s Russia are feeling similar pressure and restrictions to other religious minorities and are chafing under the elevated role of the Russian Orthodox Church (even as there are pro-Putin pagans). Strmiska concludes by focusing on the American Neopagans, noting how they are engaged in their own conflicts under the Trump presidency, including a concerted effort to refute the use of pagan imagery by Norse Pagans and other far-right groups for racist purposes (such as in the Charlottesville protests and violence). For more information on this issue, visit: <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/POM>

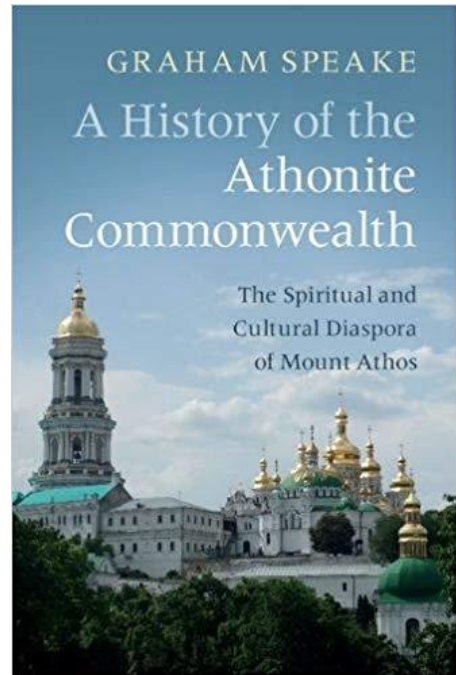


■ As its dramatic title indicates, *The Evangelical Crackup?* (Temple University Press, \$37.95), edited by Paul A. Djupe and Ryan L. Claassen, looks at how the 2016 election revealed—and caused—fissures in evangelical political activism, not only between fellow believers but between evangelical elites and laity. But as this book was being written and edited during the tumultuous primary and presidential elections, it was evident that the evangelical coalition was not so much cracking up—82 percent of evangelicals did, after all, vote for Donald Trump—even as it showed some obvious strains with the Republican Party. The studies and essays in this book tend to belie the recurring predictions (pronounced regularly at every setback to religious-right leaders and during Democratic administrations) of the religious right being a spent force, but besides that, the contributors, mostly political scientists, do not share any consensus about what 2016 really means for evangelical politics. A chapter by Djupe and Brian Calfano suggests that the gap between lay and elite evangelicals peaked during 2016 (and afterwards), with the latter unable to convince rank-and-file believers that Trump was the wrong choice. This is largely because evangelicalism is a grassroots movement, and its more liberal leadership has never had the power that elites have in other social movements.

Other chapters look at the alleged gaps between younger and older evangelicals and Hispanic and non-Hispanic evangelicals and find that they share more similarities than differences (although in the case of the former, as these young evangelicals age, their political orientations may veer left). Still other chapters suggest hidden dynamics of racial resentment among Southern evangelicals, even as culture-war issues remain powerful. Veteran religious-right scholar John C. Green concludes by noting that the 2016 election doesn't bear out either of the usual plotlines of evangelical political growth or decline, "but instead consolidation of evangelicals as a major constituency of the Republican Party...This partisan consolidation has changed the politics of both evangelicals and Republicans. During the 2016 campaign, these shifts were largely underappreciated by observers both inside and outside the evangelical community." He concludes that evangelicals have become more pragmatic and cooperative, just what critics have always urged them to be—and "nowhere is such pragmatism more evident than in their view of politicians: Evangelicals recognize it is crucial to support the most viable Republican candidate at the ballot box, especially when the options are poor."



■ If there is one place that acts as a magnet for contemporary Orthodox Christians as well as for lovers of monasticism or of the Byzantine legacy, it is definitely Mount Athos. Thus, since the foundation of the Great Lavra in 963, the “Holy Mountain” has played and continues to play a role that goes far beyond the Athonite peninsula in Greece. After having published a book in 2002 on the monastic renewal that took place on Mount Athos in the second half of the 20th century, the chairman of the Friends of Mount Athos, Graham Speake, has written a second book focusing on the worldwide impact of the place: *A History of the Athonite Commonwealth: The Spiritual and Cultural Diaspora of Mount Athos* (Cambridge University Press, \$39.99). Following an historical approach that focuses on the figures of various Orthodox saints who had gone to the Holy Mountain, absorbed its spirit and then spread it—and the fame of Mount Athos along with it—to the various corners of the Orthodox world, Speake takes his readers on travels across times and places in the Christian East, from Albania to Georgia and from the far north of Russia to the Middle East. The last of those figures is St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain (1749–1809), editor of the *Philokalia*, who didn’t travel far, in contrast with the saints Speake writes about in the other chapters, but whose work has had a considerable influence to this day beyond Orthodox circles, with translations into several Western languages.



But Speake’s book does not end there. The last chapter is titled “Athos and the West.” After mentioning some Western visitors who went to Mount Athos with various purposes, Speake comes to the turn initiated by the Athonite renewal in the 20th century. Charismatic elders started attracting new recruits, often university graduates looking for a meaningful existence, and among them were Western Orthodox converts and seekers. “The global village had come to Athos, not just in the shape of pilgrims, but as novices and monks.” And there were also monks trained on Mount Athos who brought Athonite spirituality to the West. One of them was a member of the Russian diaspora who had to flee Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, Archimandrite Sophrony (1896–1993), who spent more than 20 years on the Holy Mountain, returned to Western Europe in 1947, and finally founded a well-known Orthodox monastery in England in 1959.

In America, Father Ephraim (b. 1927) started spending more and more time at Mount Athos from the 1980s and finally settled there, founding 17 monasteries between 1993 and 2005. In France, Father Placide (1926–2018), originally a French Catholic monk and scholar of Patristics, converted to Orthodoxy in 1997 on Mount Athos and subsequently was instructed to return to France, where he and his associates founded three monasteries in the Athonite spirit. Thus “the Athonite Commonwealth has become a global phenomenon,” Speake concludes, wondering if this new internationalization might lead the Greek monks to become a minority on Mount Athos, as they had been in the early 20th century. While there has definitely been a trend towards a greater share of Slavic people on the Holy Mountain, it remains to be

seen how far the current tensions between Constantinople and Moscow might impact this trend, since Mount Athos is a territory under the spiritual authority of Constantinople.