

Impasse or opening in relations between Muslims and religious and political conservatives?

American conservatives remain divided on the presence and influence of Muslims in society, but there may be a way to forge new ties between these two groups, according to some analysts. There is a strong anti-Muslim thrust in groups near the second administration of President Donald Trump, most clearly seen in the national conservative movement. The NatCon conference, held in Washington, DC in early September, featured a range of Trump administration officials, scholars, and activists weighing in on public issues, with Islam receiving considerable attention. Calvinist pastor and self-proclaimed Christian nationalist Douglas Wilson said that Muslims should have no place in politics and that concentrations of Islamic believers, such as in the city Dearborn, Michigan, should not be allowed to publicly express their religion. In another address, conservative thinker Nathan Pinkoski called for the remigration of Muslim immigrants back to their home countries to encourage a greater Christian presence in public life. Meanwhile, an article on the *American Conservative* magazine website reports an increase in support for Trump among Muslim voters, increasing from 17 percent in the 2020 election to 31 percent in 2024. Much of this increase “was due to the Biden administration’s support for Israel’s war in Gaza, which alienated Muslims and Arabs in key battleground states,” writes Saqib Sheikh.

He adds that historically, Muslim Americans generally “leaned toward the Republican Party until George W. Bush’s declaration of the War on Terror in 2001, which involved not only multiple invasions of Muslim countries but also enhanced surveillance of Muslims at home. Such policies naturally led Muslims to flee to the Democratic Party.” Sheikh argues that recent events suggest that Muslim Americans, “not a monolithic community by any means, may be open to politically diversifying. This raises interesting prospects of a possible rapprochement with conservative forces who themselves have gone through an evolution during the Trump years as the neoconservative wing has weakened and more populist and war-weary voices have emerged.” This change has become clearer as conservatives have become more split on the issue of Israel and the extent of American involvement in Gaza since the start of Trump’s second term in office.



Some of the most prominent critics of Israel are now found on the MAGA right, with a “rising tide of young conservatives [growing] increasingly skeptical of American support for Israel and the risk of American forces being drawn further into the Middle East. This development has drawn the attention of Muslim Americans deeply opposed to Israel’s Mideast wars.”

The new, Israel-critical conservatives have sometimes extended rhetorical olive branches to Muslims as the political benefits of “Muslim-bashing” have diminished. The situation is complicated by the “shift of the conservative base towards forms of identitarianism and Christian nationalism.” The identitarians see Muslims as “invaders whose presence in America and the West was enabled by liberal mass immigration policies,” while the Christian nationalists often view Muslims as a fundamental threat to Judeo-Christian values. But Sheikh adds that the “drift of young conservatives away from support for Israel has also induced skepticism regarding this brand of evangelical conservatism.” He concludes that MAGA conservatives will not embrace left-wing Muslim Americans and many are frequently depicted as being on a “hidden mission to undermine Western civilization, a fear that has visibly resurfaced with the rise of Zohran Mamdani, the Muslim Democratic Socialist and [new mayor of New York City]. Yet Muslim voters differ politically from Muslim elected officials,” and “ordinary Muslim voters have shown a willingness to buck expectations of ‘intersectional’ ethnic-minority leftism, particularly on issues of social conservatism,” making “a broader rapprochement...very much possible.”

(The American Conservative, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/can-maga-conservatives-and-muslim-americans-unite/>)

American Islam enduring with second generation but weakening in black mosques

While American Islam is showing resilience among its second and third generations, African American Muslims and mosques are experiencing steep declines, writes Ihsan Bagby in the journal *Muslim World* (online in October). Bagby cites his 2020 U.S. Mosque Survey, where he found a majority of mosque leaders following what he calls a flexible and contextual approach to Islam that encourages involvement in American society while holding strongly to Islamic tenets. He found that only about 5 percent of mosque leaders followed a more literalist interpretation that advocates separation from society. According to his studies of mosques in 2000, 2010, and 2020, mosque growth went from 1,209 to 2,106 to 2,769 in those respective years. The average mosque attendance increased to 410 in 2020 from 292 in 2000. Immigration has been the main driver of these increases, with mosque membership still dominated by first-generation immigrants. But Bagby finds that according to Pew data, the American Muslim community is still quite young: 35 percent are aged 18 to 29 and 25 percent are 30 to 39. Among these younger generations, rates of religiosity, including mosque attendance, are similar to those for older American Muslims.



While in his survey Bagby found that a “healthy 29 percent of regular adult participants in mosques” were between 18 and 34, he cites the concern that among American Muslims young adults are becoming “unmosqued,” with some leaving the religion altogether. Indeed, standard immigration theory holds that assimilation will weaken adherence to both ethnic and faith traditions and institutions. But Bagby points to a “new paradigm” where race and religion are more closely intertwined and Muslims and other minorities retain their differences from the dominant society. “The more tension that Americans feel with the dominant society—especially younger Muslims—the greater the willingness to resist this pressure by maintaining their Islamic identity and intrinsic cultural values...The dynamics within the immigrant community have ironically led many in the second generation to accentuate their Islamic identity as opposed to their ethnic/national identity,” he writes. There is also a steady interest of younger Muslims in spirituality, with the older resistance against Sufism (Islamic mysticism) fading,

But mosques still face considerable structural constraints, such as weak membership loyalty (with worshippers attending various mosques for Friday prayer), a resulting lack of community life and low giving rates, and a shortage of trained staff. The researcher finds that the ideal of the “Prophetic Mosque” has been gaining ground among younger Muslims. This ideal mosque offers a variety of programs and upholds the principles of “welcoming diversity, engendering brotherhood/sisterhood beyond ethnic and national lines, and engaging in the relevant issues facing Muslims and American society...” There is more reason for concern about African American mosques, whose share of all mosques has declined from 27 percent in 2000 to 13 percent in 2020. These mosques are increasingly dominated by an older generation of leaders and attendees, with a lack of young participants, and only half of them are seeing increasing attendance. Growth in these mosques depends on a steady rate of conversions to Islam.

Even offering more activities, social services, political involvement, and women’s equality has not translated into greater attendance for the African American mosques. Only basic mosque activities are correlated with increased attendance: the five daily prayers, weekend schools, Islamic study classes, and youth and women groups. Welcoming young people into leadership ranks and embracing “traditional Islamic knowledge” rather than the older African American concerns of converts from the 1960s through the 1980s are also correlated with greater mosque vitality, Bagby writes. Still, there has been a renewed effort to bring African American and immigrant Muslims together, especially since the George Floyd killing and subsequent protests. Today, only four percent of all mosques in America are made up of one predominant ethnicity. The author concludes that while 78 percent of mosques have participated in some form of interfaith activity, interest in such exercises in religious pluralism are found more among mosque leaders than among laypeople.

(*Muslim World*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14781913>)

Faith-based social services and government partnerships at point of no return?

Many faith-based charities that have long partnered with the government have experienced setbacks to the point where they will not be likely to return to their former missions and levels of activity, according to leaders of religious social services during a recent New York conference attended by **RW**. The conference, sponsored by Religion News Service in mid-October, included a panel of leaders of longtime Jewish and Christian faith-based social services, who spoke about how safety-net and refugee ministries and work have changed under the Trump administration. Stanley Carlson-Thies, founder of the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance, said that sources of government support for relief and refugee assistance three decades in the making through the Charitable Choice law of 1996 and President George W. Bush's faith-based and Community Initiatives Office have largely been dismantled since the second Trump administration. It was largely cuts made by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) that affected these programs. Carlson-Thies added that while this pattern is strongly evident at the level of federal government partnerships, there is considerable local and state government support for such efforts, and there may be some refunding efforts to groups that have lost federal support, such as the HIV-AIDS program PEPFAR.

Mark Hetfield of the Jewish-based HIAS, one of the oldest and largest refugee resettlement organizations, estimated that the group has lost about half of its revenue and has largely halted its



consultations with refugees. As the administration has de-prioritized resettlement of persecuted religious minorities, HIAS's Iranian program has been shut down. The organization no longer partners with the U.S government. Hetfield noted that 8 of the 10 groups partnering with the government on refugee resettlement are faith-based. Since his organization has been helping resettle refugees for over 100 years, often without government assistance, it will continue in this work, but the faith-based resettlement programs will not likely return to their pre-2025 status. Eugene Cho of Bread for the World said that the 50-year-old hunger relief organization is facing a serious setback in its work after the government cut USAID funding. "So much trust has been broken. Many [faith-based social service] groups are saying, we're moving on and believe things will not be restored," he said.

Trap music recovering syncretistic Southern spirituality?

While trap music, an increasingly popular form of southern hip-hop, has been known for its infatuation with wealth and money, its songs also show a strong if unorthodox spiritual current, writes Rachel Bomalaski in the journal *Anthropology of Consciousness* (online in October). Trap emerged from the American South's urban centers in the late 1990s and 2000s, but has since spread throughout the world. Bomalaski sees the songs of such prominent trap musicians as Georgia rapper Pastor Troy, Kevin Gates, Gangsta Boo, and Young Thug as mixing and injecting everything from "unorthodox Islam," Christian prayer, "the divine feminine," and indigenous beliefs into their music. Apart from the lyrics, the melodies and especially the beat of trap is said to generate a dreamlike state and feelings of transcendence. For instance, in the 2023 song "Goddess from Houston," rapper Monaleo evokes a "dream space," with its crackling and hissing sound, where she "reveals her truth: 'God is a woman/God is a lady.'" Kevin Gates's



"uncanny and contrasting timbres reflect his syncretistic practice, where Islamic prayer, indigenous beliefs, and Voodoo coexist," Bomalaski writes. She concludes that the trap genre

expresses “repressed spiritualities, particularly those rooted in African American and syncretistic traditions,” and a sense of “mourning for the South’s lost religious pluralism.”

(*Anthropology of Consciousness*, <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/15563537>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **A new report from Barna Research finds that “men are significantly outpacing women in church attendance since the pandemic, reversing a longstanding trend in Barna’s decades of polling.** The 2025 gender gap is the largest recorded so far (43 percent for men vs. 36 percent among women).” The Barna poll finds that married fathers have the highest show-up rate at church compared to all other parents, while single mothers significantly trailed married couples in attendance (at 24 percent). For decades, women had outnumbered men in church attendance and often led the way in spiritual interests. But a “significant shift is occurring in American Christianity that demands attention: Women—particularly younger women—are attending church less frequently than men.” Over the years, however, women’s attendance has steadily declined, while men’s has remained more stable. In other words, churches are losing women more than they are gaining men, with the exception of 2025 when male attendance spiked upward. As of 2025, again, 43 percent of men and 36 percent of women report attending church regularly, based on reported weekly attendance. In five of the last six years, men have outpaced women on this key measure of religious engagement, and the 2025 gap is the largest measured.

(The study can be downloaded from: <https://stateofthechurch.com/>)

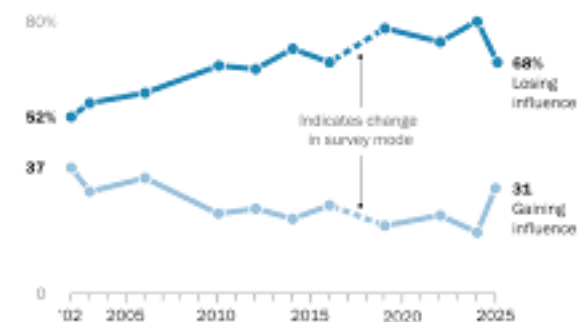


● **A recent Pew study finds a significant increase in the share of Americans who say that religion is having more influence in American life.** From February 2024 to February 2025, there was a gain of at least 10 percentage points in the proportion of adults, whether Republican or Democrat, and in every age category and most of the large religions, agreeing about religion's rising influence. Although still a minority viewpoint, the 2025 figure represented 31 percent of the population, up from 18 percent in 2024. This is the highest figure seen in 15 years. The new survey also finds that in recent years a growing share of the public takes a positive view of religion's role in society. Meanwhile, the share of those saying religion is losing influence fell sharply, from 80 percent in 2024 to 68 percent a year later. In general, 59 percent of U.S. adults express a positive view of religion's influence on American life. At the same time, the percentage of people who say they feel a conflict between their religious beliefs and mainstream culture is now 58 percent, an increase of 10 percentage points from 2024 and 16 from 2020.

(The study can be downloaded from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/10/20/growing-share-of-us-adults-say-religion-is-gaining-influence-in-american-life/>)

Between 2024 and 2025, sharp rise in share of Americans who say religion is gaining influence

% of U.S. adults who say religion is ___ in American life



Note: Dotted line indicates a change in survey mode between 2016 and 2019. Data from 2019 and after comes from Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP); 2016 and earlier used telephone surveys. The wording of the question on the telephone surveys was slightly different than on the ATP. Refer to the topline for details.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 3-9, 2025.

"Growing Share of U.S. Adults Say Religion Is Gaining Influence in American Life"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

● **The continuing adoption of Christian beliefs among young men in Finland has much to do with the strong countercultural elements of the faith, providing these men with acceptance and a sense of community, according to a study by Kati Tervo-Niemela of the University of Eastern Finland.** Tervo-Niemela presented a paper at the early-November meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Minneapolis, which was attended by RW, providing a deeper look at the increasing interest in Christianity among these young men. There have been several journalistic reports and studies showing a slowing down of secularization, particularly among young men, who now outpace young women in church attendance. Finland has been at the vanguard of this trend, and Tervo-Niemela has studied how the religiosity of young male confirmands has grown while young women's faith has shown slower growth and even decline.

While in 2019 about the same percentage of young men and women believed in God (35 percent), by 2025 a gap had grown, with 67 percent of young men and 56 percent of young women believing. Similar increases and differences between the sexes were seen in belief in Jesus' resurrection. Tervo-Niemela correlated this increase in religiosity among Finnish young men with a growth in military service. In in-depth interviews with 30 male confirmands, she found that the themes that resonated included: religion addressing personal crisis and search for meaning (80 percent), faith, theology and rituals (67 percent), faith as a counterculture



(57 percent), traditions and stability (70 percent), a positive male image during a crisis of masculinity (40 percent), community and safety (73 percent), church as a place for self-development (47 percent), and experiences related to the time of confirmation. Tervo-Niemela points out that while the church more often appeals to those young men who are religious and conservative, the value profile of religious youth is varied, especially among women who are as often liberal as they are conservative.

● **Those churches in Switzerland concerned about competition with secular activities tend to be mainline and Catholic rather than evangelical, and rural rather than urban, according to research by Jorg Stolz of the University of Lausanne.** In a paper presented at the early-November meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Minneapolis, which was attended by **RW**, Stolz said he had expected that more conservative evangelical church leaders would be the ones more concerned about competition for their members' time from secular sources, as they offer them more programs and alternatives. But it was the more lax mainline and Catholic churches that tended to be more concerned about such secular competition. Using census data on 5,834 religious groups and then surveying 1,395 of



them, the researcher also found that, as might be expected, the leaders of declining religious groups were more concerned about secular competition. But, again unexpectedly, the religious leaders of rural congregations were more concerned about secular competition than their urban counterparts.

● **Although Eastern Orthodoxy is experiencing net growth, with an increase in families and a more diverse demographic entering the church, the number of new priests being ordained is drastically insufficient to meet current needs and projected growth, according to researchers with the Orthodox Studies Institute (OSI).** The researchers, Matthew Namee and Deacon Seraphim Rohlin, were interviewed on October 14 by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick on his Orthodox podcast. Recent data gathered by the OSI shows that the number of converts has continued to grow, while shifting “from predominantly single young men to young families.” Signs of an increase in Hispanic and black American converts are also reported. Attendance is also increasing in a number of parishes, even during such lean periods as summer. There are variations across jurisdictions, with the more ethnic-oriented ones obviously drawing few converts. If confirmed over the next few years, the growth will also represent a challenge for Orthodox parishes. Even with stable membership, 100 new priests per year would be required. In the most conservative scenario, “the one where we grow by 69 percent over the next 15 years, if



we want to just maintain our current parish density, like priest to parishioner ratio, we need to be ordaining about 160 priests per year,” said Deacon Seraphim Rohlin.

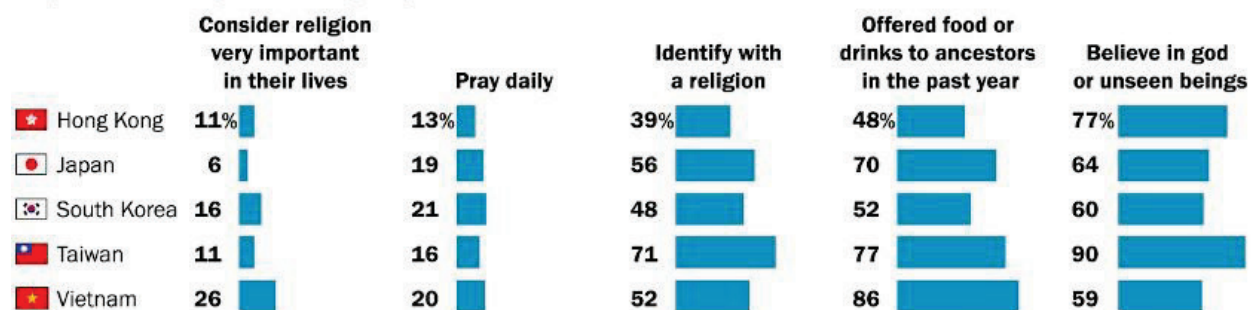
The top three American seminaries are producing about 30 new priests annually. Namee and Rohlin suggest potential solutions, such as expanding the role of deacons (following the model of the Antiochian Archdiocese, with those deacons showing the best pastoral abilities then raised to the presbyterate), developing non-residential seminary programs, and adopting a more traditional apprenticeship model for clergy training, similar to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia’s (ROCOR) Pastoral School. This is actually a traditional Orthodox model, as it would involve mentorship and practical experience under experienced priests. The laity should also be encouraged to take on more administrative and community-building roles within parishes to alleviate the burden on clergy and foster a stronger sense of community. Namee and Rohlin add that recent converts should be advised to be mindful of the pastoral load, understanding that priests are not personal therapists and that most issues can wait for regular working hours.

(*American Orthodoxy in 2040* podcast, <https://www.youtube.com/live/xQ6p3UfSLOA>; Orthodox Studies Institute, <https://www.orthodoxstudies.org>; Orthodox Pastoral School, <https://mail.orthodoxtheologicalschool.org/support-the-pastoral-school>)

• **Due to low fertility, changing age structure, and religious switching, Buddhism remains one of the most rapidly declining religious traditions in the world, according to a study by Yunping Tong and Conrad Hackett of the Pew Research Center.** In their Global Religious Landscape study issued last June, Pew found that Buddhists declined by 18.6 million members since 2010, while all of the other world religions showed growth (with Muslims increasing by 346 million members and Christians by 121.6 million). In a paper updating and elucidating the Landscape study, presented at the early-November meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study

Few East Asians consider religion very important in their lives, but many make offerings to ancestors and believe in god or unseen beings

% of adults in each place who say they ...



Note: Respondents were asked if they have offered food, water or drinks to honor or take care of ancestors in the past 12 months. Respondents were asked separately if they believe in god or if they think there are unseen beings in the world, like deities or spirits. “God” was translated into each language using as generic a term as possible, without referencing any specific religion’s god(s) or goddess(es).

Source: Survey conducted June 2-Sept. 17, 2023, among adults in five Asian publics. Read the Methodology for details.

“Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

of Religion, which **RW** attended, Tong and Hackett explained how the Buddhist decline is mainly being driven by changes in East Asia. For one thing, the general population in the region is older than the global average, and Buddhists in particular are older than the average East Asian. Women in East Asia also have fewer children than the global average, a fertility decline that has impacted Buddhists as well.

The researchers also found that many adults raised as Buddhists in East Asia no longer identify as such, with South Korea and Hong Kong having the lowest rates of those remaining Buddhist (33 and 32 percent, respectively) and the highest rates of switching to other religions or disaffiliating from all religions. In contrast, in Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka), almost all adults who were raised Buddhist still identify with the religion. In general, Buddhists experienced the biggest losses from religious switching, with South Korea leading other countries. Tong and Hackett conclude that while there are newcomers to Buddhism, they won't be enough to offset the loss from Buddhists switching out of the faith.

• **While Shamanism in Korea is often portrayed as a rural remnant of the past that is mainly expressed in Pentecostalism, the religion still has a presence in urban districts of the country, according to researchers.** Writing in the journal *Religions* (October 21), sociologists Jungsun Kim, Yuanfei Li, and Fenggang Yang find that shamanism shows more adaptation to Korean urbanization than decline. The researchers analyzed results from searches of Google Maps and Never Maps revealing 15,639 shamanic sites, as well as religious directories of about 63,000 churches and 15,000 Buddhist temples. They looked at the relationship of these shamanic sites to these other religious groups, aggregating the data to the district level of Korean administration. A density of Protestant churches showed a negative association with shamanic site density. Thus, Protestant expansion reconfigured public space to exclude these shamanist sites (such as through zoning). Buddhist temples and Catholic churches showed less consistent results, although positive local associations were observed for the former. In such regions as the southeast, Buddhist temples have visible authority and formal registration, while “shamanic practice remains domestic, portable, and informal. Kim, Li, and Yang write that Shamanism still exists in urban Korea, but through “strategic ambiguity and informality,” showing considerable vulnerability as it exists without formal institutional recognition and



credentialing systems. They conclude that “Korean modernization has not secularized religion uniformly but has redistributed it across differentiated spaces.”

(*Religions*, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/16/10/1327>)

Churches losing youth to prosperity-based ancestral worship in Nigeria

There is a resurgence of ancestral and “idol worship” for prosperity in Nigeria which is drawing an increasing number of young Christians to its ranks, according to Edlyne Anugwom. In a paper presented at the Minneapolis meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in early November, attended by **RW**, Anugwom noted that this resurgence, known as the Okeite movement, is particularly strong in the country’s eastern region. The movement follows an earlier phenomenon from the early 2000s, known as Odeshi, where ancestral worship was used for protection from knives and bullets. The Okeite phenomenon involves invoking particular deities and ancestral spirits for material blessings and prosperity by offering sacrifices of animal and human body parts contained in clay pots. The sacrifices and rituals are maintained by priests and are often publicized online. These practices benefit from the black market for



human body parts that are often the result of kidnappings for ransom and other killings by criminals. Anugwom said that the practice of ancestral worship has changed from being an agency “of justice to being reinvented to feed the [drive for] power and wealth.”

Church leaders, both Protestant and Catholic, have been reporting increasing participation of their young, mainly male members in this phenomenon. While these participants may continue attending church, they often do so under parental pressure and don’t participate in congregational services. Churches are publicly criticizing the Okeite priests and their young initiates for engaging in these practices and for their worship of materialism and wealth, although those churches also preaching prosperity have been more ambivalent in their condemnation of the phenomenon, according to Anugwom. Aside from preaching against involvement in Okeite practices, there has also been a significant social response, ranging from demolition of ancestral sacrifice sites and imprisonment of participants to vigilante actions. For their part, young members charge that they are being drawn away from the churches because of their complicity in cooperating with corrupt politicians.

Muslim women “provoking” for Palestinian rights in mosque protests

Muslim women have taken up a significant role in the protests and provocations over Palestinian rights, signaling significant changes in traditional Islamic gender roles, writes Salwa Alinat-Abed in the journal *Contemporary Islam* (online in October). Alinat-Abed focuses on the growing role of Muslim women in the protests and activism at al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, demonstrating their objection to Israel’s control over the holy site. Muslim activists have long seen the mosque as an “arena of confrontation” and protest against Israeli rule and its symbols, rejecting any political or national division of Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque within it. The guardian role that Muslims see themselves playing for the mosque has now expanded in an unprecedented way to involve a growing cadre of women activists who are reinterpreting Islamic concepts of provocation and *ribat* (political and social struggle). There have long been women involved in activism in the Palestinian cause, but their “struggle in the past was mainly nationalist in nature, and their involvement did not invoke religious symbolism and terminology in the same way as the *murabitat*,” the term for the Muslim women activists.

Provocation has traditionally meant any action seen as angering the “infidels,” which today can mean defiantly chanting “Allahu Akbar” (“God is the greatest”) repeatedly whenever the women see Israeli policemen, Jewish worshippers, or foreign tourists within the mosque’s compound. Another form of provocation is when the women sit for several hours in areas within the compound where Jewish worshippers come for prayer or visit and refuse to clear the site when



asked to do so. Alinat-Abed argues that these new women activists are providing new interpretations of Islamic concepts to advance gender equality. While not directly engaging in the explicit intellectual efforts of Muslim feminists, they reinterpret the religious term “*qiwama*,” which relates to men’s responsibility in providing for their women’s protection, livelihood, and education, to mean women’s taking up equal roles of responsibility for sacred spaces and for the men in their lives. She concludes that “provocation becomes a vehicle through which the women not only resist occupation but also build their power from within Islam, proving they are full partners in the struggle while challenging both external and internal authorities.”

(*Contemporary Islam*, <https://link.springer.com/journal/11562>)

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

1) Christian women have become prominent social media influencers, and some are drawing large offline followings. Such is the case with **Angela Halili** and **Arielle Reitsma** and their popular show **Girls Gone Bible**. Launched in 2023 in the form of a weekly podcast show, it has since gained more than 20 million listens and nearly two million followers on Instagram and TikTok combined. While its title plays on the libertine *Girls Gone Wild* franchise, its message of sobriety, scripture reading, and chastity couldn’t be more different. Halili, 29, and Reitsma, 36, deal with topics covered on other women’s shows, such as “Lust and Deception,” “Overcoming an Eating Disorder,” and “What Men Look for in a Wife,” while peppering them with lengthy Bible readings and reflections.



Donald Trump is a fan of the virtuous yet stylish women, inviting them to give the prayer at his pre-inauguration victory rally. While Halili and Reitsma are cradle Catholics, their devotees relate to the worldly and secular lives they lived prior to conversion, as well as their lack of hypocrisy. Their redemption stories are similar to the comments listeners make: “I was lost, I was broken, and then I found God.” Critics charge that their call for women to submit to their husbands and their overt support for Trump and his policies will set back the feminist agenda for decades. But their message of healing—emotional and physical—and the permission they give to stivers to opt for a husband, a family, and a faith, are said to resonate with many Gen Z young women. (Source: *The Free Press*, October 17)

2) Relatively new to Europe, the **Crossbearers** follow the model of their American counterpart, known as Operation Reconquista, to revive the national Protestant churches of Europe. The American-based group is “specifically dedicated to reviving the Mainline Protestant denominations”—the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the American Baptist Churches. The movement views itself as



engaged in “spiritual warfare against demonic forces that have infiltrated our churches.” Their primary target audience is Generation Z (those born approximately between 1995 and 2010). While primarily American, the movement openly welcomes like-minded initiatives in other countries and networks with them. According to a podcast featuring Martin Petersen and Jorge Mario Monsalve Guaracao (a deacon-in-training in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Saxony and co-leader of the European Crossbearers), the movement’s fundamental critique is that Protestant churches are “deeply compromised by a pandemic of liberalism” and corrupted by the “lies” and “deceit of liberal theology.”

The reconquest strategy distinguishes between “orthodox,” “heretical,” and “moderate” congregations. Members are encouraged to identify and report “orthodox” (theologically correct) congregations, which are then marked on a map for networking purposes and as a starting point for fighting back and reconquering mainline denominations. Their motto is “revolution through communion,” aiming to create “a confessing church within a compromised church.” According to the European Crossbearers website, the shrinking of mainline Protestant churches in Europe offers “a historic opportunity to retake our Churches for the Gospel. The congregations that hold on to Christ will flourish; the congregations that forsake Christ will simply vanish.” Critical to the movement’s self-understanding are a newly formulated “95 Theses,” covering the nature of the church, the gospel, scriptural authority, word and sacrament, human nature, and secular authority. Sexual ethics occupy a significant space (Theses 68-83), with homosexuality viewed as morally deficient and transgender identity portrayed as unnatural and contrary

to God's order. Specific sets of theses have been prepared for different mainline churches. (Source: *Zeitschrift für Religion und Weltanschauungsfragen*, <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/de/journal/view/0721-2402>; Operation Reconquista, <https://www.operationreconquista.com>; Crossbearers Europe, <https://crossbearers.eu/en/>; Echoing Wittenberg 2025, <https://echoingwittenberg.de>)

3) The planners of the **Bijlmermeer**, a housing district in southeast Amsterdam built in the 1960s, saw it as an idealistic city of the future based on the idea that secularism was a growing reality. But this “city of tomorrow” has been on an unsecular trajectory. Based on the ideas of the Swiss modernist architect Le Corbusier, over 30 large blocks of high-rise apartments, 10 stories high and 200 to 300 meters long, were laid out in a honeycomb pattern. No church buildings were planned in Bijlmermeer, since it was based on the premise that religion was dying out. By the 1980s and '90s, the “Bijlmer” experiment was reported to be a failure, with its police chief saying it had become rife with crime, drugs, unemployment and illegal immigrants. Twenty years later, the Bijlmermeer has seen its migrant communities, with many Christian believers, rejuvenate the district. About 150 Christian fellowships have emerged over the years, meeting in available social spaces—from parking garages to recently built church sanctuaries. A four-story complex known as De Kandelaar reflects the multicultural character of the neighborhood, serving 15 migrant churches. (Source: *Evangelical Focus*, October 20)



4) **Dievturība** was granted the coveted status of a “traditional religion” in Latvia on October 9. “The Dievturi Community Law goes beyond what other states have done with regard to their neopagan communities,” according to UK-based historian and folklorist Francis Young. Efforts by neopagan groups in the Baltic have been reported in earlier issues of **RW** (January 2024, December 2024). In Lithuania, Romuva was granted state recognition in December 2024. But receiving recognition as a “traditional religion” takes Dievturība to a higher level. The law, passed with 63 votes in favor, 7 against, and 2 abstentions, states that Dievturība has “maintained a longstanding presence in Latvia,” and that “it is faithful to spiritual and moral values, nurtures the Latvian language and traditions, and preserves the nation’s spiritual heritage.” The name, sacred sites, shrines, and ritual objects will be protected, and it will be allowed to provide spiritual services in military, medical, and correctional institutions.



The movement was founded in 1925 as the “systematized contemporary continuation of the ancient Latvian religion.” It was a founding member of the European Congress of Ethnic Religions (ECER) in 1998. The number of active participants in neopagan movements in the Baltic states probably remains in the low thousands, but they are mostly interested “in acceptance and cultural influence.” “In Latvia and Lithuania neopagan religious revivalism is intimately tied to folklore, folk song and folk dance, as well as to set-piece semi-ritualized performances of national identity.” (**Source:** “Pagan dawn: Europe’s first pagan state religion in 638 years? <https://drfrancisyoung.com/2025/10/10/pagan-dawn-europes-first-pagan-state-religion-in-638-years/>; Dievturība, <https://dievturi.lv/>)