

Evangelicals lacking strategy for a “negative world”?

While evangelicals have moved into an era where society views them negatively, they haven’t found a strategy to deal with their more marginal status, writes Aaron M. Renn in the magazine *First Things* (February). Renn writes that the increasing fragmentation of evangelicals is largely due to the different ways they have sought to extend their influence in a society undergoing secularization. He sees these different strategies as playing out over three periods of society’s changing view of Christianity: a “positive world,” (pre-1994), a “neutral world” (1994–2014), and a “negative world” (2014–present). In the positive world, Christianity was seen as a status enhancer, where basic Christian norms lined up with those of society. In this era, evangelicals (and fundamentalists) sought to shore up their influence, either through the new Christian right (Moral Majority) in response to the sexual revolution, or through building seeker-sensitive congregations and megachurches to appeal to Christian-friendly, if unchurched, Americans. In the neutral world, Christianity lost much of its privileged status as religious and cultural pluralism accelerated, and evangelicals took up the strategy of engaging the culture. “They believed that Christianity could still be articulated in a compelling way...In this quest they wanted to be present in the secular elite media and forums, not just on Christian media or their own platforms,” Renn observes.

Major examples of the cultural engagement model were the urban church movement represented by Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church and Hillsong Church, Veritas



Source: The American Historian.

Forum in the Ivy League universities, and even the George W. Bush administration. Renn argues that the same-sex marriage decision of 2014 inaugurated the negative world, where Christianity, especially evangelicalism, has taken on a negative status and Christian morality is seen as a “threat to the public good and the new public moral order.” This stigma only intensified during the Trump years, with the strong support evangelicals gave the populist and controversial president. At the same time, the evangelical elite was largely composed of “never-Trumpers,” while another segment of evangelicals has veered to the left on issues of race and gender. All this makes for a divided evangelical scene, with no agreed-upon strategies to address the negative world. Renn argues that challenges like the sharp increase of non-affiliated Americans and the secularization of public life will necessitate forms of the “Benedict Option,” a strategy of building strong communities to withstand outside secular pressure, even as they avoid that strategy’s pessimistic outlook. He points to his own organization, American Reformer, and the new East River Church congregation in Ohio, as responding explicitly to the negative world.

(*First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2022/02/the-three-worlds-of-evangelicalism>)

Spiritual abuse developing as issue in Muslim circles

The issue of spiritual abuse by Muslim leaders is being tackled by ground initiatives and organizations, similarly to what has been taking place in other religious traditions, writes journalist and novelist Hanan Sulaiman in *Ahram Online* (January 6). Some Sufi spiritual leaders in particular are being targeted by groups confronting spiritual and sexual abuse in Muslim environments, according to Sulaiman. “Sufi sheikhs would be found taking advantage of their followers, especially women, exploiting them financially and/or physically to the extent of sexual relationships.” She writes that these sheikhs would play with abused disciples’ fears about their salvation in order to keep them under control.

Sulaiman lists a number of initiatives against spiritual abuse, noting that they are all based in the West, despite the existence of abuse in Muslim-majority countries. These include the Hurma Project, founded by Dr. Ingrid Mattson, Chair of



Source: ISPU.

Islamic Studies at Huron University College in London, Canada, and Facing Abuse in Community Environments (FACE), which was formed in 2017 and is based in Texas. This organization wants to create a framework by which to address the leadership accountability gap within the U.S. and Canada. “Culturally, Arab Muslims tend to deny wrong-doings related to the practice of faith,” Sulaiman writes. More activist work is thus being done behind closed doors than in public. Sulaiman notes that the lack of any such initiative in Egypt is what drove her to write a novel on the topic, *The Shepherd* (available only in Arabic).

(Websites of initiatives confronting spiritual abuse among Muslims, with each providing various resources: Hurma Project, <https://hurmaproject.com>; In Shaykh’s Clothing, <https://inshaykhsclothing.com>; FACE, <https://www.facetogether.org>)

Church-switching spreads with pandemic

The Covid pandemic has “accelerated people’s comings and goings and has required new strategies to welcome and assimilate new members into the church community,” writes Melissa Morgan Kelley in *Christianity Today* (January 18). Along with other life changes wrought by Covid, for “those who were already struggling with their church, the pandemic served as a catalyst to begin exploring other congregations.” It is, however, difficult to isolate the pandemic as a cause of the new religious mobility, since it may also have been shaped by the polarization



Source: Preach the Word - The Website of Jared R Hiebert.

and social and political turmoil of the last two years. Kelley adds that “pastors have felt ill-equipped to address these issues in ways that satisfy members representing a wide spectrum of viewpoints...Controversial decisions, made under heightened scrutiny, could be what prompts certain attendees to reevaluate church fit.” One pastor says that it “used to be a quieter thing, but now groups leave together and it’s louder than it used to be.” Kelley reports that churches are often losing the “back row,” as more active attenders have become more involved during the pandemic, the moderately involved have held steady, and those less engaged have ceased attending altogether.

The prevalence of virtual services during the pandemic caused a lot of people to get lost in the shuffle. “The mix of people switching churches and worshiping online has created mystery around the true number of members who have exited church permanently,” Kelley writes. Small congregations and church plants have been better positioned to keep members during the pandemic. The loyalty necessary to keep a new church start-up going discouraged much church switching, while research by Lifeway Research found that smaller churches rebounded faster than larger ones. “Most small churches are still not back to pre-pandemic levels, but far more of them are reaching this point than larger churches,” said Scott McConnell of Lifeway. “It’s possible small churches are aided by perceived safety of a naturally smaller gathering, differences in technology options for gathering online, or the strength of relational connections,” he said.

(*Christianity Today*, 4706 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)

Anti-Semitic incidents bypassing non-observant Jews?

The recent growth of anti-Semitic incidents, most vividly seen in early January’s hostage crisis at a Texas synagogue, is most threatening to Jews who are religiously observant, writes Mark Oppenheimer in the *Wall Street Journal* (January 19). He notes that most of the recent attacks against Jews, which also include the shootings at a synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018 and a kosher market in New Jersey in 2019, have targeted those involved in identifiably Jewish activities and behavior. While these tragedies have increased the collective insecurity of American Jews overall, Oppenheimer cautions that the reality is more complicated.



Source: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

“The recent heightened antipathy toward Jews hasn’t been focused on the general Jewish population...In the past quarter-century, most American Jews have become completely liberated from the effects of anti-Jewish bias in school, work, social life, housing, and even romance: 61 percent of Jews who married in the past 10 years took a non-Jewish spouse, according to one recent study. And liberated Jews are abandoning Jewish spaces. Only a fifth of Jews attend worship services at least monthly, and only 12 percent weekly.”

Oppenheimer adds that those outside of the Orthodox world will rarely encounter anti-Semitism, but “plenty of Jews who don’t typically enter Jewish spaces are nevertheless deeply involved in Jewish culture [and] they are hardly bystanders when hostages are taken in Texas.” Yet he concludes that an ever-shrinking percentage of Jews will actually be in harm’s way as they remain outside of Jewish institutional life, even if more violence is experienced by Hasidim and others with identifiable lifestyles and practices and “Jews who continue to enter places like synagogues, having decided that praying with fellow Jews is worth the risk of dying with them.”

“Healing justice” gains following beyond its activist spirituality

The blog of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture (January 13), which offers an annual forecast for the upcoming year, is predicting for 2022 such “megatrends” as a turn to authoritarian government and religion and a virtual reality-based “metaverse,” where online “spiritual experience entrepreneurs” will seek to usurp the role of in-person and lived religion. Aside from such speculative forecasts, the blog reports on how racial justice initiatives and funding may be waning and how a “new buzzword will fill the air: healing justice.” Healing justice is defined as “a spiritually informed framework developed by Black radical feminist organizers to sustain and empower communities impacted by state violence.” The blog anticipates that this concept will be increasingly separated from its black activist context of social justice and co-opted by mainstream institutions: “Has your local megachurch issued a statement on healing and justice? Have you attended a corporate meeting that begins with a ‘grounding’ exercise or Indigenous land acknowledgement? Has your local law enforcement agency attempted to organize a ‘healing justice commission’ with community and clergy?” The piece goes on to assert that “[h]ealing justice networks across the United States will continue to grow and contribute to the flourishing of communities directly impacted by state



violence in the movement for Black lives. Organizations like Dignity and Power Now, The Nap Ministry, Harriet's Apothecary and Generative Somatics have been on the forefront of creating this trend." However, rather than being acknowledged and supported in their work, these organizations "will experience increased competition and co-optation from many of the very institutions that their work has critiqued."

(Center for Religion and Civic Culture, <https://crcc.usc.edu/pandemic-year-3-predictions-adjusting-to-a-new-normals-in-2022/>)

Western Muslims support co-religionists in China while Muslim-dominated governments keep silent

Muslim organizations in the U.S., Canada, and the UK are becoming increasingly outspoken advocates for Uyghur Muslims, who are suffering genocide under the Chinese government, according to *Axios* (January 2). While the governments of many Muslim-majority countries have faced criticism for their non-involvement and silence about China's repression of their co-religionists, Muslim laypeople have been organizing and speaking out loudly about the issue. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian reports that last September, more than 40 Muslim organizations in the U.S. and abroad organized a boycott of Hilton, after reports that a planned hotel in Xinjiang would be built atop a demolished mosque. In December 2020, more than 70 Muslim student



Source: Claudia Himmelreich (Flickr).

associations around the world along with Uyghur groups wrote an open letter to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), comprised of 57 member states, urging them to denounce China's abuses. And the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), one of the largest American Muslim advocacy groups, has been regularly publicizing reports on the Uyghur situation in China and demanding action by U.S. lawmakers and the international community. CAIR's Robert McCaw says that Uyghur Americans have also been impacted by the genocide, making this an issue directly related to American Muslim communities.

Christians see decline in Canada, but look for hope in migrant religions' growth and pandemic

While two-thirds of Canadians report a religious affiliation, this is the first time that the proportion has dropped below 70 percent, reports Ashleigh Stewart in a three-part series on religious transformations in Canada published by *Global News* (January 8–16). Some religious leaders are hopeful, though, that shifts forced by the pandemic have opened new ways of reaching out, with resistance to virtual services now gone, although there are discussions about how far this development could and should go. The decline affects primarily Christians (who are down to 63.2 percent), while the shares of Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and Hindus in the population are increasing, partly due to immigration. The decline is much more striking for a mainstream denomination like the United Church of Canada, which comprised 14.6 percent of Canadian Christians in 1985 and is now down to only 3.8 percent—barely more than the percentage of Muslims. The United Church is aging and already loses more than one church per week across the country. Similarly, Canadian Anglicans are down from 10.4 percent in 1986 to 3.8 percent, too. Moreover, both United Church and Anglican congregations have the lowest level of participation among their members, along with Jewish congregations.

While the restrictions brought on by the pandemic have hurt some religious groups, some unexpectedly tend to believe that the Covid-related paradigm shift has been a blessing—although



Source: BarrieToday.

only time will tell if this is true. Sociologist Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme (University of Waterloo) still wonders how many people will finally come back after the Covid shutdowns. Some synagogues are reporting Covid-induced growth, with people joining online services even from distant places. The statistics and research officer for the Anglican Church in Canada, Neil Elliot, who had predicted in 2019 that there would be no members of the church left by 2040, now claims that the state of Anglicanism is healthier than it used to be. Clergy have been creative in developing online services and looking for new members, thus opening new opportunities for the future. The pandemic has accelerated changes in a way that would never have been possible otherwise. Still, a majority of members do not agree that all rites could move online, with three quarters of clergy and laypeople Elliot surveyed in 2021 not agreeing that laypeople should be allowed to administer communion in their own homes.

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **A new survey shows a large segment of Americans no longer adhering to the “Protestant” label the way older generations did.** When the weekly survey Nationscape, which is conducted by the Democracy Fund, asked respondents about their religion, it found a noticeable downturn in the use of the “Protestant” label. The survey, which offers the largest publicly available survey dataset in history (with nearly a half million people polled), found that the younger a person was, the more likely they were to prefer the term “Christian” over “Protestant.” Writing in *Christianity Today* (January 7), Ryan Burge reports that among 20-year-olds, 22 percent indicated that they were Christians, while 8 percent said that they were Protestants. Among 40-year-olds, 25 percent said they were Christian, and 11 percent chose Protestant. Around age 55, people were just as likely to say Protestant as Christian. But the older generation still stuck to the Protestant label, with about one-third of 70-year-olds saying they were Protestants and just 10 percent indicating that they were Christians.



Source: PICRYL.

Burge adds that the label “Catholic” seems to be less affected by age: 18 percent of young folks said they were Catholic compared to 25 percent of those 75 and older. He cites the rise of non-denominational Christianity during the formative years of the younger generations as being one factor that may have led to ambivalence toward the Protestant label. But “race is also a factor in the gap between Protestants and Christians,” with younger African-Americans and Hispanics far more likely to choose the Christian over Protestant label. This gap is smaller among white respondents and those who identify as Asian. Burge concludes by noting that there is some evidence that “younger people who identify as Protestants are more likely to say that they are Democrats than those who say that they are Christians. For instance, 27 percent of white Protestants were Democrats, compared to 20 percent of white Christians. That gap also appears for Black and Hispanic respondents as well.”

Cuba’s evangelical Protestants join protest movement and face mounting repression

Tensions between some of the leaders of the evangelical community and the government in Cuba have increased over the past three years, as the main Protestant churches have demanded more independence from state organizations, reports Yoe Suarez on the website *Religion Unplugged* (January 19). Protestant churches have been at the forefront in rejecting Cuban government mandates, such as the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Program, with its focus on gender, sexual and reproductive rights, and the promotion of same-sex marriage. In an article originally published in the *Diario de Cuba* and *Cubamet*, Suarez notes that clashes with the state and “acts of punishment or intimidation of these churches” escalated after massive protests against the government that occurred last July 11. Protestant leaders who had never before taken to the streets to protest did so. Since then, state repression of Protestant pastors has continued and “contributed to an increasing number of religious leaders and churches questioning police repression or speaking out against the government.” The group Justicia 11J, which keeps track of those who have been arrested and subject to legal proceedings, finds that Protestants are the religious group with the most leaders repressed as a result of the protests on July 11. Evangelical Protestants represent about seven percent of Cuba’s population.

Suarez cites a source inside the religious freedom group, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, who says that the government views “religious groups as the largest independent civil society sector and fears their potential to mobilize large groups of people.” The source, who asked to remain anonymous because of the organization’s work in Cuba, adds that “The involvement of believers and some religious leaders in the [July 11] protests fed the government’s paranoia...The government wants exemplary cases to show other religious leaders what the consequences will be if they don’t follow the rules.” The Methodist Church, which had one of its pastors spend two days in detention for his involvement in the July 11 protests, published a statement on the



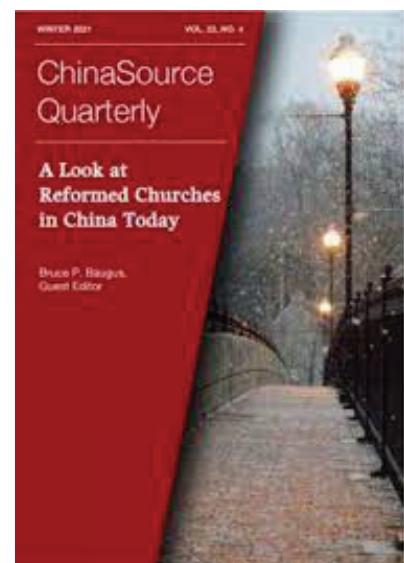
Source: Centro Cultural Cubano de Nueva York.

church's social networks with “unusually direct language critical of the government.” Other large churches, such as the Pentecostal Assemblies, issued similar statements.

(*Religion Unplugged*, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2022/1/19/the-rebellious-evangelicals-of-cuba>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ While the rapid growth of Calvinist Christianity in China has surprised some Western observers, the trend has been unfolding for years and is likely to continue, although in new forms thanks to the pandemic and the ever-tightening restrictions on churches by China's communist government. The Hong Kong-based evangelical journal *China Source* devotes its winter issue to Calvinist or Reformed churches, noting that these congregations' adaptation to current stresses should more accurately give them the name “Reforming churches.” Even without the recent challenges, these Chinese churches mirror the diversity of Reformed churches worldwide—whether they be Presbyterian (or “Presbyterian-like”), Baptist, or non-denominational house churches and networks, with a large charismatic element included. Additionally, some Chinese churches



“aspire” to be Reformed and adhere to the historic Calvinistic confessional statements and church polity but admit that they are not there yet. The closure of the controversial Early Rain churches in 2018 led some to believe that China’s Reformed experiment had ended, but the appeal of Reformed Christianity is continuing, especially seen among educated urbanites, even though new restrictions may make these congregations less accessible.

Bruce Bagus writes that Reformed churches have found creative ways to continue and to expand their ministries—from capping the number of believers admitted to worship in order to go under the radar, to multiplying meeting places to accommodate small gatherings, which often ends up multiplying membership. Covid mitigation measures have resulted in a “deluge of recorded sermons and worship services posted online and more time for ministers and lay folk to study Reformed theology,” Bagus adds. Another noteworthy article looks at how some Chinese Reformed Christians adapt their views on church-state separation to the new environment by upholding the Reformed teaching on dissent and protesting against government infringements on their faith (such as by refusing to send their children to state schools), while others steer clear of any politics and refrain from challenging the government. This issue can be downloaded from: <https://www.chinasource.org/>

■ As with other religions, Buddhism is facing a major challenge in retaining and reaching its youth. The current issue of the *Journal of Global Buddhism* (22:2) devotes its articles to Buddhist youth who are experiencing high immigration and the rise of “no religion,” reinforced by projections of decline in Buddhist fertility. These influences are evident in the ways that even teenage Buddhists from Asian families are adopting “convert” styles of Buddhism that eschew the traditional practices of monasticism, devotions, ethical teachings, and more worldly and prestigious forms of the religion. The articles in this special issue cover religious discrimination, the role of social media in shaping Buddhism among youth, and new strategies to attract young people to Buddhism in both Thailand and Britain. In summing up some of the trends among Buddhist youth discussed in this issue, the editors find that traditional elements remain prominent in youthful expressions of Buddhism, since religious elites, particularly in Buddhist-dominated countries such as Thailand and Burma, are able to maintain power and influence as they use social media to reach out to young people. Yet in case studies in the U.S., Britain, India, and



Vietnam, Buddhism appears to be taking new forms that are subject to both global and local influences and that de-emphasize rituals, dogma, and what are seen as superstitious elements. This issue can be downloaded at: <https://www.globalbuddhism.org/jgb/index.php/jgb/>

■ In our article on the “alt-right’s” influence on extremist Muslims in last month’s issue, we neglected to cite a somewhat similar populist right-wing influence in Buddhism that was reported in an article in the aforementioned *Journal of Global Buddhism* (22:1). The article, by Ann Gleig and Brenna Grace Artinger, finds that the leftist stress on “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEA) among Buddhist convert groups in the U.S. has sparked a reaction among some members that range from “reactionary conservatism to the alt-right.” For years, the growth of Buddhist converts has been criticized as a white, middle-to-upper class phenomenon, and Buddhist activists have made a point of addressing the lack of diversity in these convert groups, especially the lack of African Americans. This activist thrust was especially evident in Zen Buddhist circles in the Trump years and in the protests surrounding the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter. After a conference of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association on DEA issues, criticism circulated in other Zen Buddhist quarters, with popular Zen teacher Brad Warner calling the gathering the “Marxist Take-Over of Buddhism.”



The authors are critical of this development and are clearly on the left side of the political-ideological spectrum, but they provide an informative account of the culture wars playing out in American Buddhism—usually online—just as they are in other faith communities. Some of these conflicts include Buddhist-specific issues, such as Asian-American protests against the influence of white convert Buddhists, and it is not clear why Gleig and Artinger see these currents, such as what they call “reactionary centrism,” as mainly a conservative reaction rather than as efforts by some Buddhists to protest the dominance of left-wing and identity politics in Buddhist spaces. However, the authors do show that not all of these critics are necessarily apolitical. Such groups would include the newly formed #TheBuddhistRight, which seeks to make the case that Buddhism is naturally conservative in political and social outlook, and Right Wing Dharma Squads, a podcast which trades in alt-right online activism, appealing to the “Incel” (involuntary celibate) subculture and making the argument that true Tibetan Buddhism is hierarchical, elitist, and traditional and has little to do with the progressive Buddhism that emerged on the West Coast. This article can be downloaded from: <https://www.globalbuddhism.org/jgb/index.php/jgb/>

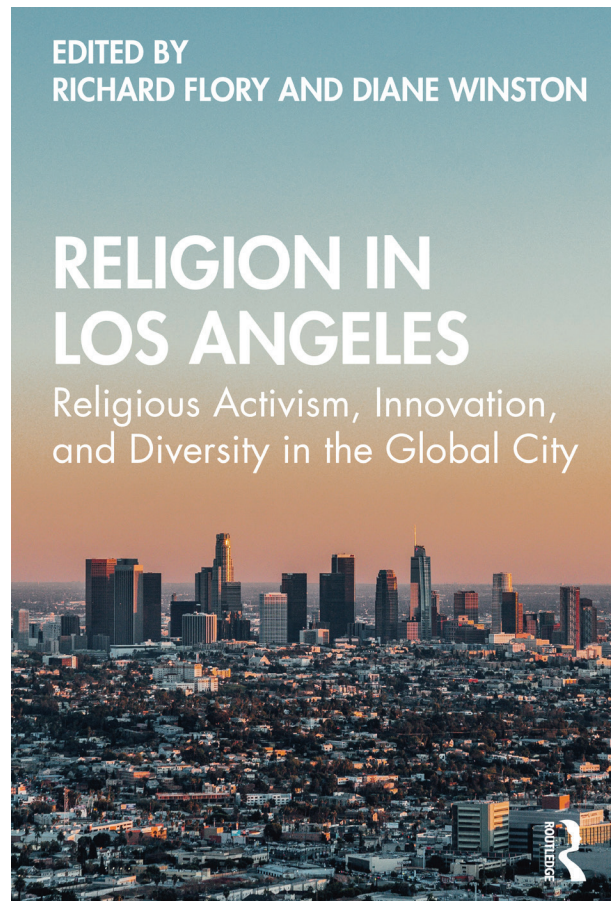
■ The conversation between theology and anthropology has advanced well beyond dialogues between Christian missionaries and anthropologists, judging by a 50-page supplement appearing in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (online in January). The special section brings together (through email communication) a group of Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist theologians with anthropologists to discuss the possibilities of a “post-secular anthropology.” That term is vague enough for both sides to engage in a constructive conversation about the way that anthropology has traditionally dismissed religion as only an object of naturalistic study rather than an approach having its own truth claims,

resulting in the exclusion of religious reasoning from public space. On the other side, the theologians find that embracing anthropological research gives them and their faith communities a greater appreciation of how their doctrines and ideas are actually lived out. Topics covered in these conversations include the conflict between the relativism of anthropology and the authority of religious traditions, how the humanistic tradition of Buddhism is in sync with much of anthropology, and the clash of values particularly between anthropologists and Pentecostal churches and leaders. For information on this special supplement, visit: <https://rai.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14679655>



■ The appearance of the new book *Religion in Los Angeles* (Routledge, \$44.95) is the result of a decade's worth of research on a city that has been called the center of religious innovation. Edited by Richard Flory and Diane Winston, the book examines the history and contemporary trends in religion in Los Angeles, drawing on contributors from several disciplines. The introduction refers to the "Southern California imaginary" in reference to the pluralistic ethos in culture and religion that drives the region, resulting in no one religious group being dominant and in the region's innovations in religious teachings, practices and organizations. Despite being seen as a secular center of entertainment and tech industries, the editors find that the religious presence in Los Angeles has actually increased over the years, with a large growth in the number of adherents, congregations and non-profit organizations.

While the first part of the book sets the stage historically for the distinctive quality of LA religion—with chapters on Theosophy, the Self-Realization Fellowship, and the beginnings of Pentecostalism in the city—the second part looks at contemporary religious expressions and related forms of religious activism, including contributions on Korean megachurches and revived Buddhism. The themes of LA's unique hybridity and transnationalism are explored in chapters on LA Jews and how they have adapted Asian religious practices, particularly Buddhism, and a case study of a Latino Pentecostal church, where older expressions of the faith originating from the Mexican borderlands mix with newer immigrant Pentecostal currents. The book ends with a quantitative analysis finding that Los Angeles and California are more diverse than other parts of the country and that even its evangelical Protestants show more religious diversity.



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

1) The formation of the **Alliance of Reformed Churches** has been a long time coming, as the liberal-conservative divide in the mainline Reformed Church in America has become increasingly sharp in recent years. The departure of the theologically conservative congregations to the new group, then, leaves some who remain in the RCA concerned for the denomination's survival. Before the split, the nearly 400-year-old denomination had fewer than 200,000 members and 1,000 churches. At least 125 churches from various denominations are in conversation with ARC leaders about joining. Because conservative churches are said to provide a large share of the denomination's income, observers fear a mass exodus may pose serious financial challenges to the RCA. The split follows the RCA General Synod's October decision to adopt measures for "grace-filled separation" with departing churches and to appoint a team to develop a restructuring plan for those

that remain. The new denomination plans to place a heavy emphasis on church planting and have a flexible organizational model; it will replace national in-person conferences with video calls, digital messaging platforms and other forms of virtual communication. Other conservative-leaning churches in the RCA, as well as those in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Christian Reformed Church in North America, and Presbyterian Church in America, are reported to be considering joining. (**Source:** *Alliance of Reformed Churches website*, <https://arc21.org/>; *Christianity Today*, January 7)

2) New real estate projects offering French Catholic believers the opportunity to live close to religious places and to like-minded believers are emerging and having a mixed reception. On the one hand, the thirst for meaningful relations in an individualistic environment is seen as a positive sign. On the other hand, some are critical of aspirations to create a Catholic "counter-culture" or follow a model denounced by some—such as the French geographer Laurent Chalard—as an imitation of American "gated communities" and thus an "Americanization of French territories." This is a sensitive issue in France, where "communitarian" approaches are perceived as divisive. The focus of this debate is a new real estate initiative called **Monasphere**. The promoters of Monasphere intend to develop Christian villages close to Catholic spiritual places. The first 17 houses will be available one kilometer away from the



Marian shrine of L'Île-Bouchard, where four girls claimed to have seen the Virgin Mary in the parish church in 1947. The model intends to combine autonomous private lives (each family buys its own house) with fraternal relations in non-urban settings with houses arranged in a village-like pattern.

The project promoters explain that they have been inspired by an already existing Christian eco-hamlet, by environmentalist authors encouraging an exodus from urban areas, and by American conservative Christian author Rod Dreher, the author of *The Benedict Option*. In an interview, Dreher praised the project and claimed that it would actually help Christian witness in a post-Christian environment. During his visits to France, Dreher found young active French Catholics to be receptive to the vision of *The Benedict Option*, while older ones had more difficulties in understanding it and tended to be reluctant or hostile to it. Whatever the future of Monasphere and similar projects, their roots are not only found in the ideas of an American author or in the echo of environmentalist views among a growing number of Christians. The influence of new communities among committed French Catholics since the 1970s has also played a role in paving the way and making such projects attractive. **(Source:** *La Vie*, January 28; *Le Figaro*, January 20; *Website of Monasphere* (in French), <https://monasphere.fr/>)

