

Trump presidency signaling rollback of secularism or rise of irreligious right?

Both supporters and opponents of Donald Trump see his election as signaling a changing of the guard in American politics and culture beyond that of his own proposed policies, even if both camps also share some uncertainty about the contours of those changes. When it comes to the role of religion in the new politics, there is uncertainty in spades, with some observers seeing a new role for traditional religion and others arguing that Trump himself embodies a “post-Christian” right. In his recent column in the *New York Times* (November 17), Ross Douthat writes that the post-Cold War consensus on what democracy, liberalism, and progress mean has been broken by both populist politics on the right and “wokeism” on the left. Without a mainstream of trusted institutions, such as the media, there is no “cultural forcing mechanism to make the radical and reactionary forces go away...We’re experiencing a more radical kind of informational fracture, with a variety of personalized info-bubbles and a much greater mystery to movements in public opinion and belief.”

Another pattern Douthat sees unfolding is the “leaving behind [of] a world where social liberalism is always at the vanguard, where the expression of cultural individualism is assumed to be identical with human progress.” While these forces are not about to disappear, there is “going to be a strong demand for alternative visions and strong selective pressure favoring communities that figure out some kind of hack or adaptation or escape from the individualist cul-de-sac...These hacks will include a turn to some forms of traditional religion: the dynamics of the 21st century will favor beliefs over secularism, Orthodox Jews over their modernized coreligionists, the Amish over their modern neighbors, ‘trads’ of all kinds over more lukewarm kinds of spirituality.” Douthat expects traditionalism to be in “competition with transhumanism,” the quest for radical life extension. “These are strange visions,” he adds, “but like the more radical political possibilities, they exist already on the fringes of our common culture and they have a special potency among the people (in Silicon Valley and elsewhere) trying to engineer our technological future.” Meanwhile, in the left-wing magazine *Jacobin* (October), Dustin Guastella sees more secularism and a kind of paganism emerging on the political right than traditional religious inspiration.

Others have written about the secularization of the right, but Guastella gives names and faces to the youthful key players who are leading conservatives to “crank up the zealotry while abandoning even a nominal Christian commitment to compassion and love of the victim, the neighbor, the immigrant, and the poor.” Three of the most “viral anti-Christian rightists—Curtis Yarvin, Richard Hanania, and Costin Alamariu (better



Former President of the United States Donald Trump speaking with attendees at the 2023 Turning Point Action Conference at the Palm Beach County Convention Center in West Palm Beach, Florida (© 2023 Gage Skidmore | Flickr).

known by his pseudonym, Bronze Age Pervert, or BAP) all evince a disdain for the Christian emphasis on care for the weak, universalism, and equity. Far from endorsing Christofascism, some of the most influential figures on the hard right seem to hate Christianity.” Guastella argues that “these irreligious voices will continue to shape conservative thought. Indeed, in the coalition between gleefully chauvinistic Chads and conservative religious ‘trads’—an alliance perfectly reflected in both the Trump-Pence and Trump-Vance tickets—the Chads are the future. Trump himself seems to realize this.” Recently, when asked what he made of the Democrats’ charge that Republicans are “weird,” he answered, “Not about me,” and said the label applied to Vance. Guastella adds that the popularity of these anti-Christian conservatives coincides with the growth of the “nones.” Just as the decline of unions and union participation led to a more tribalistic and fragmented left, devolving into identity politics, he concludes that the drop in involvement in religious institutions and the loss of a spirit of cooperation and community are breeding social isolation and a cynical spirit.

(*Jacobin*, <https://jacobin.com/>)

Conservative Millennials and Gen Xers versus progressive Baby Boomers in church conflicts?

Confrontations and tensions between Baby Boomers and younger generations in churches and the wider society are nothing new, but these generational rifts are not necessarily following traditional scripts. In the conservative e-journal *Public Discourse* (November 13), James



Source: LeadBiblically.com.

LaGrand reports that traditionally minded younger church members have been opposing Baby Boomers for their progressive leanings and teachings. This could be clearly seen at a recent denominational meeting of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), where delegates debated a motion opposing same-sex marriage that was prompted in part by two LGBTQ+ affirming churches in the denomination having ordained women in same-sex marriages to the office of deacon. Taking the conservative side in the debate was not “the wizened heads” at the meeting but two relatively young pastors.

In fact, a “disproportionate number of delegates who were fairly young or new to the denomination successfully passed the statement codifying a traditional Christian view of human sexuality,” LaGrand reports. “At first blush,” he notes, “this episode might seem surprising and counterintuitive. Is it not the young who are to lead their foot-dragging elders toward the right side of history, toward progressive views on social and cultural issues including human sexuality?” While it is true that young people in general do tend to support progressive stands on sexuality and gender, LaGrand notes that the sub-population of young people still attending church have caught some progressive Baby Boomers by surprise in not sharing their cultural values. He argues that the generations’ different moral and cultural experiences explain much of this trend. Baby Boomers in conservative churches like the CRC struggled under strict

upbringings and were shaped by liberation movements that valued individual freedom and authenticity.

However, “those in younger generations who have remained in the denomination [and many have left] or joined it recently see themselves as being formed in a different America than their Baby Boomer elders.” They have seen “respect for authority, institutions, and traditional values erode during their lifetimes, and many of those who have remained in the church seek social and cultural goods different from what their Boomer elders value.” LaGrand sees a similar dynamic developing among younger conservative Catholic priests, as well as a movement of younger conservative Christians toward traditional Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and conservative Anglican and global Methodist churches. Online thinkers who question progressive social values, such as Jordan Peterson, Mary Harrington, Jonathan Pageau, and Spencer Klavan, are most popular among younger adults, while Baby Boomers are unlikely to have heard of them.

(*Public Discourse*, https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2024/11/96403/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=a-surprising-generational-rift-in-the-christian-reformed-church)

“Muslim Rolodex” of informal contacts remains standard for hiring imams

Despite professionalization, Muslim clergy in the U.S. rely on an informal “Rolodex” of contacts composed of fellow imams, students, and other sources of support to fill leadership positions in American Islam, Nancy Khalil and Safiyah Zaidi write in the journal *American Religion* (Fall).

By this figurative Muslim “Rolodex,” the researchers point to an element they say has become more important in the process of evaluating and hiring imams than traditional professional resumes. Analyzing the resumes and hiring practices of a Boston mosque, Khalil



Source: World Bank Photo Collection | Flickr.

and Zaidi show how its “Rolodex” serves as a gatekeeper in maintaining established belief and practice. They also cite research showing that the older ways of maintaining and developing Islamic leadership in the U.S. by sponsoring aspiring imams to study abroad has shifted, as Muslim “custodians of knowledge” are formed through new domestic seminaries of higher learning. Accordingly, the composition of the American Muslim “Rolodex” has also shifted from contacts and networks abroad, such as from Egypt’s Al-Azhar University, to national networks in the U.S.

While many mosques draw on this informal network of contacts, there is considerable variation in their evaluation and hiring practices depending on the backgrounds and experience of mosque board members. A mosque can have an “extremely formal or completely informal structure to their imam hiring process,” Khalil and Zaidi write. While their case study of the Boston mosque illustrates how the professionalization of imams might entail the use of resumes that combine religious and secular references, the final hire at the mosque did not actually use a resume. In fact, resumes are often a “forced element, foisted on imams by [mosque] boards composed of working professionals who often know of no other entry point with which to assess potential hires.” Instead, Khalil and Zaidi find that the Muslim “Rolodex” remains more important than job calls, with resumes only serving as conversation starters, if they are used at all. It is mainly by “word of mouth and direct references” that mosques seek to maintain religious practices and traditions.

(*American Religion*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/3/article/943291>)

Anglican conflicts broach issues of biblical interpretation, church authority

Divisions over same-sex marriage and LGBTQ ordination in the Anglican Communion are now expanding to include new issues related to the nature of the priesthood, including women’s ordination, and deeper matters of biblical interpretation among conservative Anglicans. Writing in *First Things* magazine (November 6), Gerald McDermott argues that these issues stem from divisions in the Anglican Communion over the doctrine of marriage during the past 50 years and “threaten to return otherwise orthodox Anglicans to the liberal Protestant camp they have sought to escape.” In their conflicts with liberal Anglicans, conservatives have made their arguments based on the ultimate sufficiency of scripture itself to support their positions, even though there was some nod to church tradition. When Global South Anglicans declared their independence from Canterbury in 2023 over same sex-marriage, the Bible alone was declared “the rule of our lives” and the “final authority in the church.”

This view on the ultimate sufficiency of the Bible is common among conservative and evangelical Anglicans and has allowed for interpretations permitting the practice of women’s ordination in the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) and several Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) provinces, including having women bishops. This conflicts with the traditionalist view that the Bible cannot “interpret itself without guidance from the ancient Fathers of the Church.” In 2017 the college of bishops in the ACNA stated that the ordination of



Source: St. Mary's Episcopal Church | Flickr.

women to the priesthood was an “innovation” in the tradition and that there was “insufficient warrant” in scripture for this practice. GAFCON and the ACNA insist they still hold to the final authority of scripture. But traditionalist Anglicans such as McDermott charge that the practice of women’s ordination is a slippery slope that is now widening to include acceptance of gay rights in some surprising quarters. He cites Fulcrum, an evangelical group in the Church of England with liberal attitudes on same-sex couples (if not on gay marriage). There have also been gay-affirming congregations that once were ACNA but have joined the Episcopal Church (TEC), where their hermeneutic is more at home.

McDermott adds that in GAFCON, “the significance of sexual difference—critical to both Holy Orders and marriage—is being challenged.” In January 2024, three female African bishops issued a communiqué declaring that Christianity is “essentially a ‘women’s movement,’” and urging that the churches review “the presence of gender-related issues in liturgical celebrations.” Meanwhile, in a May 2024 Augustine Appeal, hundreds of clergy in ACNA declared: “We believe the teaching of Holy Scripture, as interpreted by the consensus of the Great Tradition, that only men may be ordained to the priesthood.” McDermott notes that the Global South Fellowship of Anglicans, with multiple provinces and an array of mission societies

and theological colleges, also defers to traditional biblical interpretation. It celebrates the ministry of women in a wide range of church activities but restricts ordination to men.

(*First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2024/11/the-new-divide-in-global-anglicanism>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

● In 2023, there were a recorded 2,444 anti-Christian hate crimes documented by police and civil society in 35 European countries, including 232 personal attacks, such as harassment, threats and physical violence, according to a report from the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians (OIDAC). At least 2,000 Christian places of worship were damaged in 2023. These attacks took place throughout the continent, including Germany, the United Kingdom and especially France, reports Paul Marshall in *Religion Unplugged* (November 19). France had almost 1,000 anti-Christian hate crimes in 2023, about 90 percent of which were aimed at churches and cemeteries, as well as at least 84 religion-related personal attacks. In the UK, there was a 15 percent increase in incidents in comparison to 2022, with some 700 cases reported. Several of these were against converts from Islam. Germany saw a more dramatic increase of 105 percent, with 227 incidents in 2023 compared to 135 in 2022.

The report also included discrimination against Christians in public life and the workplace, such as Christian politicians facing discrimination and being forced to choose between their political vocation and their faith. This has led to increasing self-censorship among Christians. The reason why these findings receive less attention than similar reports on violations against Muslims and other minorities, especially against Jews, is that those attacks are more widespread in the West, especially since the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas assault on Israel and the subsequent and ongoing Israeli military strikes in Gaza. But Marshall adds that another factor is the “outdated—but persistent—belief in much of our media that Christianity is largely Western and white and thus more likely to be an oppressor than oppressed. Hence, the issue of the persecution of Christians is seen as a ‘right-wing’ concern. This is often more an implicit attitude rather than an explicit belief, but the result is the same.”



(*Religion Unplugged*, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2024/11/19/in-time-for-red-wednesday-new-report-details-christian-persecution-worldwide>)

● **Some 985 Buddhist institutions (including temples, centers and groups) are active in Latin America, a new analysis finds.** In a contribution (in Spanish) to the newly published Volume II of *Estudios Budistas en América Latina y España* (edited by Jaume Vallverdú and Daniel Millet Gil), Frank Usarski (Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, Brazil) notes that most research on Buddhism in Latin America has been limited to specific countries. In order to get a sense of the Buddhist presence throughout the region, he tries to provide a panorama of the current situation in institutional terms, finding the distribution of institutions to be uneven: Brazil hosts 392 (comprising 40 percent of the total), followed by Mexico (139 institutions), Chile (87) and Argentina (84). There are fewer in countries such as Colombia (48), Venezuela (37) and Peru (35). Virtually every Buddhist school is represented in at least one Latin American country. The Mahayana tradition dominates with 565 institutions (60 percent), mainly from Japanese schools such as Soka Gakkai and Zen. The Vajrayana tradition (Tibetan Buddhism) accounts for 354 centers (32 percent), while Theravada is the least represented, with only 38 centers (4 percent).

Within Mahayana Buddhism, Soka Gakkai (240 local centers), Zen, and Shin Buddhism are the most common schools. Within Vajrayana, the most numerous Tibetan school is Kagyu (about 118 groups), followed by Nyingma (about 89 groups). The New Kadampa Tradition has established about 55 centers in Latin America. The Gelug school is represented by about 44 centers. The study underlines the crucial role played by Asian immigration in the development and establishment of Buddhist institutions in Latin America. Japanese immigration has had the most profound impact, while Chinese and Korean communities have contributed less but have still



established notable centers. On the other hand, the role of converts, or non-Asian Buddhists, in the growth and diversification of Buddhism in Latin America is also recognized. Converts have contributed to the establishment of various Buddhist institutions, particularly in countries with smaller Asian immigrant populations.

• **Current statistics on Roman Catholic monastic communities show that, compared to previous generations, the people who enter them now are on average older, have a higher level of education, and more often have professional experience.** The decline in religious vocations in Europe is well known. In an article (in French) appearing in the latest issue of *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* (July-September), Isabelle Jonveaux (Swiss Institute for Pastoral Sociology SPI/University of Fribourg) examines the changing profile of Catholic monastic vocations in three European countries (France, Austria, and Poland), analyzing both quantitative and qualitative changes in recruitment patterns and the challenges (and possible opportunities) these changes pose for monastic communities. She uses statistical and qualitative data gathered from various sources and a sample focusing on monastic communities following the Benedictine Rule. There has been a significant increase in the average age of entry into monastic life, a trend evident in both male and female orders across Europe. While the average age of entry was in the early 20s for those entering monastic life before 1960, it has risen steadily to the 30s for those entering after 2000. This shift is in line with the general trend in Western societies toward later ages for marriage and childbearing. At present, monastic life is aimed at people who are already adults, even if the training requires resocialization to a new way of life.

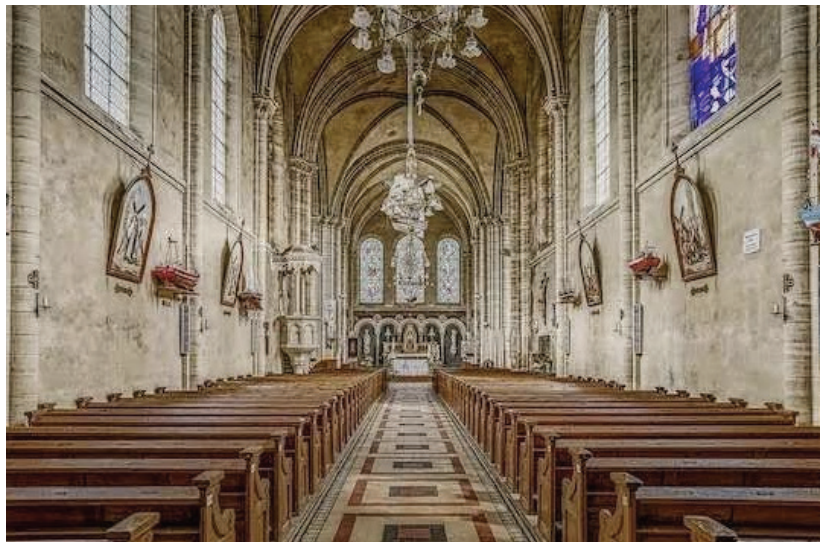


Current entrants tend to have higher levels of education, with 62 percent having completed more than three years of university. Most have significant work experience, with 73 percent having worked before entering the monastery. In general, traditional local recruitment through parish connections has declined. The circle of recruitment has widened, with more people joining monastic communities far from their homes. Some candidates deliberately choose distant monasteries to make a clear break with their previous lives. There has been a “transition from vocations of continuity, often associated with primary socialization in a religious institution, to vocations of rupture.” The Internet and social media have become primary means of initial contact. Monasteries maintain an online presence, sharing information and answering questions about their way of life, while trying to avoid explicit recruitment marketing. In the past, most people entered monastic life in their late teens or early 20s. As the age of entry into this life increases, so does the accumulation of experience as an autonomous adult. However, “entering the monastery requires giving up certain forms of autonomy in favor of a way of life defined by the rule,” Jonveaux writes. Another challenge is the need for individualized training. In the past, when there were more vocations, it was common for novices to be trained in groups. However, the decline in vocations has made this more difficult, resulting in many monastic communities offering individual training, which can be challenging for both the novice and the novice director. The future of monastic life may depend on successfully managing these transitions while preserving authentic religious experience.

(*Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, <https://journals.openedition.org/assr/>)

● **A study of congregations in Switzerland finds both a continuing pattern of secularization and increasing openness and acceptance of homosexuality and the role of women in church leadership.**

The study, conducted by researchers from the University of Fribourg and the Strasbourg and Basel faculties of Theology, and reported in *Evangelical Focus* (November 29), found that the total



number of local religious groups during the period under review fell from 6,341 in 2008 to 5,883 in 2022, a decrease of 7.2 percent. Participation in religious events fell from 894,000 (2008) to 824,000 (2022). The average age of leaders and regular participants also increased (by three years) during this time. Roman Catholics and Reformed Protestant churches lost the most members, while evangelicals and charismatics showed more fluctuation. In addition to

secularization and aging, the study found that the percentage of local religious groups accepting homosexual people as full members of the community rose from 63 percent in 2008 to 75 percent in 2022. “The growing acceptance of homosexual people is particularly evident in the Roman Catholic, Protestant-conservative and Muslim traditions,” the researchers write. The share of groups showing greater openness to women in leadership roles has grown from 47 percent to 54 percent, with 15.2 percent actually being led by a woman (from 12.4 percent in 2008). This increase has been seen most strongly in Reformed, classical evangelical, and Buddhist groups, while “conservative evangelical,” Orthodox, Muslim and Hindu Sikh groups have “changed little or negatively.”

(*Evangelical Focus*, <https://evangelicalfocus.com/europe/29199/secularisation-and-age-of-religious-leaders-grows-in-switzerland>)

● **Recent studies find both an increasing lack of trust in the Orthodox Church and a growth in atheism in Greece.** The polling firm Public Issue ran a survey on trust in institutions in Greece and found that 71 percent of Greeks lacked trust in the Orthodox Church, the largest



Saint Nikolaos Holy Orthodox Church, Parikia, Paros, Greece (© 2023_Warren LeMay | Flickr).

share since the company started to collect data on this question in 2007. The national sample comprised 2,000 people. *EUREL Newsletter* (November), a publication reporting on trends and information on law and religion in Europe, notes that another survey by the opinion poll company Kapa Research found that belief in God fell from 92 percent in 2005 to 73 percent in 2024. The study also found that the percentage of people supporting the separation of church and state had grown from 59 percent in 2003 to 70 percent today. This national survey polled 1,469 people.

(*EUREL*, <https://www.eurel.org>)

● **While less than two-thirds of Bulgarians believe in God, most identify as Orthodox, according to a survey conducted by the Bulgaria-based Gallup International Center for Social and Political Studies and Research.** The survey of 802 respondents, reported in the *EUREL Newsletter* (November), was the first survey on religion conducted since the election of the former Metropolitan Daniil as the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Daniil has been seen as more Russia-oriented than previous church leaders, criticizing the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. In a society where Orthodoxy takes on the role of a national identity as much as



St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Sofia, Bulgaria (© 2013 Dennis Jarvis | Flickr).

a religion, the survey found only 19.7 percent of Bulgarians saying they went to religious services often. Additionally, 43.1 percent said they trusted the Orthodox Church, while 35.8 percent distrusted it. As for Patriarch Daniil, 30.6 percent of respondents expressed trust in the leader, while 27 percent expressed distrust in him. An additional 22.6 percent said they flatly did not trust him and 19.8 percent said they were unaware of the patriarch's personality. The survey also showed the demographic makeup of Bulgarians: 75.3 claimed the Orthodox faith, 9.9 percent chose Islam, 11 percent no religion, and the rest affiliated themselves with small religious communities.

● **Religious youth in war-torn Lebanon tend to disassociate their faith from the sectarian conflict that has scarred the country, a study appearing in the journal *Politics and Religion* (online in October) finds.** Anthropologist Fidelia Danielle Renne (Oxford University) interviewed participants in community-based youth associations having a religious component, places that one might think would fuel sectarian conflict and violence. Renne found, however, that these participants did not see a conflict between their religious involvement and an anti-sectarian political outlook. In interviewing members of Shi'ite Muslim, Orthodox, and Maronite youth associations, she found that even as they were attached to their respective groups—often for social as well as religious reasons—these young people also engaged in interfaith friendships. “We were raised on an idea that Muslims are not good, that Druze are not good, [but that] Christians are good,” one Orthodox interviewee said. “But in [association's name] we learned that everyone is good. And we always have connections with Muslim people...”



While denouncing sectarianism as divisive, most respondents spoke of religiosity as socially bonding and integrative. They were also opposed to the idea that Lebanon's struggles were due to religion; they more often cited political divisions and structural issues as being responsible for these conflicts. While Renne's sample of respondents may not be representative, she cited recent survey research showing a marked increase in self-reported religiosity in Lebanon, especially engagement in religious practices, while showing a decrease in support of religion as an identity. This may suggest that "youth may be looking for something within religiosity that is not only different from sectarianism, but actually runs counter to the logic and aims of 'sectarianism' in their minds."

(*Politics and Religion*, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-religion>)

● **While secular people in Turkey have higher rates of university degree attainment and employment in the public sector, under the rule of the religiously conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP), pious Sunni Muslims, especially younger women, have shown a significant improvement in public sector employment, whereas seculars have seen a relative decline in their numbers.** In a study appearing in the journal *Public Choice* (online in November), Cem Oyvat, Hasan Tekgüç, and Alper H. Yagci analyzed individual-level survey data from 2012 to 2018, analyzing whether age cohorts entering the labor market before and after the AKP assumed power in Turkey experienced different public employment outcomes based on their religion and religiosity (even when controlling for education). They found that pious Sunnis moved into these positions, closing the education gap. Older cohorts of pious Sunni women have a substantially lower likelihood of being employed in the public sector compared to secular women. But this disadvantage disappears for younger cohorts and turns into an advantage in the youngest cohorts, who likely entered the job market after 2013, when the government lifted the ban on headscarves (a visible marker of Sunni piety among women) for civil servants.

Moreover, during the AKP's rule, not only did pious Sunnis, constituting a large share of Turkey's population, improve their likelihood of being employed in public-sector jobs, but the smaller group of highly religious Sunnis (only 9.3 percent of the population) also improved their employment opportunities in the public sector compared to others, including other pious Sunnis. The



Source: Ceng Ismail | pexels.com.

researchers note that their findings were likely driven by the lifting of the headscarf ban in public employment as well as AKP's strategic use of public employment and resources to reward like-minded groups in both the public and private spheres. They add that, "whether the increase in pious Sunni public sector employment resulted from favoritism in recruitment, an increase in pious Sunnis' willingness to apply for public sector jobs, or both cannot be determined using our data. However, our results highlight the important role of religious identity in public employment."

(*Public Choice*, <https://link.springer.com/journal/11127>)

Crypto-Armenian youth in Turkey embracing Christian identity

Young people in the Turkish Black Sea region are increasingly breaking away from Islam and seeking to join Christian communities, reports *Evangelical Focus* newsletter (November 22). "What is striking," Johannes Reimer writes, "is that Christian missionaries are rarely responsible for this awakening. For one thing, they have hardly any access to the region, and for another, the region has hardly been on the radar of Western missionary organizations for decades." More often, these conversions are related to young people rediscovering their Christian roots. Most of them are the grandchildren of Armenians and Greeks who were forcibly Islamized under the



threat of death during the Armenian genocide (1915–16). Entire villages changed their religious affiliation at that time, with those resisting facing death. Today, these forced converts are referred to as “crypto-Armenians,” which include several million living in Turkey. Reimer cites Turkish journalist Erhan Basyurt, who describes crypto-Armenians as ““families, and in some cases entire villages and neighborhoods, who converted to Islam to escape the deportations and death marches (of 1915), but continue their hidden lives as Armenians, intermarrying and in some cases secretly returning to Christianity.””

Even after the genocide, the Turkish state suppressed any independent development of the former Christian population. It was not until the 1960s that more liberal attitudes towards people of other faiths emerged in Turkey, and this was also the period when the first examples of crypto-Armenians returning to the Christian faith appeared. Such reconversions have often led to emigration from Turkey or to these re-converts’ segregation from Turkish society. An example of latter’s influence was the reconstruction of the Surp Giragos Church, originally built in 1376 in Diyarbakir, Eastern Anatolia, once a city largely inhabited by Christian Armenians. The Surp Giragos Church became the largest Armenian place of worship in the Middle East and its reconstruction was a key event for both reconverted Christians and Islamized Armenians in Turkey. But the church was destroyed again in the course of the Kurdish-Turkish war.

Under President Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish state is once again massively advancing its Turkification policy, with ethnic minorities facing new restrictions. The government’s war against the Kurds and the increasing oppression of other ethnic minorities is fostering the new interest in Christianity among the younger generation of Turks. Young Turks are experiencing an identity crisis and rediscovering non-Turkish roots and their families’ Christian pasts. “This process is also greatly aided by the fact that the level of education of the Turkish population and thus also their knowledge of foreign languages has increased enormously, making it possible to access the Internet and the information available here on developments in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic over the last 100 years,” Reimer adds. In the book *Anneannem (My Grandmother)*, Turkish lawyer Fethiye Çetin tells the life story of her grandmother who was taken from her family during the genocide and raised as a Muslim. Çetin’s book set off a “small avalanche in motion” when it became clear that her grandmother’s story was not an isolated case. Reimer concludes that this rediscovery of suppressed ethnic and religious roots among crypto-Armenians and their consequent openness to Christianity will likely be seen as an “outstanding opportunity for evangelization and church planting in Turkey.”

(*Evangelical Focus*, <https://evangelicalfocus.com/european-perspectives/29113/the-grandchildren-of-forced-converts-are-rebelling>)

Georgian Orthodox state church in the wings?

While the Orthodox Church has enjoyed special status since 2002 through a concordat-like agreement, the ruling Georgian Dream party, which won the October parliamentary elections with 53.9 percent of the vote, is proposing to make Orthodox Christianity the state religion

through a constitutional amendment, reports special correspondent Thomas Guichard in *La Croix International* (Dec. 2). The current 91-year-old Catholicos-Patriarch, Ilia II—who enjoys the highest level of respect and trust among all Georgian figures—officially rejected the proposal in August. But it is assumed that only 5 out of 43 bishops actually support Ilia II’s position. Most of the bishops are said by unnamed sources to be siding with Bishop Shio Mujiri, who also favors closer ties with the Moscow Patriarchate. “Russia is trying to exert ideological influence on the Church and through it on Georgian society, especially by exploiting ‘moral issues,’” says Sopiko Zviadadze (Ilia University). Support for close ties with Europe is strong in Georgia, but issues such as LGBTQ+ rights are used to promote anti-Western views. Since Georgia regained its independence in 1991, the church has played a complex role in the European integration process, writes Mariam Khakhutaishvili (Tbilisi State University) in the *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* (vol. 44, no. 3). Indeed, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgian national identity has been shaped by two main elements: Orthodox Christianity and the desire to “return to the European family.” The church officially supports integration but has also expressed concerns about Western values as opposed to traditional ones.

The church’s position is thus characterized by a mixture of support and ambivalence, reflecting both internal divisions within the church and wider societal tensions between traditional values and European aspirations. During the last election campaign, the Georgian Church stated that it could not take sides, but that it would “unequivocally support any choice that brings long-term peace to Georgia and strengthens the values that promote Christian and family traditions.”



According to journalist Shota Kincha (*Open Caucasus Media*, Oct. 23), this was seen by some as a tacit endorsement of the Georgian Dream party, “especially because it echoed key phrases from the party’s conservative talking points and election promises, repeating them twice in a short statement.” On the other hand, during the recent demonstrations in Georgia, the church was careful to keep a balanced approach and not take sides. The project is far from done. The Georgian Dream party lacks the 75 percent parliamentary majority required to amend the constitution. It would have to persuade other MPs to back the move to make the Orthodox Church the state church. But whatever the short-term outcome, the issue must be seen from the wider perspective of potential divisions within the church and society in Georgia, where the increasingly frail Ilia II may not remain at the head of the church for long.

(*Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/>;
Open Caucasus Media, <https://oc-media.org/>)

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

■ Muslim and Jewish exchanges and encounters have multiplied in Berlin and in the state of Brandenburg in recent years. Numerous projects of cultural and religious rapprochement and understanding have been most evident in the large city of Berlin, where there has been a “remarkable”



growth of encounters between Muslim and Jewish artists and actors as well as religious exchange and collaboration in recent years. Examples of this include the ambitious **House of One** project in downtown Berlin and the **Jewish Center at the Fraenkelufer Synagogue** in Berlin-Kreuzberg. In the House of One, Christians, Jews, and Muslims are planning to bring a church, synagogue, and mosque under one roof, with active communities participating in joint and public activities. There will be no proselytism or “politicization” allowed in this congregation.

The Jewish Center at the synagogue in Berlin-Kreuzberg is serving as a social and cultural center where non-Jews are introduced to Judaism and there is a celebratory approach to the faith. There are also other initiatives where rabbis and imams partner to explain their faiths to visiting students. In Brandenburg, where there are smaller Jewish and Muslim communities, Jews with immigrant backgrounds, such as from the former Soviet Union, have partnered with recent Muslim immigrants. An intercultural network called Diamond brings together migrants and refugees from a variety of countries and religions to overcome prejudice and help them integrate into German society. These Jewish-Muslim encounters have continued even after October 7 and renewed Palestinian-Israeli tensions. (Source: *Ethnicities*, online in November 2024)