



Vol. 35, No. 2

Spiritual direction outfitted for “nones”

“Just as there is a growing number of nones...there is also a growing interest in spiritual direction both within and outside of the Catholic Church...Interestingly, as more Americans move away from participation in institutional religion, many seekers and nones are also seeking out places where they can have in-depth conversations about their spiritual lives,” writes Kaya Oakes in *America* magazine (November 25). The practice of spiritual direction has mainly taken place in liturgical churches, such as Catholic, Episcopal, and Orthodox churches, but Oakes notes that the website of Spiritual Directors International lists directors from many Protestant denominations as well as directors who are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. “A number of evangelical programs in spiritual direction following the [Jesuit] Ignatian model have also sprung up in the past few years.” For the non-affiliated, spiritual direction has been further adapted away from institutional settings. For instance, a popular podcast, “Harry Potter and the Sacred Text,” which now has up to 100,000 listeners a week (and hundreds of people at its live recordings), guides people through an immersion in the world of Hogwarts, using a familiar though nontraditional text as an entry point into spiritual practices.



Oakes cites another gathering of Gen Xers and millennials adapting the Quakers’ practice of spiritual direction in group settings rather than one-on-one meetings with religious professionals; they gather once a month to talk about “life and spirituality and faith and politics,” in addition to keeping a running Google chat about the same topics. The number of programs for training spiritual

directors is also growing among non-Catholics, alongside the traditional centers run by Jesuits at Creighton University, Guelph, and Loyola University Chicago. The growing ranks of spiritual directors presents a confusing array of options to non-affiliated seekers who are also wary of their institutional sponsors. Many spiritual directors maintain that the Ignatian model, involving contemplative listening and asking questions about God’s activity in a person’s life, can be adapted for people outside of religious contexts. As spiritual direction has become disconnected from the sacrament of penance and administered increasingly by lay people, with even traditional references to “God” deemphasized in many instances, it has become less intimidating to nones, especially those who have had negative experiences with organized religion and suffered

“spiritual abuse,” Oakes concludes.

(*America*, <https://www.americamagazine.org/>)

Celebrity among evangelical women key to new influence

Celebrity among evangelical women, especially the wives of prominent pastors, has helped them to circumvent the obstacles to female leadership in evangelicalism, giving them disproportionate influence in the movement, according to historian Kate Bowler, the author of a recent book on pastors’ wives and other prominent Christian women. In an interview in *Christian Century* magazine (December 4), Bowler, author of *The Preacher’s Wife*, said she was surprised to find that, without any theological education or supportive structures, the wives of well-known evangelical leaders and pastors exercised important leadership roles in churches and organizations usually barring women from playing such roles. She cited the case of Beth Moore, a Southern Baptist evangelist and teacher who has utilized Twitter and her best-selling books as her pulpit in a denomination that does not ordain women.

Other women, usually the wives of megachurch pastors, have found fame and influence as gospel singers and worship leaders, or starting out as lay counselors and gaining celebrity by revealing their personal struggles. Nearly all the evangelical and Pentecostal women celebrities Bowler studied enhanced their fame by being beautiful or glamorous (“though not too sexy”), showing people that “theirs was a faith for successful people.” Bowler noted that as leadership is concentrated in fewer hands with the growth of megachurches, wives are seen as conferring emotional “well-roundedness” on their pastor husbands, while having a lot of power themselves as they figure out how to minister to women in the congregation. Ironically, while mainline Protestants ordain women, lacking the celebrity culture of evangelical women they rarely climb to prominent pulpits and have less influence than men.

(*Christian Century*, <https://www.christiancentury.org/>)



Paula White and the mainstreaming of Pentecostal politics

President Donald Trump’s appointment of Paula White as head of the White House’s Faith and

Opportunity Initiative, a unit in the Office of Public Liaison tasked with outreach to religious groups, suggests that the mainstreaming of Pentecostal Christians within the Christian right is about complete, writes Daniel Hummel in the e-newsletter *Sightings* (November 7). There have been Pentecostal or charismatic leaders in the Christian right for several decades, but the evangelical and fundamentalist movements that helped create the Christian right made these two communities the movement's gatekeepers. The birth in the 1990s of the Christian Coalition (a type of successor grassroots organization to the Moral Majority) started the shift toward Pentecostal recognition within the Christian right. "In major areas of conservative evangelical politics, from pro-Israel lobbying to free-market economics, Pentecostals have become central and public drivers of activism," writes Hummel.

Citing Frances Fitzgerald's historical work on evangelicals, he points out that White and her fellow Pentecostals and charismatics, coming of age after the rise of the Christian right in the 1970s, know no era of American politics that did not refer to evangelicals as a political demographic. Thus, this new breed of Christian-right leader has been defined far less by theology than by ideology. Hummel concludes that "Paula White's ascension to Trump's inner circle, and now her official position in the White House, is a dual testament to this historical process: to the ongoing mainstreaming of Pentecostalism in the broader culture of 'evangelical politics' and to the historically contingent de-emphasis of labels like Pentecostalism in shaping American political coalitions at all."



More priests refusing to become bishops in Catholic Church

Over the course of a decade the percentage of priests turning down offers to become bishops has tripled, according to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, as reported in *La Croix International* (December 13). Xavier Le Normand writes that three out of 10 priests asked to become bishops have recently declined the offer. Even some priests called to high positions in Rome have preferred not to become bishops. The article mentions the case of Father Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves, appointed prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy in November, who won't be ordained as a bishop in order "to return more easily to the Society of

Jesus at the end of his Vatican mission.”

The number of bishops increases slightly each year in the Roman Catholic Church, and there are now 5,400 of them. But being a bishop today means being much more visible and exposed than in the past, as the crisis surrounding clerical sexual abuse has made clear. Obviously, a priest who has led a double life (not only in matters of sexual abuse) would prefer to escape the added scrutiny, notes Father Raymond de Souza in *The Catholic Herald* (Sept. 26). But he adds that there are also a number of other reasons for reluctance to become a bishop, such as the feeling that it will change a priest’s relationship with other priests because of the authority a bishop needs to exercise and the firmness he needs to show when making decisions that may affect priests, even if they are taken for the assumed greater good of the diocese. De Souza also mentions as another factor bishops’ current challenge of managing parish decline and shutting down parishes in areas where attendance has decreased. For instance, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia had to close 70 parishes in eight years, “and said recently that only about 100 of the more than 200 remaining are needed.”



Yoga faces its #MeToo moment

In a field that is relatively unpoliced and protected by claims to spiritual authority, yoga teachers are facing accusations and pressure about inappropriate touching and other forms of abuse against followers, according to Katherine Rosman in the *New York Times* (November 10). In recent years, former and current students have gone public about their treatment at the “hands of one of yoga’s most important, influential, and revered gurus”—Krishna Pattabhi Jois, who popularized the school of Ashtanga yoga. Ashtanga yoga, involving an intensive series of postures and dynamic moves, has attracted celebrity practitioners (such as Madonna and Mike D) and others “hungry for a type A workout with a side of spirituality,” Rosman writes. Because this form of yoga, also called flow yoga and vinyasa yoga, involves teachers manipulating the bodies of their students, accusers are charging Jois, who is deceased, with exploiting these techniques to



commit sexual abuse. Also facing similar accusations is well-known Ashtanga yoga teacher Jonny Kest, who denies these allegations. A former student of Jois says that because practitioners are told that yoga is a spiritual practice, it is assumed they don’t understand such mysteries and need to trust the teacher. Ashtanga leaders still revere Jois and are reluctant “to take part in an open dialogue about his legacy.” But Ashtanga yoga studios have

implemented policies that allow students to express their uneasiness about certain forms of touching. Meanwhile, also under the spotlight for sexual abuse is “hot yoga” empire founder Bikram Choudhury, who is the subject of the Netflix documentary, *Bikram: Yogi, Guru, Predator*.

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **Undergoing religious initiation ceremonies, such as baptism, confirmation, and bar mitzvah, predicts a lower likelihood of disaffiliating from religion, although not later religious commitment, according to a new study published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (online in December).** Samuel Perry of the University of Oklahoma and Kyle Longest of Furman University analyzed the National Study of Youth (surveys 1 and 4), allowing them to study the effects of these rites of passage over time. The researchers found that young adults who claimed a religious affiliation and experienced a religious rite of passage were over 30 percent less likely to disaffiliate than youth who did not go through such rites. But Perry and Longest add that the predictive power of these rites regarding young adult affiliation did not seem to vary by specific religious tradition or rite, suggesting that it is the nature of the ritual itself rather than the specific religious content of the rite that may have an effect.

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



● **Many American churchgoers, especially liberal Protestants, report significant conflict with their congregations, something which may have fed the trend of people disaffiliating from their religions over political issues, according to a study by Sean Bock of Harvard University.** In a paper presented at the late-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in St. Louis, Bock noted that while there is evidence for the thesis that part of the reason for the growth of the non-affiliated, or “nones,” is their protest over the politicization of churches since the 1990s, there has been little research on the process leading up to their disaffiliation. Bock used the Baylor Religion Survey (Wave II) to analyze the attitudes of conflicted church members in conservative churches, particularly on the issues of same-sex marriage and abortion, which he said was the first attempt to measure attitude conflict with churches in an effort to understand the relationship between this conflict and religious

participation.

The researcher found that liberals, by a wide margin, were most likely to conflict with their churches compared to other political orientations. “Not only are they the most likely group to have already left their churches, but they make up the vast majority of those who remain [for now] in churches with which they disagree, as well.” Evangelicals were unlikely to conflict with their churches on these issues, Bock found. The liberal dissenters have not filtered into churches with more liberal views but have remained in their more conservative churches, although lowering their attendance rates. Unexpectedly, younger Americans and the highly educated were less likely to conflict with their churches, although Bock said the reason may be that these groups have already disaffiliated. He concluded that with evangelicals standing apart from other



groups as the least conflicted, “traditional American religion may be increasingly represented by devout, intense religionists with more conservative attitudes, keeping the United States firmly as an outlier among fellow wealthy democracies, despite marked decline in its religious participation.”

● **Converts to Modern Orthodox Judaism make up a large and growing segment of the movement, and they tend to be more liberal and diverse in their observance of Judaism than cradle Orthodox, according to a new study of “baalei teshuvah,” or converts to the faith.** The survey was conducted by Nishma Research among 744 converts to Modern Orthodoxy, and while not representative, the sample did match the demographics of Modern Orthodox reported in a 2013 Pew study of American Jews. Converted Modern Orthodox Jews, who are observant while accommodating modern life, were found to represent about 42 percent of the movement. Most of the converts came from Conservative (49 percent) or from other Orthodox groups. The baalei teshuvah tended to be more socially and politically liberal and tolerant of secular influence, and more observant in diverse ways, than those born Modern Orthodox. A significant segment (42 percent) cited the Chabad Lubavitch movement as an influence in their conversions. Male converts were more often drawn by such outreach and by intellectual aspects of the religion, while women were attracted more by spirituality and the community aspect.



(The study can be downloaded at: <http://nishmaresearch.com>)

● **A new poll shows a significant decline in Catholicism in Pope Francis' homeland of Argentina.** The survey, conducted by CONICET, found that 62.9 percent of Argentina's population identified as Catholic, next to 76.5 percent in a comparable 2008 study. Citing the survey, the *Catholic Herald* (December 5) reports that even more dramatic were the shifts found in public attitudes toward the church, with three-quarters of respondents saying that the state should not give financial support to religion and about half saying that religion should not be taught in the schools—both long-held practices in Argentina. Pope Francis was ranked fourth in a list of people or institutions trusted by the public, after universities, the Catholic Church as a whole, and the military. The article notes that Argentina “seems midway between European secularization and the Pentecostal surge in other Latin American countries. More than 15 percent of Argentines now identify as Protestant, with almost 20 percent saying they have no religion.” With the Catholic Church now seen as just one player in a field of religious and secular competitors, it is expected that the country's new leftist government will liberalize laws championed by a once-dominant Catholic Church, especially on abortion.

(*Catholic Herald*, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/>)



● **Although considered one of the most secularized countries in the world, the Czech Republic does not actually count a higher number of convinced atheists than other European countries, while there is a pronounced lack of interest and distrust toward traditional (Christian) religious institutions as well as a high level of individualization in religious beliefs and attitudes.** According to David Václavík (Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic) in *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (November), such attitudes can partly be traced to the early twentieth century, preceding the Communist period. From 1910 to 1925, the Roman Catholic Church had lost a huge number of followers, although this decline differed from one region to another. After World War II and the advent of the Communist regime, this was reinforced by the deportation of the local German population and the settlement of individuals (but not groups) loyal to the Party in those areas.

During the last period of the Communist regime, religious groups would to some extent be seen by the people as symbols of dissent and hope, but from a purely political perspective. Although this led to a temporary surge in Catholic or other religious self-identification in the years immediately following the end of Communist rule, there was a rapid decline only a decade later. Those people stating a clear religious affiliation were down to 21 percent of the population by the time of the 2011 census. But it would be wrong to understand this downward trend as a spectacular growth of atheism, since various surveys show that 40 to 50 percent of the Czech people believe in some kind of transcendence (in contrast with around 10 percent believing in a personal God). Traditional Christian beliefs (heaven, hell, resurrection) are shared by less than 30 percent of the Czech population, but beliefs in the curative power of amulets or in the reliability of horoscopes are accepted by more than 40 percent of Czechs.

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



● **While anti-conversion laws in India have been established to prevent attempts to force or pressure people into religious—often Christian—conversion, a new study finds that such laws have had the effect of generating violent anti-Christian persecution by creating a vigilante culture in the states where they have been implemented.** As reported in the journal *Ethnicities* (online in December), Nilay Saiya and Stuti Manchanda (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) analyzed persecution in those Indian states having anti-conversion laws between 2000 and 2015, using a dataset based on information from the U.S. International Religious Freedom Reports on the persecution of Christians as well as data drawn from a number of sources on the political, religious, economic, and social characteristics of the states. The researchers also looked at the state of Madhya Pradesh, which enacted anti-conversion policies decades before the first official anti-conversion laws in India, which are now enforced in seven states.

They found that states enforcing anti-conversion laws were statistically more likely to give rise to violent persecution of Christians than states where such laws do not exist. This pattern was also borne out in Madhya Pradesh: while the state has ratios of Christian populations similar to its two neighboring states of Haryana and West Bengal, which do not have anti-conversion laws,

it was found to have three times the number of cases of anti-Christian violence of Haryana and two times the number of West Bengal. Saiya and Manchanda conclude that “these laws not only pose a serious threat to the freedom of religion in the states where they exist, but they also empower activists to resist conversion and provide a pretext for attacks against religious minorities, sometimes leading to violent conflict spirals.”



(*Ethnicities*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/etn>)

Gang life entangled with evangelical churches in El Salvador

While evangelical churches are often viewed as safe havens from gang life in El Salvador and much of Central America, there is actually significant interaction between these churches and gangs, writes Stephen Offutt in the journal *Social Forces* (online in December). Offutt notes that the idea of evangelical churches serving as havens where gang members can safely exit criminal life and find little repercussions from gang leaders has wide currency, especially in a situation where both churches and gangs are a large and fast-growing presence. But in his ethnographic research in the churches of El Salvador, Offutt found that church members have a good deal of contact with gangs through family ties, living together in neighborhoods, and even gang members and their families attending church services. The gangs of El Salvador are so powerful and enmeshed in the everyday life of society that even when pastors preach against involvement with gang culture, some members find it difficult not to cooperate or even work for them in some way (almost half of the country’s businesses experience extortion from gangs).

While it is true that churches can often serve as an alternative to gang culture, it is also true that “Evangelicals, for their part, are more likely to hide gang members who are related to them from the police. They are also likely to encourage family members, regardless of gang or other affiliations, to come to church,” Offutt writes. Family networks are particularly complex among the lower class in El Salvador, where women—evangelical or not— without formal marriage often have children with different partners, making for extended families that connect large numbers of people in the community. The powerful presence of both gangs and evangelicals has



led to a situation where they actually share governance in many neighborhoods, sometimes in opposition to the police who are viewed as corrupt. Offutt concludes that the ways evangelical churches are entangled with gangs shows that the former’s “geographic and physical proximity to social problems is as important as the cultural distance that evangelical churches try to create. [Such an approach] recognizes that churches open themselves

up to outside influences by creating low barriers to entry.”
(*Social Forces*, <https://academic.oup.com/sf>)

Islam used as soft power by Turkish government in Europe

Not a few Muslims in France see Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the model of a modern Islamic leader, and such feelings accord with Turkish efforts for influence across the Muslim world, writes Ariane Bonzon in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (November). Particularly among young, non-Turkish Muslims in France, Erdoğan is frequently considered a model Islamic leader, advocating for the rights of Muslims and Palestinians—a leader of the kind they would like to see at the helm of their own countries of origin, as French researcher Romain Caillet notes. Many have had the opportunity to travel to Turkey as tourists, and they experience it as a country where Muslim faith and citizenship in a modern society seem to be fully compatible. The Turkish government has been encouraging such feelings by presenting itself as a defender of the rights of Muslims. In recent years, Turkey has been at the forefront of the fight against “Islamophobia” and has also been active in promoting such issues in the international diplomatic and research arenas, as well as through the work of the intergovernmental Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in which Turkey is quite active.

Recently, it was discovered that a report on Islamophobia in Europe prepared by the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), a Turkish think tank close to the Turkish government, had been financed by a research grant from the European Union, leading some of the people labelled as “Islamophobic” to protest against that financial support (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 11). State-supported Turkish organizations sponsor some non-Turkish Muslims living in Europe to spread and establish the concept of Islamophobia in public discourse. Through creating a network of sympathetic non-Turkish Muslims, Bonzon suggests that Erdoğan would like to show European governments that he is able to have an influence on European Muslims. More generally, one should pay attention to the way in which Turkey is positioning itself as an international actor in the Islamic field. On November 29, the largest mosque in Djibouti (a country in the Horn of Africa) was inaugurated, and its construction was entirely financed by Turkey. It bears the name of the last reigning Ottoman Sultan and Caliph (*SaphirNews*, December 3).

(*Revue des Deux Mondes*, 97 rue de Lille, 75007 Paris, France - www.revuedesdeuxmondes.fr)



Mindfulness expands and challenges Buddhists in Japan

Mindfulness meditation is returning to its origins in Japan, though the more secular style it has assumed in the West is proving difficult to integrate with Buddhism in that country, reports Karen Jensen in *Tricycle* magazine (Winter). In 2017 at least three major Japanese news magazines ran cover stories praising the benefits of mindfulness meditation, and mindfulness events are cropping up across the country. Buddhist leaders have taken note of this surge and have tried to integrate the practice into their teachings, but it is a difficult feat in a society where Buddhism is seen as old-fashioned and irrelevant, Jensen writes. Most Buddhist temples and monks no longer teach meditation and are valued for the memorial services they provide for deceased followers. Buddhist leaders and organizations have been stereotyped as engaging in moneymaking schemes though marketing their funeral services to the public.



But Zen priest Takafumi Zenryu Kawakami is part of a small group of monks who are promoting mindfulness in their temples and through public outreach. Other Buddhist priests have emerged as critics of the mindfulness phenomenon, charging that Buddha's eight-fold path to enlightenment cannot be simply extracted for general use, regardless of beneficial health effects. For now, Kawakami acknowledges that he mainly teaches his version of mindfulness in English to foreigners. He argues that mindfulness is at a crossroads in Japan; it can become a shallow "McMindfulness" that will prove damaging, or be integrated with traditional Buddhism, enriching both the practice and the Buddhist religion in the process.

(*Tricycle*, <https://tricycle.org/>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ We almost neglected to mention that this issue marks the thirty-fifth year of publishing Religion Watch. Some things do get better with age, and we hope RW is among them. We thank readers for their support and interest in this newsletter over the years. Our gratitude also goes out to the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University and its staff for providing a home for RW, as well as to associate editor Jean-Francois Mayer, especially for his assistance in putting out the newsletter during personnel changes earlier this year. We also take this opportunity to thank our departing copy editor Brian Bartholomew for his excellent work during the past two years and to welcome our new copy editor (and layout person) Micah Lambert.

■ The open-access journal *Religions* (November 11) devotes a special issue to the future of Christian monasticism. Although **RW** ran an article from this compiled issue on monasticism in Africa (see Vol. 34, No. 12), readers might be interested in the whole issue, which includes articles on new forms that include communities comprised of vowed and non-vowed members, men and women, and cloister-less or part-time membership. An article by Evan B. Howard sees the rise of less institutional forms of monastic life that were first expressed in the Middle Ages by the Beguines. These communities, as represented by such groups as the Nurturing Communities Network, Community of the Beatitudes, Missional Wisdom Foundation, the new hermit-based Ravens Bread, and the Order of Sustainable Faith (connected with the charismatic Vineyard churches), come from different denominational traditions but are marked by the common characteristics of tending not to take solemn vows or to abandon their professions before they join (though making a commitment to simplicity), blending active and contemplative faith, being self-governing, and being connected by networks of support. To download this issue visit: <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/12/643>

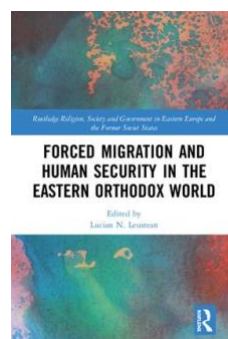


■ The responses of religious leaders toward the arrival of migrants have been mixed and not always consistent, and this also applies to Eastern Orthodox churches, leading Lucian N. Leustean (Aston University, Birmingham, UK) to launch a research project on forced migration, religious diplomacy and human security in Orthodox countries. Conducted in 2018, with workshops taking place in Belgrade and Kyiv, the project has led to a volume, edited by Leustean, *Forced Migration and Human Security in the Eastern Orthodox World* (Routledge, \$175), on a topic on which little research material is otherwise available. Across the chapters, one can sometimes sense the tensions between the roles played by Orthodox churches as preservers of their respective national identities through turbulent national histories and their attempts to provide a Christian answer to humanitarian crises. The volume includes a chapter by RW associate editor Jean-François Mayer on the experience of migration for Orthodox migrants in Western Europe and how it has been leading them to make sense of their presence in new countries as well as its consequences for Orthodoxy worldwide.

According to Leustean's observations, the forced migrations linked to the post-2011 Syrian refugee crisis and post-2014 conflict in Ukraine have led some clergy to populist discourses, but also led others to question the validity of nationalist discourses coming from some of their own hierarchs. In Greece, while Orthodox church leaders are definitely concerned about identity issues, do not promote the idea of multicultural societies, and show eagerness to prevent a demographic shift, several of them have also

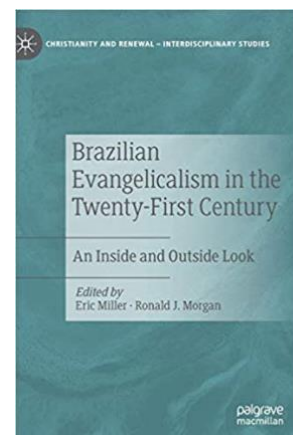
strongly advocated providing help to refugees and dealing with them humanely, as Georgios E. Trantas (Aston University) shows. On the other hand, in Bulgaria, in contrast with other religious denominations in the country, an address from the Synod of the Orthodox Church in 2015 put the emphasis on refugees as a threat to the nation and state security, as one can see in a chapter by Daniela Kalkandjieva (Sofia University, Bulgaria). “Orthodox churches do not have an overarching social policy on engaging with forced migration,” writes Leustean. Several churches have active social services, but they rely on national policies regarding migration, which means that those policies also influence the ways in which churches interact with migrants.

The eleven chapters in the volume offer case studies of Orthodox churches dealing with migration and humanitarian crises in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, without attempting to elaborate a theoretical model. However, in the introduction, Leustean attempts to identify some key findings. First, the European Union’s policies are contentious and have been politicized in those countries, making the European approach to migration look like one of the elements in a clash between East and West. Second, religious communities (including Orthodox ones) have been among the first actors to respond to humanitarian crises and to provide help for refugees (sometimes having been requested to do so by authorities not having the resources and expertise to deal with these emergencies). Third, in the Donbas region of Ukraine, the buffer zone between both sides has not only generated violence, but also tolerance and reconciliation efforts by religious groups. Fourth, the attitudes of Orthodox churches as well as the competition among them have had “a direct impact on state support and engagement with human security.” Orthodox churches are learning. For instance, before the Ukrainian crisis, the Russian Orthodox Church had no well-developed strategy for addressing a flow of displaced people, but it then started to develop programs tailored to specific needs, as Alicja Curanović (University of Warsaw, Poland) writes.



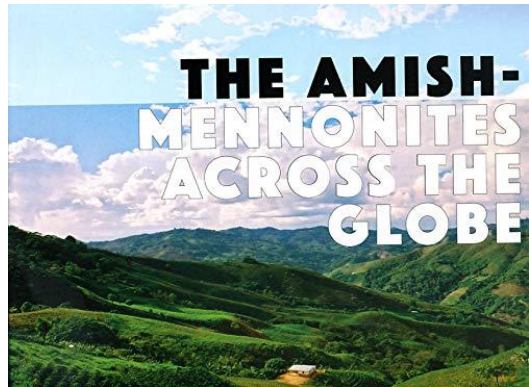
■ That the recently published anthology *Brazilian Evangelicalism in the Twenty-First Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, \$109), edited by Eric Miller and Ronald Morgan, is already being overtaken by developments in Brazil illustrates the rapidly shifting situation of evangelicals in that country. The book brings together American and Brazilian scholars of evangelicalism to give their assessments of evangelicals on several fronts—from evangelical feminism to evangelical environmentalism to church outreach in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. In an early chapter providing an overview of evangelicals in Brazil (which includes Pentecostals there), Brazilian sociologist Alexander Brasil Fonseca argues that processes of pluralism and “de-traditionalizing” are underway among all churches. He points to the presence of a growing number of “syncretic evangelical churches,” where the older boundaries between Protestant faith and indigenous forms of spirituality are more porous, and observes that the dominant conservative prosperity gospel of many Pentecostals exists side-by-side with a theological discourse of “holistic mission,” stressing community development and social action. It should be noted that the book has its origins in a gathering of American and Brazilian scholars, many from evangelical backgrounds, to look especially at evangelicalism and social concern, accounting for the political undertone of the volume.

Most of the contributors acknowledge the conservative political involvement

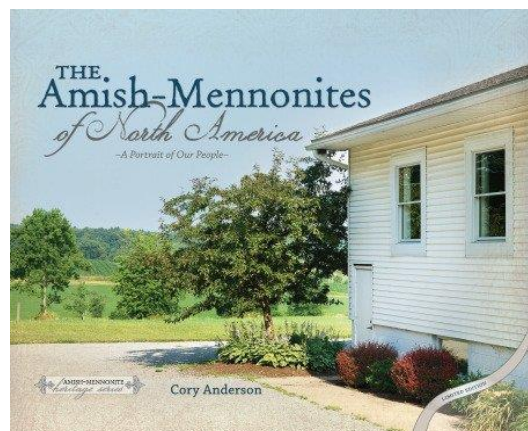


of many evangelical churches, but none of them eyed the emergence of Jair Bolsonaro and how his conservative populism would register as enthusiastically among Brazilian evangelicals as his counterpart Donald Trump's presidency has among evangelicals in the U.S. This is not to say that the holistic Brazilian evangelical movement is not a notable trend, but the tendency to plot a trend line in the direction of the political left is questionable. That said, political scientist Paul Freston does find that loyalty to evangelical politicians just because they are evangelical is weakening. It also seems that sectors of Brazilian evangelicalism do reflect its liberalizing counterparts to the north in some ways. American and transnational evangelical organizations, such as InterVarsity and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, have encouraged engagement with evangelical feminism in Brazil. The twin challenges of climate change and poverty are generating new activism, though the editors strike a cautious note regarding the claim that evangelical missions naturally foster democratic development and social reform wherever the faith is planted, adding that American evangelicals need to accept their limited understanding of Brazilian evangelicalism.

■ The new book *The Amish-Mennonites Across the Globe* (Acorn Publishing, \$45) follows the first volume *The Amish-Mennonites of North America* (Ridgeway Publishing, \$35) in its visual, historical, and sociological portrait of this fascinating movement. An in-depth profile of the movement in the first book details the boundaries and identity of the Amish-Mennonites (AM), which are often unclear to members as well as outsiders. Authors Cory Anderson and Jennifer Anderson note that many Amish studies specialists have often viewed the movement as the “social residue” of the numerous schisms among the more familiar Old Order Amish and thus have classified such groups and congregations with their distant Mennonite cousins. The highly decentralized nature of the AM movement (although there is the growth of new networks and associations) and lack of intergenerational continuity are additional reasons why they have gone under the radar. The authors (and photographers) of this pictorial portrait see the Amish-Mennonites best described as a conservative Amish movement that stands halfway in its distance from the modern world and technology (and the Amish are indeed distinguished among themselves by degrees of adaptations to modernity), most clearly reflected in its oldest (1920s) group, the Beachy Amish-Mennonites. The movement has 22,464 adherents (which include children and non-member attenders) in 201 churches.



Today, the Amish-Mennonites are distinguished by a high interest in missions and outreach (drawing converts), and by inclusion of “radical Mennonite” groups that have little historical connection to the Beachy Amish. The newest book also largely consists of photos and short profiles of AM congregations around the world, although these churches, which number 83 (with 4,796 members), tend not to use the AM label or actively seek to promote this identity apart from acknowledging common historical roots. It is the missions and church-planting emphasis of the AM that created most congregations across Latin



America, the Caribbean, Eastern and Western Europe, Australia, and Africa (where the congregations tend to be larger, although that means about 100 members in this movement), although some are the result of Amish resettlement. Along with historical and sociological overviews and full-color photos of AM churches, the books also feature interesting thumbnail sketches of each congregation.

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

The Aumists at the Holy City of Mandarom Shambhasalem, members of a French universalist new religious movement, continue to navigate legal problems and restrictions. Founded in 1969 by Guru Hamsah Manarah, considered by Aumists as the Cosmo-planetary Messiah, a Messenger of God sent to bring about the Golden Age of Unity, the group had received a favorable judgment in the European Court of Human Rights in 2013 recognizing Aumism as a religion.

But the ECHR decision did not end ongoing challenges from environmentalists and the French government about land use on the Mandarom property. The case began in April 1992, when the followers of Hamsah Manarah were granted a permit to begin construction of a “Pyramid Temple” high up on the hillside of their community near Castellane, in Alpes-de-Haute-Provence. The permit was immediately challenged by the regional representative of the French government, the Prefect of Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, as well as by an environmental group, the Verdon Lakes and Sites Protection Association (l’Association pour la Protection des Lacs et Sites du Verdon), which decided to join “the fight against sects.” Since then, there have been several instances of unfair treatment by the court, and concerns about possible collusion between the media and government to influence the case.

The scholar Susan Palmer of McGill University writes that “It seems clear from a study of the French media since 1995 that Mandarom became a convenient target for persecution simply because journalists’ photos of their spectacular architecture and exotic costumes fanned the public’s fear of sects as weird, threatening and non-français.” In August 1996, the Verdon Lakes and Sites Protection Association filed a motion for the restoration of the Pyramid Temple site to its original condition. Litigation on the land case continued until 2014, when the Verdon Protection Association won an initial settlement of €30,000. A court decision in October 2018 was even more severe, ordering the Aumists to pay €70,000 in damages and legal fees, and giving them six months to restore the hill to its natural condition. The case is now on appeal in the Supreme Court of Appeals (Cour de Cassation). Starting in early December 2019, the order to restore the hillside is expected to be



enforced: the Mandarom community will be fined €500 a day for noncompliance, under a penalty that seems constructed to deliberately drain the finances of the religious group. Ms. Christine Amory, the current Chairwoman of the Non-profit Organization running the Mandarom community, said, “We will not pay.”

Additional information can be found on the Aumism website: www.aumisme.org.

—By Holly Folk, a historian of religion who teaches at Western Washington University.