

The evangelical moment in American prison reform?

Religious groups and volunteers, particularly evangelicals, are becoming a dominant influence in prisons thanks to a new model of incarceration that relies on outsourcing rehabilitation programming to faith groups, write Michael Hallett (North Florida State University) and Byron Johnson (Baylor University) in the online magazine *Public Discourse* (October 25). Facing unprecedented levels of violence and mental illness among inmates and a lack of sufficient funding to deal with such problems, maximum-security prison administrators have been forced to look for alternative solutions. New public-private partnerships between prison wardens, religious educators, and faith-motivated volunteers are now operating in 27 states and over 70 maximum-security prisons nationwide. Hallett and Johnson compare this prison reform



Source: Desiring God.

movement to earlier Quaker efforts on this issue given the large private investment backed up by powerful legislative advocates.

Hallett and Johnson, who recently co-authored the book, *The Restorative Prison* (with Sun Joon Jang), conducted research in America's largest maximum-security prisons to find that many of these religious programs are largely interracial and thus strongly ecumenical, with "cross-fertilization of worship [becoming] a normalized practice." Religion in prison is marked by a "relaxed and non-hierarchical openness to various forms of religious practice in a doctrinally neutral space.... Steeped in the twelve-step theologies of addiction recovery programs...many inmates adopt surprisingly tolerant views concerning the religious doctrines of their peers. As a result, practitioners are more relaxed about doctrinal strictures and much less attentive to 'culture war' battles playing out beyond the walls of their institution." Evangelical ministries clearly lead in the new prison reform movement, with a presence far beyond what the evangelical proportion of the population would suggest, but there has been little acknowledgement of this reality, Hallett and Johnson write. They add that the key to evangelicals' effectiveness in prisons is their model of the "wounded healer," which uses peer-based rehabilitative programming, where, for instance, former addicts will work with addicts in prison.

(*Public Discourse*, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2021/10/78662/>)

Charismatic prophets show few signs of recanting after failed prophecies

Leaders of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), who prophesied that Donald Trump would be reelected, show few signs of recanting their predictions, according to scholars assessing the movement at a recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which **RW** attended. This is even as a formalization of the movement seems likely, with more denomination-like networks emerging. The NAR, a coalition of charismatic megachurches, church networks, and evangelists teaching that the biblical prophetic and apostolic offices are being restored, attracted worldwide attention for its prophecies about the Trump presidency starting in 2016—and ending in 2020, when its reelection predictions were met by Trump's defeat at the polls. Stuart Wright of Lamar University has been compiling a growing database of 49 of the movement's prophets and found that 70 percent still say the election was stolen and that Trump should be



Source: Religion Unplugged.

president, with some prophets even claiming that Trump was declared president in heaven. Meanwhile, 10 percent have remained silent on the matter, at least for now, while seven percent have stated that their prophecies were wrong and have apologized to their followers, most notably Jeremiah Johnson and Chris Valentin.

Wright argues that there is a strong “party line” among prophets and pressure to maintain the validity of their prophecies. As reported in a paper by Damon Berry, any reassessment of the prophetic ministry that might be discerned came in the issuing of a “prophetic standards statement” last spring that sought to establish protocols for making prophecies. In another paper, J. Gordon Melton of Baylor University reported that there are now 220 apostolic networks that often function like denominations. He said that new NAR prophecies emerge daily and are “vague enough that what constitutes fulfillment or failure is difficult if not downright impossible to discern.” But the Trump prophecies were clearer and more definite, making them more difficult to recant or re-interpret, which suggests why very few prophets have announced that they are wrong and have apologized.

Evangelical “sleeper cells” among Orthodox Jews?

Suspicious about proselytizing initiatives targeting Jews, anti-missionary Jewish groups over the past few years have exposed several Christian missionaries posing as Orthodox Jews, including most recently a father and son who had changed their name from Dawson to Isaacson and been active as Orthodox rabbis in several U.S. Jewish communities, reports the *Jewish Chronicle* (October 21). A few months earlier, another missionary who had lived



Source: Aallen, October 2011 (Creative Commons).

as an Orthodox rabbi in Jerusalem along with his family, and who had even launched a small yeshiva (seminary) of his own while being supported at least at some point by MorningStar Ministries in South Carolina, had been denounced by the anti-missionary group Beyneynu (*Jewish Chronicle*, May 6 and 17). In both cases, despite their claims, the missionary rabbis apparently had no Jewish background, and beyond the deceit and the concerns about any type of

missionary activities toward Jews, the specific tactic they adopted raised another critical issue from the viewpoint of Jewish law (*Halacha*)—the fact that the rituals in which they were involved were invalid and needed to be repeated.

Last spring, Michael Brown wrote in *Townhall* (May 4) that leading Christian evangelistic organizations addressing Jews were eager to disassociate themselves from deceptive missionary tactics, while differentiating between such practices and the hiding of beliefs that converts sometimes need to practice in specific environments. In *Christianity Today* (June 23), Jayson Casper wrote that “Messianic Jews were quick to distance themselves [from the practice].” Attempts to create “sleeper cells” among Orthodox Jews are seen as fringe initiatives and do not seem to have produced any converts anyway, while the ultra-Orthodox community remains largely untouched by missionary efforts. “[S]ince most Messianic Jews came from the non-Orthodox community, efforts to share the gospel with the ultra-Orthodox are still in their infancy,” Casper remarked.

CURRENT RESEARCH

- **The new, recently released Faith Communities Today (FACT) study shows continuing declines in congregational attendance, although about one-third of congregations report growth.** The survey, which was conducted right before the pandemic and is issued every five years, was based on questions about congregational life sent



to 15,278 congregations and their leaders from 80 denominations. The survey found that prior to the pandemic, many congregations were small and getting smaller, while the largest ones were finding growing attendance. Another major finding was that congregations have continued to diversify, particularly in terms of racial composition. The first FACT survey in 2000 had found that 12 percent of congregations could be considered multiracial (having either racial majorities of no more than 80 percent or no racial majority); today, 25 percent of congregations can be considered multiracial. Other findings showed a significant increased use of technology, even pre-pandemic. The fiscal health of congregations was found to have remained mostly steady.

(The FACT survey can be downloaded at: <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/fact-2020-survey/>)

- **A study finds nondenominational churches continuing their growth trajectory even as they now outpace denominational evangelical congregations on such key measures as attendance, youthfulness, diversity, and outreach.** The research, based on a random sample of 500 churches, was presented at the late-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Portland, Ore., which **RW** attended, and is part of the Faith Communities Today (FACT) study that has been conducted by Scott Thumma every five years since 2010. Thumma



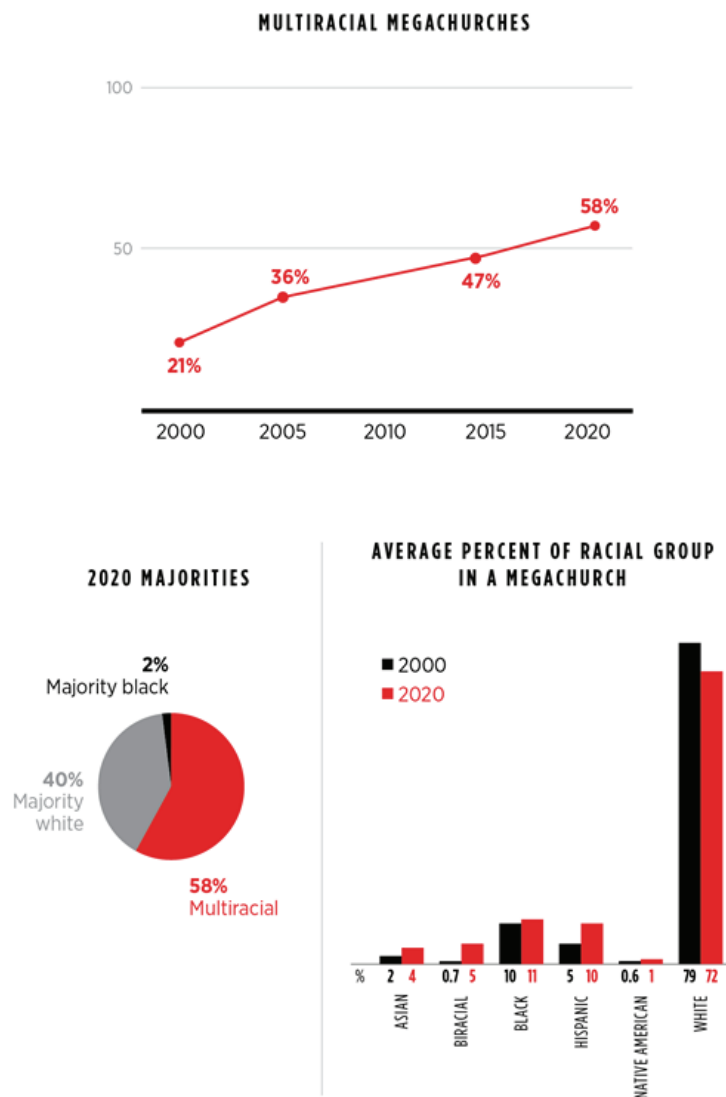
Source: The Church and Family.

found that more nondenominational churches in the survey had grown by 5 percent or more than had those associated with evangelical denominations, “and many of them by 25 percent or more over the past 5 years.” He confirmed the recency of a significant portion of nondenominational churches’ founding, with a median founding date of 1970 compared to 1958 for evangelical denominational churches, as independent churches have exited their denominations in the last two decades over such issues as LGBT conflicts.

As observed in previous surveys, most of these nondenominational congregations were found to be involved in formal and informal networks with other congregations, such as ACTS 29 and the Willow Creek Association. Although a relatively recent phenomenon, nondenominational churches tend to show more intentional diversity, greater use of contemporary worship, more fervent religious practices, and more effective member engagement compared to evangelical denominational congregations. Thumma concluded that “one has to wonder if indeed the nondenominational phenomenon isn’t the next wave that supercedes the current more denominationally-based evangelicalism. This is especially true since evangelical denominations have become associated with Trump, anti-vaxers, and Christian Nationalism—while much of the culture is moving in the opposite direction.”

● **Although the pandemic is likely to change some aspects of megachurches, the most recent survey of these large and multifaceted congregations finds trends of increasing**

multiethnicity and continued growth. Sponsored by Evangelicals for Financial Accountability, the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, and Leadership Network, the survey of 582 megachurches was conducted by Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, who presented results at the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which **RW** attended. The survey found that these congregations' attendance has continued to rise, even though their seating capacity has remained steady at 1,200. And while two decades ago only 21 percent of megachurches were multiracial (defined as having 20 percent or more of a minority presence), the researchers found that today more than half (58 percent) of these congregations report being so.



HARTFORD INSTITUTE FOR RELIGION RESEARCH
AND EVANGELICAL COUNCIL FOR FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The increased racial diversity is accompanied by characteristics that include being better at welcoming and including newcomers and having a greater percentage of immigrants. Three-quarters of the congregations reported growth over the past five years, showing a median growth from 3,800 attenders in 2015 to 4,200 in 2020. Megachurches have also grown in other ways, displaying more involvement in church planting and an increase in the number of multisite campuses (or satellite churches). Bird concluded that the pandemic's effect on megachurches (on which Thumma is currently leading a large study) will likely sort out these congregations, with those pastors having a "church planter mentality" gaining the advantage as they "replant and relaunch" their ministries. "There will be fewer slots [for megachurches]...but congregations that emerge [from the pandemic] are going to be larger," he said.

- **A national study of religious leaders finds as many continuities as changes in their demographic patterns, morale, and beliefs, according to sociologist Mark Chaves.** The study, conducted between 2019 and 2020 among 1,600 religious leaders (both clergy and those in congregational leadership), and presented at the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, found that many patterns have held constant since a similar study that was conducted in 2016: clergy were just as likely to be married and showed similar education levels and a similar likelihood of entering the ministry as a second career. As for morale, while few have left the clergy for secular work, the study does show that the proportion of those considering leaving the ministry has increased from five percent in 2016 to nine percent today. Clergy have definitely aged, with those 44 years old and younger having made up 27 percent of the clergy studied in 2016, compared to only 12 percent today.

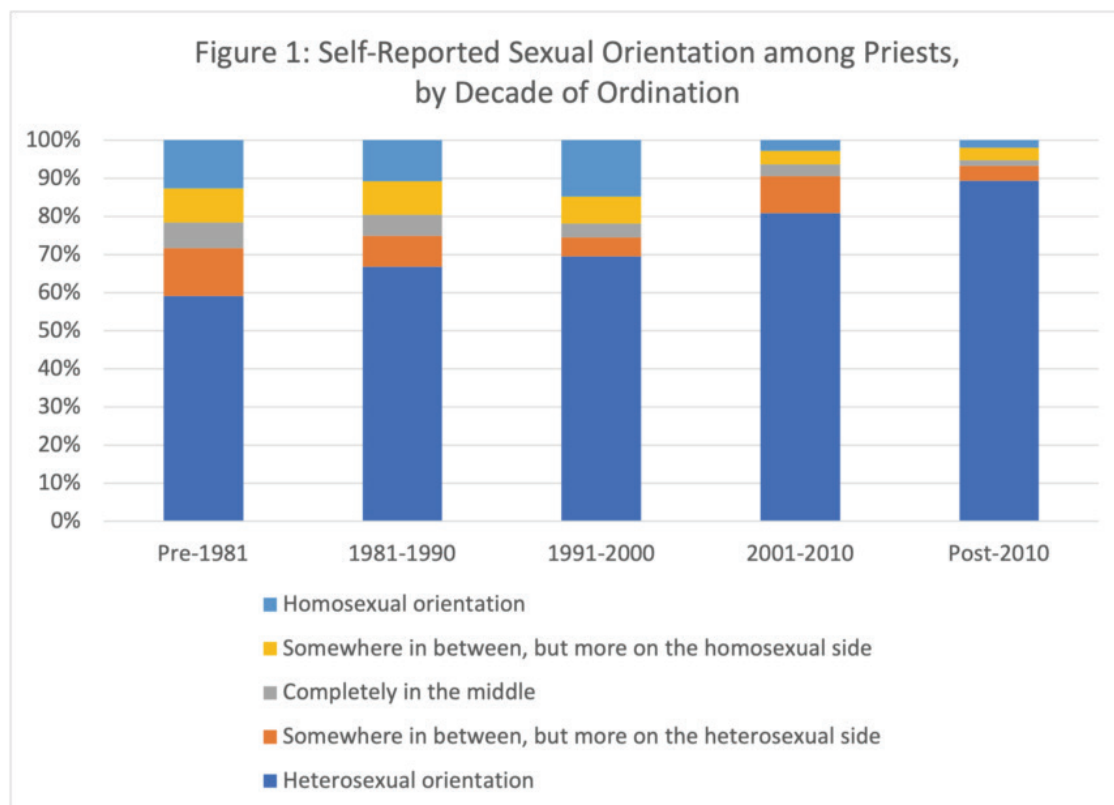
Clergy were found to be less white, more female, more likely to have another job (36 percent today versus 26 percent in 2016), and more likely to work part-time in ministry (29 percent today versus only nine percent in 2016). As for beliefs, the study found mainline church leaders continuing to drift away from their evangelical and Catholic counterparts in their lack of certainty on core beliefs, such as the belief in life after death, with 71 percent holding this belief with certainty compared to 96 percent of other Christian leaders. On politics, the majority of religious leaders showed some political activity and engagement in "cue-giving," or indirect expression of political views, but mainline leaders were more likely to engage in direct political action than evangelicals. On voting behavior, the study found that clergy were more likely to vote than other adult Americans, with 94 percent saying they had voted.

- **American Catholic priests have taken a significant conservative turn on their vows of celibacy as well as other sexual matters, according to a 2021 survey cited in the online magazine *Public Discourse* (October 31).** Conducted in late 2020 and early 2021, the Austin Institute fielded a survey replicating a variety of questions that were posed to American priests in 2002 by the *Los Angeles Times*. The survey was conducted among just over 1,000 priests, who were not randomly sampled but drawn from the extensive lists in the Official Catholic Directory (which the *LA Times* also used), as well as the mailing list of a large Catholic nonprofit organization. The survey found that a self-identified homosexual orientation was notably more

common among ordinations that occurred before the year 2000 (between 11 and 15 percent) than it was after (2–3 percent). A heterosexual orientation appeared to be a linear function of the date of ordination, ranging from 59 percent of pre-1980 ordinations to 89 percent of those priests ordained after 2010. At this rate, it is projected that by 2041 the share of Catholic priests self-identifying as either entirely or mostly heterosexual should amount to over 92 percent, while those self-identifying as either entirely or mostly homosexual should make up 7 percent.

As for celibacy, the questions posed in the 2002 *LA Times* survey about this issue, and replicated in 2021, resulted in less of a trendline among ordination cohorts. But the statement, “Celibacy is not a problem for me and I do not waver in my vow,” was chosen by fewer respondents before 2001 than it was after, with 55 percent of priests ordained on or after that year choosing it. Among priests ordained before 2000, the most frequent responses to a question about the value of celibacy to their priesthood were that it “takes time to achieve” and “it is a journey.” After 2000, the modal answer shifted to one of greater confidence and commitment, and even more so after 2010. But the attitude shift on homosexuality is the most noteworthy. Among priests ordained before 1981, only 34 percent responded “always” to the question of whether homosexual behavior was sinful, with an additional 33 percent saying “often.” The “always” answer grows in a linear fashion up through the most recent cohort: 45 percent (1981–1990), 57 percent (1991–2000), 82 percent (2001–2010), and finally 89 percent among those ordained after 2010.

(*The Public Discourse*, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2021/10/78773/>)



• **According to a recent study, the events of January 6 leading to the riot at the Capitol building in Washington were in part driven by a form of Christian nationalism fed by conspiratorial thinking, white identity concerns, and political grievance.** The study, conducted by David Buckley, Adam Enders, and Miles Armaly, and presented at the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, used a survey of 817 respondents, whose demographic traits were matched with those of the general population according to the U.S. Census. Even though its definition is contested, attention to “Christian nationalism” has grown since the Trump presidency, and generally it has come to refer to those Americans supporting the Christian nature of the U.S., including its government. Buckley, Enders, and Armaly found that those supporting the January 6 riot had sympathy for Christian nationalist views, but that when there were low levels of white identity,



Source: Quinn Dombrowski, 2008, Flickr.

perceived victimhood, and QAnon conspiracy support, the Christian nationalist element was not a significant predictor of such support for violence. The researchers argue that the “strength of the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for violence—in the case of the Capitol riot and more abstractly—is conditional on the strength of one’s identification with the white race, the extent to which one feels like a victim, and strength of QAnon support.”

• **A study of rural public religion finds a shrinking of the civic role of religious institutions and a growth of their political dimensions, which adds to polarization.** The study, conducted by Penn State University sociologist Gary Adler, was based on 200 interviews with religious leaders across eight sites in Maine and Pennsylvania, and the results were compared to data from the 1998 and 2018 National Congregational Studies. Adler’s paper was presented at the late-October meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Portland, Oregon, which **RW** attended. The researcher found that the civic role of public religion in small towns has been decreasing due to related losses and aging taking place in mainline Protestantism. This decline has involved looser connections between religious leaders and congregations and local officials, a high rate (40 percent) of congregations having outside groups use their buildings, and reduced resources as congregations seek to avoid duplication of ministries and outreach programs.

At the same time, a political form of public religion has been gaining ground. Adler sees this in the frequency of voter guides and selective visits made by political candidates. Most of the political influence operates informally, based on conversations, and is most often found in

evangelical and Catholic congregations, according to Adler. He adds that the symbolic dimension of public religion is shifting from an inclusive to more particularistic modality, which can be seen in chaplains at various institutions invoking the name of Jesus at public events. The study concludes that as the political form of public religion becomes more prominent, “its civic and symbolic dimensions weaken.”



Source: Penn Today.

- **The pandemic has accentuated existing differences between the Amish and the Mennonites, with the former showing greater dissent from public health measures as well as higher mortality rates, according to research presented at the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Portland.** Sara Guthrie, Katie Corcoran and Rachel Stein of West Virginia University examined the responses to Covid of 334 Amish and Mennonite communities in Ohio and Pennsylvania through an analysis of their service announcements appearing in *The Budget*, a national newspaper of these religious communities. The key difference they found was in the higher proportion of Amish congregations (which are in members’ households) holding in-person services during the peak of the pandemic (78 percent) compared to Mennonite congregations (59 percent). Mennonites were more likely to cancel services during outbreaks (66 percent versus 37 percent for Amish). Amish congregations did follow guidelines for social distancing (with 80 percent implementing social distancing), yet by not canceling services, the virus spread more widely among members.

In another paper in this session, Rachel Stein looked at Amish death rates through an analysis of what are called “excess deaths” in these communities, which capture direct and indirect deaths related to Covid. At the beginning of the pandemic, many observers claimed that Amish communities had more protection from the virus than the rest of the country because of their isolation and lifestyles—a view that Stein sought to test. She collected obituaries appearing in *The Budget* from 2015 to 2020, drawing on a national sample of 2,400 death notices. By comparing 2020 death rates to the average, she found that excess deaths rose in April, May, and June, and then declined until November when they rose again. The number of deaths in 2020 was higher than the average, and the pattern of Amish deaths was similar to the death rates in the broader society and in Ohio (where many of these Amish lived). As state guidelines were lifted, Amish church life went back to normal, a pattern which still continues, even though there have

been new spikes in infections among the Amish, especially since many are not getting the vaccines. Stein concludes that public health publicity has not been effective among the Amish and that such efforts need to incorporate the culture and beliefs of the communities that they are addressing.



Source: Penn Medicine News.

• **Forty-nine percent of the population of Quebec no longer believes in God, and even 51 percent if only the French-speaking population is considered, according to the daily newspaper *Le Devoir* (Oct. 22), which commissioned a survey by leading market research institute Leger.** While surveys are not an exact science and different surveys may bring partly different results, this one seems to confirm a trend. Compared to previous surveys conducted over the past two decades, it suggests that a decline is continuing. In 2005, 77 percent of the population of Quebec was still claiming to believe in God, according to the Crop Survey Institute, but this was down to 62 percent by 2016. Earlier dubbed a “priest-ridden province,” Quebec has seen drastic changes and is now the least believing region of Canada. According to sociologist Martin Meunier (University of Ottawa), the higher percentage of non-believers in Quebec as compared to the rest of Canada might be partly related to the higher percentage of first- and second-generation migrants in the other provinces. Meunier notes that during and after what is called the “quiet revolution” in Quebec, from 1960 to

the early 2000s, cultural Catholicism still left its mark on the province, with about 75 percent of the children born in Quebec in 2001 being baptized despite a low level of religious practice. Cultural Catholicism is still real for a significant part of the population, but the percentage of newborn children who get baptized has fallen by half. However, Meunier points to the strong variations existing across areas within Quebec



Source: The Museums of Quebec.

beyond the city of Montreal. For instance, in the Diocese of Chicoutimi, more than 90 percent of the people still describe themselves as Catholics. Moreover, evangelical groups have developed in suburbs. Interviews with people who do not believe in God show that this is not necessarily associated with hostility against religion or lack of interest in it. Beyond belief in God, a key issue might be the extent of cultural Catholicism's ability to persist in some ways. Meunier points out that 73 percent of the people in Quebec still identified as Catholics at the time of the 2011 census. With the results of the 2021 census arriving soon, one can be sure that the level of self-identification will have declined, but it remains to be seen how far.

(The Crop blog article reporting on the 2016 survey is available at: <https://www.crop.ca/fr/blog/2017/168/>)

El Salvador's evangelicals carrying the flame for liberation theology?

While evangelicals in El Salvador, pandered to by the country's conservative populist president, Nayib Bukele, have been met with growing suspicion by the left, this growing group of Christians has adopted many of the liberation theological views of Catholics, writes Claire Moll Namas in *Religion and Global Society* (October 25), a blog of the London School of Economics. Today 35 percent of Salvadorans are evangelicals (with 45 percent being Catholic) and their social influence has grown, though not necessarily in a conservative direction. Moll Namas cites research suggesting that evangelicals "do not view the world beyond the church as a profane, catholicized social space nor as a domain that should be avoided altogether." Her own research on the Prophetic Church in rural El Salvador showed that the church belied its strict, conservative reputation, with women holding equality with men in much of family and community life and often being regarded as important leaders. The evangelicals in her study were some of the most active participants in the local community organizing initiatives of a



Source: Impacto Evangelistico.

national NGO. “[W]hen I asked my evangelical interlocutors why they attended church, marched for access to clean water, and saved their money in a community savings and loan group, they repeated the same phrase for each activity: ‘para seguir adelante’ (to collectively move forward)... [A]ll of their actions are done in order to achieve a good life whether through Jesus or through political and social activism.”

(*Religion and Global Society*, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2021/10/reality-versus-stereotype-the-case-of-the-anti-progress-evangelicals-in-el-salvador/>)

Hungary’s mainstream religious organizations find benefit in “Christian inspired” policies

Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orbán, who has become a hero for many conservative Christians in the West (see the *New Yorker*, September 13), seems also to be generally appreciated by mainstream churches in the country, writes Hungarian sociologist of religion Gergely Rosta in a background report published in German by *Nachrichtendienst Östliche Kirchen* (September 9). Often accused of misusing religion to consolidate his power, Orbán turned away from atheism in the 1990s. In a talk in 2019, he interpreted his coming to power with a two-third majority in 2010 as a kind of Christian regime change, and he has indeed taken

a number of measures to emphasize the Christian identity of the country, such as an amendment to the constitution in 2018 stating that “each and every body of the State shall be obliged to protect the constitutional identity and the Christian culture of Hungary.” Since 2020, Hungary has also committed itself to protecting the education of children according to Christian values, and support for the construction and renovation of church buildings has massively increased.

Thus it is not surprising that Christian churches tend to be mostly appreciative of Orbán, or at least to refrain from criticism of him, writes Rosta, not only because they benefit from his emphasis on Christianity, but also because in 2010 his government had replaced a liberal-socialist government that was much less favorable to traditional religious groups. There are a few Hungarian religious leaders maintaining a cautious distance, however, such as the Protestant bishop Tamás Fabinyi, who commented in an interview in September that the Christianity the government has had in mind as a natural ally may not be the same Christianity understood by theologians. Elections will take place in 2022, and opposition parties have a chance of winning only if they manage to form a united front. While these parties represent quite diverse orientations, what is sure is that their victory would mean less governmental support for the churches.

(Nachrichtendienst Östliche Kirchen - <https://www.noek.info/>)



Source: *Church Militant*.

Ireland's Protestant and Catholic church leaders share new sense of unity

“Despite a history of sectarian strife, cooperation between the leaders of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in Ireland has deepened in recent years, with the churches increasingly speaking with one voice on important social and political issues,” writes Ger FitzGerald in the online magazine *The Conversation* (October 19). FitzGerald reports on the Church Leaders Group, which has brought “together the top leaders of the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Ireland—whose jurisdictions extend across the whole island—as well as the president of the Irish Council of Churches.” Since the passing of Brexit and the pandemic, the five church leaders have been coordinating more closely than ever on these and other issues. Observers note that the churches’ increasing cooperation is not due to their diminishing size or influence. In fact, despite Ireland’s history of political and religious conflict, relations between the churches have always been collegial. The recent increase in ecumenical activities has rather been nudged along by a new generation of church leaders who grew up during the three decades of Northern Ireland’s political violence known as the “Troubles” and who share concerns over current issues. FitzGerald cites a recent analysis by Queen’s University that found interchurch cooperation at the national level to be “more frequent and united during the pandemic than at perhaps any other time in Irish church history.”

The combination of increasing political pressures with the convenience of the virtual meetings that resulted from Covid restrictions has also brought church leaders together more frequently.



Source: BBC.

While the 1998 Good Friday Agreement ended most of the violence associated with the Troubles, the pact had also introduced a form of power-sharing called “consociationalism,” which, although intended to maintain social peace in religiously divided societies, can also entrench division and make it more difficult to overcome. This can be seen in Northern Ireland’s educational system, where more than nine in 10 children are in schools segregated by religion, although the majority of the public now supports integration. The UK’s withdrawal from the European Union has returned the border to the center of politics, with Northern Ireland remaining aligned with the EU, something that has angered Protestant unionists. The Church Leaders Group, quick to see that Brexit could threaten the fragile peace, collaborated on a consultation document to brief local congregations and interchurch groups on the withdrawal’s likely impacts. With the centenary this year of the partition of Ireland likely to generate more heat and division, the Church Leaders Group has stressed unity, issuing a joint message acknowledging how, in the words of Eamon Martin, the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, “Too often we have been captive churches, not captive to the word of God but to the idols of state and nation.”

(*The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/a-century-after-partition-irelands-churches-are-cooperating-more-closely-than-ever-169068?>)

Catholic Church plays disruptive role in Philippines’ anti-drug violence

The Catholic Church may not be winning the hearts and minds of those engaged in the war on drugs in the Philippines, but the church is playing an important role in preventing violence and helping victims, according to University of Louisville sociologist David Buckley. In a paper presented at the recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which **RW** attended, Buckley noted the Catholic Church’s longtime opposition to the campaign of President Rodrigo Duterte against drugs, which has resulted in the deaths of 6,000 drug dealers and 25,000 others killed in vigilante attacks. Buckley and his colleagues looked at the relationship between parishes’ location and the rate of killings and found that 30 percent fewer killings took place in the neighborhoods of Catholic parishes. Even controlling for the rate of young single men in the area and for other



Front view of The Cathedral in Intramuros, Manila, April 2015
(Patrickroque01, Wikimedia, Creative Commons).

churches, the Catholic effect remained robust, according to Buckley.

Buckley explained that rather than providing sanctuary for drug dealers and others accused of drug involvement, the church has been calling attention to how they are victims of a violent campaign, thereby disrupting enforcement of its laws. The church's public criticism of police for engaging in violent actions has not changed their hearts and minds and led to reform or repentance, but it has been disliked and feared by police as something that could hurt their careers. Thus, while the church is not converting them, it may be lowering the violence by "activating self-preservation" among police. Meanwhile, church-run rehabilitation programs also have been insulating people from the violence.