

Politics driving new divisions among Catholics and evangelicals

Both Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism have been seen as the more stable segments of Christianity in the U.S., but political pressures, such as the growth of populism, and the loss of Christian influence in the country are leading to new divisions and even fragmentation among these Christians, according to two reports. In the conservative ecumenical magazine *First Things* (August), Ross Douhat writes that up until recently, Catholics in the U.S. may have been divided into liberal and conservative camps, but they “took for granted the harmony between their interpretation of post-Vatican II Catholicism and their interpretation of the liberal order.” These Catholics gravitated to either the Democratic or Republican parties, depending on their views of capitalism, the welfare state, and the implications of the sexual revolution, including abortion, but they were broadly united in their support of liberal democracy. But recent years have seen new divisions and subgroups form among Catholic intellectuals and writers that question the status quo and liberal order, and their influence may soon be felt among parishes and other Catholic institutions. As liberal America and the Democrats have become further secularized to the point of putting new pressures on religious institutions, and as the political failures of mainstream Republicans have raised doubts about their fusion of free-market advocacy and traditional values, a reshuffling of the deck is taking place.

Douhat writes that the new configurations can be seen in four new Catholic schools that relate faith to society and politics: 1) *Populist* Catholics see the shifts brought about by Donald Trump as congruent with church teaching, correcting too close of an alliance with libertarians, and they favor such “corporatist” measures as a family wage, immigration restrictions, and ramping up the culture wars to fight elitist liberalism. The editors of *First Things* clearly sympathize with these views. 2) The *integralist* Catholics want to throw the whole liberal order into question as they seek a Catholic politics that will govern the church as well as the state. While the proponents of this resurrected philosophy (such as Gladden Pappin of *American Affairs* magazine) are vague about its actual implications in U.S. politics, they specifically press for greater political independence in governing the church and a willingness to use state power. 3) The *benedictines* are also wary of the current order, but they favor redirecting their energy toward creating

countercultural communities and engaging in greater evangelization. Championed by such writers as Rod Dreher and Leah Libresco Sargeant, this camp may see its fortunes grow during periods of secularist dominance. 4) The *tradinistas* mainly target capitalism and seek to revive a form of Catholic socialism. These Catholics write for older liberal journals such as *Commonweal* while allowing for a more a conservative view on sexuality and the family, and they are, as might be expected, fervent admirers of Pope Francis. Douthat notes that the borders of these categories are not fixed and there may be some overlap between them (for instance, populists who are also sympathetic to integralism). But he argues that with the continued weakening of Catholic institutions, in terms of decreased participation and resources, growing anti-Catholic attitudes from the wider secular society, and what he sees as indecisive leadership from Pope Francis, these new models for how the church may engage society can take on greater importance.

Meanwhile, evangelicals are experiencing similar ferment, although in their case fragmentation has already reached believers in the pews, according to a post by Michael Graham and Skyler Flowers on the blog *Mere Orthodoxy* (June 7). As with Catholics, recent political changes are behind evangelicals' fracturing into what the authors, after consulting with pastors and other church leaders, see as the following six subgroups: 1) *Neo-fundamentalist evangelicals* have been influenced the most by "Christian nationalism" (a syncretism of right-wing nationalism and Christianity), although they have deeper theological commitments than that movement, seeing the major challenge to the church being theological and political liberalism. 2) *Mainstream evangelicals* have retained the focus on evangelism, while also showing concern about both the secular right's and, to a greater extent, leftist influence on the church. 3) *Neo-evangelicals* have a stronger identity as "world Christians" and prefer not to use the label "evangelical" in some circumstances because it has taken on greater political connotations. These are the evangelicals



concerned with conservative Christian support for Trump and critical about how they think evangelicals have not dealt with questions of race and sexuality. 4) *Post-evangelicals* no longer use the term “evangelical” to identify themselves. Although most have remained “churched,” and some are still in evangelical congregations, others have sought greener pastures in mainline, Catholic, and Orthodox congregations. Their main concern is the inroads of abuse, corruption, hypocrisy, and Christian nationalism.

Graham and Flowers also include “dechurched evangelicals” and “deconverted evangelicals” (those who have left the faith altogether) in their taxonomy, but it is the first four subgroups that are having the most fragmenting effect in evangelicalism. As with the Catholic typology, there is considerable overlap among these camps, but the interaction of these different types is causing new tensions in congregations, especially between neo-fundamentalists and neo-evangelicals and between mainstream evangelicals and post-evangelicals (which might take place in a megachurch). Graham and Flowers add that similar dynamics of conflict may play out in denominations, and especially parachurch organizations and large campus ministries, where it will be “difficult to find a least common denominator satisfying to a very broad group as many will be dissatisfied.”

(*First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/08/catholic-ideas-and-catholic-realities>; *Mere Orthodoxy*, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/six-way-fracturing-evangelicalism/#R548111-ecb96e90-C5BW67JQ>)

Pope’s move to limit Latin Mass testing church’s unity within diversity?

Pope Francis’ recent motu proprio letter, *Traditionis custodes*, which puts new restrictions on the celebration of the Latin Mass, will weaken the role of traditionalists in the church, though there is some debating just how large and influential the Latin Mass community really is. The pope’s letter comes on the heels of concerns expressed by the Vatican and a segment of the world’s bishops about the divisive nature of the Latin Mass in the church, especially among devotees who question the validity of the Novus Ordo Mass introduced at the Second Vatican Council and associated teachings that sought to update the church’s teachings and practices. The new document calls for greater oversight and control over Latin Mass and, more significantly, says that new Latin Masses have to get Vatican approval. In a blog for the conservative *First Things* magazine (July 20), Raymond de Souza notes that the motu proprio may be the first papal document to respond largely to an Internet phenomenon. He explains that the traditionalists whom the Vatican has become so agitated about tend to congregate on blogs and social media where they wage battles against the modern church and its liturgy, most notably the following of Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, a sharp critic of Pope Francis. But de Souza adds that there are vast numbers of Latin Mass goers who are uninvolved in these skirmishes. Yet he concludes that such a papal response to the Internet won’t be the last, as the Internet now shapes “public governance of the liturgy, and consequently, the church’s worship.”



Source: Andrewgardner1 - Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license).

In the conservative British magazine *The Spectator* (July 19), Tim Stanley hews to the overwhelming view of conservative and traditionalist Catholics that the pope is seeking to stop a flourishing movement that is the future of the church. Stanley points to large, young families filling the pews for Latin Masses and to seminaries with ranks of future priests eager to say the old rite. He argues that “we all know deep down that [the pope’s action] is a desperate last stand by the 1960s generation of clerics, a generation that is about 10 years from losing its grip on power.” In a somewhat similar vein, political scientist Anthony Gill writes in *Law and Liberty* (July 27) that the pope’s action will weaken the church and not have the unifying effect for which he had hoped. Gill writes that the genius of Catholicism is that it has supported a wide diversity of traditions while maintaining unity. While the number of Latin Mass devotees may be small, they represent a devout group of Catholics, and alienating them will deprive the church in the long run of needed resources (money and labor) and commitment.

Gill adds that from an institutional perspective, the pope’s limiting of the Latin Mass may be his attempt to signal his preference for the next pope and mobilize progressive forces ahead of the next election. In *Sapientia* (July 21), the blog of Fordham University’s Center on Religion and Culture, journalist David Gibson questions the popular narrative that Latin Mass devotees represent a growing vital segment of the U.S. church. He cites data from the Latin Mass Directory as showing that the Tridentine (Latin) Mass is attended by a minuscule number of Catholics who are outside of the actual Catholic growth centers of the global South. He even finds that the numbers drawn to the old rite have peaked and are on the downturn. And a survey finding Latin Mass growth has been faulted for relying on self-selected respondents. But Gibson

does acknowledge the influence of Latin Mass proponents (calling them “liturgical One Percenters” and the “uber elite”) in that they have the money and platform in industrialized countries to wage a campaign against the Francis papacy.

(*First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/07/for-pope-francis-the-mass-is-the-message>; *Spectator*, <https://spectatorworld.com/topic/pope-merciless-war-against-old-rite/>; *Law and Liberty*, <https://lawliberty.org/divine-diseconomy/>; *Sapientia*, <https://crc.blog.fordham.edu/faith-religion/latin-mass-hysteria/>)

January 6 as both a political and Christian revolt

Although it is unlikely that the January 6 riots on the U.S. Capitol will be explained to everyone’s satisfaction, even after late July’s public hearings on the issue, the role of religion in the revolt is becoming clearer, at least as far as who the actors were and the dynamics driving them. In the *Washington Post* (July 6), Michelle Boorstein reports that many religious observers see the Capitol attacks as an example of the religious ferment that presaged movements such as Mormonism and Pentecostalism. Most observers and specialists note how the religious element



Source: Ted Eytan (licensed under Creative Commons ShareAlike 4.0 International Attribution).

of the protests and subsequent riot were largely leaderless and disconnected from clergy, congregations, and denominations (although some church members were bussed in for the earlier rally). Aside from protestors and rioters who were part of alternative and syncretistic spiritualities, such as the much publicized horn-wearing “shaman,” the participants saw themselves as Christian rebels, or as one woman told a judge, a “free living soul.”

Paul Froese of Baylor University says that Christian nationalists, who blend nationalist rhetoric with Christian themes, are prime examples of such disconnected Christians. In a recent paper, he reports that Americans who have Christian nationalist beliefs and don’t attend church are more likely to have voted for and to support Trump compared to those who attend more regularly. The *Post* article also cites University of Chicago political scientist Robert Pape, who found in his research on the January 6 rioters that any religious role in the event was not due to deep indoctrination or education. He said that such individuals “tend to have a thin knowledge and understanding of their religion. Recruits tend to be making individual decisions about the ideologies they want to follow and even what it means. It’s very much at the level of the individual.” Going through the court records of January 6 rioters, Boorstein concludes by profiling some of them, including one former pastor of a “cowboy church” who left his congregation after his arrest, and a woman with a Pentecostal background who dropped out of church and now considers herself a healer who was a preacher for Christ on January 6.

Facebook’s post-pandemic religious moment

Facebook is making a concerted effort to reach out to religious groups following the pandemic, reports Elizabeth Culliford for Reuters (July 22). A major component of the outreach is a new prayer feature that allows users to request and receive prayer. As early as 2017, CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that he wanted to create a team focused on “faith partnerships,” and the pandemic gave new urgency to these efforts, culminating in the company holding its first virtual faith summit with religious leaders last month. Outgoing Facebook app head Fidji Simo said that when she “looked at the data of what was taking off during the pandemic, we were seeing massive growth in the spiritual category.” At the end of May, Facebook made its prayer tool accessible for all U.S. Facebook Groups. The tool is used to make a request for prayer for a particular person or concern, to which people can then reply by clicking a button to say “I prayed,” with their names counted underneath. Users can choose to be notified with a reminder to pray again the next day. The prayer posts are also used to personalize ads on Facebook, as with other content, although advertisers will not be able to directly target ads based on the content of prayers.

While many religious leaders interviewed by Reuters welcomed Facebook’s attention in a year when the pandemic forced faith communities to stay at home, some users cited concerns over the privacy of prayer posts, questioning how their spiritual activities could be exploited. Early in the pandemic, as places of worship closed down, Facebook sent faith groups “starter kits” with



Source: The Digital Artist - Pixabay license.

equipment like small tripods and phone holders for live-streaming and shooting content. This year it has started up an Interfaith Advisory Council to hold regular meetings with faith leaders and educators, and the company has been picking the brains of organizations already running large online faith platforms, like evangelical megachurch Life.Church. The religious turn is seen as beneficial for Facebook, as it faces attacks from global regulators and lawmakers over its track record of failing to curb harmful content. “Connecting the faithful during a global pandemic is the kind of application [Facebook] says it wants to double down on,” writes Culliford.

Pandemic likely to leave some lasting marks on American Orthodox parishes

The pandemic has forced American Orthodox parishes to adopt amazingly quick innovations but has also led to fierce arguments over the restrictions in some parishes, writes Alexei Krindatch in a newly-released report on the pandemic’s impact on these parishes that extends and updates observations shared in a previous report last year (see **RW**, Vol. 35, No. 10). The report is part of a collaborative effort across Christian denominations, coordinated by the Hartford Institute for Religious Research and the Faith Communities Today research initiative. The research was conducted during the first half of July, with 151 clergy representing all jurisdictions answering a questionnaire. Krindatch notes that parishes have been differently affected by the pandemic depending on the extent to which their regions were impacted. About 44 percent of parishes never ceased in-person services (93 percent of those under the Russian Orthodox Church Outside

of Russia [ROCOR]). Sixty percent of the clergy sometimes had the feeling that this was the most difficult year in their priestly experience, and 32 percent reported having thought once or several times about resigning from the clerical vocation (this ranging from only 9 percent among ROCOR priests up to 45 percent among clergy of the Orthodox Church in America [OCA]).

Unexpectedly, nearly half of American Orthodox parishes (48 percent) experienced an increase in donations, while 18 percent experienced a decline. Regular participation in parish life decreased, with the exception of most ROCOR parishes reporting a marked increase of in-person worship attendance compared with pre-pandemic figures. However, Krindatch writes that “when taking into account both in-person and online attendance, the pandemic had relatively little impact on the number of people worshipping in American Orthodox parishes on a typical weekend. Nearly the same percentage of parishes reported either increase (45 percent) or decrease (46 percent) in attendance now versus two years ago.” The pandemic has indeed spectacularly boosted the use of the Internet for liturgical services (with the percentage of American Orthodox parishes offering online services jumping from 13 to 64 percent as early as May 2020, according to a previous report), but also for religious education, rather successfully for adults but sometimes with mixed results for children (due to Zoom fatigue). According to the results of the survey, “about one-third (32 percent) of the regular attendees in American Orthodox parishes now take part in their churches’ worship remotely from their homes. In the



Source: International Religious Liberty Archives.

two largest American Orthodox jurisdictions—GOA (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese) and OCA—this percentage is even slightly higher: 36 percent. Very differently, in ROCOR parishes, the audience attending online is relatively small: only 10 percent of all regular worshippers.”

(The 25-page-long report can be downloaded from the Orthodox Reality website, <https://orthodoxreality.org/reports/>)

Identity politics drives Buddhist turn among younger Asian Americans

There has long been a division between Asian American Buddhists and mainly white converts to the religion, and while there have been recent efforts to reconcile the two groups, recent political developments are reasserting ethnic Buddhist identity among young members, according to a report by *NBC News* (July 9). “[I]n the racial reckoning sparked by Black Lives Matter and the murder of George Floyd, growing anti-Asian racism during the pandemic and the coming of age of a younger, more outspoken, generation, Asian American Buddhists...are challenging the white-dominant narratives of Buddhism and re-centering Asian American identity in what it means to be Buddhist in the U.S.,” according to



Source: Asian American Buddhist Voices.

writer Caitlin Yoshiko Kandil. Chenxing Han, author of *Be the Refuge: Raising the Voices of Asian American Buddhists*, says that “Asian American Buddhists are tired of being ignored.”

Devon Matsumoto, 23, a social worker in the San Francisco Bay Area, grew up going to his Japanese Buddhist temple but noticed that Hollywood and the media depicted Buddhism usually showing a white person meditating in the mountains, which didn’t match his own life experience. Last year Matsumoto and about a dozen other people created The Young Buddhist Editorial, an online forum for Gen Z and millennial Asian American Buddhists to share their own writings and art. The group also started social justice book clubs and virtual workshops about “anti-Blackness;” curated a “Humans of Buddhism” photo exhibit; and compiled stories, poetry and art to honor people of Japanese descent incarcerated during World War II. After the shootings of eight people, including six Asian women, in the Atlanta area in March, the forum held a healing

circle. “We’re trying to say: ‘This is how we as an Asian American Buddhist community, this is how we say we want to go, this is how we say we want to be represented,’” said Matsumoto, the group’s president.

Luxury apartment developments offering spiritual space and services

Luxury apartment complexes are offering spiritual services as part of “wellness” amenities to residents, especially in the wake of the pandemic, reports Candace Jackson in the *New York Times* (July 18). “Several new developments around the country are offering meditation, healers, shaman and spiritual concierge programs—taking wellness several steps beyond on-site yoga and Pilates. In an age of self-care and mental health awareness, developers are hoping the offerings will appeal to those who have embraced spirituality as part of a wellness lifestyle,” Jackson writes. The Gardenhouse development in Beverly Hills will have monthly spiritual experiences related to lunar cycles and a healing ceremony led by a shaman, while the Maverick complex in New York City has a spiritual concierge on hand who provides residents with a “one-stop shop” for those unfamiliar with navigating and vetting the spirituality marketplace. The concierges are often not paid by residents and don’t have fixed desks in building lobbies. Other developers incorporate distinctive spiritual practices for their residents. Gravity, a sprawling new development in Columbus, Ohio, includes a Transcendental Meditation (TM) center. Developer Brett Kaufman is a TM practitioner himself and says that his development is a “conscious community” that treats mental and spiritual health in the same way as physical health and the provision of running clubs and yoga studios.

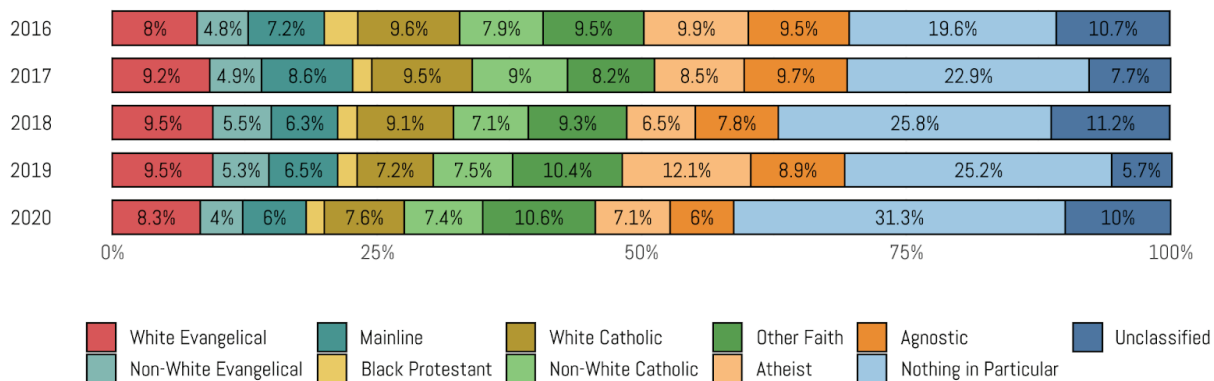


CURRENT RESEARCH

• **The most recent data on Generation Z shows a higher rate of non-affiliation and secularism compared to Millennials and preceding generations, writes Ryan Burge in the blog *Religion in Public* (July 15).** Burge analyzes the 2019 and 2020 waves of the Cooperative Election Study and finds that those belonging to Generation Z (born in 1996 or later) have secularized in significant ways as they have gotten older and moved into adulthood. In 2016, about 39 percent of the generation were “nones,” while today it is up to 44.4 percent. Seven percent now identify as atheists, six percent as agnostics, and another 31 percent say they are “nothing in particular.” The percentage identifying as Protestant or Catholic went down to 35 percent in 2020 from 41 percent in 2016. Broken down by racial groups, Burge finds that a substantial 47 percent of African Americans in this generation are now nones (even though they are more hesitant to embrace an atheist or agnostic identity), while Latinos are the only group where Christians outnumber nones. As previous surveys have shown, politically liberal members of Generation Z are much more likely to be non-affiliated and atheist and agnostic, though Burge notes that the rate of nones among conservatives has also climbed, increasing from 20 to 29 percent.

(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2021/07/19/generation-z-and-religion-the-most-recent-data/>)

Religious Traditions Among Generation Z - Born in 1996 or Later



@ryanburge
Data: CES 2016-2020

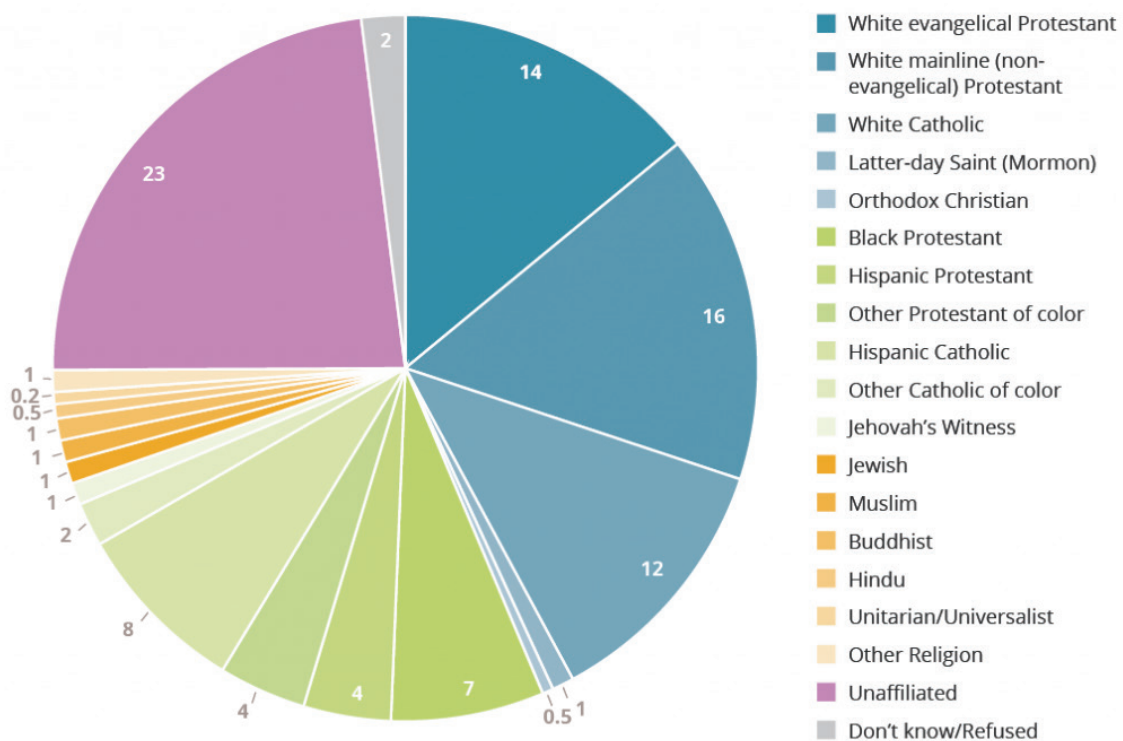
• **A new “religious census” of the U.S. finds evangelical decline and unexpected but small growth among mainline Protestants.** In the absence of census-style data (as the U.S. Census does not ask questions on religion), researchers at the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) conducted a study over the course of seven years, asking nearly 500,000 respondents not just about religion, but also age, race and ethnicity, geography, and political preference. The study found a “mainline rebound” that drove a slight increase in white Christians between 2018 and

2020. Since 2007, white mainline (non-evangelical) Protestants have declined from 19 percent of the population to a low of 13 percent in 2016, but the last three years have seen small but steady increases, up to 16 percent in 2020. As white evangelical numbers continued to decline, the percentage of religiously unaffiliated Americans went up, and there appeared to be an association between the two trends with ex-evangelicals moving to the “none” category. Over the last three years, however, the unaffiliated category has stabilized while the white evangelical exodus has continued. What was once a supermajority of white Christians—with more than 80 percent of Americans identifying as such in 1976, and two-thirds in 1996—has now plateaued at about 44 percent, according to the new survey.

(The PRRI's study can be downloaded here: <https://www.prri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>)

FIGURE 1. The American Religious Landscape in 2020

Percent who identify as:



Source: PRRI 2020 American Values Atlas.

• **The debate about the effects of the pandemic on religious beliefs and practices will continue for several years, but at least one study among committed believers in Britain finds that Covid-19 had a positive impact on their faith, reflecting findings in the U.S.** Writing in the London-based *Church Times* (July 2), Leslie Francis and Andrew Village look at how the first few months of the pandemic (up to July 2020) affected believers, drawing on data

provided by 3,678 laypeople identifying as Catholic and Anglican who had participated in online services. The data shows that more participants, 57 percent, reported enhanced faith compared with only seven percent who reported a deterioration in personal faith. Fifty percent reported enhanced prayerfulness compared with 12 percent who reported less prayerfulness, while 43 percent said they felt closer to God compared with 10 percent who felt more distant. Francis and Village found that Catholics were more likely to report these positive effects than Anglicans. How people engaged in online services also had some impact on faith enhancement: those who took a more active part in preparing for online services, such as by lighting candles and typing in prayer requests, reported enhanced faith.

(*Church Times*, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk>)



- **Religious teaching was a key factor in the high rate of Covid-19 infections among the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel, according to a study published in the journal *Contemporary Jewry* (online July 20).** While observers have cited the ultra-Orthodox population's living patterns and segregation from the rest of society in accounting for its high rate of infection (with 40 percent of all cases in Israel coming from the ultra-Orthodox sector), it has not been clear whether cultural or faith factors have been more decisive in this health crisis. The study, conducted by Sara Zalcborg and Sima Zalcborg Block, is based on in-depth interviews with 25 ultra-Orthodox individuals who either contracted the disease or had contact with a

Covid-19 patient. The study acknowledges the structural factors involved in the spread of the virus in the community, such as housing and population density, lack of access to public health information, and close contact between members in frequent gatherings, as well as the ideological factors, such as the belief that the Ministry of Health discriminates against the community. But the authors argue that even these factors are related to religious beliefs and practices. The interviewees frequently related these lifestyle practices to the priority they gave to religious authority over public health edicts. The authors note, however, that the interviewees showed a diversity of views on the virus's spread and on the Ministry of Health's efforts to stem the outbreaks, suggesting that there is no unified front against state authorities being put up by the ultra-Orthodox community.

(*Contemporary Jewry*, <https://www.springer.com/journal/12397>)



Source: The Israel Democracy Institute.

Christian Zionism faces new political hurdles in post-Trump and post-Netanyahu era

A changing of the political guard both in the U.S. and Israel is challenging the power and influence that evangelical Zionists had exercised during the administrations of President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reports Colum Lynch in *Foreign Policy* magazine (July 19). Some observers have noted that during the past four years evangelical Christians eclipsed the American Jewish community as Israel's most important political ally in the U.S., even helping to pave the way for Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. But the Democratic transition in the U.S., and the election of a coalitional government of Israeli centrists and Arab Israelis friendlier to supporting a Palestinian state, represent a serious setback to evangelical Zionists.

Lynch adds that this turnaround comes as a younger generation of American evangelicals views Israel more critically than their elders. Yet while evangelicals have felt the loss of influence with the election of Joe Biden, their “relations with Trump Republican politicians remain as strong as ever. They will also remain a powerful ally for any future government in Israel,” Lynch writes. This continuing influence could be seen during Israel’s recent offensive in Gaza, as evangelicals came to the country’s defense and such prominent evangelical Zionists as John Hagee blasted the international community for allegedly holding to a double standard in criticizing Israel’s actions while remaining silent on Palestinian rocket attacks.

(*Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/19/christian-zionists-israel-trump-netanyahu-evangelicals/>)



Sukkot, March 2011 (source: Avital Plinnick | Flickr).

Eco-friendly sorcery helping to regenerate natural resources in Cameroon

Instead of relocating to nearby cities as a response to resource scarcity, some rural communities in Cameroon are reinstating various traditional strategies, including sorcery as an effective tool for bolstering a policy of resource regeneration, writes Hugues Morell Meliki in the 2021 issue of *Tsantsa*, the annual journal of the Swiss Anthropological Association. Land grabs by multinational firms and local business tycoons are encouraged by state-promoted policies of

agricultural modernization in a country where large fertile areas are not exploited. But a side effect is to encourage the private ownership of rural communities' land assets to the detriment of such communities, the author explains, creating in those areas a lack of resting time for remaining land plots, infertility, and food insecurity as well as price increases.

Among various strategies for dealing with scarcity, some communities have attempted to regenerate resources with the help of shared beliefs in occult powers. Previous authors have already observed the use of sorcery in African countries for facing societal challenges such as scarcity and nature conservation. In Meliki's case study of a local community in Cameroon, the family heads, aware of resource depletion, thus decide to give a river and neighboring forests a rest from human activities for two years. To dissuade potential violators, they enforce the decision through sorcery, endowing objects with ritual powers and ceremonially installing them in the protected areas to frighten people with bloody death by the mystical serpent, *ingokdom*, if they should defy the order. This threat is perceived as very real. During interviews, villagers report violators being attacked by the mystical snake or other frightening experiences. Thus for a given period the river and part of the forest become transformed by community agreement into an untouchable sacred zone, allowing resources to develop again.

(Tsantsa, <https://bop.unibe.ch/Tsantsa/article/view/7170>)



Source: Njang Dickson Akwo (Wikimedia - Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license).

Findings & Footnotes

■ The French Catholic conservative magazine *La Nef* devotes its July–August issue to an overview of the traditionalist milieu, a movement that has gained wide interest after Pope Francis issued a recent document restricting Latin Masses. The issue shows that French Catholics in full union with Rome while attached to the pre-Vatican II Mass (Tridentine rite) represent a diverse milieu with a variety of organizations. The movement is unevenly spread across French territory, representing a relatively small minority among practicing Catholics, but it is increasingly attracting people who are not exclusively practicing the Tridentine rite. According to a survey conducted by the magazine, there are more than 50,000 Catholics in France who more or less regularly (but not always exclusively) attend Masses celebrated according to the Tridentine rite—around 4 percent of practicing French Catholics. In strongholds such as the Diocese of Versailles, they make up to 15 percent of practicing Catholics. In addition, estimates are that some 35,000 French Catholics are attending places of worship associated with the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), founded by the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, which has to this day not reached an agreement with Rome.

Regarding other countries, an article by Jean Bernard notes that the number of places where the Tridentine Masses are celebrated has markedly increased in the United Kingdom and Germany after the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* in 2007, but even more so in the United States, with a growing number of young priests willing to celebrate both forms of the Roman rite and several hundreds of places with the Tridentine Mass celebrated every week. Beside people who live their spiritual life exclusively around the Tridentine rite, a development in recent years has been the existence of faithful who go to regular Mass in their parish but also to a Tridentine Mass at least once a month. A notable phenomenon in France (where the Charismatic Renewal and various new communities issued from the Renewal have been influential) is the emergence of the so-called “tradismatics,” believers who find spiritual nourishment both in the Tridentine rite and in periods of

prayer and adoration with Catholic charismatic groups—thus bringing together two approaches to Catholicism that rarely met in the 1970s. In an interview with Christophe Geoffroy, Archbishop Eric de

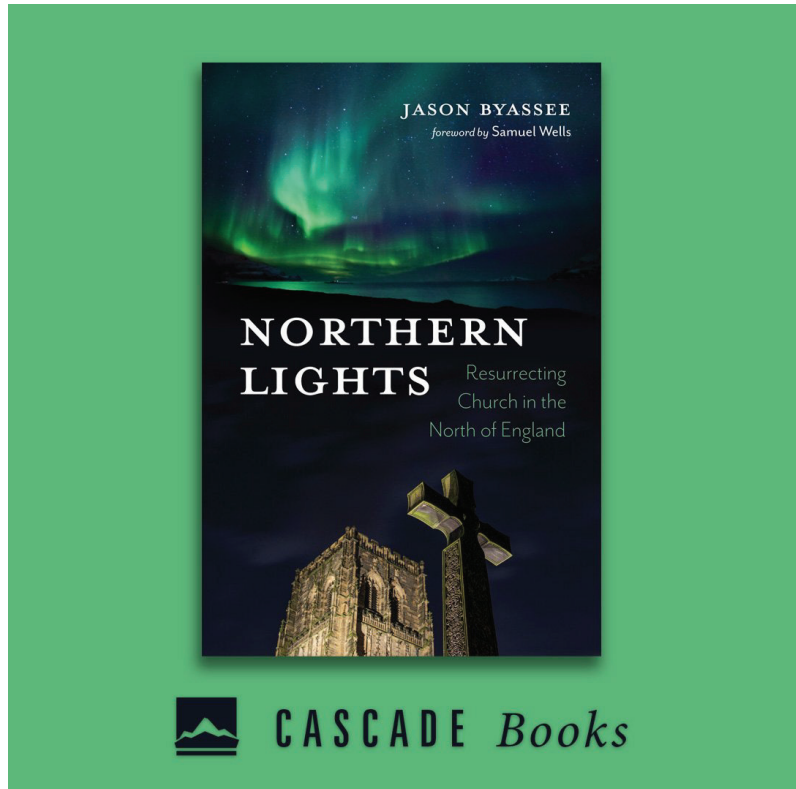


Moulins-Beaufort, current chair of the French Bishops' Conference, also mentions the fact that a significant number of faithful in the traditionalist milieu have actually discovered Catholicism through the Tridentine rite. For more information on this issue, visit: *La Nef*, <https://lanef.net/>.

■ While the north of England has been considered a secular bastion with few signs of religious vitality, Jason Byassee's book *Northern Lights* (Cascade Books, \$23) yields surprises that challenge the secular narrative. Byassee, a Methodist pastor and journalist based in Canada, took a year off to study the Christian presence and prospects in such cities as Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne. He acknowledges the strong secularity of the north, with church attendance figures in the single digits, but reports on places and people that fall below the demographer's and pollster's radars (even if his observations are pre-pandemic). For instance, while

generally overlooked, he highlights the large attendance characterizing some cathedral worship, including midweek and choral Evensong services, calling this an example of Anglo-Catholic and liberal church growth. The Ugandan-born Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, has drawn crowds to his preaching and charismatic-friendly ministry. In Durham there is a lively and competitive church scene, ranging from the city's large and historic cathedral to a variety of Anglican expressions and churches outside the established church. The innovation of "resource churches" in the C of E, where certain parishes are funded and equipped to assist struggling churches and clergy, has been effective in this area. Byassee finds that Alpha, an evangelical outreach movement based on introductory classes on Christian basics, has made its way to the north from its London base through an extensive church-planting network.

Even Byassee's own Methodism, which has almost "evaporated" in such once-prominent strongholds as Newcastle and other industrial northern cities, has seen growth, often through challenging a traditional system that disincentivizes expansion by making growing churches pay for declining ones. Byassee also reports on the growth of congregations ministering to the large Iranian immigrant population in the north, as well as a church-run health clinics initiative, as new avenues of outreach. He seems most optimistic about the Fresh Expressions model and its offshoot, Messy Church, movements that plant often unconventional and post-modern congregations inside and out of the C of E, since they empower people (a group of skateboarders, for instance) to start congregations with little overhead or structure



and are appealing to people on the edges of the established church—a place where most people in the secular north are today.

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

1) The **American Solidarity Party (ASP)**, which describes itself as “based in the tradition of Christian democracy,” has been gaining members and has even won some election victories since the 2020 election cycle. Started in 2016, the party sees itself as espousing much of Catholic social teachings, even though it is open to those of all religions and to nonbelievers. The party’s platform rests on seven foundational principles, all built on the theme of solidarity: sanctity of life, social justice, community-oriented society, centrality of the family, economic security, care for the environment, and peace and international solidarity. It opposes abortion, capital punishment, and the creation of pornography, supports universal health care, and champions an



economic model known as “distributism,” which is based on widespread ownership of production assets. Exact membership numbers are not disclosed but interim executive director Tony Guidotti said the party’s membership doubled within the 2020 election cycle alone. Brian Carroll, the party’s 2020 presidential candidate, earned more than 42,000 votes nationwide, some six times the number of votes received by the party’s inaugural presidential candidate four years earlier. Even though most parties’ memberships decline after an election, the ASP’s grew by another 10 percent since the 2020 election ended.

The party has found particular appeal in Michigan, California (which has the biggest chapter), and South Bend, Indiana, home of the University of Notre Dame. “I think that real, authentic growth of a political movement, or any movement, happens at a lower level. It happens in a city, in a church. It happens in a network of people around friendships and in a relationship,” Guidotti says. Charles Camosy, a professor at Fordham University, said that one goal of the ASP is to help break apart a left/right political binary in which people define their views, and themselves for that matter, in antagonism toward those on the other side. And he views another function of the party as trying to “force the major parties to appeal to us and our values,” he added. “Already the idea of a ‘solidarity Republican’ (maybe someone like Congressman Fortenberry of NE) or a ‘solidarity Democrat’ (maybe someone like Governor Bel Edwards of LA) is starting to take root in some places.” So far, the party has had a few local victories, including members being elected to the roles of mayor in a city in Pennsylvania and a board of education member in a town in Connecticut. It is also running a candidate in California’s gubernatorial runoff election, Dr.

James Hanink. To have a strong effect in states and nationally would require building membership, fundraising, and running campaigns, as well as enacting electoral reforms that make it more feasible to have alternatives to the entrenched two-party system. (Source: *The Pillar*, July 16)

2) The charter meeting of the **Jewish Psychedelic Summit**, which met on Zoom in May, is one sign of the interest that various religious groups are showing in psychedelic substances, such as LSD and mushrooms, as these find new acceptance in the medical world. The meeting, drawing almost 1,500 people, testifies to the decades-long involvement of some Jewish people in



advocating and using psychedelic substances as a source of spiritual enlightenment and experience. Much of the impetus for the summit and the wider movement to draw on psychedelic substances to enhance Jewish experience and practice comes from the Jewish Renewal movement and its architects, such as Rabbi Arthur Green and Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, who experimented early with LSD and psilocybin. The summit was cofounded by Natalie Goldberg of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, writer Madison Margolin, and Rabbi Zac Kamenetz of Shefa, a group seeking to integrate psychedelic use into the Jewish spiritual tradition. The main focus of the summit was showing how Jewish mysticism and psychedelics complement each other, providing unique interpretations of traditional teachings—such as how Adam’s fall from union with God should lead to efforts at spiritual repair and restoration from historical Jewish trauma (from destruction of the Temple to the Holocaust) through use of these substances. There was also an attempt to trace how ancient Judaism made room for the use of entheogens (substances that occasion a spiritual experience), such as poppies, wormwood, and plants like acacia. (Source: *The Tablet*, July 26)

3) **A.I. and Faith** is an interfaith coalition of tech executives, artificial intelligence researchers, theologians, ethicists, clergy, and engineers that seeks to apply faith-based ethics to this expanding technology. The coalition was started in 2017 by David Brenner, a retired risk-management lawyer, and has since grown to include more than 80 individuals of different faiths, mainly based around the Seattle area but also located in far-flung areas of Istanbul, Oxford, Brussels, and Nairobi. The group brings together varied and often conflicting views to discuss the ethical implications of A.I., an area of concern that has been neglected in the global tech world. Brenner, who grew up evangelical though describing his affiliation now as “cross-denominational,” became concerned about the ethical and spiritual vacuum he saw in writings about A.I., where religion and the religious individual are portrayed as being superseded by humans with god-like powers creating a religion based on data. He sees the organization as building bridges and serving as a moderating force that can help keep tech workers from thinking they need to “reinvent the wheel” of human morality and help them resist the allure of unbounded profits. The coalition’s work has a self-preservationist dimension as it seeks to ensure that the texts and traditions of the world’s religions are not discarded in the rush to embrace a remade world. More



specific issues that the group addresses include the prospects of greater surveillance, disenfranchisement of those without A.I. technology, and even understanding the new dilemmas and spiritual questions that come from interacting with A.I. programs such as Alexa and Google. Brenner and his colleagues are planning to create a faith-based introductory curriculum for congregations and tech workers as an aid for mutual understanding and bridge-building. It will include videos of a pastor, a rabbi, and a Muslim engineer, discussing why congregations need to take a more active role in approaching ethics and A.I. (Source: *New York Times*, July 18)

4) Claiming to be an ancient monotheistic cult of the sky and a return to the alleged ancient religion of the Turkic people, **Tengrism** has been articulated since the 1990s by small intellectual circles in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as in several national republics of the Russian Federation, including Tatarstan and Buryatia. “Functioning primarily as an intellectual trend for cultured urban elites, it is intended to be a religion of the reborn nation,” writes researcher and author Marlene Laruelle. In Tatarstan, Tengrism has been supported by advocates of an anti-Muslim Tatar nationalism. On the other hand, in Bashkortostan, the Chief Mufti expressed a favorable view of Tengrism, which he saw as the purportedly most ancient monotheistic religion and a precursor of Islam—a view not shared by mainstream Muslim leaders. In Kazakhstan, Laruelle explains, “the Muslim Spiritual Directorate has refused any syncretic bringing-together of Islam and Tengrism,” although this does not discourage advocates of Tengrism from seeing it as the foundation of the uniqueness of Kazakh civilization. According to Laruelle, “it is in Kyrgyzstan that the Tengrist movement has achieved the highest visibility,” with aspirations of competing with Islam for the status of national religion, along with unsuccessful attempts at developing a state ideology based on Tengrist views.

In response, some Islamic leaders have also attempted to present Islam as a form of ethnic faith specific to the Kyrgyz, or at least tried to stress the existence of a specifically Kyrgyz Islam. “We call ourselves Muslims, but we are Muslims with distinctive features,” stated the former director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs of Kyrgyzstan in 2006. Laruelle understands Tengrism as a Eurasian version of New Age, claiming to offer a comprehensive cosmology adapted to the modern world and combining eclectic sources and inspirations. Its supporters also emphasize the supposedly environment-friendly attitude of

Tengrism, blaming Christianity and Islam for distorting the relationship between human beings and nature. Moreover, “Tengrist followers insist on a direct, unmediated link between humans and the divine; Tengrism is a faith without a prophet, without a holy text, without any institutionalized place of worship, without a clergy, without dogma or interdicts, without rites and prayers...They do also find in the (invented) religion of Tengrism the resource for exalting the ethnic past of the nation and defending it against both Russian and Western influences. Freeing the nation from a foreign religion and reviving ethnic faith is thus advocated as the last step toward full, sovereign nationhood.” (Source: Marlene Laruelle in a chapter on Tengrism in her new book, *Central Peripheries: Nationhood in Central Asia*, UCL Press)



Temple dedicated to Genghis Khan, in the Mu-Ur Desert in Inner-Mongolia, China (source: Enrique Bendicho, Wikimedia, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license).