



Reviewing and previewing religion in fractured times

It may not come as a surprise that the religious trends emerging in 2019 reflected many of the divides that mark society—from denominational schisms to new political-religious fractures. Yet some developments stemmed from actors and actions existing apart from political dynamics, even if they will carry considerable social impact. In this year’s review and preview of trends in religion, we will put the accent on the latter, particularly because our new publishing schedule brings our issue to readers already into the new year of 2020. As usual, we cite the issues of RW and other sources where these trends were reported.

1) The editorial in the mainstream evangelical *Christianity Today* magazine calling for the removal of President Donald Trump and criticizing fellow evangelicals for their loyalty to the president was given wide media coverage. For those unfamiliar with the diversity of American evangelicals, the editorial may have driven that point home. But it was the response and controversy surrounding the editorial that was more revealing about the new political configurations of conservative Christians. The responding “open letter” critical of the editorial was signed by a group of Christian leaders who are not well-known (largely Pentecostals and Baptists) and stood in relief from the prominent evangelical names defending the CT editorial. The way that Trump's evangelical supporters are not only populists in relation to political elites but also to evangelical elites was illuminated by the episode and will likely be spelled out more clearly in this election year.

2) The division in the Catholic Church over the leadership of Pope Francis has existed for several years. But last year’s Amazon Synod where the issue of clerical celibacy was broached, as well as the more recent case involving Pope emeritus Benedict XIV’s voicing his strong support of priestly celibacy in a co-authored book (though Benedict



retracted his co-authorship) has turned up the volume on charges of liberalization, even heresy, from the Catholic right. Added to that is new determination to pursue the cause of women deacons among liberal groups (encouraged by the consultation on the issue convened by the pope himself) and the more defiant tone of German Catholic leaders and activists to pursue such issues

as communion for remarried divorced. These events and developments may not suggest Catholic schism as much as uncertainty and confusion about the church's direction. (RW, Vol. 34, No. 4)

3) The impending schism in the United Methodist Church has been a long time coming, but the adoption of a “traditional” policy concerning ordination of LGBT individuals and same-sex marriage last year made it all but certain that this slow motion, defacto schism on these issues would become a reality. The announcement last month that conservatives and progressives would part ways in the form of a new denomination made up of “traditionalists” would seem to settle the matter. But it all may unravel as the May General Conference approaches, since it is not clear how resources would be allocated fairly in such a connectional, centralized church body where its bureaucracy has long been dominated by the progressive party. (RW 34:5)

4) The hardening of China's religious policy was on full view in 2019, especially in media revelations about the detention and brutal treatment of the Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang. That such a crackdown against religion will intensify and broaden is suggested by new administrative measures set to be implemented in February that stipulate that religious organizations promote the Communist Party and its ideology in its teachings. (RW 34:4; also see *Bitter Winter*: <https://bitterwinter.org/2019-administrative-measures-for-religious-groups/>)

5) The growth and visibility of anti-Semitic incidents in 2019 and into the new year is part of an uptick in hate crimes against religious minorities in the U.S., although its source is far from clear. On one hand, while these anti-Semitic incidents, such as those that took place in the New York area, target definite Jewish symbols and often observant orthodox Jews themselves, it is difficult to track down a specific source beyond individual hatreds and resentments. On the other hand, “lone wolf” terrorism—whether from Islamic extremism or far-right sources—has been shown to not be not as solitary as first thought, as such violent acts and actors are often linked to online networks and other forms of support. This was revealed last year in the finding that the perpetrator of the attack on the synagogue in Pittsburgh was part of a far-right network.

6) The dispute between the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Constantinople) and the Moscow Patriarchate regarding autocephaly granted to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) has not abated. The Patriarchate of Alexandria as well as a majority of the Greek Orthodox Church have now joined Constantinople in recognizing the new autocephalous church. Which other churches might follow remains unclear. In Ukraine itself, Orthodoxy remains divided, with a few hundred parishes under the Moscow Patriarchate having joined—more or less willingly—those already under the autocephalous OCU. Behind the Ukrainian controversy, the key issue, also decisive for the future shape of Orthodoxy around the world, centers around the role played by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the global communion of Orthodox churches. (RW 34:9)

Islamist violent extremism beyond ISIS is far from waning

Despite the eradication of ISIS's caliphate across Syria and Iraq in 2017, the group remains active, while 96 other Islamist extremist groups were tracked in 2018 by the annual Global Extremism Monitor (GEM). The authors of this detailed report released by the *Tony Blair*

Institute for Global Change (January 15) also includes developments monitored during the following year, such as the April 2019 attacks in Sri Lanka. The report notes that today's Islamic extremist groups can be traced back to networks and conflicts as far back as 40 years ago. But Islamist extremism is also spreading to new geographies, the report warns. It identifies several areas with a risk of Islamist extremism to grow, listing Bangladesh, Tunisia, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Kashmir and the Philippines as countries to be watched, where measures should be taken for preventing and countering such developments.

The map of Islamist groups appears as a complex and constantly changing one, with groups and organizations ebbing and flowing in and out of existence or being subsumed into jihadist coalitions, as well as evolving into new entities. While all subscribe to militant Islamism, groups



are often competing, and the report mentioned that ISIS targeted 19 other Islamist extremist groups in nearly one-third of their operations. Beside the use of violence for enforcing totalitarian projects, Islamist extremist groups are keen on exploiting vacuums of governance, thus showing the connection between stability and security, the report emphasizes. In many cases, beside their brutality, Islamist extremist groups have also provided some public services in difficult environments, as shown by al-Qaeda in Yemen or ISWAP (Islamic State's West Africa Province, still

usually known as Boko Haram) in northeast Nigeria and around Lake Chad. The report adds that Muslims continued to be the biggest victims of Islamist extremism, with 85 per cent of attacks against public targets occurring in Muslim-majority states.

(The full report can be read and downloaded [here](#))

Women pursuing Talmudic study

Study of the Talmud, long confined to men, especially in orthodox circles, is finding new interest and participation among orthodox Jewish women, reports the *New York Times* (January 5). The conclusion of an intensive international marathon of daily Talmud study in Jerusalem but streamed to an international audience showed a growing number of women who have joined the effort. The event drew 3,000 women to celebrate the end of a seven-and-a-half-year cycle of Talmud learning known as Daf Yomi. The idea behind Daf Yomi is to have Jews across the world synchronize their efforts to study the Talmud by focusing on the same page of the text



every day. The greater involvement of women in Talmud study has been aided by technology and social media (especially having access to the Talmud on tablets). There are now Daf Yomi phone apps, podcasts, and Facebook discussion groups. Haran, a new organization for women studying the Talmud co-founded by Michelle Cohen-Farber, sponsored the Jerusalem event and has been

instrumental in advancing Talmud study for women.

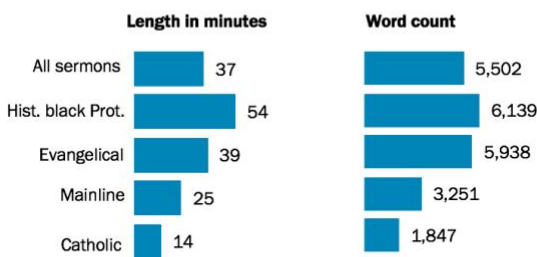
The establishment of Sefaria — a comprehensive digital Jewish library with English translation — has helped make Talmud study far more accessible to women across the Jewish world. A few women began the Daf Yomi program several decades ago, writes Isabel Kershner. “Talmud study has since been introduced in some religious girls’ schools and there has been growing interest in secular academia and modern Orthodox circles,” she writes. Although Talmud was traditionally seen as not relevant and too difficult for women to master by rabbis, there has so far been little push-back from orthodox men about this trend, even in Israel where liberal Jewish currents are less prevalent. One rabbi said that study of the Talmud used to be limited to yeshivah students and scholars, so any study of it by laypeople is new and has become the “in thing...Now everybody’s studying Daf Yomi.”

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **A study by the Pew Research Center finds striking differences in the length and content of American sermons according to their Christian traditions.** The study used computational tools to identify church in the Google Places application programming interface (API) and then collected, transcribed, and analyzed the sermons publicly posted on a representative sample of their websites during an eight-week period. The median sermon taken from congregational websites is 37 minutes long, with Catholic sermons being the briefest (at a median of just 14

Median historically black Protestant sermon is over three times as long as median Catholic homily

Median ____ of sermons



Note: Length figures include only sermons shared in a readable video or audio format. Word count figures include sermons posted in audio, video and text formats.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of sermons delivered April 7-June 1, 2019, and available on church websites (N=49,719 sermons from 6,431 churches that posted sermons online).

"The Digital Pulpit: A Nationwide Analysis of Online Sermons"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

minutes), compared with 25 minutes for sermons in mainline Protestant congregations and 39 minutes in evangelical Protestant congregations. The longest sermons were by far found in historically black Protestant churches, coming in at 54 minutes. Clergy across all major Christian traditions, are more likely to refer to books from the New Testament (90 percent do) than the Old Testament (61 percent). This pattern of citing the New Testament is especially pronounced in mainline Protestant and Catholic sermons. This may be due to Protestant and Catholic clergy preaching on the day’s Gospel reading from the lectionary. The analysis also picked up on the distinctive vocabulary in each

Christian tradition. While the word “hallelujah” is not unique to historically black Protestant services, the usage of it was a hallmark of black Protestant sermons. Catholic sermons tended to include the words “diocese” and “Eucharist.” The three terms most disproportionately used in evangelical sermons include variants of the phrases “eternal hell,” “lose ... salvation,” and “trespass ... sin.”

(The Pew report can be downloaded [here](#))

● **British television shows are portraying clergy and religion in a more favorable light than was the case two decades ago, although these depictions may also signal continuing secularization in Britain.**

A study, conducted by Andrew Crome of Manchester Metropolitan University and published in the online journal *Religions* (11,38), looked at recent television shows with clergy as central characters and how that shows what has been called the “new visibility of religion” thesis taking shape in secular Western societies. The shows, running between 2009 and 2019, are *Fleabag*, *Broadchurch*, *Broken*, and *Rev.*, and are compared with shows in the 1980s and 1990s, which tended to have a more negative depictions of clergy. Such shows as *Broken*, portray the way priests served the working class in ways that other people could not, even using imagery of the Eucharist to portray their sacrifice. The creators of *Rev.* show God’s intervention through the sacraments and in everyday life, and even the irreverent sexual humor of *Fleabag* shows the power of the priest’s vocation as he is unable to leave the priesthood. But while these shows do suggest a new visibility of religion in the media, Crome cautions that they assume a secularized society where religion is seen as exotic and performing a certain social function (such as in inner city ministry) but losing relevance for most people.



(*Religions*, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/1/38>)

Catholic traditionalism finds a following in Latin America

There has been a growth of Catholic traditionalism in Latin America as seen by the spread of the celebration of Latin Masses, reports Julie Gomes in the conservative web site, *The Church Militant* (December 25). Latin Masses are mushrooming in the main South American dioceses of Rio, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Bogota, Lima and Santiago, often attended by youth and young families. The website cites a frontpage article in the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale*, which



reported on the spurt in the Catholic traditionalist movement in Latin America: “Right-leaning blogs are multiplying, animated by young and very young people, with millions of followers. New political and cultural groups of conservative orientation are arising. Online conferences of traditionalist orientation are gaining notoriety. Stores of modest clothing are spreading, in open contrast to today's immoral or extravagant fashions. After

decades of virtual cultural monopoly of the Left, more and more books are being published and more and more conferences in the center-right area are being held. Sometimes the phenomenon can even be dazzling. For example, polls show 37 percent of Brazilians in favor of the restoration of the Brazilian monarchy.”

Brazil's traditionalist Catholic Good Shepherd Institute is also reporting a boom in vocations, with its members extolling the Gregorian liturgy. Juan Miguel Montes of the conservative Catholic group Tradition, Family and Property attributes the interest in traditionalism to the same trends driving the ascendancy of Protestantism as a reaction to a “sociological turn of preaching in the Catholic Church,” which he associates with liberation theology. He also associates this interest with the practice of traditional devotions, such as Marian practices, adding that such Catholics “are not afraid of introducing themselves for what they are, conservative Catholics, even in the way they dress. In politics, they are increasingly demanding from candidates...the non-negotiable principles preached by Benedict XVI, that is, the defense of life from conception to natural death, the family founded on the union of two people of different sex and the inviolable right of parents to choose education for their children.”

(*The Church Militant*, <https://www.churchmilitant.com/news/article/booming-traditional-catholicism-is-busting-progressivism-and-protestantism?>)

European Buddhism between Asian legacies and Western contexts

Faced with a loss of innocence in the West after the controversies regarding the abuses by some spiritual masters, Buddhism must also deal with key questions about finding a balance between



preserving ancient teachings and finding its European way, writes the former head of the unit for interreligious dialogue of the Archdiocese of Vienna (Austria), Werner Höbsch, in a contribution written for an issue on Buddhism in the West in the series *Weltanschauungen - Texte zur religiösen Vielfalt* (No. 113). Several features of Western European Buddhism represent challenges for its future at the same time. People with a higher level of education have been overrepresented among European Buddhists, and it remains to be seen how far it will be able to reach other milieus. The role

of well-educated lay people has been significant for European Buddhism, with the role of Buddhist monasteries and religious orders being less important than in Asian countries. This raises the question of the future development of monasteries and orders, but also of the interaction between those in the West and their Asian counterparts.

The intra-Buddhist relations in Europe are also changing, with growing interactions after a long period when Asian and European Buddhist groups led separate lives. The role of Buddhist

umbrella organizations for fostering exchanges is likely to prove crucial. But there will remain questions about the ways of organizing Buddhism in Western environments, since social forms of Asian Buddhism cannot be merely transplanted in the West and Western Buddhists are often reluctant to reproduce Asian hierarchical models. The place of women in Western Buddhist groups is highly significant, including in some leadership roles (e.g. teaching), in contrast with male-dominated Asian Buddhism. It will be interesting to observe how this will impact worldwide Buddhism. Many people in the West develop an interest in Buddhism through meditation and practices which they see as personal spiritual enrichment and as a way without church and dogma, even going as far in some cases as promoting “secular Buddhism.” However, Buddhism is not limited to the individual and also involves ethical awareness and actions, so it remains to be seen how social responsibility will be put into practice and propagated in the West, in the way the “engaged Buddhism” approaches it.

(*Weltanschauungen - Texte zur religiösen Vielfalt*, <https://www.weltanschauungsfragen.at/>)

New Age Sufism finds fertile ground in Egypt

Meditation practices inspired from Sufism are gaining popularity in the Egyptian capital Cairo as people are looking for alternatives to rigid religious practices, writes Egyptian journalist Dalia Chams on the French website *Orient XXI* (January 9). This is a recent phenomenon, acknowledges 46-year-old Sonia Hassan, an



American Egyptian-born meditation teacher who was trained at the US-based University of Spiritual Healing & Sufism and claims to have been the first to have associated Sufism with Zen meditation in Egypt in the years after the 2011 Egyptian revolution. She uses the Islamic names of God as mantras and starts meditation with the first verses of the Quran, but also applies yoga respiration methods. Chams remarks that New Age Sufism is not a new phenomenon. Groups derived from the Sufi Order in the West, founded in 1914 by musician and spiritual teacher Inayat Khan (1882-1927), have found their place in the New Age milieu in the West, while emancipating themselves from a purely Islamic reference as they spread to non-Muslim countries. Non-Muslim foreigners also attend meditation practices in Cairo, but for Muslims the fact of using the names of Allah instead of Sanskrit mantras allows them to connect to something already familiar. Chams observes that not a few participants have already experimented with various spiritual or therapeutic practices.

This trend is part of a modern revival of interest in Sufism, evidenced by the phenomenal success of a book by Turkish novelist Elif Shafak, *The Forty Rules of Love*, that was translated into Arabic in 2013 and is reported to have sold ten million copies in Egypt. According to Chams, all

this is paving the way to developments not unlike those of the 1960s in the US. People who are urban, modern, Westernized to some extent, not secular but neither satisfied with standard offers on the Muslim religious market, are becoming open to psychologists, therapists and spiritual coaches. Online social networks are also helping such ideas to spread. Moreover, one should remember that the New Age, urban nature of this phenomenon also benefits from the popular image of the more widespread traditional Sufism, with some 80 traditional Sufi brotherhoods in Egypt and likely numbering up to 9 million faithful.

(*Orient XXI*, <https://orientxxi.info>; *University of Spiritual Healing & Sufism*, <https://sufiuniversity.org/>; *Elif Shafak*, <https://www.elifsafak.com.tr/home>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ *American JewBu* (Princeton University Press, \$29.95) by Emily Sigalow, is both a history and sociological study of the phenomenon of Jews converting to or simultaneously practicing Buddhism. The book is also one of a growing number of works that explores the growth of religious syncretism or at least “dual religion” in the West, where once this pattern was most evident in Eastern societies. The history of Jewish involvement and interest in Buddhism stretches back over a century in the U.S. and such borrowing and fascination has not only been a one-way affair. Sigalow writes that the Jewish adaptation of Buddhism, starting with intellectuals practicing Zen over a century ago, has had the effect

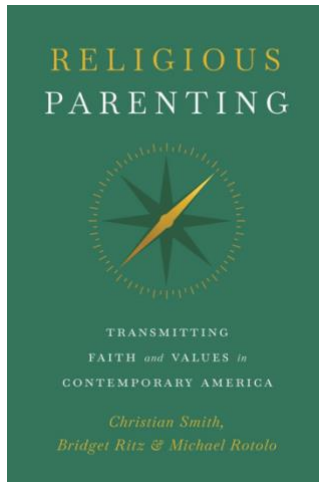


of secularizing Buddhism of its distinctive religious traditions (stressing meditation over rituals) while reviving spirituality in American Judaism. The unique minority position of Jews, making them the first large non-Christian immigrant population in the U.S. facilitated much of this interchange. Buddhism’s remove from the Jewish-Catholic-Protestant establishment appealed to liberal Jews as well as to other later countercultural intellectuals, but Buddhism has since moved from the “left periphery” and gained wider acceptance among Jewish Americans, mainly through its mindfulness practices and “medicalization” (seeing meditation as healthy). Sigalow adds that another possible reason for the Jewish-Buddhist affinity may be that the structural openness of Buddhist centers allowed for those of other persuasions to participate without feeling they must choose between one or the other affiliation.

As Jews increasingly fill the ranks of Buddhist centers and teachers, such an accumulating presence has made these institutions and leadership positions more appealing and welcoming to other Jewish practitioners. Through interviews, Sigalow finds that Jews involved in Buddhism are largely divided between those whose primary religious-spiritual identity is Buddhist even as they retain a Jewish ethnic identity and those who use Buddhist practices to support a Jewish religious identity. The syncretistic concept and label of a “JewBu” identity is welcomed by younger generations, seeing the “identity as a way of staking out a progressive and sometimes even radical social position further to the left of the mainstream American Jewish community.” Older Jewish Buddhist practitioners tend to reject the label, seeing it as shortchanging both identities. Sigalow concludes that just as Jews changed the non-ethnic American Buddhist community, the younger JewBus, especially those from Asian-Jewish families and marriages, may bring new changes to Judaism. “Perhaps the next period of Jewish-Buddhist encounter

in the United States will be one in which Jews take an interest in Buddhism and Buddhists take an interest in Judaism, and the result of these crossovers are new creative Jewish Buddhist and Buddhist Jewish outcomes,” Sigalow concludes.

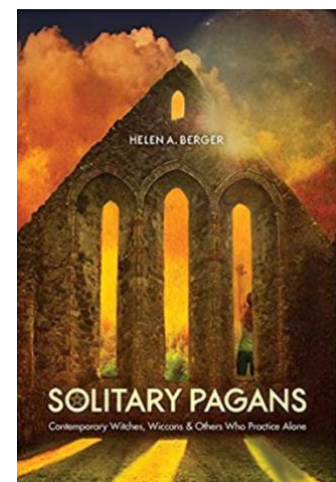
■ Although religious socialization is often seen as major factor in secularization and religious vitality, there has not been much research on the role of religious parenting (though more on children) in such outcomes, something the new book *Religious Parenting* (Princeton University Press, \$35) attempts to remedy. The book, by Christian Smith, Bridget Ritz, and Michael Rotolo, looks at the various parenting strategies, practices, and beliefs across the religious spectrum. Based on a national survey of 235



religious and non-religious parents, the book focuses on the 215 self-identified religious participants. The study tends to find more similarity than differences among parents on the importance of transmitting their particular faith, but there was also more moderation on a didactic approach to keeping children in the faith (black Protestants are the exception here). The one thing most agreed on was their concern about their children moving to an “extremist” and “fanatical” religion. Immigrant and conservative religious parents did show more concern about their children leaving their faiths, but Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo generally found a strong this-worldly orientation—religion as promoting family-togetherness and helping children to lead a better and more fulfilling life—rather than a concern with salvation and life after death among most parents (again, conservative Protestants being the exception).

The pragmatic tone of the parents carried over into their attitudes toward the authority of their respective religions. The Catholic parents were among the most individualistic, feeling authorized to question and decide beliefs of their tradition, while Jews and Muslims felt little conflict with their religions. The authors conclude that most of the religious parents tend to see the transmission of their faiths to their children through a framework of a “this-worldly resource.” This is where religion is valued for its practical ability to help with life problems and relationships and to foster “values” rather than with maintaining distinctive beliefs and traditions. Smith’s previous formulation of the belief system of young people (known as Moral Therapeutic Deism) is clearly in play among these parents. It was also found that these parents see religious socialization as a “family project” rather than a more communal endeavor in partnership with congregations, religious education, and youth workers.

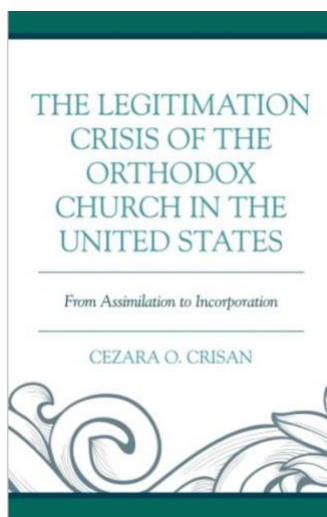
■ The popular image of Pagans engaged in group rituals and magic is debunked in Helen Berger’s new book *Solitary Pagans* (University of South Carolina Press, \$34.99), as she finds a growing number of solo practitioners. Berger bases much of the book on a “Pagan Census,” where she surveys Pagan practitioners about their beliefs and practices (this is an online survey of 6,000 U.S. pagans and is not a random sample). She notes that the percentage of solitary practitioners has grown from just over 50 percent in her first census to 78 percent in her most recent survey. Berger argues that while it may be true that contemporary Pagans (or Neopagans) have embraced religious individualism, they are far from socially isolated (even if they have fewer ties to those who work in groups, they still attend festivals



and participate in social media networks) or politically uninvolved. In fact, while solitary Pagans are less politically involved than those involved in group practice, they are still more active than most other Americans. Berger's findings cover wider ground than the group and solitary dynamics of paganism. She writes that the main factor in the rise of solitary Paganism was the overall increase and diversification in Pagan interest and involvement overall, and much of this is mediated through the Internet, which suits individual-based religion and spirituality.

But there is not much of a difference in the kinds of Pagan beliefs and practices according to whether practitioners embrace a group or solitary style (although the majority consider themselves "goddess worshippers," "wiccan" and "witches.") Paganism (especially the solitary kind) is attracting a younger following, much of it based on entertainment media such as on teen witches, as well as Internet involvement. In fact, younger practitioners make up 36 percent of Berger's U.S. sample, while baby boomers comprise 34 percent. Other changes that Berger found since her first census is a growth of non-tech and STEM professions among Pagans; still largely female (71.6 percent) and growing in that regard; contemporary Pagans are more rural based than the rest of Americans (though most are still urban and suburban); right-wing Pagans are still a small minority (about one percent), although such a group as the Heathens (stressing European ethnic roots and not all racist) are attracting among the youngest people to their ranks. Berger concludes that Paganism is a disorganized religion, but she differs from secularization theorists, who see such a diffuse movement with fuzzy boundaries as lacking social and moral influence and headed for extinction. Rather, she argues that Pagans do have boundaries, even if they are weaker than other religions, and show a set of ethics that is largely women-based and concerned with "caring and connecting."

■ The ways that different interests and needs of older assimilated members, a newer wave of immigrants from the post-Soviet Union, and converts to Eastern Orthodoxy in America conflict in this venerable Christian tradition is the subject of the new book, *The Legitimation Crisis of the Orthodox Church in the United States* (Lexington Books, \$80). Author Cezara O. Crisan, a sociologist from Purdue University, refers to the "crisis" in the Orthodox churches as relating to the way that the various parties have different expectations and visions of the church that often hampers its broader ministry and role in society. Crisan bases her research on an ethnographic study of Orthodox parishes in the Midwest along

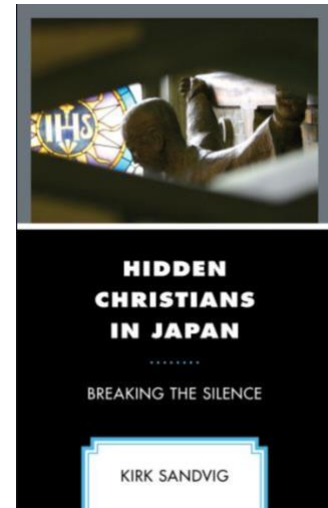


with an analysis of a national study of Eastern Orthodox immigrant churches. The sociologist focuses on the distinctive nature of the newer immigration from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union largely in the non-ethnic Orthodox Church in America (OCA), where she finds (along with other immigrants) transnational identities take precedent over the older model of assimilation (other more ethnic Orthodox bodies, such as the Greek Orthodox Church and the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese are not included in this study). These immigrants tend to favor older ethnic traditions—many of which have been discarded by Orthodox parishes—and distance themselves from participation in democratic decision-making process in these churches.

Through interviews, Crisan finds that these immigrants don't feel that these Americanized parishes offer the traditions and help they need to pass on the faith (and ethnic traditions) to their children. But because influxes of newer ethnic members are still needed to financially sustain parishes, their influence can also

prevent needed reforms and the evangelizing of American society, which frustrates priests and bishops (many of whom are converts) as they seek to minister to everybody in the parish. While Eastern Orthodoxy has become attractive to non-ethnic Americans for its spirituality and practices in recent years, Crisan argues that these converts, who tend to have more in common with the older, assimilated members as they de-emphasize ethnic belonging, may also be discouraged in these ethnically dominated parishes. As long as these competing interests and needs are unmet not addressed by the church, this “crisis of legitimacy” will persist and may even intensify in Eastern Orthodox churches in the U.S. as nationalism grows at home and abroad, Crisan concludes.

■ Japan’s “hidden Christians” who went into seclusion during three centuries of persecution, managed to retain an amalgam of Christian practices, beliefs, and artifacts through familial devotion and transmission up to the present day, even as Christianity became legal and a segment of practitioners joined established churches. But that effort to preserve the hidden Christian identity is faltering due to the loss of communal ties, writes Kirk Sandvig in his new book *Hidden Christians in Japan* (Lexington Books, \$90). In recent years communities of hidden Christians in remote parts of Japan have disbanded, leading Sandvig to focus on the bleak prospects of their influence continuing. The author looks at Hidden Christian communities on the islands of Goto and Ikitsuki where Hidden Christian practices are on the verge of imminent demise. The Japanese practice of ancestor veneration most strongly seen among Buddhist and Shinto adherents has been adopted by hidden Christian communities, though directed toward Christian martyrs who faced persecution.



Even if distinct Christian beliefs had faded, family rituals helped perpetuated these communities up until recently, with the growth of tourism and the display of artifacts (images of saints, Mary, and Jesus) in museums giving public recognition to the hidden Christians. But the shift in the multi-generational household structure of hidden Christian families, with members living apart to a greater extent, younger people migrating to the cities, and the growth of intermarriage is further dissolving these communities, a process ironically intensified due to the tourism surrounding hidden Christian sites. Sandvig concludes that hidden Christians have increasingly taken up an amalgam of Buddhist and Shinto practices (with parents now preferring to teach their children only those observances), with the meanings behind Christian rituals largely fading. The solution of joining the Catholic Church (which is most similar to hidden Christian’s beliefs and practices) has been taken up by some hidden Christians, but others resist the exclusive nature of Catholicism and rather tend to transfer their beliefs and practices to other religions.

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

The newly launched **Hurma Project** is a Muslim expression of the broader #MeToo movement and is direct response to cases of sexual abuse by leaders in the Islamic community. The project, started by Canadian Islamic scholar Ingrid Mattson, recently had its first conference looking at abuse in Muslim

spaces. Reporting and conversations on sexual and spiritual abuse in the Muslim community has been ongoing for several years, particularly in the wake of revelations about scandals involving preacher and teachers such as Bayyinah Institute founder and prominent preacher Nouman Ali Khan, who was caught Tariq Ramadan, a prominent Swiss Islamic scholar; and Usama Canon, of the Ta'leef Collective. Observers also attribute the new movement to the new opportunities for women's leadership and in Muslim spaces. (Source: *Hurma Project*, <https://hurmaproject.com/>)

