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A pope, a president, and persecution: previewing religion for 2026

Unlike previous years, when emerging trends unfolded on an unofficial level, in 2025, momentous events—war, an assassination, a papal election and a presidential reelection—will likely shape religious developments in the next year and beyond. Here are the editors' selections of trends to watch out for in 2026. After each item, we cite the pertinent issues of ***RW****, as well as other publications, that have reported on these events and trends.*

1) Perhaps the most significant institutional change in global religion this year was the election of Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost on May 8, 2025, as Pope Leo XIV—the first American pope in the history of the Catholic Church. His choice of the name Leo signals a foundational commitment to the social justice aims of Leo XIII (1878–1903), whose encyclical on labor justice launched the modern Catholic social tradition. The new pope's first magisterial document, the apostolic exhortation *Dilexi te* ("I have loved you"), preaches the love of Christ as incarnated in love for the poor, caring for the sick, defending women who experience exclusion and violence, making education available to all, and accompanying migrants. The document continues themes from Pope Francis's final encyclical *Dilexit nos*. In relation to his predecessor, Leo XIV seems to be on a line between continuity and pacification, although one has to wait for major decisions in order to start understanding fully the guiding principles of his pontificate and his way of implementing them. A recent report from the "Study Commission on the Female Diaconate" rejecting the diaconate for women is said to have closed the door on women's ordination of any kind, suggesting that Pope Leo doesn't fit the progressive mold either (although the commission was first organized by Pope Francis). (May **RW**; *First Things*, December 10)

2) The reelection of Donald Trump as U.S. president has not turned out to be "more of the same" regarding matters of politics and religion. The "Christian nationalist" label was—and still is—used indiscriminately since Trump's first term in office, but this time there really are political and religious leaders inspired by a Christian nationalist vision. What such a vision entails is not always clear, with standard Christian-right positions (such as on pro-life issues) either downplayed or dismissed by this administration. But judging from the discourse of those in and

close to the administration, such as the National Conservative movement, there is a concerted effort to revive talk of a Christian heritage and tone down references to religious pluralism. It is more difficult translating this discourse into policy, though we see some clear ramifications of the administration's vision as a whole in the way faith-based refugee and social service organizations have faced cuts and reductions from the federal government. The elevation and assertion of the "Muslim question," casting doubt on the place of Islam in America's religious tapestry, may be an important area where the Christian nationalist element will gain some traction. Already there is serious talk about "remigrating" Muslims, not to mention restricting Muslim immigrants (and there are even some conservative Christian protests against public expression of Hinduism). Such policy changes can receive ideological support from the anti-Islamic sentiments that have become prominent in evangelical circles since 9/11. (September, October, November **RW**)

3) For all the talk of Christian nationalism over the past decade [see above], the place of religion in Republican politics had been waning—at least until the assassination of Charlie Kirk last September. The grief and fervor surrounding Kirk's death reenergized the religious element both in the party and also for many Americans on a personal level. The unique blend of religion and politics on display in Turning Point USA (both before and after Kirk's death) is a different kind of religious upsurge from recent decades, but it is typically American in the way it draws on deep wells of patriotism and spirituality. Whether it is a revival is an open question, but the stabilizing of religious affiliation in the U.S. and reports of renewed spiritual interest in Europe, especially among young men, suggests the Kirk phenomenon is part of something larger than American political dynamics. (September **RW**)

4) While the U.S. government has shown a longtime concern about religious persecution (especially persecution of Christians) around the world, the Trump administration has upped the

ante, adding military strikes to exercising soft power. This could be seen in Trump's strikes in Nigeria against groups connected to the Islamic State on Christmas day. India, Nicaragua and various other places will likely be feeling increasing heat about their treatment of Christians.

5) The redrawing of the map of global Anglicanism seems to be closer than ever at the end of 2025. The response of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) to the appointment of Dame Sarah Mullally as the new Archbishop of Canterbury on October 3, 2025, appears to have formalized a long-simmering divide between conservative and progressive factions of the Anglican Communion. GAFCON's Primates' Council dismissed the Archbishop of Canterbury as an "Instrument of Communion" and stated that they are no longer willing to participate in the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and the Primates' Meeting, criticizing them for having failed to uphold Anglican doctrine. As Zenit Catholic news agency noted, "the decision underscores a broader realignment within global Christianity, in which demographic growth and theological authority are migrating toward the Global South. For many observers, the move echoes tensions long visible in other Christian traditions—the struggle to balance cultural adaptation with doctrinal fidelity." (*Zenit*, October 20)

6) The year 2025 marked the 1,700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD), which became an occasion for significant ecumenical engagement. In November, Pope Leo XIV traveled to Iznik (ancient Nicaea) in Turkey to celebrate an ecumenical prayer meeting with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople and around 20 church leaders from Christian communities around the world. The previous month, in Egypt, the Coptic Orthodox Church hosted the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order (October 24–28). This World Council of Churches (WCC) gathering produced the "Ecumenical Affirmation of Wadi El Natrun." This document called for "visible unity" in the face of global polarization.

7) The religiopolitical changes in the Middle East, with the weakening of Iran and the post-Assad transition in Syria, will likely have repercussions in 2026 and beyond. In the case of Iran, the power of the clergy, long in decline, showed itself as largely ineffectual in unifying and rallying the country during and after the short war with Israel and the U.S. The country has experienced a rapid secularization over the years, with women and young people in particular growing disenchanted with the ruling clergy and its theocratic government. In considering what might come after the elderly Ayatollah Ali Khamenei leaves the scene, analyst Karim Sadjadpour writes that even if another hardliner is chosen as its leader, Iran has had a five-decade experiment resulting in theocratic mismanagement. "If Iran's next age belongs to another strongman, he is unlikely to wear a turban." (May **RW**; *Foreign Affairs*, November/December)

Supplying the chaplain demand of a more religious military?

If the U.S. military with its reorientation under the leadership of Secretary of War Pete Hegseth has shown a strong interest in religion, it appears that the feeling is mutual, with the religious devotion of members of the military outpacing that of the population as a whole. Hegseth's drive to revive traditional religious faith and spiritual leadership in the military can be seen in a

December 16 video statement he made, arguing that the chaplain's corps has been "degraded" by the "war on warriors," political correctness, and secular humanism. He cited the Army Spiritual Fitness Guide as a sign of such secularization, noting that it only mentions God once, while making numerous references to feelings, consciousness, and even "playfulness," stressing therapy and self-care. Hegseth said his department will replace that guide with a streamlined document that will emphasize the "chaplain as pastor," and putting faith and spiritual well-being on the same level as mental and physical health. There may well be a demand for the supply of chaplains that Hegseth and his department are trying to put on the menu. In his newsletter *Graphs About Religion* (December 1), Ryan Burge looks at data from the Cooperative Election Study and finds something of a revival among those in active military service.

Burge notes that there has been a dramatic decline of active service members in comparing the baby boomer to the millennial generations. Those who have had a connection to the military in these surveys are not very different from the general population on religion; about two-thirds were Protestant or Catholic, and about 30 percent were nonreligious. That means around 7 percent belonged to another religious tradition. Burge then focuses on the active-duty military now, comparing samples from the first three years the religious affiliation question was asked (2010–2012) to the three most recent surveys (2022–2024). He finds that the share of active-duty Christians has dropped significantly—from 58 percent in the early surveys to 50 percent in the most recent ones. Still, compared to 18–45-year-olds who are not actively serving, the military respondents are more likely to be Christian. Military members are also significantly less likely to be nonreligious: 32 percent, vs. 48 percent among everyone else.

But when looking at the attendance rates of active-duty military, Burge was surprised to find that the share of military members who attended religious services had grown from 36 percent in 2010–2012 to 45 percent in the most recent data. "That's insanely high, honestly. A member of the military is about twice as likely as a civilian to be a weekly church attender. And remember:

we're comparing only 18–45-year-olds in both samples here," Burge writes. On the question about religious importance, there is a similar increase—from 39 percent of active-duty members in the earlier surveys to 44 percent today. "That shift is even more striking when compared to the rest of the sample: in the general public, religious importance dropped by seven points," he adds. Burge concludes that there is not a revival occurring in military ranks but rather that new recruits are coming from more religious backgrounds and regions. "It's not that the military is making its men and women more inclined toward a faith community—they were already that way before they swore the oath."

Haredi Jews warm to Zionism, with a little help from Trump

Although ultra-Orthodox Jews have traditionally been anti-Zionist, the younger generation has embraced Israel as well as a more ethno-nationalist brand of the faith, writes Martin Francisco Saps in *Arc Magazine* (December 17), which covers religion and politics. The official Haredi—or ultra-Orthodox—stance toward Israel has been that it was established without God's approval and the coming of the Messiah. Even though that strict stance may have softened in recent years, it is not common to see Israeli flags and prayers for the State of Israel during services in Haredi synagogues as compared with other synagogues. But the events of October 7, as well as the globalization of the ultra-Orthodox community, have created a generation of young Haredi Jews who find a stronger sense of identity through an attachment to Israel, Saps writes. The more

pietistic Haredi leaders, who lost some respect among younger members over infighting between various dynasties, are being challenged by the fourth generation of Haredim in America, who are "more online than the last ... [and are] not content with asceticism and being apolitical. They may be speaking Yiddish and dressing like their ancestors, but young people—especially young men—are experimenting with new ideas and trends."

"In this context, supporting Israel is a form of rebellion against the old orthodoxy; it's a different way of being Jewish," he adds. A new kind of male bravado among younger Haredi Jews can be seen in how many are taking up activities that were previously unthinkable, such as working out, owning guns, and showing off material wealth. A new sensitivity toward anti-Semitism since October 7 is felt more by the visibly Jewish Haredi, with one anti-Zionist Jew admitting that "everybody in Williamsburg [a center of ultra-Orthodoxy in New York] knows now that Free Palestine is something you say when you hit a Jew." The new support for Israel has even impacted the traditional Haredi refusal to serve in the Israeli army, with recently established special units like Hashmonaim slowly normalizing the practice. Uniting the young Haredi both in the diaspora and in Israel is a "religious supremacy" that prioritizes power and security and holds a figure like Donald Trump in reverence.

The fact that Trump is pro-Israel [some Haredi say they became more Zionist because of Trump] as well as nationalistic and conservative has increased the Haredi vote for him in each election. Yet there is something of a dissenting movement among some ultra-Orthodox, led by Yaakov Shapiro, a great nephew of the rebbe of the Satmar community, the largest Haredi sect in the U.S. Shapiro blends Orthodox and secular anti-Zionist teachings, addressing both audiences. Since Haredi institutions have not shifted their basic stance on Zionism and young ultra-Orthodox are more institutionally attached than other Jews, it is not impossible that such a popular anti-Zionist figure as recently elected New York mayor Zohran Mamdani can appeal to more members if he develops a good relationship with Satmar community officials.

(*Arc Magazine*, https://arcmag.org/can-zohran-mamdani-reverse-ultra-orthodox-jews-drift-towards-the-far-right/)

CURRENT RESEARCH

• **A recent survey finds that the top 10 seminaries in terms of enrollment do not include a single mainline seminary and tilt decidedly toward the evangelical and, in particular, Baptist side of the spectrum.** The *Aquila* newsletter (December 1) cites an analysis by Nathan McKanna of data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), finding that of the 245 accredited seminaries, evangelicals now outnumber mainline Protestants 46 percent to 33 percent. And of that 33 percent of Protestants, females outnumber males two to one. Of the 10 seminaries with the largest enrollment now, 80 percent are Baptistic if not formally Baptist; for instance, Dallas Seminary is officially independent but is doctrinally close to the Baptists. The only two non-Baptistic seminaries in the top 10 are Fuller and Asbury (Methodist). Adding together Dallas, Gateway, and Liberty (with sharp gains in enrollment, though a large part of it is

Photo of Southern Evangelical Seminary.

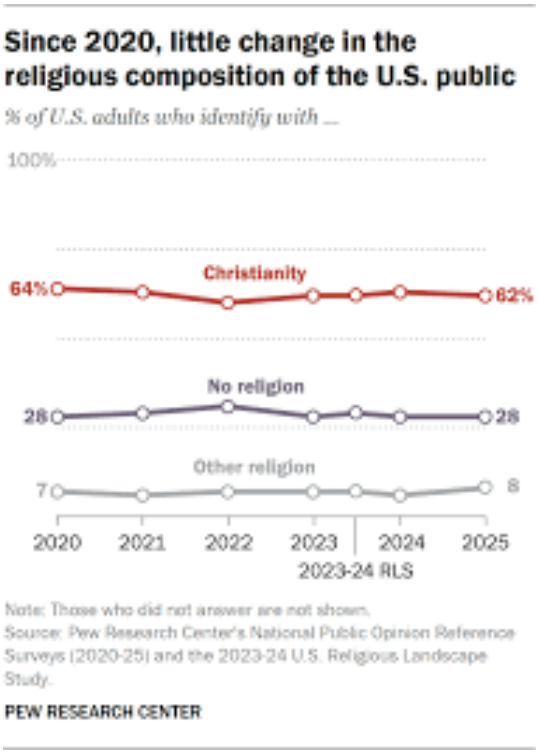
online), along with the other schools with "Baptist" in their name, makes for a total of 13,826 full-time students. This now represents a ratio of 15 to 1 of Baptists over Methodists, with little other representation from mainliners—"a sea change in American theological education."

Many of the largest seminaries have reduced the number of hours to receive a standard divinity degree, and the classical emphasis on biblical languages has been shortened in most seminaries. Another far-reaching development is the rapid increase in online studies, with approximately 70 percent of classes taking place online compared to 30 percent 10 years ago. The study concludes by noting that "The average headcount at seminaries in the United States is 303 students, but what's interesting is that more than 75 percent of seminaries (191) have an enrollment below that figure. ... *In other words, nearly half of all student enrollment is concentrated in just 7 percent of seminaries*, all of which are evangelical Protestant."

(*The analysis can be downloaded at:* https://www.logos.com/grow/hall-top-seminaries-by-enrollment/)

• **The main indicators of American religious devotion continue to stabilize after a long period of decline, according to a Pew Research Center survey.** The shares of U.S. adults who

identify with Christianity, with another religion, or with no religion have all remained fairly stable in the center's latest polling, a pattern that started five years ago. The percentages of Americans who say they pray every day, that religion is very important in their lives, and that they regularly attend religious services also have held fairly steady since 2020. While some observers have reported that a religious revival is serving to stabilize the numbers of non-affiliated, the Pew researchers argue that there are no clear signs of nationwide revival, though they allow that there may be local religious upsurges. The finding that young men are now about as religious as women in the same age group represents a "notable change from the past, when young women tended to be more religious than young men. It also differs from the pattern seen among older people. This narrowing of the gender gap is driven by declining religiousness among American women. It is not a result of increases in the religiousness of men."



(*To download this report, visit*: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/12/08/religion-holds-steady-in-america/)

• **While religion and faith are generally seen as important parts of American life, a new survey finds a wide variance of up to 34 points in Americans' views of their importance across communities, reflecting the country's rural-urban divide on key sociocultural issues.** The survey of 5,400 respondents was conducted by the American Communities Project (ACP), which studies social trends in various American communities distinguished by demographic and regional characteristics, in cooperation with IPSOS, a polling firm. The survey found that more than 75 percent of those in very rural communities of moderate to low means—regions designated by ACP as "Aging Farmlands" and "Native American Lands"—said that religion and faith were important parts of American life. For "Evangelical Hubs" and "Working Class Country," rural communities with lower incomes based in the South, Midwest, and Appalachia, the figures were in the mid-60s.

In middle-income rural communities in the country's upper tier and interior West, called "Rural Middle America" and "LDS Enclaves," 59 percent of residents said religion and faith were important in American life, while in the "African American South" and "Military Posts," known for their large Black populations, 57 percent and 52 percent of residents said so, respectively. On the other side of the spectrum were such urban-oriented places as "Big Cities," "Urban Suburbs," and "College Towns," which registered in the mid- to upper-40s. Beyond these divides, attending religious services was not found to be widely popular. Across communities, only 4 in 10 said

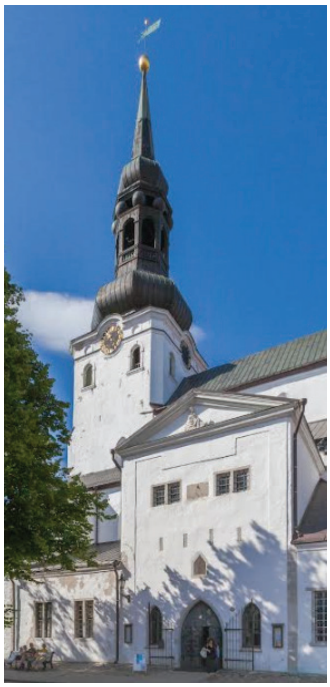
they attended religious services at least every few months. "Graying America" counties, where more than a quarter of residents are 65 and older, were the exception, with 51 percent saying they never attended services. Regarding religious identity, 56 percent of all those considering themselves Protestant, other Christians, or other non-Christians identified as evangelical or born-again. There was no definite urban-rural split, with percentages reaching the mid- to upper-60s in the African American South, Working Class Country, and Evangelical Hubs. But even the big cities mirrored the national average, while Urban Suburbs and Aging Farmlands were both in the mid-40s.

(*The ACP/IPSOS survey can be downloaded from:* https://www.americancommunities.org/americans-identify-with-religious-diversity-but-they-divide-over-religions-role/)

• **Larger evangelical churches are better able than smaller ones to meet internal and external challenges in everything from having quality programs to resisting atheism, a new study finds.** In research reported in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* (21:4), David Dunaetz, Kristina Fightmaster, and William Ingersoll studied 129 evangelical churches, asking church leaders how difficult each of 50 challenges were for their churches. The greatest challenges reported were evangelism and youth ministry, leadership support and development, and lay involvement, but they were not related to church size. Two kinds of challenges were related to church size: high quality church programs and external threats. The study confirms current and past research on megachurches and how they are more economically efficient.

The larger churches in the study were more open to organizational change, largely because they could hire and retain qualified staff. Smaller churches were more likely to struggle in this area, making quality programming more of a challenge. On external challenges, larger and smaller churches faced different perceptions of risk. A loss of a few members in smaller churches could make them more likely to face financial collapse. Similarly, in smaller churches, members' exposure to opposing beliefs, such as atheism, could have more serious results than in larger churches. The latter have larger social networks that can help members deal with such challenges to belief, whereas smaller churches have fewer such resources, making them more vulnerable.

(*Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, https://www.religjournal.com/articles/article_view.php?id=192)



● **An analysis of 28 countries in the European Union finds that the separation of religion and state is rarely practiced, and that even countries that may qualify as secular meet only loose standards of secularism and neutrality regarding religion.** The study, published in the journal *Politics and Religio*n (online in November) and conducted by Jonathan Fox of Bar Ilan University in Israel, is based on the Religion and State dataset. It looks at five different variables to measure the separation of religion and state (SRAS): government-based religious discrimination; restrictions, regulations, and control of the majority religion; government religious support; whether governments finance religion; and whether the state declares an official religion. Fox finds that none of the 28 countries practice SRAS as it is expressed in such policies as zero tolerance (where if a state bans an action, it must meet this standard with no exceptions), while some of the EU states might strictly uphold neutrality on religion (such as the Netherlands and Slovenia).

The researcher concludes that SRAS is either uncommon or non-existent in the EU. But he also adds that there is a deficit of religious freedom in these countries, all of which "restricted the religious practices and/or institutions of religious minorities in a manner that that was not applied to the majority religion…"

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

• **Britain is undergoing religious recomposition rather than straightforward secularization, according to a report (December 2) by Charlotte Littlewood and Rania Mohiuddin-Agir, researchers at the Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life (IIFL).** While the 2021 census showed an historic decline in Christian affiliation (from 59 percent to 46 percent), religion has not disappeared but is diversifying and becoming more personalized. The report draws on a survey of 2,774 UK adults "who self-identified as having experienced a change in their religious belief." The largest single shift is toward agnosticism or atheism (39 percent of respondents), followed by movement into or within Christianity (36 percent), spiritual-but-not-religious identities (8 percent), Dharmic traditions (3 percent), and Islam (2 percent). Christianity is described as "the busiest corridor," with 73 percent of those "becoming Christian" having already been Christian—changing denomination or deepening existing faith rather than converting from outside. For those who have turned toward spiritual-but-not-religious identities, self-identified new beliefs include Pagan (40 percent) and Wiccan (9 percent).

Across the majority of faiths, conversion is linked to greater purpose and wellbeing. The report argues that religion is increasingly functioning as an "existential toolkit" for healing and purpose rather than a set of communal obligations—although one should not underestimate the appeal of structured, embodied practices, for instance, in conversions to Islam. Deep transformations are

underway, with the story being "no longer one of simple decline but of diversification, from organized religion toward personalized meaning systems that combine elements of faith, spirituality, and moral individualism."

(*Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life*, https://iifl.org.uk)

• **A recently released survey captures a Catholic community that increasingly recognizes its minority status in contemporary French society—a reality shaping transformations within the faith, reports the French Catholic daily *La Croix* (December 8).** While 46 percent of French adults still describe themselves as Roman Catholic, the focus of the survey was on more engaged Catholics. According to the survey, 5.5 percent of French adults—approximately 3 million people over 18—attend mass at least once a month, qualifying as "regular churchgoers." An additional 3.5 million (6.5 percent) are classified as "occasional engaged" Catholics, who rarely attend Sunday masses beyond family ceremonies but who may have a religious life of their own and whose faith has led them to parish, charitable, or social commitments. Among regular practitioners, 8 in 10 pray frequently at home, 44 percent recite the rosary, and roughly a third regularly go to confession or participate in adoration. The occasional engaged, by contrast, emphasize values like sharing and peace, with their religious practice showing signs of gradual detachment.

The demographic profile of regular churchgoers shows an average age of just under 50, with nearly one-third living in the Paris region—evidence of an increasingly urban Catholicism.

Slightly more than half are men. Crucially, nearly two-thirds come from families that regularly attended mass, underscoring the importance of family transmission, though 13 percent follow a form of renewal Catholicism and come from non-practicing backgrounds. Politically, 40 percent of the regular churchgoers identify with the right or far-right (15 percent with the Rassemblement National/National Rally), 30 percent with the left or far-left, and 15 percent with the presidential majority. Political scientist Yann Raison du Cleuziou says the survey shows that French Catholicism is reorganizing around a "hard core" of 3 million regular churchgoers who are highly committed and mutually reinforce each other. The increase in adult baptisms does not compensate for the collapse in infant baptisms.

The apparent dynamism of certain downtown parishes serves as a "magnifying glass effect," with zealous Catholics, once dispersed, now concentrated in a few locations, creating an impression of renewal. Those who value religious obligation have resisted detachment better than those who prioritized personal fulfillment. Remaining practitioners therefore tend to be more conservative. Although they are not all attracted to it, two-thirds of regular Catholics no longer object to the Latin Mass, which has moved beyond post-Vatican II conflicts. Only 22 percent of regular churchgoers consider it a step backward. It now serves as a spiritual resource for young people, a "pole of intensity" that anchors faith. While no more than 9 percent say the Latin Mass is their preferred form, 25 percent of the regular churchgoers report liking both forms equally. According to an article by Matthieu Lasserre and Eve Guyot (*La Croix*, December 11), there is a growing phenomenon of "bi-ritualism" among practicing French Catholics, where faithful attend both the traditional Latin Mass (Tridentine rite) and the ordinary form. These Catholics are predominantly young adults under 35, living in large cities where they have access to both forms.

Muslims in Italy activist, locally based—and a political Trojan horse?

Italian Muslims are taking a unique and more activist path compared to Islam in other European countries, alarming populist and conservative groups and political leaders, but also carrying tendencies that may avoid the confrontations and tensions experienced in other parts of Europe. Writing in the *European Conservative* magazine (December 10), Javier Villamor reports that "In several European countries, a political trend that until now remained discreet is becoming increasingly visible: the deliberate construction of Islamist lobbies inspired by models already employed by other pressure groups." He cites the recent example of Italian activist and influencer Ibrahim Youssef, who holds a PhD in political science and philosophy and has argued that the Muslim community must prepare to play a significant political role in the medium term. Representing 4.6 percent of the Italian population in 2022, Muslims could reach nearly 10 percent by 2050. Youssef claims that this demographic trend "opens the door to growing electoral influence if it translates into cohesive political participation. His view is that a unified voting bloc could force major parties, especially conservative ones, to rethink their discourse on immigration and integration to maintain their chances of governing. The argument is presented not as an ideological project, but as an electoral calculation based on figures," Villamor writes.

Youssef proposes that the Muslim community should "emulate the Zionist lobby" for its long-term vision. This means the Muslim community should support any Muslim candidate who enters politics, "reinforcing internal cohesion mechanisms that allow negotiation with traditional parties." This strategy seeks to advance step by step within institutions, "even if a Muslim representative cannot fully defend a religious program," Villamor adds. Youssef also highlights the importance of cultural influence, using the LGBT movement as an example. This view that the Muslim community must prioritize its cultural presence before aspiring to broader institutional weight is aligned with the strategy of international Islamist organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and has alarmed the Italian right. Italian Deputy Prime Minister and populist Lega president Matteo Salvini threatened to suspend "all permits to build mosques and Islamic centers [in Italy] until they [Islamic communities] also sign an accord with the Italian state in which they pledge to respect our laws and traditions."

In an article in the journal *Contemporary Islam* (online in November), Stefano Allievi (University of Padua) writes that any such accord between Islam and the Italian state is a long way off. The conservative government actively opposes a legal recognition of Islam that it has given to other minority religions. Allievi agrees that a second generation of Muslims has emerged and "new social actors" are introducing greater activism in the "production of Islamic culture." Islam in Italy is unique in that is based more in smaller cities and is more local than

national, avoiding much of the sharper confrontations involving Muslims and nationalists throughout Europe. And Italy not elaborating a plan to integrate Islam, neither embracing the French model of secularism nor the Anglo-Saxon style of multiculturalism, could prove to be a "competitive advantage, allowing the country to avoid the extremes…of either."

(*European Conservative*, https://europeanconservative.com/articles/news/italian-islamist-strategy-if-we-vote-our-own-well-control-politics/; *Contemporary Islam*, https://link.springer.com/journal/11562)

Conservative niches and countercultures as the future of UK Catholicism?

Young Catholics in the UK are increasingly taking up distinctive practices and gravitating to parishes that cater to these conservative youth subcultures, according to the study *After Secularization*. The study, published by the Catholic Truth Society and conducted by Stephen Bullivant, Hannah Vaughan-Spruce, and Bernadette Durcan, is based on a 2019 survey of British Roman Catholics that compared generations in the church. As reported in *Church Times* (December 2), the study finds a "growing trend of people choosing which parish to attend based on reasons other than pure geography." Parishes showing growth have accepted these changes, moving from operating as a generalist organization that serves a heterogeneous market to a specialist mode that caters to newcomers who want a more traditional expression of the faith,

from observing the Latin Mass to saying the rosary, devotion to the saints, and claims of supernatural experiences.

The young Catholics' differences from older generations are borne out in the survey results, which show that 41 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds reported attending Mass weekly, compared to only 17 percent of 55-to-64-year-olds. About two-thirds of this youngest cohort said they "definitely" or "probably" believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, compared with 41 percent of the older age group. Bullivant says that liberal-conservative differences also exist between younger and older priests. The study emphasizes that Catholic decline continues, with Mass attendance falling from almost 2 million in 1980 to 592,000 in 2022. But it predicts that the decline will "bottom out" and, to a degree, reverse, although such a revival will result from drawing on these conservative sources rather than appealing to the shrinking "middle of a middle that is becoming less and less Christian…"

The rise of Catholicism in Norway

Secularization, immigration, conversions, and a young generation's hunger for spiritual meaning are transforming the religious landscape of Norway and making a new place for Roman Catholicism in that country, reports Pierre Jova in the French Catholic weekly *La Vie* (December 10). While Catholicism remains a minority faith in this traditionally Lutheran nation of 5.5 million, its growth has been striking. Registered Catholics have risen from approximately 46,000

Catholic procession in Norway.

in 2009 to 168,000 in 2025, representing about 3 percent of the population. Actual numbers may be considerably higher—between 250,000 and 300,000—since many immigrants never formally register with the church. This could make Catholicism Norway's second-largest religion, after the Lutheran Church (which claims 62 percent of the population) and ahead of Islam (3.5 percent). Immigration has been the major channel for the growth of Catholicism in Norway. Besides that, some practicing Lutherans have been attracted to Catholicism due to its doctrinal stability, liturgy, and historical tradition, writes Jova. Among recent converts to Catholicism are also young men aged 15–35, many without a religious background, who often discovered Catholicism through conservative North American voices on YouTube, including psychologist Jordan Peterson and Bishop Robert Barron.

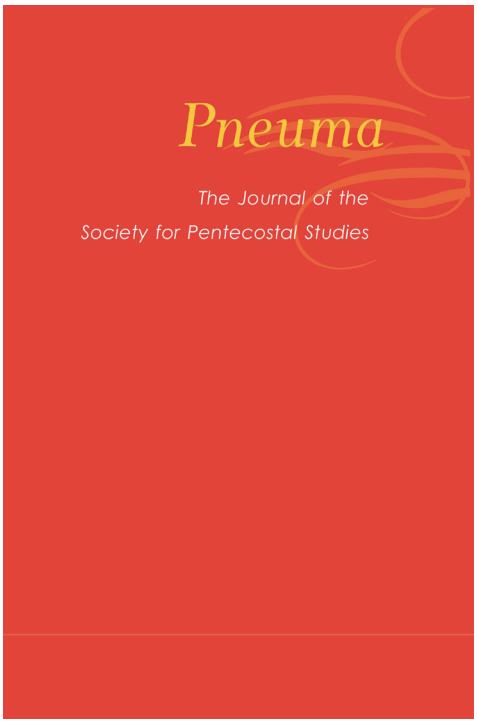
The established Lutheran Church of Norway, while no longer representing the state religion since 2012, has struggled with its historical ties to government. Professor Bernt Oftestad, a church historian who converted to Catholicism in 2000, describes the Lutheran Church's "curse" as its "allegiance to the state, which reduced it to being the nation's social worker, without spiritual content." The church's 2016 decision to celebrate same-sex marriages has not stemmed its decline. A 2020 survey found that 48 percent of Norwegians did not believe in God, while only 30 percent affirmed belief. Despite lively Lutheran pockets, as well as the remnants of evangelical and Lutheran pietism in the country's southwestern Bible belt, "there is hardly anything left to secularize in Norway," said Erik Varden, Catholic Bishop of Trondheim, who became the first native Norwegian bishop since the Reformation when appointed in 2019. He sees opportunity in Norway's thorough secularization, however. "This is an enormous cultural and religious loss, but it gives us an immense possibility to proclaim the Gospel for the first time, since our populations have forgotten what it is about," he remarked.

Finding & Footnotes

■ The December issue of *Commonweal* magazine features a symposium on the future of Christian democracy based around the opening essay of conservative Catholic writer Sohrab Ahmari. Democracy is increasingly being called into question by prominent Christian intellectuals, political activists, and even some politicians, while "some progressives doubt that traditional Christian beliefs are compatible with liberal democracy," according to the editors. By "Christian democracy," Ahmari most often means the political and economic policies and parties promoting Catholic social teachings that were inaugurated by Pope Leo XIII in the late 19th century (and that Pope Leo XIV is attempting to revive today). Christian Democratic parties and ideas steered a middle ground between Marxism and laissez-faire capitalism, calling for the economic rights of workers, family, and associational life, while working against the class antagonism inherent in Marxism.

Ahmari writes that this Catholic social tradition has been challenged by neoliberalism and, more recently, by technological innovation, especially AI, and the way it might threaten the rights of workers and diminish human creativity, for all the good it might also accomplish. The respondents to Ahmari's article praise the way the conservative thinker may be building bridges with the political left, especially on the emerging AI challenges, while seeking to revive Catholic social teachings. Yet they criticize his silence on other issues related to Catholic social teaching, such as ministry and support for immigrants and how Catholic institutions themselves have shown little support for organizing unions and fair treatment of its workers. Political scientist John Dilulio responds that Ahmari's warnings are, if anything, too late about AI's negative repercussions—from draining electricity and water supplies through its data centers to "making us not just clever creatures but pseudocreators; and perverting, corrupting, and capturing hearts and minds that long to be the Creator, one that can dial up digital immortality for others and plan to 'resurrect' oneself." To download this symposium, visit: https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/future-christian-democracy

■ The journal of Pentecostal studies *Pneuma* devotes a double issue (3–4) to trends and new research in African Pentecostalism. While the journal has covered many topics involving African Pentecostal churches in recent years, the current issue draws on a wide range of recent research to look at the state of the faith on the continent. The introduction notes that 23 percent of Christians in Africa are Pentecostal, likely a low number due to the inroads Pentecostalism has made in other churches. An article by Mookgo Solomon Kgatle discusses how Pentecostalism has grown in Africa by relating to the lived religious experiences of Africans in a way that other faiths have not. An interesting aspect of this is the way Pentecostal churches have made "giving testimonies"—members' accounts of how they came to the faith and experienced miracles—a central part of their services and are now extending these testimonies through social media and other productions throughout Africa. Kgatle provides an overview of the many kinds of Pentecostal churches in Africa—such as new prophetic churches, classical Pentecostals with roots in the U.S. and Canada, the Word of Faith movement, and African Independent Churches.



Kgatle also looks at such trends as the way the prosperity movement has moved beyond its origins in the U.S. to focus more on the prosperity and development of the community rather than just the pastor and congregation. This is tied to the way that Pentecostalism has gradually embraced a holistic faith that embraces politics and economics, seen especially in Ghana and Nigeria. The way that Pentecostalism addresses the lived religion of Africans is nowhere clearer than in its strong emphasis on spiritual warfare, deliverance and healing, which provides answers for many venerating and warding off the influence of perceived spirits. Among the most impactful trends is the reverse migration to the West of

African Pentecostals, many of whom have had notable success in reaching out to non-Africans once there. Kgatle notes that there have been notable failures among these migrant churches in reaching indigenous populations, such as with the Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministry. Yet he argues that "African migrant churches are better placed in reviving Christian spiritualities in the West through their pneumatic approaches to prayer, church fellowship, and spiritual services." Other articles cover the growing ecological involvement of African Pentecostal churches and the way Nigerian Pentecostals have blended associations with cats with witchcraft accusations in the Yoruba spiritual imaginary. For more information on this special issue, visit: https://brill.com/view/journals/pneu/47/3-4/pneu.47.issue-3-4.xml

■ While the goal of evangelizing unreached people groups has been a key concern of Western evangelical missionaries since the 1970s, it is being challenged both by missionaries and Christians in the global South. The November/December issue of *Christianity Today* features a roundtable of mission leaders on how they are rethinking the concept. The original idea of "unreached people" was defined as an ethnolinguistic group in which evangelicals comprise 2 percent of the population. The term was used by mission mobilizers and missionaries to urge on evangelical Christians to contribute and participate in global missions. Samuel Law, a missions professor in Singapore, argues that the idea of unreached people groups downplayed the role of indigenous Christians in spreading the faith. Today it is local churches evangelizing neighboring tribes rather than mission agencies. He adds that the location of the "unreached" has changed, with few countries not having an evangelical presence.

In another article, Chris Howles, a cross-cultural mission mobilizer, writes that cities in the world today are where cultures mingle and evangelism has become more of a lifestyle. The same is true for technology, where evangelical content is available to the masses through their phones and social media. In situations where language barriers persist, the rapid development of AI translation tools making for communication across linguistic divides may soon be a reality for outreach. This roundtable issue is available from: https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/11/unreached-people-groups-missions-missionary-global-evangelism-bible/