

Christian Nationalists' identity dilemmas

As the election season heats up, Christian nationalism is again in the headlines and even in movie marquees (with the new film, *God and Country*), but researchers are increasingly divided about the strength and even the identity of the diffuse movement. A new study from the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), in cooperation with the Brookings Institution, follows the original approach many scholars have developed to study Christian nationalism, assessing the extent of its support by measuring agreement with five statements, such as that “the U.S. government should declare America a Christian nation” and “U.S. laws should be based on Christian values.” Using such criteria, the study finds 3 in 10 Americans expressing some sympathy for Christian nationalism. It then goes on to gauge this support in a state-by-state breakdown. Among those states drawing 45 to 50 percent of supporters to its principles were Mississippi, North Dakota, Alabama, West Virginia, and Louisiana, while the least supportive states were Massachusetts (18 percent), Maryland (19 percent), New York (19 percent), and New Jersey (20 percent). At a webinar on the survey in late February, which **RW** attended, PRRI director Robert Jones said that the percentage of Christian nationalist sympathizers has changed little since 2022.

The study used the same categories of protagonists and antagonists used in previous studies, with the most supportive respondents being dubbed “Adherents” (representing 10 percent of the country) and “Sympathizers” (20 percent), and those opposing the statements, “Skeptics” (37 percent) and “Rejecters” (30 percent). These patterns were then tracked according to voting preferences, with red states found to be more likely to sympathize with Christian nationalism than blue states. Fifty-five percent of those who voted for Donald Trump in 2020 are said to be Christian nationalists. As for Christian nationalists' religious makeup, white evangelicals make up 66 percent and Hispanic Protestants 55 percent of this group, with many of them drawn to charismatic and Pentecostal prophetic and prosperity teachings. The report does not elaborate on how its characterization of white Christian nationalism relates to its growing Hispanic expression, except in finding that Latinos were less opposed to immigration. African-Americans



Source: Kelly Kanayama / Medium.

showed the highest rate of Christian nationalist support, but the report argues that such support is not tied to voting Republican or for Trump. Contrary to other research, the survey found that Christian nationalists were more likely to be regular church attenders than “cultural evangelicals.”

Discussants in the webinar reporting the survey’s results clearly struck a note of alarm about these findings. The survey’s state-based focus and analysis intends to help people monitor Christian nationalism’s impact on voting outcomes in primary and general elections, according to panelist and political scientist Andrew Whitehead. Christian nationalism, as defined by the study, was portrayed as an authoritarian and violent threat to pluralistic democracy, with Whitehead saying that if they have their way, white Christian nationalists will make non-Christian, non-white, and non-heterosexual Americans into “second class citizens.” Meanwhile, fellow panelist

and progressive journalist Katherine Stewart pointed to the recent Alabama court decision against In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and argued that it is “just one more part of the [Christian nationalist] march to go after people’s rights” that started with the pro-life movement.

The PRRI survey did not go much into the long-term trends of Christian nationalism. Looking back past 2022, political scientist Ryan Burge writes in his newsletter *Graphs About Religion* (Feb. 22) that most survey results “point to the fact that Christian Nationalism is fading in the general population.” This is evident in the declining support for the five statements that measure Christian nationalism (Christian values in government, prayer in public schools, strict separation of church and state, the presence of religious symbols in public spaces, and that the success of the U.S. is part of God’s plan). For instance, in 2007, 55 percent of respondents agreed that the government should advocate Christian values; in 2021, that share had dropped to just 38 percent. Burge adds that there was a 19-point “drop in the share of respondents who say that the government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces. In 2007, a bare majority (51 percent) agreed that the government should enforce a strict separation of church and state. That increased to 62 percent in the most recent data.” Burge thinks that the growth of the non-affiliated may be a factor driving down Christian nationalist sentiment. But controlling for the “nones,” the declines in Christian nationalist thinking do not change that much. Agreement with the Christian values statement still drops by 17 points. Thus it is apparent that Christian nationalism has lost its hold on many religious Americans, especially among mainline Protestants, but even evangelicals showed some decline. Their mean score was 15.9 in 2007, but it dropped to 13.8 in 2021.

As might be expected, Democratic support of Christian nationalist sentiments shows a significant downturn, with Democrats in 2021 being half as likely to say that the federal government should advocate Christian values as they were in 2007. Burge found that Republicans were more mixed, showing a 10-point decline in support of Christian values in government, prayer in schools, and the importance of religious symbols in the government. There was even a 21-point increase in the share of Republicans who say that the government should enforce a strict separation of church and state. Yet the share of Republicans who say that the government should declare the U.S. a Christian nation has risen by five points since 2007 (from 40 percent to 45 percent). And the share who say that the success of the United States is part of God’s plan has increased 13 points during this same time period (from 46 percent to 59 percent). Much of the above results are based on the same five questions and categorizations of degrees of support and dissent for Christian nationalism. But Burge is part of a new approach to studying Christian nationalism, with findings from a national survey of more than 2,000 U.S. adults reported in the study, *Neighborly Faith*. Again, it was found that few Americans (five percent) identify with the label. The project created an expanded battery of questions and employed more advanced statistical analyses to measure where Americans fit in with Christian nationalist beliefs and attitudes.

The new approach resulted in 11 percent of respondents being classified as Christian nationalists, with a further 19 percent found to be sympathetic to the worldview—not too far from the PRRI survey results. But taking together the sympathetic with the unsympathetic views, the researchers used Latent Class Analysis to classify Americans into four groups in addition to Adherents and Sympathizers: Christian Spectators, Pluralistic Believers, Zealous Separationists, and Undecideds. “By and large, Americans are broadly committed to civic and religious pluralism and are willing to welcome and work with others across divides to make the nation better,” the report found. For example, 60 percent of participants agree with the statement, “America’s openness to people from all over the world is essential to who we are as a nation.” Ninety-three percent are either “moderately” or “very” willing to work with others of different faiths to improve society.

But the report goes on to note that Christian nationalist Adherents and Sympathizers generally lack the aforementioned commitments so essential to a pluralistic society. “These respondents are more likely than others to dehumanize their political opponents, express the highest preference for a ‘strong leader who does not have to deal with Congress and elections,’ and to exhibit a tendency to dislike many outgroups. Yet Christian nationalist Adherents are more favorable toward groups like Jews, Asian Americans, and African Americans than non-Adherents. The report concludes that “by most of our measures, CN Adherents are equally willing to engage in civic work with those of different faiths as others. There are even a handful of activities (such as gathering to discuss solutions to community issues and raising money or organizing help for victims of natural disasters) where they are actually more willing to do so than the average American.”

(The PRRI report can be downloaded at: <https://www.prri.org/research/support-for-christian-nationalism-in-all-50-states/>; the Neighborly Faith report can be downloaded at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-2qh08f6J6zj-TXZjqKTemPtSfLx5tku/view>)

Lent viewed as alternative to D.I.Y. Christianity by younger Christians

Younger Christians are “reclaiming Lent” by rehabilitating older traditions as a reaction against techniques of self-help and self-optimization both within evangelical churches and in the broader culture, writes Molly Worthen in the *New York Times* (February 18). In informal interviews, Worthen finds that younger Christians who have recently adopted Lenten traditions, such as fasting, often see them as an alternative to the evangelical traditions and their D.I.Y. emphasis of affirming and expressing one’s own preferences in spiritual practices. However, the attraction to traditional rules is counterbalanced by the eschewal of older traditions and practices of “self-punishment” and ritualism. Among the young Christians with whom Worthen spoke, most started taking Lent seriously only when they got to college, often in the process adopting a more liturgical Christian church, such as Anglicanism.



Source: MTSOfan | Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mtsofan/16712309262>)

More than the liturgy, these respondents valued the Lenten traditions of these traditional churches and how they provided them with a structure. Fasting seems to be the most favored Lenten discipline, with one woman linking fasting to developing a deeper prayer life. The respondents also showed an interest in learning from Christians outside of the West and how they practiced Lent. For instance, Korean churches were cited as showing a more communal approach than that found in the individualistic West. “In revival meetings in Korean communities, there’s this crying out in suffering. It’s not purely, ‘I did all these bad things and therefore I need to repent of them,’ but ‘I’m in the midst of this suffering, broken reality, and part of it is my fault, but part of it is the world I live in,’” said Soong Chan Rah of Fuller Theological Seminary. Accompanying this approach, fasting was often linked to affluent Christians’ awareness of world hunger.

Wide range of conservative Christians take up the veil

There is a modest revival of conservative Christian women using veils and other head coverings during worship, reports *Gottesdienst* (February 27), a journal of Lutheran liturgy. While traditional Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox women have long taken up the veil during

their liturgies, this practice is now spreading among conservative Lutherans, Reformed Church members, and Anabaptists, writes Larry Beane. Wearing head coverings is still a widespread practice among Amish and some Mennonite women, who wear veils both for worship and everyday life. The new practice seems most popular among young women, while older women often criticize the practice as subjugating and demeaning women. Beane adds that the practice may be part of a conservative reaction to the blurring of gender and sexual differences. It was only in the 1960s when wearing head coverings was regularly practiced everywhere from Catholic and Orthodox parishes to Methodist, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches. The practice was pronounced enough that the feminist National Organization of Women made a concerted effort

to liberate women from their veils in the late 1960s, even proposing veil-burning events. The small but growing revival of head coverings can mean anything from wearing veils in worship to wearing them only in public to wearing them all the time. While Beane thinks head coverings will remain a minority practice, at least in Lutheranism, which allows wide latitude for different worship and devotional practices, he hails the development as a “laudable custom and beautiful ritual of the assertion of biblical femininity.”

(*Gottesdienst*, <https://www.gottesdienst.org/gottesblog/2024/2/27>)



Source: Ron Lach | Pexels (<https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-wearing-head-covering-praying-before-icon-10619933/>)

Women gaining entry to Sikh leadership in the U.S.

Women are increasingly taking up leadership roles in organized Sikhism in the U.S. and are challenging the norms and gender roles in male-dominated institutions, writes Komal Kaur in the journal *Sikh Formations* (online in February). Younger Sikhs have become increasingly activist in the religion in recent years, though more in society than organized Sikhism [see **RW**, Vol. 34, No. 3]. Kaur writes that the mass shooting of Sikhs at a FedEx building in Indianapolis in 2022 was one turning point in women getting more involved in leadership in American Sikhism. The question of emotional well-being and mental health among Sikhs became a concern of the emerging women leaders. This concern is seen in the new nonprofit organization, Umeed-Hope Inc, which seeks to address systemic discrimination, trauma, and the lack of mental health resources among Sikhs, according to Kaur (who is a founder of the group). She claims that the Sikh male leadership does not have the training or emotional capabilities to address these mental health needs.

Other organizations with significant female Sikh leadership are SALDEF, the Jakara Movement, Sikh Family Center, the Sikh Coalition, and Young Khalsa Girls. Although classic Sikh teachings advocate for women's equality, portraying them as warriors and scholars in the faith, Kaur argues



Source: P.L. Tandon | Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/13070711@N03/24160841917>)

that the emerging women leaders challenge the “prevailing climate that does not support women but perpetuates the patriarchal norms” of organized Sikhism. She adds that some Sikh leaders see the women leadership as representing a threat to traditional values, and it is true that a strong identity politics and feminist note is struck by the new Sikh women leaders. Kaur argues that the women leaders “represent a collective shift towards a more inclusive and equitable future,” again stressing the challenge of mental health and its stigma in the Sikh community. She adds that the discrimination against Sikhs in the U.S. by whites is compounded for women who are also Sikh activists.

(*Sikh Formations*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rsfo20/current>)

In wake of scandals, 3HO movement signs on to DEI and seeks Sikh ties

Although the 3HO movement, a “neo-Sikh” group promoting Kundalini Yoga and drawing a largely white following, continues to suffer repercussions from sexual abuse scandals involving its founder Yogi Bhaajan [see **RW**, Vol. 34, No. 9], the group has reinvented itself, stressing racial equality and diversity and building ties to mainstream Sikhism, writes Simranjit Steel in the journal *Sikh Formations* (online in February). Since 2020, the movement has faced an internal “reckoning” stemming from reports of the founder’s abuse, but the reforms have centered around



Copyright © 2013 Gurumustuk Singh - sikhphotos.com

bringing Kundalini Yoga to “underserved communities” and aligning the organization with “anti-racism” and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) practices.

In studying email communications, Steel finds increasing portrayals of non-white members. Other examples of concern with anti-racism strategies are monthly meet-up groups separating out “people of color and white-bodied people to support those who have been unrepresented in the community and to unpack white privilege respectively,” she writes. Her analysis also revealed a shift in organizational communications “toward greater emphasis on connections to and alignment with more ‘mainstream’ Sikh traditions.” This includes publicizing classes in Gurmukhi, the language of the sacred text, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, and celebration of holidays commonly observed by Sikhs in Punjab, India. Steel concludes that the anti-racism efforts and alignment with traditional Sikhism are a strategy of the 3HO to reassert its legitimacy in the face of widespread instability due to its abuse crisis.

(*Sikh Formations*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rsfo20/current>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

• **One of the first cross-national studies on abortion and religion finds that the religious or secular character of nations’ cultures has more influence on abortion attitudes than religious affiliation.** The study, conducted by sociologist Amy Adamczyk of the City University of New York, was presented at a seminar at New York’s Columbia University in mid-February, which **RW** attended. Adamczyk, author of the forthcoming book, *Fetal Positions*, based on her research, analyzed waves 5, 6, and 7 of the World Values Survey (WVS), which has a sample size of 11,317 respondents from 88 countries, as well as using data from the Pew Research Center and collecting qualitative data comparing China and the U.S. She said that because the WVS dataset has only one abortion question, it has been difficult to get a handle on international abortion attitudes and their relation to religion.

The weak effect Adamczyk found in the correlation between religious affiliation and abortion attitudes was only partially offset by respondents’ Catholic affiliation, with an increase in abortion disapproval appearing in Catholic countries, but there was no such effect for dominant religious groups in other countries. But she found it was the country effects (the influence of the surrounding religious or secular culture) that had as much impact on abortion attitudes as personal beliefs. In comparing abortion attitudes in China and the U.S., Adamczyk and researchers conducted 40 expert interviews (comprising such professionals as journalists, researchers, and doctors) and found a wide chasm between the two countries on the issue. In China, there was no effect of religion and spirituality on abortion attitudes, aside from an individual belief in karma with collective implications, while the pervasive Christian presence in the U.S. kept abortion prominent in public life. But in her interviews, Adamczyk found religious overtones to several respondents, ranging from views that confession can help women in coping



Source: American Life League | Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/64235822@N00/9186763697/>)

with the loss caused by abortion to the belief that through reincarnation the couple could have another chance to have children.

- **A new study finds that only about a third of those LDS members who claim to attend church weekly in surveys actually do.** While there are several different estimations of Church of Latter-day Saints church attendance, the new estimates by economist Devin Pope of the University of Chicago are unique as they are based on a larger project that tracks the cellphones of 2.1 million Americans over nearly a year (from April 2019 to the pre-pandemic month of February 2020). In her blog for Religious News Service, *Flunking Sainthood* (February 16), Jana Reiss reports that in his study Pope took circumstances such as illness and travel into consideration, designating members as “weekly attenders” if they went to church at least 36 weeks out of the year. But even with such allowances, the researcher found that 0.29 percent of the U.S. population actually attend as compared to the 0.87 percent who claim to be weekly attenders. “Surely we’re seeing some social desirability bias,” Pope said, “where people want to claim that they are weekly attenders and they’re just not.”

Yet LDS members overreport at a lower rate than other religious adherents; Catholics, Muslims, Jews and Jehovah’s Witnesses showed higher rates of discrepancy. And even if the total is only

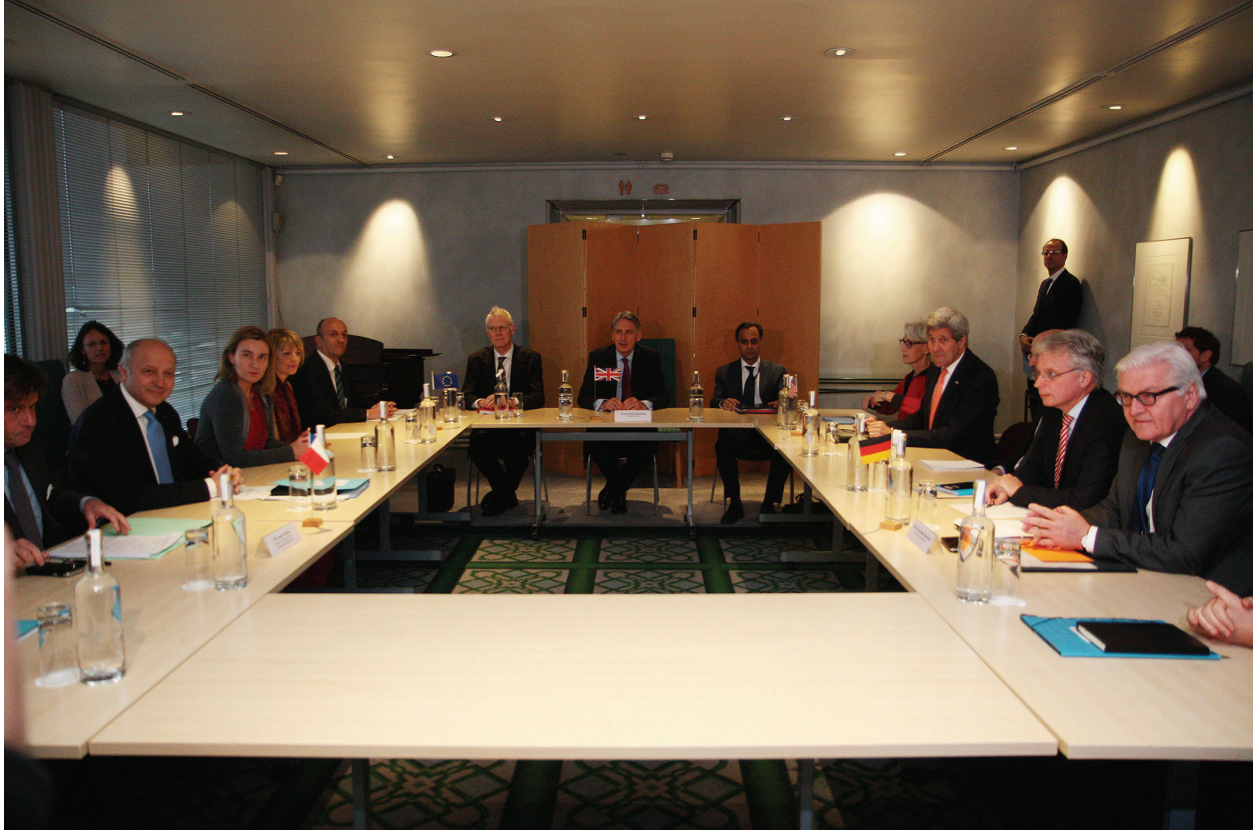
one-third of LDS claims to weekly attendance, Mormons remain some of the most stalwart weekly attenders in America: about 15 percent of U.S. Latter-day Saints appear to be weekly attenders, which is triple the national average of 5 percent. Other singularities that Pope finds among the LDS is that they lack the spikes in holiday attendance of other Christians, which is another sign that most of the just under 2 million people in the pews on a given Sunday are regular attenders. He finds LDS congregations to be the least economically diverse of all religious groups. Even when controlling for geography, thinking that the Intermountain West's high rate of homogeneity (especially Utah) was skewing the results, Pope still found that the LDS "remains one of the least diverse places of worship."



Source: GetArchive / Pixabay (<https://garystockbridge617.getarchive.net/media/salt-lake-city-church-utah-religion-b90d2f>)

● **While religious countries are often viewed as resistant to compromise on territorial issues because of their ideological inflexibility, a recent study finds that such regimes are more likely to embrace bilateral negotiations than less religious countries in engaging over religiously salient issues.** In the study, published in the *Journal of Global Security Studies* (9:1), Ariel Zellman, Florian Justwan, and Jonathan Fox compare highly religious societies to moderately religious and secular ones on how they deal with interstate territorial issues, measuring religiously salient claims in internationally disputed territories from the new Peaceful Resolution of Territorial Disputes dataset. They find that highly religious regimes, as illustrated in the cases of Northern Ireland and the conflict between Jordan and Israel, have gained the legitimacy among their constituents that gives them the latitude to engage in risky diplomatic ventures. For example, despite the continued unpopularity over the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, the latter country has been able to soothe domestic discontent by demonstrating its "religious bona fides" by extracting Israeli concessions over symbolic issues. Yet Zellman, Justwan, and Fox also find that foreign policy executives in highly religious states are also particularly hesitant to give up their decision-making authority regarding religious disputes to outside mediation or arbitration.

The researchers find that secular regimes "lack both religious legitimacy and political motivation to engage over religious issues given their much broader constituencies, such as that their dispute resolution forum preferences are unaffected by religious salience." In contrast, moderately religious regimes, such as seen in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, "are caught in the middle. Unlike secular regimes, their domestic politics and

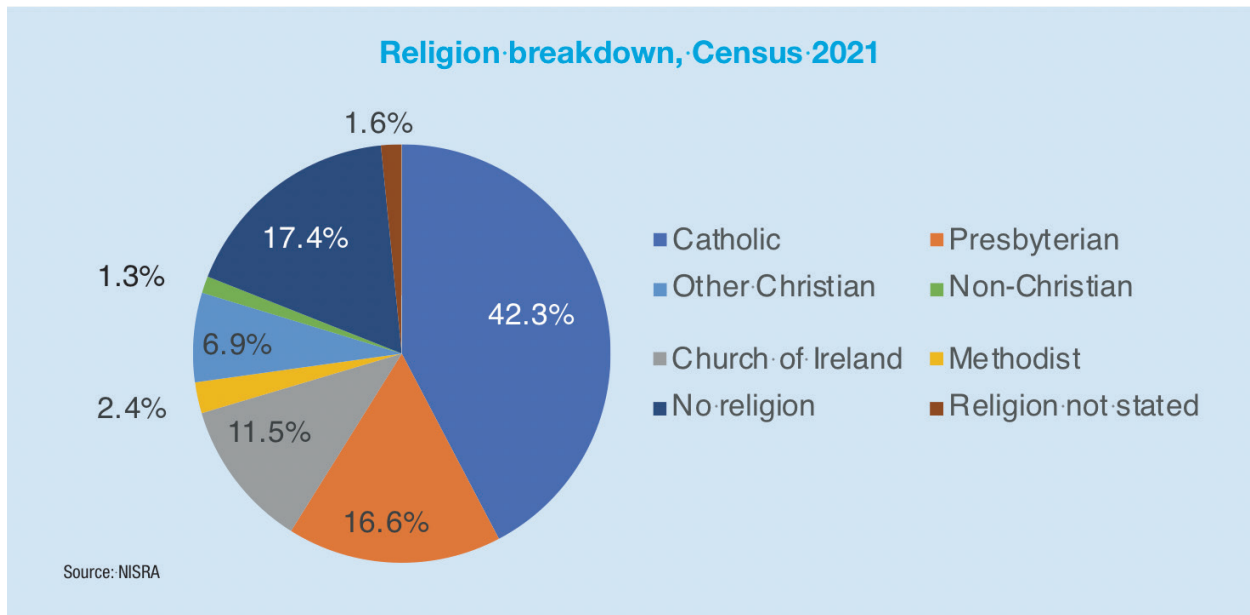


Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Wikimedia)

institutions are substantially informed by religious interests and agendas, so non-engagement over religiously salient disputes is unlikely. Yet their dearth of religious legitimacy compared to highly religious regimes implies a substantial risk of domestic religious outbidding and consequent negotiation failure when they do engage,” the researchers write. This results in moderately religious regimes avoiding dispute resolution “rather than engagement of any kind,” they add.

(*Journal of Global Security Studies*, <https://academic.oup.com/jogss>)

● **While Northern Ireland remains a Christian dominated country with a strong evangelical Christian presence, it might surprise Protestant stalwarts in the country that a significant minority of Catholics also claim the “evangelical” label, according to two surveys.** In the blog *Brainstorm* (February 27), sociologist Gladys Ganiel of Queens University Belfast reports on the two recent surveys that complicate the picture of evangelicalism, one a representative poll of the public across Northern Ireland conducted by the firm Savanta, the other an Internet survey by the Evangelical Alliance. Church attendance has declined significantly in the country since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, when 77 percent of Catholics and 52 percent of Protestants attended church services on an at least monthly basis. By 2019, attendance for both Protestants



and Catholics was down to 46 percent—still towering over attendance rates in the Irish Republic and in England.

The recent Savanta poll confirms a continued high level of belief and practice, even if attendance has declined to 36 percent for monthly or more attenders. But more noteworthy was the wide appeal of the evangelical designation: “47 percent of Protestants and a startling 38 percent of Catholics who consider themselves practicing self-identified as evangelicals,” Ganiel writes. Those considering themselves “evangelical” in both surveys stood out from the general population in their support for pro-life measures and opposition to same-sex marriage. But Ganiel concludes that “the two surveys confounded some stereotypes of evangelicalism.” Eighty-one percent of the Evangelical Alliance respondents agreed that asylum seekers and refugees should be supported in practical ways and made to feel welcome, compared to just 56 percent of the general population. The surveys also showed that 82 percent of the general population and 83 percent of Evangelical Alliance respondents agreed that more effort is needed to promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

(*Brainstorm*, <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2024/0227/1434591-northern-ireland-religion-evangelicalism-identity-survey-feb-2024/>)

- **Major media and the German government have claimed that antisemitic acts have been largely committed by right-wing Germans, but evidence points more in the direction of extremist Islamic groups and individuals, according to an analysis by Andrew Hammel in *Quillette* (February 13).** Recently Susan Neiman, director of the Einstein Forum in Berlin, wrote in the *New York Review of Books* that “police statistics show that over 90 percent of antisemitic hate crimes are committed by white, right-wing Germans.” Hammel writes that Germany’s Federal Criminal Police Office (the Bundeskriminalamt or BKA) tracks crimes that



Source: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (Montecruz Foto via Jewish Policy Center).

appear to be motivated by political or religious ideology and issues annual reports on them. He notes that under a controversial policy implemented in 2001, the BKA by default classifies all unsolved antisemitic incidents as being perpetrated by “extreme-right” actors. Since most antisemitic incidents are never solved (only [42 percent](#) of politically motivated crimes, including antisemitic hate crimes, were solved in 2022), this means that the majority of antisemitic crimes classified as right-wing are not based on evidence. There is an exception to this rule when the circumstances surrounding an unsolved crime indicate that it was motivated by religious or ethnic bigotry or a “foreign ideology.” But Hammel adds that even in those cases, the BKA may still classify the crime as “right-wing.” He cites cases of Muslim extremists giving Nazi salutes and painting swastikas on a Jewish-owned business being classified as right-wing unless the police find the perpetrator.

An alternative to the much-cited BKA numbers is to be found in surveys of Jews in Germany and Europe, which find that “most incidents of violence or harassment are committed by Muslim immigrants of whatever generation.” Among others, he cites a [2018 survey](#) of Jewish residents in 12 European countries conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, finding that the most frequent offender category identified by victims of antisemitic harassment was “someone with a Muslim extremist view,” which accounted for 30 percent of all incidents in the 12-country

study and 41 percent of incidents in Germany. The 12-country average for “someone with a right-wing view” was 13 percent (the figures for “someone with a left-wing view” were 21 percent). “This is the same figure found by a 2022 study by the independent Research and Information Clearinghouse for Antisemitism. Hammel adds that, “according to the best studies we have, only 10–15 percent of antisemitic incidents in Germany are motivated by right-wing ideology—a statistic comparable to the number of antisemitic incidents traceable to extreme-*left-wing* ideologies. These results [hold true](#) for all other European countries with significant Muslim populations, including France and Sweden.”

(*Quillette*, <https://quillette.com/2024/02/13/narratives-damned-lies-and-statistics/>)

● **Nigeria witnessed its most violent year of Islamist attacks against Christians in 2023, with more than 8,000 killed, according to a new report by the Catholic-inspired NGO, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law.** *Crux* (February 16), the Catholic news website, cites the report as finding that the combined forces of government-protected Islamic Jihadists and the Nigerian Security Forces (NSFs) were directly and indirectly responsible for hacking to death no fewer than 8,222 Christians between 2023 and 2024. The killings were carried out by a broad range of actors, including Jihadist Fulani herdsmen who



Source: Lausanne Movement (<https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2022-05/christian-persecution-in-nigeria>).

were responsible for at least 5,100 Christian deaths, Boko Haram and their allies with 500 deaths, Jihadist Fulani bandits with 1,600 deaths, and “Islamic inspired” security forces with 1,000 Christian deaths. The killings marked “the deadliest [period] in recent years,” the report states, citing the failure of the Nigerian government and the security forces to “rise to the occasion...Nigeria has become the second deadliest Genocide-Country in the world [after Syria] accounting for more than 150,000 religiously motivated defenseless civilian deaths since 2009.” The report adds that about 100,000 Christians were among the 150,000 killed, while moderate Muslims accounted for about 46,000 and members of other religions accounted for the remaining 4,000 defenseless civilian deaths.

Crux writer Ngala Killian Chimtom cites the report as showing that the killings and related violence resulted in the destruction of tens of thousands of civilian homes, more than 18,500 Christian places of worship, 1,000 religious shrines, and 2,500 Christian/traditional education centers. During the same period, over 59,000 square kilometers of land that belonged to native Christians and non-Muslims were taken over and their inhabitants displaced. “Between 2016 and 2023, a period of eight years, more than 30,000 defenseless civilians were abducted by Islamic Jihadists and, some say, ‘Islamic inspired’ security forces in Nigeria,” the report states. It adds that “the most shocking of it all is that the Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen operate freely and unchallenged with impunity and reckless abandon, with the Nigerian Security Forces (NSFs), widely accused of being ‘Islamic-inspired,’ turning blind eyes or looking the other [way], except when it comes to protection of Fulani cows and their herders or arresting members of the victim communities and their leaders, labeling them ‘bandits.’”

(*Crux*, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2024/02/nigeria-experiencing-a-silent-genocide-against-christians>)

Role of Orthodox military chaplains enhanced in Russia

One should expect the relationship between the military and the Russian Orthodox Church to continue developing and playing a role in countering antiwar sentiments, writes Pär Gustafsson Kurki, Senior Researcher at the Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), in a recent report titled *Apostles of Violence: The Russian Orthodox Church's Role in Russian Militarism*. Although only a minority of Russian Orthodox in the country are actually practicing, there is a high level of cultural identification with the country's Orthodox heritage. Moreover, “the recurrence of topics in Russian media relating to the Church and religion contributes to a sense of ‘ambient faith’ in Russia,” Kurki writes, interpreting it as “a top-down ideological propaganda project.” According to the author, the state's use of the Russian Orthodox Church for militaristic propaganda is linked to the concept of Russian spirituality (*dukhovnost*), which is perceived positively by many Russians. “When the state's propagandists, such as the military clergy, associate militarism with *dukhovnost*, the result is a potentially higher threshold for the target



Source: Pravmir (<https://www.pravmir.com/number-military-chaplains-increase-russian-orthodox-church/>).

population to voice antiwar sentiments.” While religion did not seem to play a very central role in daily military life, a survey published in 2010 by the Russian Ministry of Defense identified a “religious potential” among a segment of soldiers who are believers, with the junior officers presenting the highest percentage of believers in the armed forces. “It is clear that the official agenda is to use this ‘religious potential’ to strengthen the Russian military’s capability by raising soldier morale via the spiritual factor.”

In 2009, the institution of military clergy—that had been abolished in 1918—was formally restored. The training of military clergy started in 2014 at five military command colleges. While most are Russian Orthodox priests, there are also a number of Muslim and a few Buddhist chaplains. In addition, there are also priests who work through direct agreements with individual military unit commanders (as used to be the case before 2009), without an official status. In April 2023, Patriarch Kirill appointed an archpriest as Chief Military Priest for the war in Ukraine. It is known that the number of priests in the armed forces is considered to be insufficient. Recently, the Patriarch mentioned that there are currently more than 100 military chaplains in combat areas in Ukraine (where some clergymen have also lost their lives), while the Metropolitan in charge of work with the armed forces indicated that there are a total of 281 military chaplains, a number that is planned to quadruple with the adoption of a new federal law defining their status (*Religion*

& *Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, February). Kurki concludes that “the Russian State relies on Orthodox spirituality-based propaganda through the military clergy because it believes that Orthodoxy can contribute to unit cohesion in the armed forces.” But the author also suggests that “a more limited function of the clergy is to suppress criticism of the war by linking a positive value (i.e., Russian spirituality) to militarism.”

(The report can be downloaded from the FOI website: <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--5514--SE>)

Deep changes underway in Islam in West Africa

Islam in West Africa has undergone significant transformations since independence, including urbanization, modernization, globalization, and possibly the feminization of Islamic practices, writes Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, senior researcher at the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD), in the online *Bulletin de l'Observatoire International du Religieux* (January). While not denying the presence of vibrant Salafi networks, the author notes that those developments may be more significant in the long term, if less visible, than the cases of radicalization that are currently receiving the most attention from observers. Rural exodus and sedentarization have had a strong impact on Muslims in West Africa. In major West African cities, it is common to see Muslim families sending their children to private Christian schools that are perceived to have a higher quality of education than public schools. More broadly, population mixing and the arrival of many Sahelians in coastal urban areas have led Islam and Christianity to blend together. Through constant interaction, Muslims and Christians have influenced each other's practices over time. For example, Yoruba Muslims in southwest Nigeria now organize overnight vigils and missionary campaigns inspired by the success of Pentecostal church crusades, Pérouse de Montclos writes.

As religions contend with modernity and diversity in globalized urban settings, some liberal or “nominal” Muslims have gradually secularized. Despite patriarchal traditions, some observant women have also “feminized” Islam by occupying public roles, working in civic organizations, and sometimes emerging as spiritual guides in spaces formerly reserved only for men. The number of girls in Quranic schools has increased, and girls are reported to now make up a majority in Islamic schools in Nigeria and Senegal. Monogamy is progressing and the age of marriage is rising. West African Muslims have seized opportunities from globalization to demonstrate not only their ability to modernize and produce high-quality religious teachings, but also to have a voice and participate in global debates. Both Salafi and Sufi clerics have leveraged media liberalization to establish Islamic radio and TV stations. Similarly, Muslims have formed NGOs to institutionalize religious advocacy in a more structured framework conducive to dialogue and mediation as alternatives to armed struggle or electoral politics. This has also



The Great Mosque of Touba in Senegal (source: Council of American Overseas Research Centers, <https://www.caorc.org/>).

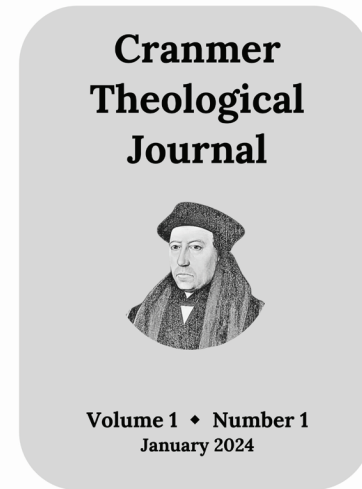
helped close their historical gap with Christians who traditionally used to be more active in development work thanks to international funding.

In response to growing demand, private Islamic higher education has expanded rapidly across the region since the 1970s, influenced by models from Saudi Arabia and other countries. Islamic universities and colleges have often been established through Gulf-based charities. However, these universities generally did not achieve a high enough standard to provide real professional opportunities, revealing the challenges of development through the Islamic education sector. Pérouse de Montclos points out that Muslims in West Africa have not only been at the receiving end, but that some reputed sheikhs have gone abroad. For example, Abdallah bin Bayyah first went to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, from Mauritania in 1981 and then moved to Abu Dhabi in 2014, where he has emphasized “middle way” Islam with the support of the Emirati authorities and became head of the UAE Fatwa Council in 2018.

(*Bulletin de l'Observatoire International du Religieux*, <https://obsreligion.cnrs.fr/bulletin/les-transformations-de-lislam-en-afrique-de-louest/>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ A new peer-reviewed journal of Anglican theology, *Cranmer Theological Journal*, would like “to fill a void by addressing the needs of biblically orthodox Anglicans in North America, at a time when the existing journals reflect the same doctrinal issues that prompted numerous Anglicans to leave the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada.” Along with theology, the charter issue provides noteworthy information about conservative Anglican developments and identity. It is published by Cranmer Theological House, a seminary of the Reformed Episcopal Church in Dallas, Texas, but is meant for Anglicans of various jurisdictions. Authored by the Rev. Dr. Gerald McDermott (Reformed Episcopal Seminary), one of the issue’s three articles considers the future of Orthodox Anglicanism after the Kigali Commitment of April 2023 at the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON IV). While welcoming the public stand in Kigali “against Canterbury’s subversion of marriage” (by some churches’ support of same-sex marriage), McDermott identifies risks in having a “correct” emphasis on the authority of Scripture that might forget “that Scripture’s birthplace and guardian are the Church and her tradition,” breaking with what the author sees as the Anglican way, i.e., *prima scriptura*, but not the Bible alone.



As one illustration, McDermott mentions the ordination of women to sacramental ministry. “GAFCON provinces represented at Kigali have already consecrated female bishops (Sudan and Kenya), several GAFCON provinces ordain women to the priesthood, and nearly all have ordained female deacons.” In North America, the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) “permits the ordination of women to the diaconate in nearly all of their dioceses and to the priesthood in a number of them.” There has been no rebuke from GAFCON. McDermott stresses that *sola scriptura* is not enough for safeguarding orthodoxy. While saluting the courage of the Kigali leaders, some of whom could lose support from Anglicans in more prosperous countries as a consequence of their refusal to go along “with Canterbury’s heresy on marriage,” the author is convinced that “the Anglican future holding to Holy Order will be integral to continuing orthodoxy on marriage.” Without a solid anchoring in the tradition of the church, what is rejected today might become acceptable to future generations. Since Rome cannot be the answer—Anglicans are catholic but not papist—the future of Orthodox Anglicanism as McDermott envisions it will be “a remnant Church.” For more information, visit: <https://cranmerjournal.org/>

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

Launched on February 27 at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) in Nairobi, Kenya, *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth* presents an Islamic outlook on the environment in a

bid to strengthen local, regional, and international actions that would combat climate change and other threats to the planet. The result of a work that started in 2019 and of a process of consultation with 300 Islamic institutions and international partners, the document aims to offer “an Islamic equivalent to Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’*” (2015). While there is no supreme authority in the Muslim world equivalent to the one in the Roman Catholic Church, *Al-Mizan* “has the endorsement of the Muslim Council of Elders, an independent organization chaired by Egypt’s Grand Imam, Ahmad al-Tayeb, a top Sunni cleric” who met with Pope Francis (National Catholic Reporter, Feb. 28). Along with other efforts, the document also reflects the involvement of representatives of various religious traditions integrated into UN environmental efforts through the Faith for Earth Coalition of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

“Faith for Earth has three main goals: to inspire and empower faith organizations and their leaders to advocate for protecting the environment, to green faith-based organizations’ investments and assets to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and to provide them with knowledge and networks to enable their leaders to effectively communicate with decision-makers and the public.” Scholars of Üsküdar University (Turkey), which has been involved in drafting the document, believe that *Al-Mizan* and the various initiatives that should be associated with it is a project that will contribute to “mental transformation.” The Director of UNEP’s Faith for Earth Coalition, Iyad Abumoghli, sees *Al-Mizan* as a “a catalyst for change” toward translating Islamic values into concrete actions (TRT World, Feb. 28). After a review of major threats to the environment, the document identifies Quranic references that can address such issues and describes “the ecological ethos and ethics of Islam.” It lists Islamic principles and practices that could be used for answering a variety of ecological concerns. Its obvious ambition is to provide the foundation for a variety of initiatives. (Sources: *National Catholic Reporter*, February 28; *TRT World*, February 28; *Al-Mizan*, <https://www.almizan.earth/>)

