

## Elites gravitating to religion—and religious moving to elites

Talk of a religious revival among American elites and creatives may be an exaggeration, but there are signs that those in the art worlds and other elite segments of society are showing a new interest in spirituality and religion. The *New York Times* (July 14) reports that a group of tech savvy young artists are returning to the “big questions” in their work and are “building iconography from pieces of other belief systems: some role-playing games and anime, some major religions.” These artists grew up with the social dislocations and events of 9/11, the 2008 financial crash, the Covid pandemic, mass protests, and the Trump presidency, which “dislodged the social narratives of previous generations,” writes Travis Diehl. Far from traditionally devout, these artists, such as Chris Lloyd, Brian Oakes, and Rachel Rossin, often use their religious pasts to create a synthesis of sacred and secular images that may be deemed irreverent. But, as one artist said, some see artmaking itself as “intrinsically spiritual.” Diehl adds that these artists’ use of technology, particularly artificial intelligence and claims made about its opaque and mysterious quality, may be a factor in their exploration of religious themes. Meanwhile, in The *Christian Science Monitor* (June 24) Leonardo Bevilacqua reports on the emergence of a “new cadre of young artists” in cities like Washington and New York who are decrying what they see as the “cultural rot and decadence” brought about by liberal elites and taking up an interest in traditional religions.

There is even a Manhattan neighborhood where such dissidents congregate, Dimes Square, near Chinatown. They started gathering there with skaters and others in defiance of Covid quarantine measures a few years ago. The podcast “Red Scare,” begun in 2018 and hosted by cultural critics Dasha Nekrasova and Anna Khachiyani, was a precursor to these gatherings, shifting from a forum for Bernie Sanders supporters to one exploring the ideas of the “new right,” even inviting guests like Steve Bannon and Alex Jones. Nekrasova, a devout Catholic, and Khachiyani have been outspoken against what they see as the godless politics of the left. Partly because of their influence, the Dimes Square scene began to include a number of artists with more conservative and religious visions. “Writers, filmmakers, and fashion designers have been dabbling in pre-



Group of artists in Dimes Square. Photograph: Elias Altman (source: <https://gdess.substack.com/p/dimes-square-and-the-end-of-history>).

Vatican II Catholicism. They play the church organ rather than DJ at nightclubs. Instead of free love and polyamory, they espouse commitment and monogamy,” Bevilacqua writes. In a 2022 *New York Times* essay, Julia Yost of the conservative magazine *First Things* described the Dimes Square scene: “Traditional morality acquired a transgressive glamour...Disaffection with the progressive moral majority—combined with Catholicism’s historic ability to accommodate cultural subversion—has produced an in-your-face style of traditionalism. This is not your grandmother’s church—and whether the new faithful are performing an act of theater or not, they have the chance to revitalize the church for young, educated Americans.”

While Dimes Square denizens say that no ideas are off-limits, the underground salon in Chinatown has included a number of religiously conservative artists and thinkers. “People are tired of pure secularism,” one artist said. “It’s a dead end. It doesn’t promise anything.” Writer Audrey Horne, a non-denominational Christian, who reports that there is a similar scene of religious thinkers and seekers in Washington, DC, adds that there is “something in the air right now that does feel much more open to faith...I think that culture now feels a lot more—a lot softer, like people are curious about it and seeking it...We want something pure. We want something earnest...” In his Substack newsletter (July 25), social and urban affairs forecaster Aaron Renn notes that, like Dimes Square in New York, there are other instances of social and



religious conservatives gravitating to elite cultural centers in “blue cities.” He cites the case of the Los Angeles suburb of El Segundo, which is drawing conservatives to its burgeoning tech industry. “I’m very struck that the epicenter of the young, high talent, conservative, pro-America, pro-Jesus startup community is...Los Angeles,” he writes. “That is, they are in what’s effectively a neighborhood of an extremely progressive elite coastal city in one of America’s bluest states.” Renn concludes that conservative elites are drawn to progressive cultural environments because they “want to live in or near a nice walkable urban center, with lots of shopping, dining, arts and cultural opportunities, intellectual stimulation, and opportunities for new experiences.” [Interestingly, however, the *New York Times* (July 7) reports that this trend has been moving in the other direction, with conservative elites moving out of blue cities and states for red ones in their opposition to their secular culture.]

### **Closing congregations repurposing properties for affordable housing**

Faced with the prospect of closing their houses of worship, an increasing number of congregations are repurposing their properties to provide affordable housing, especially as the housing crisis intensifies, writes Nadia Mian in *The Conversation* (July 19). It is estimated that 100,000 congregations may close in the next few decades due to declining membership, aging buildings and large, underutilized properties. While congregations and other faith-based



Photo by Joseph W. Daniels Jr. (source: <https://www.planning.org/planning/2023/spring/transforming-empty-churches-into-affordable-housing-takes-more-than-a-leap-of-faith/>)

organizations have been engaged in building housing for many years, generally by purchasing additional property, Mian finds that more houses of worship are building affordable housing on the same property as the sanctuary. While some congregations are repurposing their sanctuaries, others are building on excess parking space, such as a parking lot, or demolishing existing buildings to create new developments (which may or may not have space for the congregation). Mian adds that a faith-based organization may receive proceeds from the sale of its land or from leasing its property to a developer, funds that can be invested in ministry or on a new space for worship. Sometimes congregations will rent out those spaces when they are not being utilized for worship.

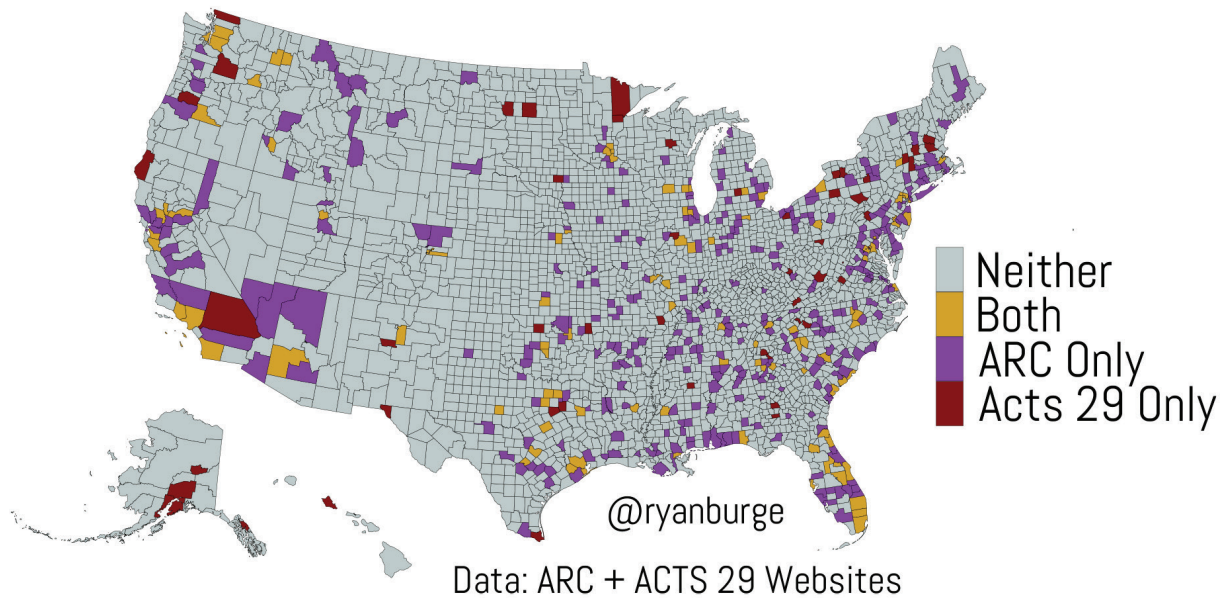
Mian finds that faith-based organizations often see these projects as a way to do “God’s work,” and in some cases they may include community services beyond housing needs. Zoning regulations regarding land use remain a significant hurdle in making such changes, although many states and municipalities have reformed laws and ordinances as a response to this trend. For instance, Washington State passed a bill in April 2019 that gave religious organizations a density bonus for building 100 percent affordable housing on their property, allowing for an increase in the allowable number of units constructed. Similar measures have been passed in California, either removing parking requirements or bypassing other regulations. At the federal level, last March Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio introduced the Yes in God’s Back Yard (YIGBY) Act, which would provide technical assistance to faith organizations interested in building affordable housing. The other challenge of neighbors fighting the building of new housing in their areas (the pattern known as “Not in My Back Yard” or “NIMBY”) and protesting the demolition of historic buildings may be more formidable. Mian has chronicled the decade-long and continuing battle of West Park Presbyterian Church with its New York neighbors and historic preservationists in its effort to create housing on its property. Congregations and other faith-based groups are finding a growing number of resources for developing skills and finding funding in this ministry, such as Enterprise, the Local Initiative Support Corporation, Bricks and Mortals, Partners for Sacred Places, and the Faith Leadership Campus, which is sponsored by Trinity Church Wall Street.

(*The Conversation*, <https://religionnews.com/2024/07/19/affordable-housing-in-gods-backyard-some-religious-congregations-find-a-new-use-for-their-space/>)

## CURRENT RESEARCH

- **Recent church planting efforts tend to be near each other and are concentrated in Northeastern and West Coast areas as well as Florida and Texas, a new analysis finds.** In his newsletter *Graphs about Religion* (July 25), Ryan Burge discusses the results of his study of two leading church planting networks, Acts 29 and the Association of Renewal Churches (ARC), whose mapping data he scraped from their websites. He found ARC to have a larger number of

## Counties That Have Acts 29 and ARC Churches



Source: <https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/geographic-church-planting-strategies>.

church plants on their website than Acts 29, with 1,244 churches compared to 393. This may be because ARC includes not only its own church plants but also churches that joined the network after planting. [ARC is largely charismatic while Acts 29 is Reformed; several large churches have left the latter in recent years]. Each planting network is concentrated in the eastern half of the United States, with a lot of plants in Florida, especially in places that are close to the ocean. But there are also heavy clusters around the major metropolitan areas in Texas (Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, and San Antonio) and the West Coast.

In many states there is not much difference in concentration between the two networks, with the gap being less than two percentage points. While in much of the Midwest there is no statistical difference in concentration, the ARC is more concentrated in the traditional Bible Belt (and it is based in Birmingham, Alabama). About a quarter of all ARC churches are in Arkansas, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, while the region accounts for only 12 percent of Acts 29 churches. The two biggest states for both networks are Texas and Florida. Burge found that the majority of Acts 29 churches were planted in very close proximity to an ARC church, while the majority of ARC churches are not in close proximity to an Acts 29 church. This tendency may be due to ARC's larger size, but it also shows how both church planting networks are focusing on the same parts of the United States. "It's not like one has a strategy that is focused on reaching rural America, or the Northeast or the Great



Plains,” Burge concludes. “Instead, planters are setting up shop in areas that are experiencing population growth.”

● **While those attending the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM) have been seen as holding schismatic and negative attitudes about the pope and Vatican II, a new survey suggests that such devotees are more orthodox and conservative than the average Catholic but not necessarily on the verge of schism from the church.** The study, which is preliminary and published on the blog *What We Need Now* (July 16), was conducted by sociologists Stephen Bullivant and Stephen Cranney, who surveyed 446 TLM attenders and interviewed an additional 20 respondents. They found that 77 percent of the respondents leaned Republican and 85 percent were very prolife, holding that abortion should be illegal in all cases. Yet though the TLM Catholics were orthodox, they were found to generally accept the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis has targeted the Traditional Latin Mass as fostering a subculture of traditionalists opposed to the modern church. But when the researchers asked, “I accept the teachings of Vatican II,” 62 percent of the respondents agreed (and 15 percent somewhat agreed). It should be noted that Bullivant and Cranney found some ambivalence about Vatican II among their interviewees, who dissented from accepted interpretations of the council’s documents while formally accepting their validity.

The respondents also accepted the authority of Pope Francis, even if they were unhappy with his papacy. The survey did not ask a question about “sedevacantism,” which holds that the papal throne is vacant due to Francis’ alleged apostasy, because those holding such positions may be in separatist groups, such as the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), which were not



Source: Saint Mary Church (<https://www.stmarylatinmass.com/the-traditional-latin-mass>).

included in the sample. The respondents attended “licit” Latin Masses rather than those deemed “illicit” and practiced in such groups as the SSPX. Bullivant and Cranney conclude that their results suggest that members of the TLM community, while drawn to a different aesthetic than the typical parish experience, “hold onto the beliefs of the Catholic faith more consistently than the wider population of Catholics, including regular *Novus Ordo* Mass-goers. That is not to say there are not questions that can and should be asked about how TLM Catholics live their faith, but the caricature of the TLM community as near-schismatics threatening the authority of the papacy is itself questionable.”

(*What We Need Now*, [https://whatweneednow.substack.com/p/data-and-the-traditional-latin-mass?r=5c98f&utm\\_medium=ios&triedRedirect=true](https://whatweneednow.substack.com/p/data-and-the-traditional-latin-mass?r=5c98f&utm_medium=ios&triedRedirect=true))

● **Since the Covid pandemic, there has been a notable increase in the number of converts to Eastern Orthodoxy in the U.S., a new study finds.** The research, conducted by a team at the Orthodox Studies Institute at Saint Constantine College in Houston, and described in the report, “Converts to Orthodoxy: Statistics and Trends from the Past Decade” (July), gathered data through interviews and information collected from Orthodox clergy in 20 parishes across 6 different jurisdictions in 15 states. During the period from 2013 to 2019, the variation in the total number of converts to the Orthodox Church per year was not found to be statistically significant.



Source: <https://catalog.obitel-minsk.com/blog/2017/12/reasons-why-you-should-not-convert-to>.

There was then a significant decline in the number of conversions in 2020, undoubtedly due to the pandemic, followed by a notable increase in 2022 compared with the previous period. From 2013 to 2020, the proportions of male and female converts were very similar, with some variations, but since 2022 there have been more male converts. It remains to be seen if this latter trend will continue and can be extrapolated to other U.S. Orthodox parishes.

The data also showed that the majority of converts (62 percent) since 2013 were under the age of 40 at the time of their conversion, and an even larger proportion (73 percent) were joining the church without minor children, which was consistent with the average age range. The researchers found that 65 percent of the converts came from a Protestant background and 15 percent from a Catholic one. Sixty percent cited theological reasons for converting, nearly 7 percent felt attracted to Orthodox spirituality, and 12 percent converted for the purpose of marriage. In a companion report analyzing the same data to examine converts' participation in the faith, "Converts to Orthodoxy: Statistics on Engagement" (July), the same team (Matthew Namee, Fr. Nicholas Metrakos, Cassidy Irwin, Nathanael Morgan, and Paisios Hensersky) notes that "those who converted in recent years are more likely to be engaged than their peers." As expected, those who reported converting for theological reasons were the most likely to be engaged (81 percent).

(The reports can be downloaded from: <https://www.orthodoxstudies.com/fs/resource-manager/view/a0625708-8584-40fb-8b4d-043aa97d4db9>; <https://www.orthodoxstudies.com/fs/resource-manager/view/1f353b2b-1039-464c-89fe-feb6266d2684>)

- **A study of congregational finances after the Covid pandemic by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research finds that congregational income has not been keeping pace with inflation, even though there has been a surge in online giving since the pandemic.** The research, described in the report, "Finance and Faith: A Look at Financial Health Among Congregations in a Post-Pandemic Reality," was based on a nationally representative survey data from 2020 and 2023. It found that the median congregational income reached a 15-year high of \$165,000 in 2023, which, however, fell short of keeping pace with inflation. At the same time, there has been a



Source: Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations study, Hartford Institute for Religion Research



surge in online giving, with nearly 70 percent of congregations now using digital platforms. This development is associated with higher per capita income, suggesting a positive impact on congregational financial health. It was noted that a majority of religious leaders (61 percent) reported their congregation to be in excellent or good financial health, which was a significant increase from 2020.

(The report can be downloaded at: <https://www.covidreligionresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/FinanceReport2024.pdf>)

- **The recently elected House of Commons in the UK is the most “openly non-religious” in the history of that body, according to research cited in the newsletter *Counting Religion in Britain* (July).** The newsletter cites a recent analysis by Humanists UK describing the proportion of the 2024 intake of Ministers of Parliament (MPs) who, during their swearing-in ceremony, chose to make a secular affirmation instead of the traditional religious oath to God. Not counting the 18 MPs who had yet to be sworn in at the time of the analysis, 40 percent of the parliamentarians were found to have made a secular affirmation—16 points higher than after the 2019 general elections. Broken down by party affiliation, 47 percent of the Liberal Democrat MPs, 47 percent of the Labour MPs (which party includes the newly elected Prime Minister Keir Starmer and half his cabinet), and 9 percent of the Conservative MPs made secular affirmations.



Source: Associated Press / Huffington Post ([https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/what-happens-when-an-mp-is-pregnant-or-ill-during-a-crucial-parliamentary-vote\\_uk\\_5c3dbf12e4b0922a21d87f01](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/what-happens-when-an-mp-is-pregnant-or-ill-during-a-crucial-parliamentary-vote_uk_5c3dbf12e4b0922a21d87f01)).

Humanists UK added that a large number of those swearing on the Bible were also non-religious, with some being public about it.

(*Counting Religion in Britain*, <https://www.brin.ac.uk/counting-religion-in-britain-july-2024/>)

### **Brazilian Spiritists in Germany: integrating or staying among themselves?**

While religious communities are often thought to be resources for the integration of migrants, the opposite can also be true, as Helmar Kurz (University of Muenster, Germany) writes in an article in the *International Journal of Latin American Religions* (June) based on his research on the role of Brazilian Spiritist centers in Germany for migrants. Spiritist centers in Germany function as spaces of care for Brazilian migrants, such as young women in love with German partners but suffering because of cultural differences. The centers, which have been established by Brazilian immigrants in Germany since the 1990s, provide spiritual, social, and emotional support, but according to Kurz some Brazilians prefer to keep them “as a resource for not having to integrate and instead staying among themselves.” At the annual meeting of the umbrella organization for these Spiritist centers, Kurz observed how the place of the German language at local centers was



Source: Casa de Jesus (<https://www.casadejesus.online/post/does-spiritism-have-rituals-or-priests>).

a contested issue, with some arguing “that Spiritist centers should be a refuge for Brazilian immigrants and the maintenance of their cultural identity, whereas others saw them as a space of integration, exchange, and the elaboration of the Spiritist doctrine in Germany,” emphasizing the universal value of the Spiritist way of life, preserved in Brazil and ready to spread again around the world.

In one local center studied by Kurz, about 20 percent of the participants were of German descent, while the rest were Brazilian. However, some of the Brazilian members who had lived in Germany for a long time participated in the center’s German language study group and were frustrated that the center remained primarily a refuge for Brazilians—thus showing that there was a fault line among the members of Brazilian descent themselves. Cultural differences and prejudices manifested themselves on both sides. The group split over these issues in 2017. About a third of the group, made up of Germans and Brazilians who had lived in Germany for many years, advocated a “de-Brazilianization” of Spiritism in order to promote a less religious, “scientific-philosophical” attitude. Kurz’s case study illustrates problems common to many religious groups that spread to new areas as a result of migratory flows

(*International Journal of Latin American Religions*, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41603-024-00233-0>)

## **Congo attempts regulation as revival churches proliferate**

Following an administrative decision in June by the Minister of Justice of the Democratic Republic of the Congo intended to regulate the proliferation of evangelical churches in large Congolese cities, many of those churches suddenly find themselves in an irregular situation, reports William Minh Hào Nguyen in *La Croix International* (July 26). Revival churches stemming from neo-Pentecostalism have found a huge following in the country, even more so in recent years. “According to the Church of the Congo Awakening (ERC), one of the main structures federating this movement in the country, the number of churches increased from 12,500 in 2015 to over 42,300 in 2022, with 15,000 in Kinshasa alone.” In a crowded city, this is creating disturbances. Nguyen quotes a resident who said that he had no choice but to move, after no less than four churches opened their doors in front of his house, with singing starting at 5 a.m.

The Ministry of Justice stresses that there is no desire to limit religious freedom, “but aims to clean up the church sector to maintain public order.” One of the provisions is that churches should no longer be established less than 500 meters from each other. Earlier attempts to regulate revival churches had failed, but the ministry has now adopted a new approach by involving church federations themselves in a mixed commission in order “to define new criteria for granting legal personality to churches applying for it.” One of the criteria would be “the requirement for the religious community’s legal representative to have theological training





Source: World Revival & Salvation Ministries (<https://www.wrsmworld.com/ministering-the-word-of-god-in-goma-congo/>).

recognized by the state,” and to have an administrative link with the ERC. However, the reform faces challenges, as the Pentecostal movement is decentralized and values church autonomy. Observers doubt that such a regulation can be implemented.

### **Youth culture in Japan now based on weak self, vicarious religion**

Japanese youth culture is shifting from embracing spiritual and self-empowerment to stressing a “weak self,” which includes invoking and having relationships with self-created sentient beings, Satoko Fujiwara and Hiroki Miura report in the journal *Social Compass* (71:2). In analyzing popular youth culture, particularly pop songs, anime, and online sites, especially X, they find references to “tulpas,” an originally theosophical idea derived from Tibetan Buddhism. Tulpas could be considered supernatural entities, but in the youth culture they are also created through one’s own mental power. First emerging on the fringes of Japan’s occult milieu in the 1980s, tulpas have been embraced both in Japan and the U.S. as self-created beings with which youth can have “relationships and [which are] not related to meditation, spiritual awakenings or



Source: Kawaii Journeys (<https://kawaiijourneys.com/harajuku-japanese-youth-culture/>).

supernatural powers. The goal of creating a tulpa is no longer to achieve enlightenment or to acquire psychic powers.” Instead of “tulpa-mancers” seeking to achieve their own self-realization and spirituality, “they want their tulpas to grow spiritually and personally,” Fujiwara and Miura write. Thus, the authors see a drive toward “vicarious religion,” where spirituality is projected onto other entities, and objects and practices are valued over beliefs.

Another feature of Japanese youth culture, especially in fandom or “otaku” subcultures and among young women, is what Fujiwara and Miura call “gendered fetishism,” meaning that some religious objects, such as Buddha statues, are believed to have an affective or even romantic attachment to their devotees. For instance, while traditional spiritual people may regard gravestones or the graveyard as an entrance to the otherworld and may claim to contact the dead, otaku devotees are attached directly to the gravestones themselves. Much of this change started in the era after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo attack, where youth spiritual ideals changed from those of personal transformation to coping with reality under an economic downturn and emotional problems, such as addictive behavior, low self-image, and experiencing a “multiple self.” In Japan, where there is not a clear line separating religion and secularity, the youth culture embraces both religious and non-religious beliefs and practices, according to Fujiwara and Miura. They add that another part of youth culture today is a disdain for consuming brand items



and seeking a sense of belonging, known as “tsunagari.” Non-religious Japanese youth who previously may have expressed a secular spirituality through rituals and visits to shrines on New Year’s Eve, are more likely to express their “inner, subtle religiosity” through favoring pop songs where there are frequent references to people praying (not necessarily to God) and which are about finding belonging rather than romantic love.

(*Social Compass*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/scp>)

### **Tibetan Buddhist women’s ordination—so close yet so far**

Although a group of Tibetan Buddhist nuns received full ordination in 2022, breaking with centuries of monastic tradition, the practice continues to be resisted by Tibetan clergy, writes Vicki Mackenzie in the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* (Summer). Hosted and initiated by the royal family in Bhutan, 144 women became the first-ever Tibetan nuns to receive full ordination. Nuns in the Tibetan and other Buddhist lineages were formerly given the status of novices and mainly seen as serving monks, taking a back seat at ceremonies and being barred from the higher teachings. Since the ordinations in Bhutan, the response from Tibetan clergy in Dharamsala, home of the Dalai Lama, has been one of silence. Those who oppose the ordinations argue that because they were done solely by monks (bhikshus), they were not valid. These critics claim that there must already be ordained nuns, or bhikshunis, to ordain other nuns, which sets up a



Source: Lion’s Roar (<https://www.lionsroar.com/women-receive-full-ordination-in-bhutan-for-first-time-in-modern-history/>).



catch-22 situation: since bhikshunis do not exist in the Tibetan lineage, they cannot be made. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, a leading advocate of equal status for nuns in all traditions, argues that the Buddha himself allowed for nuns to be ordained by monks when bhikshunis were not present.

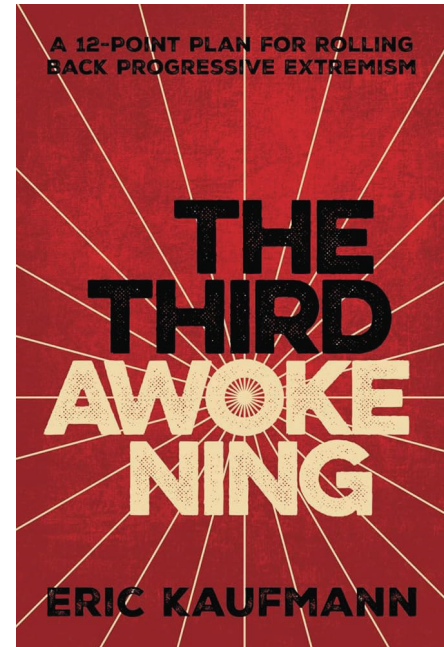
She argues that Tibetan monks do not like the fact that the 2022 Bhutan ordinations (and more are to take place this year) were performed outside Tibet, and that they are concerned that if nuns come up into fully ordained status, they will diminish their own power and status. She points out that only in China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Korea do nuns have full bhikshuni ordination, while in Burma and Thailand they still have the status of novices, receiving hardly any financial support or respect from laypeople. In the countries where nuns have received full ordination, Tenzin Palmo says they are treated by laypeople in the same way as monks, leading to greater opportunities, including starting hospitals, schools, universities and orphanages. The few instances of full nun ordination that have occurred in the Tibetan tradition have been spearheaded by Western women, among the first of whom was Karma Tsultrim Khechog Palmo (known as Sister Palmo), who was championed by the 16th Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. The popular monk Ajahn Brahm in the closely related branch of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand recently conducted the first nun ordinations in Australia and was summarily excommunicated by conservative lineage holders. Tibetan nuns themselves are not pushing for full ordination, nor have they staged any type of protests, according to Mackenzie. Tenzin Palmo herself is reluctant to embrace a Western mode of protest against the resistance to full ordination, believing it would be counterproductive. The Dalai Lama has said he would ordain women in a heartbeat, but that he needs the agreement of monastic heads first. But he has recently instituted a group of Tibetan and Theravada scholars to research the issue and “see if there is some way it can happen,” Mackenzie writes.

(*Tricycle*, <https://tricycle.org/>)

## Findings & Footnotes

■ There have been several recent books about the emergence of “wokeness,” and some of them have traced this diffuse phenomenon of political correctness and identity politics relating to race and gender to religious or quasi-religious origins and sentiments. There is some debate as to the definitions and extent of “wokeness” and whether it is losing its influence. Political scientist Eric Kaufmann’s new book, *The Third Awakening* (Bombardier Books, \$17.99), argues that wokeness is a long-term trend and also sees the phenomenon in quasi-religious terms. But he goes further than similar works in providing actual data about wokeness and organized religion. Kauffmann, a critic of wokeness, argues that the phenomenon is a form of “cultural socialism” that elevates principles such as diversity and equality in race and gender to a sacred level while “canceling” those deemed to be engaged in the “taboos” of violating them.

Added to this familiar argument, Kaufmann's book uses survey data to show how neither secularization nor religious growth may have a great impact on the influence of wokeness. Using his own surveys, the political scientist finds that woke attitudes are as common in secularists as they are in Christians. Especially in the U.S., Christianity only works against woke values "insofar as it inclines individuals to be conservative. A leftist who attends church regularly is not less woke than a leftist who doesn't," Kaufmann writes. Interestingly, in the UK, religious affiliation is more of a partial barrier to wokeness in that it is more closely tied to patriotism and pride in being British. He concludes that "if religion roared back, this would reduce wokeness somewhat, but only because it would produce more conservatives, who would then track toward patriotism and anti-wokeism. The return of a strong secular nationalism (think Eastern Europe or East Asia) would have a bigger effect."



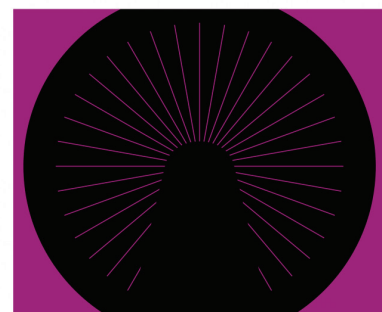
■ There has been both a "spiritualization of ecology" and an "ecologization of religion" taking place in Switzerland since 2015, according to research presented in the new French book, *Les éco-spiritualités contemporaines: Un changement culturel en Suisse* (Seismo, €43), edited by Irene Becci. The study, conducted by Becci and other researchers at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland), was based on field research in Switzerland, complemented by the use of survey data. The book offers a rich variety of insights, putting recent developments in a historical and global perspective without ignoring regional peculiarities, even within Switzerland itself. The starting point of 2015 is not an arbitrary one, the authors emphasizing that a socio-cultural turning point occurred around that year, when Pope Francis issued his encyclical *Laudato si'* and the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris adopted a legally binding international treaty on climate change. Whereas in the 1970s, the spiritual dimension of environmental concerns was more or less confined to an alternative, countercultural milieu, today it is increasingly integrated in secular discourses on ecology.

The researchers identify five types of eco-spirituality, ranging from approaches within the context of institutional Christianity to less organized religious expressions and secular contexts. Within mainline Christian churches, the impetus comes either from ecumenical initiatives or in the form of local projects in congregations (e.g., greening church buildings and other practical approaches). Across denominational lines, others—not just Christian believers—advocate for an "inner transition" to address the ecological crisis, inspired by figures such as Joanna Macy (originator of "The Work that Reconnects"), who is also seen as a resource by some Extinction Rebellion activists. A third type are

Irene Becci (dir.)

## Les éco-spiritualités contemporaines

Un changement culturel en Suisse



Seismo

the “spiritual neo-traditions of nature,” aware of “Mother Earth,” with references both to the wisdom of distant indigenous peoples as well as local traditions or pre-Christian cultures. Then come the New Age “holistic practitioners,” usually with a seeker’s background, who listen to their intuition and feelings, wary of restrictive traditions and adapting eco-spirituality to their own circumstances. Finally, in a kind of gray area, there are public figures who do not claim spiritual credentials and are known for their scientific, cultural or political commitments, but who use words, metaphors or techniques reminiscent of eco-spirituality.

The authors also pay attention to festivals and other events, which are seen as sites of hybridization between eco-spiritualities, but which in some cases also reveal tensions between environmental political activism and those who emphasize “inner transitions.” Interviews with representative individuals reveal two main profiles in the field of eco-spirituality. On the one hand, there are environmental activists who have added a spiritual dimension to their work, often interested in the ideas of “inner transition,” eco-psychology or deep ecology, and inclined toward collective action. On the other hand, there are spiritual people with an environmental sensibility who emphasize private, personal commitment first. Nevertheless, breaking with the cliché of narcissistic spirituality, a “large majority of eco-spiritual activists” place their spirituality in a political framework, embedding their spiritual practices within a broader purpose and as part of a collective project of environmental awareness, the authors conclude. *The book is open access and can be downloaded in PDF format from the page: <https://www.seismoverlag.ch/fr/daten/les-eco-spiritualites-contemporaines/>*