

Vol. 34, No. 5**March 2019****Sizing up the impending schism in United Methodism**

The United Methodist Church's (UMC) recent decision at a special session of its General Conference in St. Louis to turn down a proposal that would have allowed congregations to ordain gay clergy and ministers to officiate at same-sex marriages is likely to lead to a schism, with liberals either starting their own body or departing for more congenial networks of like-minded mainline churches—it's just a question of how much of a schism will take place. In the blog *Religion in Public* (February 26), political scientist Paul Djupe estimates that the United Methodists stand to lose more members and clergy than did the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in its schism of a decade ago, when conservatives comprising about 10 percent of its membership left the denomination, also over issues of gay rights. Djupe writes that United Methodists may lose double the amount that the ELCA did because the "liberal wing is larger in the UMC than was the conservative side of the ELCA. The liberal wing is also on the side of expanding rights, which is a dominant mode and powerful frame in American political life." He adds that "churches with younger overall congregations will be more likely to depart. This decision also comes at a time when national ties are frayed as they have not been in a long time, national trust continues at a low point, and people are walking away from traditional ties like never before."

Djupe speculates that there "is an outside possibility that all of those...United Methodists who are in favor of same sex marriage might depart. That may add up to something more like 40 [percent] of those in favor of same-sex marriage leaving. The total loss in that scenario would reach to something like 2.2 million members lost." He cites a *New York Times* report that "pastors and bishops in the United States are already talking about leaving the denomination and possibly creating a new alliance for gay-friendly churches." Djupe quips that such an organization "already exists, though people more often call it the Episcopal Church. It has some different ways of organizing the denomination and theology, but it's welcoming even of Lutherans so it's not far off."

An article in *The Atlantic* (February 26) throws some doubt on the prospect of a massive schism, noting that while "the United Methodist Church is often described as a liberal, mainline Protestant denomination, in reality, the body is much more split, even in the United States. In a poll of its American members, the denomination found that 44 percent of respondents described their religious beliefs as traditional or conservative, 28 percent said they are moderate or centrist, and

20 percent identified as progressive or liberal.” The survey didn’t ask directly about LGBTQ issues, but they clearly invoke these theological dividing lines in the denomination. Writer Emma Green adds that “[w]orldwide, those numbers would likely shift even more toward a so-called traditional perspective. The United States accounts for roughly 60 percent of the UMC. At the General Conference in St. Louis, pastors from global communities were resolutely opposed to same-sex marriage and LGBTQ clergy.”

(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/02/27/after-the-tradition-plan-passes-what-could-the-umc-look-like-in-a-few-years/>;

The Atlantic, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/02/united-methodists-fracture-lgbt-plan-rejected/583693/>)



Sexual abuse crisis in the SBC also an evangelical problem?

Widespread sexual abuse and the ability of abusive pastors and church leaders to move on to other congregations without censure or reproof in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) may also be a problem in other parts of the evangelical world, writes Dale Coulter in a blog at *First Things* magazine (February 17). The sex abuse crisis in the SBC, first reported in the *Houston Chronicle* (February 9), involves 380 church leaders and volunteers who have faced allegations of sexual abuse in the last 20 years. That report notes that local church autonomy in Baptist polity has permitted sexual abusers to circulate freely among churches. It also notes how Baptist ministers are easily ordained, since the practice of local ordination means that one can simply secure the endorsement of any congregation in good standing with the convention to be ordained, however small or remote it may be. Coulter adds that “the problem extends beyond the Southern Baptist Convention. As one denominational leader pointed out to me, ministers brought up on charges and

dismissed from one denomination have simply gone to another for credentials. It's not just laity who take advantage of evangelicalism's big tent to move around."

Such open networks allow for "ministerial movement from one part of evangelicalism to another [and] allow sexual abusers to escape judgment and start over. We don't need a database of sexual abusers for the Southern Baptist Convention, we need it for evangelicalism as a whole. We need greater cooperation and transparency among evangelical churches and institutions on matters of church discipline so we can close these open networks." The *Chronicle* report also added that denominations have begun to function like corporations, where they seek to protect the brand rather than the victims. In a similar way, Coulter argues that "[e]vangelicals have too often succumbed to victim shaming while simultaneously protecting their leaders[.]" as seen in the way conservative leader Paige Patterson's abusive actions were denied and unquestioned because of his status, which took priority for his followers over church doctrine. Coulter concludes by focusing on the "bad theology" of the SBC and evangelical circles when it comes to extending "forgiveness over and over—even when patterns of sinful behavior have been established. The problem isn't that they offer the mercy of Christ to persons caught in sinful patterns, but the idea that extending such forgiveness means the person should be allowed to remain in a position of authority."

(*First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/02/evangelical-apocalypse?/>; *Houston Chronicle*, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/local/investigations/abuse-of-faith/>)



Islamic leaders, scholars worry that American Muslims are too integrated into American culture

Conservative American Muslim leaders are more likely to be concerned about a creeping liberalization in their own ranks than about promoting Sharia law or some other political issue, writes Mustafa Akyol in the *New York Times* (February 18). He writes that there is concern over a new genre of Muslim bloggers and writers who are seen as challenging or outright rejecting the traditionally normative Islamic view on social issues and Muslim life and espousing a form of “liberal individualism.” According to Butheina Hamdah, an academic, this attitude is seen among American Muslim women for whom the hijab is becoming a mere “cultural marker of identity” and losing its “deeper theological dimensions.” She argues that these younger Muslim women are embracing feminist notions of “bodily autonomy” and “individual choice.” Akyol himself sees this liberal trend clearly reflected in the “skyrocketing acceptance of gay marriage, which, as a 2017 poll showed, is now stronger among American Muslims than among white evangelical Christians. It is also reflected in the pro-L.G.B.T.Q. stance of two new Muslim congresswomen, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar.” Akyol observes two distinct lines in this trend toward American values. One is a form of social liberalism embracing these modern currents, spearheaded by small groups such as Muslims for Progressive Values, while the “other, larger line is a political liberalism that accepts a pluralist framework for society while preserving its own social and moral conservatism.”



Akyol cites Jonathan Brown, a convert to Islam and scholar of Islamic studies at Georgetown University, who theorized the latter approach when “he accepted gay marriage of non-Muslims by making an analogy to traditional Muslim empires’ noninterference in what he called ‘incestuous Zoroastrian marriages.’” According to interfaith leader Eboo Patel, concerns about Islamophobia after 9/11 and particularly in the Trump era required the American Muslim community “to show that it really fits America. Hence, the center of gravity has shifted from ‘traditional Muslims,’ whose authority derives from knowledge of religious sources, to a new group of media-savvy ‘social Muslims,’ whose strength is interpreting the Muslim experience for the broader society.” But unexpectedly, the progressive narrative of these “social Muslims” is now having an impact on the whole American Muslim community. “Once you invoke diversity as a value,” Patel writes, it is hard to deny a place to “gay Muslims, Shia Muslims, non-hijabi female Muslims, less-observant-than-you Muslims.” Akyol concludes that the challenge for the American Muslim community is to adhere to political liberalism in the public sphere and social conservatism at home or at the mosque and to carry out a liberal reinterpretation of its traditions without losing itself.

A disenchanted world for spiritual masters in the information era

When it comes to following gurus and spiritual masters, “[w]e have come to know too much to worship unconditionally,” says Bernhard Pörksen, a German media scholar and professor of media studies at the University of Tübingen, in an interview with Ursula Richard published in *Buddhismus Aktuell*, a German Buddhist quarterly (1st Quarter). He attributes this development primarily to the impact of media, which makes the apparently unquestionable power of spiritual masters and gurus more vulnerable than ever before. Any follower can launch petitions or report about negative experiences. According to Pörksen, in Japanese and Tibetan Buddhism, in many yoga schools, and in various communities around the world we are currently witnessing “a subterranean implosion of spiritual authority.” (In its review of 2018 trends in the January 2019 issue, **RW** reported on the spread of abuse scandals across Tibetan Buddhist groups.)

Every minor and major instance of misconduct can be disclosed at lightning speed in an overexposed world. There are no longer remote monasteries or ashrams out of reach when we can easily access online all kinds of critical information and images that sharply contrast with the elevated image projected by spiritual masters. Pörksen quotes examples such as the Shimano Archive, a website documenting decades of abuse by a Zen monk. Once this material became available online, the reputation of the monk was destroyed very rapidly. However, Pörksen observes defensive strategies at work with communities and individual followers confronted with scandals. There are both material and spiritual interests at stake. If the spiritual master is disclosed as fallible, questions about the validity of his teachings arise. The otherwise legitimate desire to avoid gossiping in a spiritual environment can also be used for attempting to block disclosure. The refusal to be judgmental can turn counterproductive. Even if there will remain people looking for new master figures after disappointments, Pörksen sees the coming together of the longing for perfection, the will to unmask and radical transparency as leading to a pulverization of charisma and authority.

(*Buddhismus Aktuell*, <https://buddhismus-aktuell.de>)



CURRENT RESEARCH

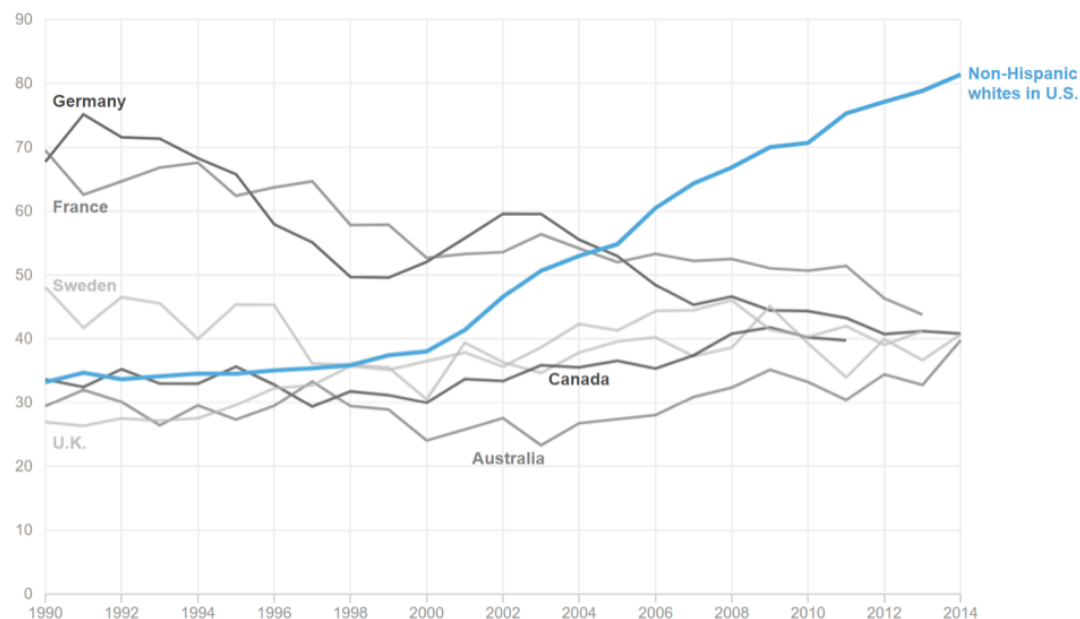
●“Deaths of despair” has become a popular term used in the last few years to account for the rising number of middle-aged white Americans who have been dying from suicide, drug overdoses and conditions related to alcoholism, but there have been few attempts to relate the phenomenon to religion. In a paper presented at the early March meeting of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture (ASREC) in Boston, which **RW** attended, economist Daniel Hungerman of the University of Notre Dame followed other recent research in tracing the start of this mortality trend, which is specific to the U.S., to the early 1990s. He thus discounted the epidemic of opioid abuse as a leading cause of the phenomenon, since the drugs involved in that epidemic were not yet available 30 years ago. Other single causes, such as rising inequality and economic crises, would not have had such a strong effect during that decade. What did occur during the early 1990s that was also singular to the U.S. was the rapid rise of religious non-affiliation—a trend most strongly associated with the same demographics marking those experiencing the deaths of despair.

Using the General Social Survey for data on attendance and affiliation and recent figures on these kinds of deaths, Hungerman found that the two trends of religious disaffiliation and despair-related mortality rates closely tracked each other starting in the 1990s. Whereas middle-aged, non-Hispanic whites had the lowest levels of non-affiliation before the 1990s, afterwards they showed the highest. The same pattern was true for church attendance. Also, middle-aged whites and other racial groups did not show great divergence in attendance and affiliation patterns until after the

early 1990s. Hungerman added that the convergence between declining religion and deaths of despair took place among both men and women and rural and non-rural populations. He acknowledged that more research was needed to make a stronger causal case for the relationship between deaths of despair and declining religion, yet added that “[w]e know of no other large coincidental changes of this kind.”

‘Deaths of Despair’ Rates Across Countries

Deaths per 100,000 by drugs, alcohol and suicide among men and women ages 50-54



Source: Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*

Credit: Katie Park/NPR

● According to an interview by *Paix Liturgique* (February 12) with Christian Marquant, a French historian and traditional Catholic layman, there are currently 4,500 Catholic priests around the world who celebrate the rite of the Traditional Latin Mass (*usus antiquior*). The Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) counts some 660 priests, to which around 100 belonging to the same milieu should be added. There are also around 730 priests affiliated with various institutes fully recognized by Rome, the most numerous one being the Fraternity of Saint Peter with more than 300 priests, followed by the Institute of Christ the King with 112 priests. In addition to this almost 1,500 priests, Marquant adds those diocesan or regular priests who celebrate the Traditional Mass beside the ordinary one. Some have received the mission from their bishop to celebrate it for faithful who have asked for it: there are currently some 200 such priests in Italy, more than 250 in France, and more than 150 in the United Kingdom.

There are also priests who approach traditional institutes (including the SSPX) for instruction in how to celebrate the Traditional Mass. A significant number have been trained in this way. A conservative estimate concludes that there are at least 3,000 priests not affiliated with the traditional milieu who love and celebrate more or less frequently the Traditional Mass. This makes for a total of 4,500. Marquant remarks that this should obviously be put into perspective with reference to global Catholic clergy figures. The most recent official statistics (2016) put the total number of Catholic clergy around the world at 414,467 (including Eastern rite clergy), meaning that priests who exclusively or regularly celebrate the Traditional Mass represent slightly more than one percent of Catholic clergy worldwide—a small percentage, but growing.

(*Paix Liturgique*,
<http://www.paixliturgique.com>)



● **Recent statistics suggest that, in its 10th year, the conservative Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) is growing and moving beyond its main identity as a breakaway church of the Episcopal Church (TEC), according to an article in *The Living Church* magazine (February 15).** The denomination has collected enough substantial data since 2013, with the majority of parishes reporting in, to reveal some dominant trends. Excluding the ACNA's Canadian churches and the Diocese of South Carolina—which left TEC in 2012 (with a loss of 21,808 members) and affiliated with ACNA in 2017—its membership has grown from 103,090 in 2013 to 105,691 in 2017. Average attendance has grown more in the same period, from 65,885 to 74,027 (excluding South Carolina and Canada). Including South Carolina, the number of ACNA congregations in 2017 was up to 1,020, from 932 in 2013. Excluding South Carolina, the number of congregations has risen modestly from 932 in 2013 to 967 in 2017. Figures from 2014 reveal that 62 ACNA congregations closed between 2013 and 2017, but 109 opened during the same time. Writers David Goodhew and Jeremy Bonner note that “[t]he propensity to proliferate may be increasing. In 2017, 41 congregations opened, while only seven closed.” This may all be due to a 2009 policy of church planting which may have “helped the church move on from the issue of sexuality and conflict with TEC to focus on mission.”

Bonner and Goodhew write that “[o]verall, ACNA's growth is significant, but not stellar. Its significance lies, in part, in comparison with TEC, which has continued a steady and substantial decline in the same years.” The authors note that while the jurisdiction of many ACNA dioceses extends across multiple states, ACNA has six dioceses that could truly be described as non-territorial. Membership in these dioceses increased from roughly 13,500 to almost 21,000 between 2013 and 2017. One diocese, named C4SO (the Diocese of Churches for the Sake of Others), more

than doubled its attendance during this time. In the same period, however, territorial dioceses declined by at least 4,800 members. The majority of ACNA dioceses are neither growing nor shrinking much, yet the “figures suggest that the ACNA dioceses largely composed of ex-TEC parishes have tended to plateau or shrink.... Such shrinkage requires proper research before solid causation can be ascribed. But they may reflect that (a) most TEC parishes were on a downward trajectory well before the split and this has proved hard to arrest; and (b) when these parishes left TEC they also left the umbrella of a large denominational apparatus and were more vulnerable within the more limited infrastructure offered by ACNA.” Denominational figures also show a growth in ethnic parishes, with the ACNA’s Diocese of the Trinity, which is predominantly Nigerian, rapidly proliferating.

(*The Living Church*, <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/2019/02/15/the-growth-of-the-anglican-church-in-north-america/>)



● **Papal visits tend to bring improvement in human rights conditions, although such changes most often come before the pope’s arrival rather than during the visits and afterwards, according to a recent study.** The study, presented at the early March meeting of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics and Culture, which **RW** attended, looked at papal visits over 40 years and human rights violations in the forms of government repression, killings and incarcerations. Economists Marek Endrich and Jerg Gutmann of the University of Hamburg, who looked at the three years prior to and after each visit as well as the year of the visit, noted that they are often seen as putting governments in the spotlight for human rights abuses and used by leaders to legitimize their rule. But the researchers found that significant improvement on human rights issues tended to take place in the three years prior to the visit but neither in the year of the visit nor in the three years after the event. These findings held regardless of whether it was a Protestant or Catholic country, and it was found not to be significant whether or not the pope or Vatican

intentionally selected countries because they were already experiencing an improving human rights climate.



● **Witchcraft is a persistent presence throughout the world, especially in Africa, even though recent research suggests it does not play a particularly pro-social role in society.** Economists Nathan Nunn of Harvard University and Sara Lowes of Bocconi University presented a paper at the meeting of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics and Culture in Boston in early March based on experiments conducted in a village in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they tested pro-social attitudes involving witchcraft. They hypothesized that if an individual knows that a neighbor or acquaintance is involved in witchcraft they would engage in more pro-social



attitudes toward them so they would not be targeted with spells and other forms of magic. Nunn and Lowes had participants play a series of games that involved whether to credit or discredit fellow players after being informed (among other information provided about them) that they practiced witchcraft. In one game, those who were associated with witchcraft were found to be 38 percent less likely to be chosen to play in the game. Nunn and Lowes found that the knowledge that people are engaged in witchcraft “seems to induce less pro-social behavior, not more.” As to why witchcraft is then so pervasive, Nunn said a common view is that “it works.” But because strong stigma is still attached to witchcraft, secrecy is encouraged for such beliefs and practices.

● **The influence of mosques in Indonesia is waning as a result of social media-based preaching and other alternatives, according to a recent study conducted by the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture (CSRC) at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) in Jakarta.** The study, which surveyed Muslims aged between 17 and 24 in 18 regencies and cities across the country, found that young Muslims are losing interest in studying religion in mosques and that social media-based sermons had reduced the influence of religious education in the family, organizations or other formal educational institutions, reports the *Jakarta Post* (February 10). Scholars and Muslims gathered in Jakarta recently to discuss how to attract youth to mosques amid the increasing influence of social media in the proliferation of Islamic teachings. A lecturer at UIN Jakarta, Masdar F. Mas’udi, said abandoned mosques were prone to being used by radical groups to disseminate their views. “At least that’s what’s happening in some mosques in Bogor, West Java, where I studied the phenomenon some years ago,” he said recently. He said mosques needed to enliven themselves to stop the spread of radicalism. Recent reports disclosed that a number of mosques in the country had been infiltrated by groups affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) to recruit members for the terrorist network.



Dark side of the revival of Russian Orthodoxy emerges

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is still in a period of “revival” marked by the rehabilitation of its position in society and rapid institutional expansion, but “signs of crisis are mounting rapidly,” writes Sergey Chapnin in *IWM Post* (Fall/Winter), a publication of the Vienna-based Institute for Human Sciences. Chapnin argues that the positive tendencies characterizing the ROC’s revival, including the growth of parishes and monasteries and its becoming the largest and most politically influential non-governmental organization in Russia, have given way to negative ones. These include the growing concentration of ecclesiastical authority in the hands of the current patriarch Kirill; the conflict between the Moscow Patriarchate and Constantinople growing to the point of actual schism; “church teaching [being] perceived by society, especially young people, as merely a form of state propaganda; evidence of the ROC episcopate’s involvement in major corruption scandals and the younger bishop’s luxurious lifestyle [coming] to light; [and] frank confessions of former clerics who have left the priesthood...being published.”

Chapnin adds that most of the positive features of the revival of Orthodoxy have been restricted to the parish level and to some extent “church-adjacent institutions,” particularly charitable ones. The problem is that such activity “has little to no impact on the image and authority of the Moscow Patriarchate.” The writer traces the church crisis not so much to the revival of the last few decades but rather to the church hierarchy’s continuation of policies of the Soviet period into the post-Soviet era. Kirill’s “plan of action is the very same as his predecessors’. The primary focus is on seeking the state’s support for the church and an obvious willingness to serve state interests in pursuit of that support. One of the consequences of such policies is utter neglect of the interests of civil society but even of his own flock — both laypeople and clergy.” Chapnin, who formerly served as the editor of the official church journal and newspaper, calls for a “severe” restriction of the



church leadership's authority as well as "clear definitions of the canonical status of laypeople and of how autonomy is granted to parish communities."

(*IWM Post*, Spittelauer Lände 3, 1090 Vienna, Austria)

Chinese workers discovering evangelical Christianity in Africa

With some 10,000 Chinese-owned firms operating in Africa and hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers currently staying in African countries, an unexpected consequence is that some of them return home after having converted to Christianity, reports journalist Christopher Rhodes in *UnHerd* (Feb. 13). Rhodes remarks that having to live in such a different culture can be a difficult experience for these Chinese expatriates, and that religion can become a source of comfort. Since vibrant forms of Christianity are heavily present across sub-Saharan Africa, a number of evangelical churches have started reaching out to Chinese workers—"including incorporating Mandarin into services," notes Rhodes. Some ethnic Chinese missionaries from Taiwan and other countries have also started sensing opportunities for conducting missionary work that wouldn't be possible in mainland China.

Once they return home, these workers bring their newly-found faith with them. According to Rhodes, in the coastal province of Fujian, one can "now hear South African accented English and see houses adorned with crosses." There have been a few articles in recent months which report that Chinese firms are winning contracts for building churches in Africa or for printing Bibles for use in African countries (for example, see: <https://thedi diplomat.com/2018/07/chinas-belt-and-road-exporting-evangelism/>).

(*UnHerd*, <https://unherd.com>)



Chrislam encountering inter-faith taboos in Nigeria

Despite the attempt of a syncretistic movement known as Chrislam to bridge the differences between Islam and Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, the public reception to such groups has been characterized more by sharp debate and hostility than interest and acceptance, according to a study by Corey L. Williams in the journal *Studies in World Christianity* (25:1). Chrislam has been especially active in the high conflict areas of Nigeria where it seeks to act as a counterpoint to the religious violence carried out by such extremist groups as Boko Haram. There have been several groups founded on these syncretistic beliefs and practices since the 1970s, adding up to a movement of around 15,000 adherents throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Williams focuses on the most recent group in this movement, the Ogbomoso Society of Chrislam (OSC), which, founded on a religious vision in 2005, teaches that Christianity, Islam, and African indigenous religions come from the same source and should be reunited as a single religious movement. The group, with about 1,200 people in its directory, has knitted together threads from the three religions into a distinctive mosaic that includes such practices as worshipping on Saturdays (as a compromise between Sunday Christian and Friday Muslim observances meant to allow members to keep their attachments to their former religious communities), sermons based on the Koran, Bible, and Yoruba proverbial literature, and rituals that draw on baptism and cleansing ceremonies.

Despite members' conviction that they have received a divine call to counteract divisive religious politics and violence, the OSC "has received substantial criticism and what they term 'religious persecution' at the hands of the local...population." The prospect of ostracism if they are seen to be involved in the OSC has led some members to leave the group. For their part, the OSC has been strident in their criticisms of religion as it is practiced by Nigerians, which has also fanned the flames of hostility. Williams concludes that the tolerant attitudes of the Yoruba people are being tested by Chrislam, since the movement threatens the "relatively stable boundaries between and interaction among different religious traditions in south-west Nigeria." It seems the Yoruba can



tolerate the syncretism of African indigenous religions with either Christianity or Islam, but that the attempt to mix Christianity and Islam is a step too far.

(*Studies in World Christianity*, <https://www.eupublishing.com/loi/swc>)

Catholic Church in Philippines faces intimidation and irrelevance under Duterte regime

The Catholic Church in the Philippines is losing its once substantial civic role as it faces growing secularism and an aggressively anti-Catholic president, writes Adam Willis in *Commonweal* magazine (February 22). While Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's stringent war on drugs has brought the church into confrontation with the government over its abuses, it has not won the public's respect for such activism. The institutional church has "been on the wane for years," and Duterte has seized on its weakened state to demonize church leaders who have challenged his regime. Duterte has attacked Manila Bishop Pablo "Ambo" David for denouncing police tactics in the drug war, wielded the "clergy's history of sexual impropriety and abuse as leverage," alleged corruption in the church hierarchy and attacked Catholic teachings, with many Filipinos supporting him. After recently threatening Ambo, Duterte stoked violence against like-minded clerics, even calling on laypeople to kill them.

The animosity has been enough to move the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines into more active resistance against Duterte, recently staging a silent protest against the president's hostilities to the church. Since December of 2017, three priests have been killed under mysterious circumstances, and 226 clerics have petitioned the government to carry firearms to protect themselves. Willis writes that Duterte is trying to dismantle the church's moral influence and replace it with a new religiosity based on himself as a messianic savior of the country, dubbing

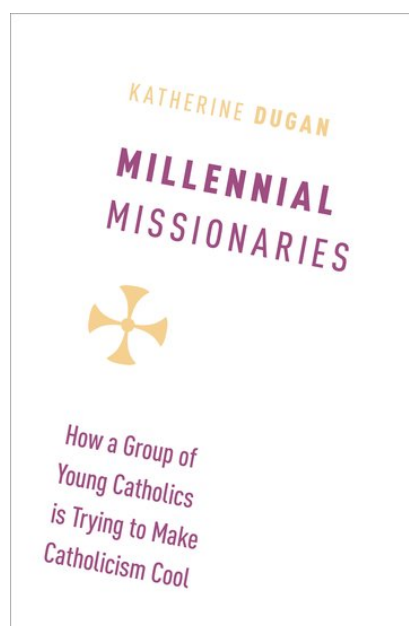


himself “Saint Rodrigo.” Political scientist David Buckley adds that Duterte has no interest in coopting religious leaders as much as challenging their leadership. With tens of thousands killed and the justice system severely compromised, Willis writes that “the erosion of their traditional moral code has given rise to a new understanding of the value of human life” for Filipino Catholics, and there is a new drive to educate the consciences of the majority of Filipinos about a basic sense of good and bad.

(*Commonweal*, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/who-stupid-god>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ **RW** has covered the rise and growth of FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), and now Katherine Dugan fills out the picture considerably, showing how this group has fused evangelical practices and fervor with orthodox Catholicism in her new book *Millennial Missionaries* (Oxford University Press, \$34.95). As its title implies, the book provides an in-depth look at the way the organization trains a large core of lay leaders or “missionaries” to start ministries on campuses and who then often go on to influence parish life. Dugan’s ethnographic study of the conversions of students—from both Catholic and non-Catholic backgrounds—finds that their spiritual encounters are similar to those of evangelicals (having a personal relationship with Jesus), even as they go on to compete with evangelical ministries and build a Catholic subculture on campus with their own kinds of music and worship (often centering on eucharistic adoration) that are modeled at their annual “SEEK” conferences.



FOCUS’ conflicts with other more liberal Catholic groups already on campus, such as the Newman Centers, suggest that the campus environment reflects the divisions of American Catholicism in general. FOCUS also clashes with other Catholic campus ministries in their strong assertion of Catholic gender teachings—trying to recapture “feminine genius” and “authentic masculinity”—while they do not completely forsake 21st-century gender roles and millennial culture in general. They try to revive the role of romance in relationships to offset the “hookup culture” predominant on many campuses. As these young Catholics carry their fervor and devotion into parish life, they are likely to have a formative influence in American Catholicism mainly because they will dominate the thinning ranks of active young people in the church.

■ *American Cosmic* (Oxford University Press, \$24.95), by religion professor D.W. Pasulka, is an unusual book on UFOs and their believers that examines the phenomenon more as a religion than as a variety of pop folklore. The book also stands out because it focuses on a distinguished group of scientists and high-tech professionals who are highly secretive about their beliefs, mainly because of the stigma it would bring them, rather than the “usual suspects” of conspiracy enthusiasts. Stephen Hawking has called UFO believers “cranks and weirdos,” but Pasulka’s study shows the wide appeal of this diffuse movement (UFO belief is at an all-time high). The book’s “cast of characters” consists of a network of researchers whose work on UFOs has rarely seen the light of day, both in order to avoid professional scandal and because of the pledge of secrecy they made in their government positions, but also an entourage of “influencers,” producers, government agents, and even actors who are household names. Not every claim made about spotting a UFO is a religious event; it only becomes so through a process of interpretation supported by a community.



The artifacts (such as unexplained objects found at alleged UFO crash sites) that UFO believers collect and in some ways venerate are similar to holy relics and the way they create devotion among believers. Many of the members of the group the author interviews believe they are in contact with alien intelligences, yet they still retain some doubts and skepticism about their experience. The same goes for the UFO devotees’ claim of recovered memories (through hypnosis) of alien abductions, as recent research has shown that false memories can be implanted or influenced by the media and its frequent depictions of UFO scenarios and images. Pasulka concludes by stressing that the ambiguous and mysterious nature of UFO artifacts—especially for the skeptical yet believing scientists—creates the power to inspire belief. And sometimes this belief crosses the border from the paranormal-occult to institutional religion, as seen in the book’s concluding section, where the main protagonist experiences a radical conversion to Catholicism while in Rome. Like others at the intersection of institutional religion and popular spirituality, he integrates his experiences with UFOs into a belief and experience of Catholic miracles, such as apparitions and bi-locations.

On/File: A Continuing Record of Groups, People, Movements, and Events Impacting Contemporary Religion

1) Ignatian Yoga is the latest attempt to graft Christian meanings and messages onto yoga practices, this time taking its inspiration from Jesuit contemplation and meditation. The practice is drawing enthusiastic crowds to retreats and workshops drawing on the public appeal of both yoga and Ignatian spirituality. It began in 2014 at Fordham University in New York, with a Jesuit scholastic, Bobby Karle, a certified yoga instructor, offering sessions in yoga framed by Jesuit principles before the weeknight liturgies at the campus church. By 2017, Ignatian Yoga had become an established organization holding workshops across the U.S. The phenomenon is not actually a mixture of Ignatian meditation practices and yoga as much as a utilization of yoga to calm and center a person so he or she is able to receive more fully Christian Ignatian spirituality (which involves contemplating the imagery of Christ in the gospels). No syncretism is

attempted between Catholic practices of the Eucharist, confession and the liturgy in general and Eastern spirituality and practices. But the asanas (yoga exercises) are often practiced in the church sanctuary, around the altar. (Source: *America*, February 18)



2) The **Napa Institute** is a new organization among a plethora of Catholic NGOs seeking to energize and equip Catholic leaders to defend and advance orthodox Catholicism, drawing on substantial wealth and influence. It was founded by Timothy Busch, a wealthy businessman who promotes capitalism and conservative Catholicism through high-end events at his resort in California and other high-profile spots where professionals and church leaders are invited. Busch is the multi-million dollar benefactor of Catholic University of America's School of Business (named after him) and a supporter of other charities. He said at a recent Napa Institute event at Catholic University that the evangelization of our country is being done by private foundations, Catholic NGOs, like Napa and Legatus (an organization for Catholic business professionals). He said that such nonprofits remained "tethered to the church through a bishop...But they have access to capital that the church doesn't." (Source: *Sojourners*, March)

