

## Death dreams as the new near-death-experience frontier

The “death dreams” of dying patients that are usually about being reunited with deceased loved ones are coming under new scrutiny from medical researchers and are viewed by chaplains as adding a new spiritual meaning to dying, writes Paul Lauritzen in the Catholic magazine *Commonweal* (April 23). While those claiming near-death experiences make up a spiritual movement in their own right, death dreams and visions are far more common, though they are only recently being acknowledged. End-of-life dreams and visions (ELDV) are often found in hospice settings, where a patient will report having dreams or a visual experience of being reunited with family members and other loved ones. Even if a patient is not seen as being in immediate danger of dying, having these dreams is regularly viewed as a sign of their impending death within a few days. The phenomenon is widely known among hospice nurses as well as chaplains but had not been documented before hospice physician Christopher Kerr started studying it. Even though Kerr has “generated a substantial body of evidence that ELDVs are common, therapeutically important, and frequently predictive of imminent death,” it has been an “uphill battle to get clinicians to take end-of-life experiences seriously,” Lauritzen writes.

But popular reception of Kerr’s work, which is chronicled in his co-authored best-selling book, *Death Is But a Dream*, has been strong, with a popular TEDx talk and PBS documentary spreading the word about this phenomenon. The singular setting of hospices, allowing hospice nurses, doctors, and chaplains to spend in-depth time engaged in conversation and social activities with dying patients, stands in contrast to the more impersonal and technologically driven practices of conventional medicine, which may account for the former’s ability to capture such experiences, Lauritzen writes. In tracking these end-of-life dreams and visions, Kerr found that 90 percent of patients reported having at least one dream or vision that could be classified as an end-of-life experience. These dreams are distinguished from regular dreams by being particularly vivid and can occur both during periods of sleep and periods of wakefulness. Kerr found that as patients approached death their dreams changed from being about living friends and relatives to deceased ones. On a scale of one to five, with five signifying the highest level of



Source: Heart & Soul Hospice.

comfort, dreams with dead relatives and friends scored a 4.08, while dreams of living friends and relatives scored a 2.86.

These experiences were also found to have positive effects on the bereavement of patients' family and friends, who were comforted by knowing that their loved ones were at peace. Interestingly, almost none of Kerr's patients had a dream or vision that was explicitly religious. Kerry Egan, a former hospice chaplain who has written about dying experiences, said that in all her years of listening to the dreams of patients, she "never once heard a patient talking of seeing Jesus in a dream." Yet she argues that the dreams, which are often about deceased parents, sometimes beckoning the dying to join them, are profoundly spiritual. Hospice chaplains who spend time talking to these patients find that talking about their families functions as a religious experience. Such conversation "is how we talk about God," Egan said. "This is how we talk about the meaning of our lives. That is how we talk about the big spiritual questions of human existence." Lauritzen concludes that although his own original question about how such dreams could predict death remained unanswered, "knowing that such dreams provide comfort to the dying is itself comforting."

(*Commonweal*, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/end-life-dreams>)

## Under second generation's influence, African immigrant churches turn to social action while keeping traditional identity

While African immigrant churches continue to expand in the West, second- and third-generation members are seeking to maintain African traditions while reaching out to the wider society with evangelism and social action, write Allison Norton and Caleb Opoku Nyanni in the *International Bulletin of Mission Research* (47:2). African immigrants who planted churches in the West in the early 2000s generally replicated practices and theology from their motherland in Africa, even though they were strongly driven to engage in what has been called “reverse mission.” The belief that these churches had a God-given task to evangelize secular Europe and the West was deeply ingrained in their establishment, especially in such denominations as the Nigerian Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Ghana-based Church of Pentecost. But for all their vitality, these churches have not drawn many non-Africans over the years.

The second-generation members are now reaching young adulthood and are challenging some of the immigrant generation's approaches. They seek alternatives to the evangelism strategies of the first generations, marked by open-air evangelism, tract distribution, and engaging in “spiritual warfare,” and have “embraced...serving the poor and providing other daily life accessories to the needy and unchurched in the community.” Second-generation believers in the Netherlands, for instance, embarked on carnival-style music evangelism in 2022, and they use Twitter and Instagram as evangelistic tools. The second generation tends to look back to an earlier Pentecostal emphasis on the importance of ministering to people experiencing economic problems, the researchers add. In their case study of Church of Pentecost (CoP) members in the



Source: St. Paul's United Methodist Church.



UK and U.S., Norton and Nyanni found a pattern of second-generation members crossing between Western and African traditions and cultures.

These younger members valued the opportunity to worship in a community of peers who understood the realities of living as Africans and Ghanaians, but at the same time they “articulated a desire to expand the boundaries of belonging in the CoP in their loyalties... Navigating between universalistic and particularistic identities within the church was often a source of tension for the next generation, as they were sometimes frustrated at the seeming inability of the church to transcend culture or race in order to fulfill evangelistic visions of a multiracial, universal Christian community,” Norton and Nyanni write. The second-generation interviewees stressed creating spaces of belonging that extended beyond their ethnic group, with several members saying that they had built collaborative relationships with African-American and other black Christians on their university campuses and communities. The second generation has established Pentecostal International Worship Centers as a way to reach out to urban professionals, academics, and non-Ghanaians. These niche congregations built across North America have sought new areas of engagement in their communities, including “serving as food pantry sites, providing educational and health resources within their neighborhoods, and in some cases, partnering with local government resources to sustain their community engagement.”

(*International Bulletin of Mission Research*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/IBM>)

### **Asbury revival’s reverberations felt far from the evangelical tent**

While the Christian revival based at the evangelical Asbury College that was active in February has since simmered down [see March RW], it did spread to other schools and churches around the country and abroad, even outside evangelicalism. Writing in *Public Discourse* (April 10), Baylor University historian Thomas Kidd notes that the lasting effects of the work at Asbury are as yet unknown. “We won’t be able to tell for some time whether it was a one-off event or a pattern of larger, enduring renewal...Years from now, perhaps dozens or hundreds of pastors, missionaries, and other devoted Christians will look back and remember that God changed their life at Asbury or associated campus revivals in 2023.” He adds that one post-Asbury episode demonstrating the breadth of its impact is the recent Eucharistic renewal at the Holy Cross Church in Bronx, NY. While this Catholic renewal movement is self-consciously drawing on what happened at Asbury, it is dominated by urban Catholic immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa instead of white Protestants.

One of the Bronx priests associated with the renewal said, “There were prayer teams, and music, and people just came and kneeled in the sanctuary close to the Lord. And by midnight, there were like 600 people there, still just praying and praising—and in the style of our communities; the style of the Caribbean Catholic culture is very charismatic, so that’s the style.” *Charisma* magazine (May/June) reports that the release of the recent film *Jesus Revolution*, which chronicles the Jesus movement of the 1960s and 1970s, also became part of the Asbury revival.



Holy Cross Church (Bronx) (source: Wikiwand).

Opening just when the Asbury revival was taking place, it finished number three at the box office on its opening weekend and brought in more than \$15.5 million, more than doubling its projected \$7 million take. Co-producer Andy Erwin said that the film’s popularity “represents a desire for God to do it again...like never before. For people outside the church, especially for a younger generation, it represents the answer to the equation for something I think they’ve been desperately looking for.”

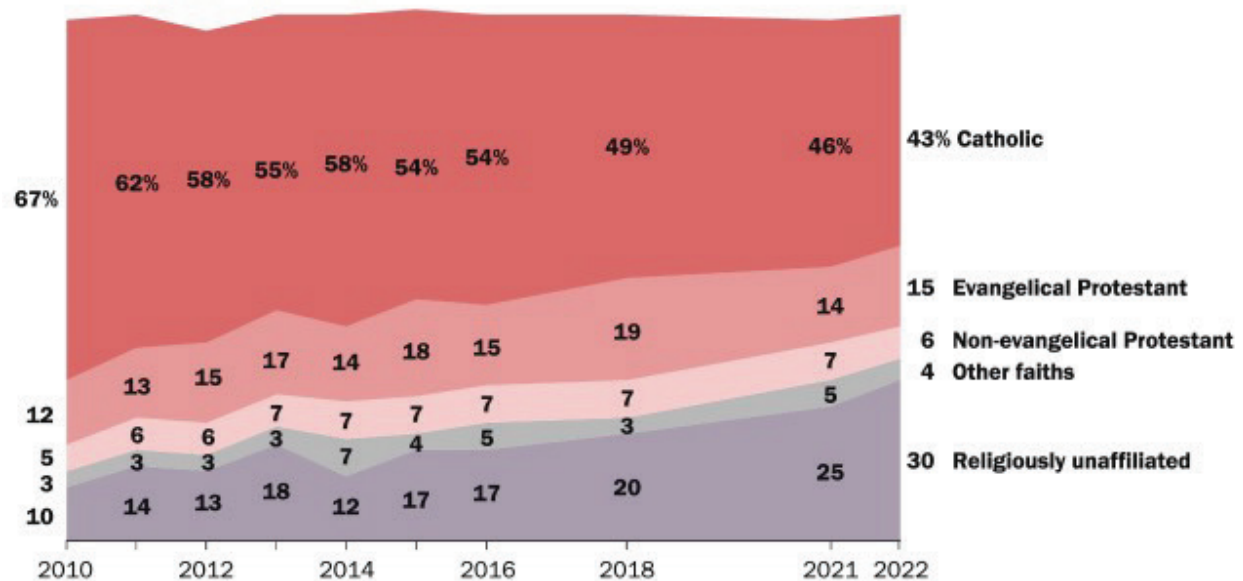
(*Public Discourse*, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2023/04/88217/>; *Charisma*, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746)

## CURRENT RESEARCH

- **While Catholicism continues to see Latinos exiting the church, it still remains the largest faith for U.S. Hispanic adults, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis.** Pew finds that the share of Latinos identifying as Catholic dropped from 67 percent in 2010 to 43 percent in 2022. Among the 65 percent who said they were raised Catholic, as much as 23 percent said they

## Steady decline in share of U.S. Latinos who identify as Catholic

% of U.S. Latino adults who identify as ...



Note: Respondents who did not answer the question are not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center's National Survey of Latinos, 2010-2016, 2018, 2021-2022. The survey of Latino adults was conducted by telephone through 2018 and subsequently moved online to the American Trends Panel. Data for 2021 and 2022 are weighted to targets drawn from the previous year's National Public Opinion Reference Survey.

"Among U.S. Latinos, Catholicism Continues to Decline but Is Still the Largest Faith"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

no longer identified as such. Latinos born in the U.S. are less likely to be Catholic than those born abroad. Overall, they still remain about twice as likely as U.S. adults in general to identify as Catholic, and considerably less likely to be Protestant. Meanwhile, the share of Latinos who say they are atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular" went up by 20 percentage points since 2010, from 10 to 30 percent. While Latino non-affiliation is on the rise, it is still outsized by the 70 percent who continue to identify with a religion. Even a substantial minority of the unaffiliated (29 percent) say they continue to pray at least weekly. Meanwhile, Protestants remain the second-largest faith group after Catholics, accounting for 21 percent of Hispanic adults, a share Pew reports has been relatively stable since 2010.

(The Pew study can be downloaded from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/04/13/among-u-s-latinos-catholicism-continues-to-decline-but-is-still-the-largest-faith/>)

- **A new study finds that almost all of the top 25 worship songs used by churches originated from just a few megachurches.** The website WorshipLeaderResearch.com cross-referenced CCLI lists, which are considered the Billboard charts for church music, with the top songs of Praise Charts, from which churches often purchase chord charts and arrangements. The researchers arrived at a figure of only 38 songs that are among the top 25 titles sung in churches. Most of these songs are directly traceable to four megachurches: Bethel, Hillsong, Elevation, and

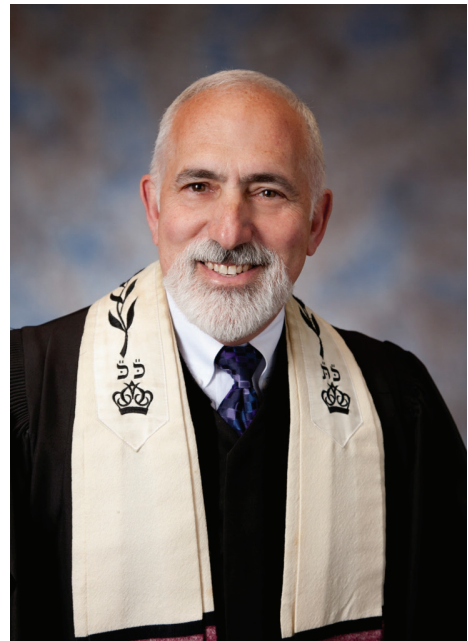




Source: WorshipLeaderResearch.com.

Passion, along with a handful of other artists. In each of these megachurches, songs are usually performed during worship services and then become a staple on their YouTube channels, only a year or so later appearing on the CCLI charts. The researchers conclude that it “appears clear that a few megachurches and a small number of affiliated artists are shaping the song repertoire of a broad swath of Christian congregations.” This confirms anecdotal fears among churches that “unless a song has the support of these limited but powerful churches, they will not gain widespread popularity in the Christian music industry and, by extension, the church.”

- **A new study finds that Jewish young adults have mainly positive feelings toward rabbis, even when they have not interacted with them, and that they are open to a relationship with such clergy in the future.** In an exploration of the impact of rabbis on Jewish young adults, Benenson Strategy Group conducted in-depth interviews with 41 young American Jews aged 18–44 years, followed by an online survey of 800 Jewish Americans in the same age range. They found that 69 percent of their survey respondents had had an experience with a rabbi at some point, and those that did had mainly positive experiences (47 percent positive, 23 percent mixed, 7 percent negative, and 25 percent neutral). These interactions took place in contexts ranging from synagogue services and Shabbat dinners to college campuses, camps, and classrooms. Among those who interacted with a rabbi, 69 percent of



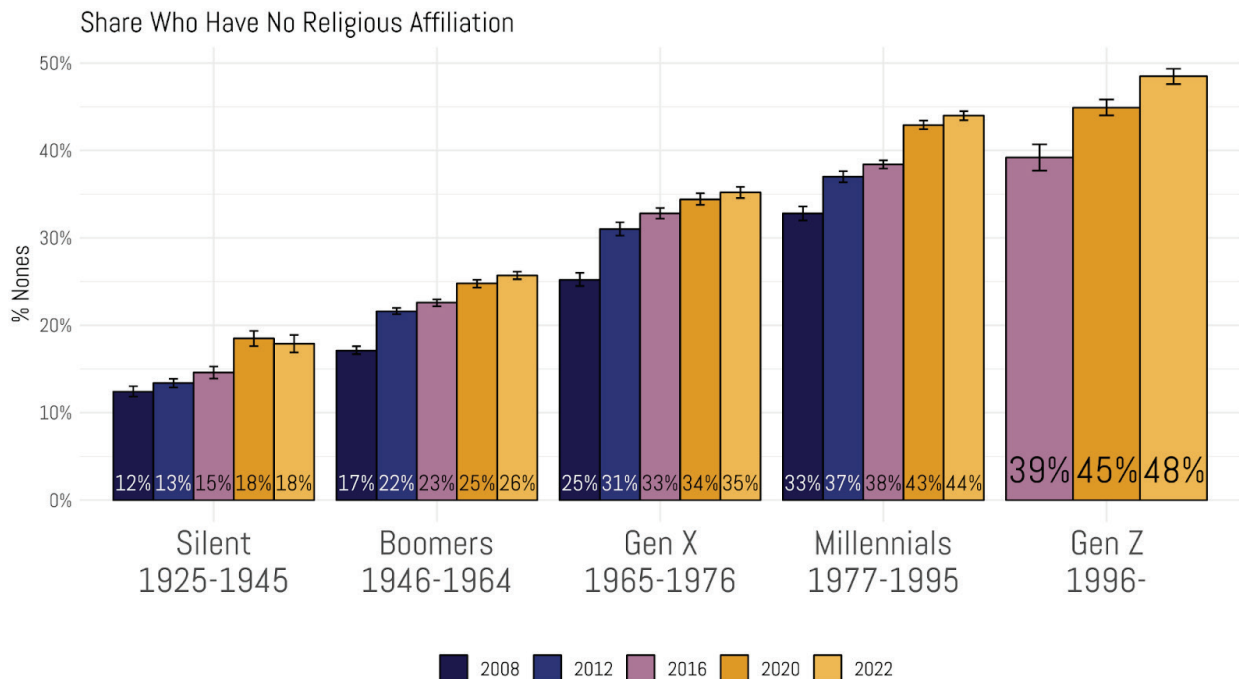
Source: North Shore Synagogue.

Orthodox, 79 percent of Conservative, 73 percent of Reform, and 63 percent of non-denominational Jews had a positive experience with a rabbi.

Only 12 percent of all respondents said that it was not currently important and would not be important to them in the future to have a relationship with a rabbi. Eighty-seven percent of Orthodox, 74 percent of Conservative, 56 percent of Reform, and 66 percent of non-denominational Jews rated it important to have a relationship with a rabbi. A majority of Reform (70 percent) and non-denominational Jews (63 percent) who said it was not currently important to have such a relationship were open to it becoming more important later in life. Across denominations, young American Jews' top priorities for a rabbi were acceptance of themselves or how they chose to be Jewish and the rabbi being "someone I trust." Forty percent of young Jews said it was hard to develop a relationship with a rabbi today because they felt some distance toward synagogues.

(The report can be downloaded from: [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e7ce07bd961fc6a9d520542/t/6418b77c01464d3bd8e359df/1679341467448/Executive\\_Summary\\_The\\_Rabbi\\_Effect.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e7ce07bd961fc6a9d520542/t/6418b77c01464d3bd8e359df/1679341467448/Executive_Summary_The_Rabbi_Effect.pdf))

- **Generation Z continues to show the highest growth of non-affiliation among all the generations, according to new data from the Cooperative Election Study.** In the blog *Religion in Public* (April 3), political scientist Ryan Burge analyzes the raw data the study just released, which was collected in October and November of last year, and finds a significant shift in religious affiliation among the members of Generation Z just in the year since the previous



@ryanburge  
Data: CES 2008-2022



wave of data collection. Burge notes that the study consistently uses the same questions and response options and the same survey mode—something that has not been the case with other surveys during the pandemic. Based on a sample of 60,000 survey respondents, Burge notes that the data showed no increase in non-affiliates or “nones” among the Silent Generation since 2020. There was a noticeable jump between 2016 and 2020, but that stopped in the last three surveys. This was also true for the Baby Boomers, who showed a noticeable jump during the Trump years, “then really no shift since 2020. Thirty-five percent of Generation X are nones now—that’s up a full ten points since 2008—but the lion’s share of that happened between 2008 and 2016. Modest shifts since then.”

Millennials have been on a slow and steady march away from religion since 2008; the share of nones in 2016 was 38 percent and that has now jumped to 44 percent. “But Generation Z,” Burge writes, “already started at a much higher baseline—39 percent. Now, the share of the youngest adult generation that has no religious affiliation is 48.5 percent. It seems statistically justifiable to say that by the time the United States has another presidential election, half of Generation Z will identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular...Generation Z is the least religious generation in American history. And they are becoming less religiously identified as each year passes. Every day in the United States, thousands of members of the Silent and Boomer generation are dying off. Every day in the United States, thousands of members of Generation Z are celebrating their 18th birthday and becoming official adults. That simple fact is changing American religion and society in ways that we can only begin to understand now.”

(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2023/04/03/gen-z-and-religion-in-2022/>)

- **Although people from the “First Nations” in Canada are publicly portrayed as valuing their traditions of a creator god and holding nature in reverence, the recent Canadian census reveals that the country’s 1.8 million Indigenous people are anything but monolithic in regard to religion and spiritual practice.** In fact, the census found a fast-rising number of Indigenous people who are choosing “no religion, and secular perspectives,” reports Douglas Todd in the *Vancouver Sun* (April 20). That share is now 47 percent, up from only 20 percent in 2011. There are also a declining number of Indigenous people who say that they are Christians (also about 47 percent). Only four percent of Canadian Indigenous people place themselves in the slot of “traditional (North American Indigenous) spirituality.” This small group would be closest to the historic form of spirituality described above and often extolled in Canadian educational resources. Indigenous religious diversity stretches surprisingly wide in 2023, flowing into unfamiliar streams, with about 1,840 Indigenous Canadians who say they are Muslim, while another 1,615 Canadians are Jewish.

Todd writes that although the proportion of Indigenous people who belong to mainstream denominations is declining, “485,000 Indigenous people today (27 percent) still say they’re Catholic, 110,000 affiliate with the Anglicans and 42,000 are United Church members.” These



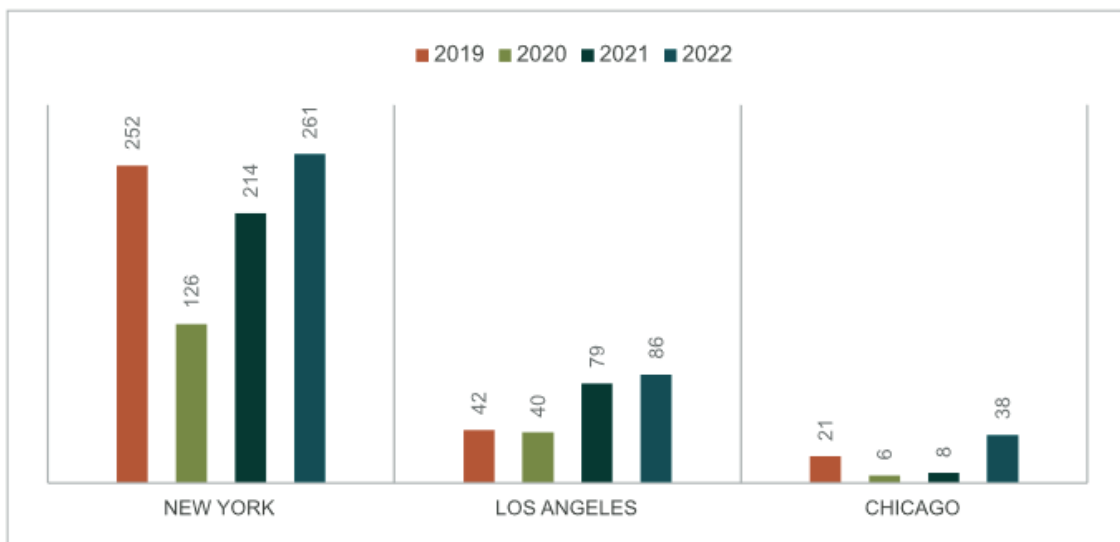
Source: The Canadian Encyclopedia.

churches ran residential schools for Indigenous children which have recently come under fire for abuses. In addition, 28,000 Indigenous people belong to the Pentecostal Church, which did not operate a residential school, along with 6,515 who are Jehovah's Witnesses and 5,035 who belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. According to Ray Aldred, a member of the Cree Nation who directs the Indigenous studies program at Vancouver School of Theology, the sharp increase in Indigenous people choosing the secular category may be a way of them saying "that they don't want to be associated with 'one of those,'" meaning the Christians who are increasingly being condemned for their role in operating the approximately 125 residential schools, almost all of which were closed by the 1970s. "He said Indigenous people are picking up the concept [of the secular] from attending college and university, where faculty tend to vilify Christianity and academic papers about the faith seem to only get published if the author can show they hate the religion," Todd writes. "All that has an impact," Aldred said. At the same time, he said many Indigenous people do not see a contradiction between Christianity and their peoples' ancient spiritual ways. "Their families have been part of the church for a couple of hundred years."

(*Vancouver Sun*, <https://vancouversun.com/opinion/columnists/canadian-indigenous-spirituality-anything-but-monolithic>)

● **Visibly identifiable Jews, particularly Haredi Jews, are the main victims of antisemitic assaults in the West, according to a new study.** Researchers at the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University examined dozens of assaults, including beatings, being spit on, and having objects thrown at victims, reported in New York (the city that recorded the most assaults in the United States), London (which saw the largest number of attacks in Europe), and several other cities. The study suggests that physical attacks on Jews tend to occur in a small number of areas in major urban centers, usually on the street or on public transportation rather than near or in synagogues or Jewish establishments. Most attacks appear not to be premeditated. Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews are the main victims, not only because they are easily identifiable as Jews, with their beards, black hats and coats, but also because they are seen as unlikely to fight back. The study found that the motivations of the perpetrators are not easy to discern and could be driven by a deeply held antisemitism, hatred for Israel, bullying, or a combination of the three.

### Antisemitic Hate Crimes in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, 2019–2022



Source: ADL/Tel Aviv University.

Dr. Carl Yonker, one of the leaders of the research, said it was “very disturbing to discover during fieldwork in London that some Haredim regard antisemitism as the inescapable fate of Jews in the diaspora, sometimes even blaming members of their own communities for the situation.” Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which co-sponsored the study, added, “The data contained in this survey is very troubling. It is alarming to see the significant increase in antisemitic incidents and trends across the U.S. and in several other countries. Equally concerning is that, unlike in 2021, there were no specific events which



can be linked to a rise in antisemitism, which speaks to the deeply-seated nature of Jew hatred around the world.”

(The report can be downloaded from: [https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2023-04/AntisemitismWorldwide\\_e.pdf](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2023-04/AntisemitismWorldwide_e.pdf))

- **The growth of Hindu nationalism in India and the resulting decrease in religious freedom and social diversity are having a dampening effect on the country’s economy, according to a study appearing in the social science journal *Society* (online in April).** Economists Abdul Shaban and Philippe Cadene analyzed data from 1990–91 to 2017–18 on the share of the population in 16 major Indian states speaking different languages and following various religions, along with data on per-capita domestic product spending. They found that religious and cultural diversity were more widespread due to the tendency of capitalist development to lead people to move to states with higher economic growth. But while the current leading parties have argued for economic liberalization and the development of entrepreneurship, the researchers note that they “simultaneously promote the religio-cultural nationalism leading to open and coercive violence which inhibits the diversity, languages, occupations, choices of food, practices, and expression of other religious and culturally diverse groups.” During the pandemic period, many states introduced laws “that restrict the employment



President Narendra Modi of BJP on a massive street sign - Delhi, India March 2015 (source: Erik Törner / Flickr).

opportunities only to the locals, limiting opportunities for the migrants. Local governments in some culturally diverse megacities of India are becoming less accommodative to minority languages and religions.” Thus, the “declining economic growth in India from 2017 onwards... may be linked to this cultural repression and anxiety among the economic agents.” The researchers conclude that it may not be religion itself that is responsible for economic decline but rather the “legitimacy of religious politics.”

(*Society*, <https://www.springer.com/journal/12115>)

## **Are Christians in Spain being targeted by jihadist terrorists or is it all in the mind?**

After a period of relative calm in Europe, jihadist terrorism has reemerged to target churches, especially in Spain, reports Itxu Diaz in *First Things* magazine (April 18). Diaz writes that two years ago the Islamic State ordered its followers to attack churches in Spain, and recent incidents suggest that “the call is being heeded.” In January, a Moroccan man attacked two churches in the town of Algeciras in southern Spain, wounding a priest, killing a sacristan, assaulting Mass goers, and destroying sacred artifacts. After the attacker tried to break down the door of a third church, he was apprehended by authorities. Two hours before the attack, the FBI alerted Spanish police to another Moroccan jihadist in Gerona who was plotting to attack tourists. And 10 days before the attack, Spanish police had dismantled an Islamic State terrorist cell in Almeria. Also during that time a man shouting in Arabic was arrested for breaking into a basilica in Oviedo (although Spanish authorities did not consider this a jihadist attack).

These incidents followed a terrorist attack on the Gare du Nord train station in Paris, where a Libyan man with a deportation order stabbed six people while shouting “Allah is great.” Last September, two people were killed in Germany from terrorist attacks. Diaz writes that these attacks usually come in waves, and Spain may now be experiencing attacks on Christians and churches that have mainly been seen in France. Among the other incidents in recent years in Spain were a planned major attack during Easter Holy Week in 2019 that was foiled by the police, and another failed attack in 2017, this time on Barcelona’s Sagrada Familia (when the detonation of a bomb forced the attackers to change their plans). Diaz charges that Spain’s leftist government has downplayed these attacks and instead focuses on not criminalizing Muslims or the illegal immigration by which the extremists have entered the country. Following the recent spate of attacks in Algeciras, civilian groups have banded together to patrol the main churches of the city during times of worship. Diaz concludes that among Christians there is a spirit of mistrust toward the government on this issue, as it exhibits what they feel to be “Christophobia” on a daily basis.

In an interview with the *CTC Sentinel* (April), the newsletter of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Military Academy, Catalan terrorism specialists Lluís Paradell Fernandez and

Xavier Cortés Camacho say that, rather than anti-Christian terrorism in Spain, they are seeing “a new paradigm that people who could appear in front of our eyes as simple pickpockets in our country are in such sophisticated and current contact with the Islamic State in order to prepare a bombing in the city [of Barcelona]. We have to deal with these two dimensions of the threat. On the one hand, the day-by-day monitoring of people with mental health challenges with the potential to carry out lone wolf attacks. On the other hand, we have people that don’t have the appearance of being terrorists, but when you look deeply at the information they have in their houses or electronic devices, you can see that they are really deeply connected with these international groups.” Fernandez and Camacho say the attack in Algeciras was “initially considered a terrorist attack but now it seems to not



San Isidro church, where a parish priest was wounded (source: Wikipedia).

have been so because the perpetrator had mental health challenges... We are monitoring a group of people that have mental health challenges, who are playing with the ideology of jihadism. So they are not really people concerned with this ideology, but they *think* they are concerned. So the threat is almost bigger because they are not under any kind of personal control and they very usually have problems with people in the street, so they could act with a knife or something similar at any moment.”

(*First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2023/04/jihadism-re-emerges-in-europe>; *CTC Sentinel*, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/april-2023/>)



## Inflation forcing hard choices upon churches and Christian organizations in Europe

Faced with increasing demands for financial donations in a context of rising inflation, Christians in Europe are being forced to make choices, just as consumers must prioritize their spending, but the consequences are not being felt in the same way everywhere, notes journalist David Nadaud in an article for the evangelical magazine of the French-speaking world, *Christianisme Aujourd'hui* (May). In interviews with leaders of evangelical churches and organizations in French-speaking Europe, Nadaud found unease about the financial picture. The leader of a communion of evangelical churches explained that while there was no noticeable decrease in financial support for the denomination's churches in 2020–21, despite the pandemic, there was a noticeable decrease in 2022. In Switzerland, several evangelical churches reported a decrease in income, although this may be due to the fact that a number of churches have not recovered the level of participation in church services they had prior to the pandemic. In the case of NGOs and evangelical Christian organizations in Switzerland, there has been no significant decrease in donations, and in some cases there has even been an increase. In the case of organizations that have registered a decrease, this may be explained by a strong response to immediate crises (Ukraine, etc.) to the detriment of long-term actions,



Cologne Cathedral, Germany (© Raimond Spekking / CC BY-SA 4.0 (via Wikimedia Commons))

even if concerns about inflation may also have played a role. But the increase in financial demands also appears to have an impact, forcing potential donors to sort and prioritize.

Across Europe, religious groups are watching out for the consequences of successive events that could potentially impact the donations of their congregations—first the pandemic, then inflation and rising energy costs. In Germany, an analysis published by an economic research center, the Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft (April 8), notes that the 2022 increase in the income of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany—whose resources come largely from church taxes—is misleading because it was accompanied by a record number of people leaving the churches (1.3 million in 2022). Moreover, inflation is eroding purchasing power and incomes will decline as the population ages. In France, according to a press kit released in December 2022 by the Conference of Catholic Bishops, church revenues were 527 million euros in 2019, fell to 489 million in 2020 due to Covid, but in 2021 surpassed the 2019 level to reach 537 million. However, soaring energy prices (heating, electricity) and inflation are expected to lead to a sharp increase in expenses, which donations are already not enough to cover, since only real estate income, real estate sales and bequests made up for a 139 million euro gap between expenses and resources in 2021.

(*Christianisme Aujourd'hui*, <https://www.christianismeaujourd'hui.info>;  
*Report of the Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft*, <https://www.iwkoeln.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/tobias-hentze-kirchen-muessen-2027-mit-elf-prozent-weniger-geld-auskommen.html>)

## **War in Ukraine turning Moscow Patriarchate into a national church**

While the end of the Soviet Union had opened a period with many possible futures for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), the war in Ukraine has definitely sent it on a path toward its consolidation as a Russian national church, writes Kristina Stoeckl (Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali) in *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (April). Despite its closeness to the regime for years, this was not inescapable, since the ROC did not present itself as the church of the Russian Federation and wanted to be seen as a global religious player. It had promoted the concept of the “Russian world” as a civilizational rather than national idea. Since 2020 at the latest, however, the ROC’s identity as a national institution and a supporter of a national ideology has been confirmed. It is significant that voices expressing different views within the church are no longer tolerated. Moreover, as a consequence of the war, the Moscow Patriarchate is losing control over a large part of Orthodox faithful in Ukraine, and will probably lose influence beyond it, which is bound to reinforce the turn toward a national church.

Meanwhile, in another article in the same issue, the editors Regula Zwahlen and Natalija Zenger write that there is significant minority dissent within the ROC about the war. Surveys suggest that around 20 percent of the Russian population does not support the war, and it is likely that the percentage is similar among Russian Orthodox believers. There have been open statements





Source: Hippopx.

against the war by priests and laypeople, but consequences can be serious, in relation both to the state and the church itself. Some anonymous Russian priests explain their dilemma of deciding if they should take a stand against the war or rather give priority to their pastoral work. Some express silent dissent by not including some new, patriotic prayers in religious celebrations. But even this is not without risk. The current atmosphere of fear of being denounced also exists within the church, which means that only war rhetoric is freely spoken, but the silence does not mean unanimous approval.

(*Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Institut G2W, Bederstrasse 76, 8002 Zürich, Switzerland - <https://g2w.eu>.)

### **Freedom of indigenous spirituality gets short shrift by African states**

Although African indigenous spirituality has been proclaimed a cultural treasure in UN and UNESCO documents, African states are increasingly denying or marginalizing the freedom of such religious expressions, according to a new report by the USCIRF, the United States





Samburu ceremony celebration, Kenya, Africa (source: Alex Strachan / Pixabay).

Commission on International Religious Freedom. The USCIRF is a bipartisan independent commission whose members are appointed by the congressional leaders of both parties and nominated by the president. According to its April 4 report, “Within the discourse on freedom of religion or belief in Africa, the experiences of practitioners of African traditional and indigenous religions are often neglected or peripheral. Some of the most significant challenges adherents of these faith traditions endure include violence and impunity, legal restrictions and coercion, the desecration of sacred lands and objects, and official and societal discrimination.” As the newsletter *Bitter Winter* (April 10) reports, the document points out that “While some experts assessed that the number of practitioners of African traditional and indigenous religions decreased throughout the 20th century and predicted they would continue to do so, recent decades have seen a resurgence of traditional and indigenous practitioners in the region.”

The report points to cases of Christian and Muslim extremists attacking gatherings of African indigenous spirituality, such as when Islamic State fighters in a Mozambique insurgency attacked a male initiation ceremony and beheaded over a dozen men and teenage boys. In 2022, Boko Haram fighters in Nigeria slit the throats of 20 women they accused of witchcraft. Even in democratic African states, “some governments discriminate against practitioners of African traditional and indigenous religions...many of whom are religious minorities in their areas of

origin, based on their beliefs. State institutions like founding documents, judicial procedures, and school curricula show overt favoritism for faiths like Christianity or Islam and skepticism or bias against traditional or indigenous religions,” the report states. *Bitter Winter* editor Massimo Introvigne adds that in the specific case of South Africa, its Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) has applied to African indigenous spirituality and some Christian minorities categories of Western anti-cult discourse.

(*Bitter Winter*, <https://bitterwinter.org/uscirf-denounces-discrimination-of-african-indigenous-spirituality-in-africa/>)