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Litigating and legislating against clergy sex abuse rises amidst mounting secular pressure

Church-state issues surrounding clergy sexual abuse are becoming a pressing concern to church bodies, even as they draw up new regulations to punish perpetrators and establish ministries to help victims, according to scholars speaking at a recent symposium on religious freedom in New York, which **RW** attended. The trend of more legislative attempts to require clergy to report cases of abuse, even if they are under traditional confidentiality privileges, was the main topic of concern at the late-September gathering sponsored by the Morningside Institute, a think tank dealing with religion and public life that works with New York-area universities. Mark Movsesian of St. John's University Law School in New York cited as an example of this type of legislation Senate Bill 360 in California, which would require priests to report other clergy if they learned of incidents of abuse. There have been other bills that have sought to make clergy report abuse crimes, but they have rarely been enforced and they have exempted confidential conversations, such as in confession. SB 360 focused on clergy in penitential situations, however, and it passed the California senate by a 30-2 margin, igniting significant protests. Eventually, the bill landed in the state assembly where it was put on hold.

But Movsesian said that similar bills that violate the free exercise of religion are being written, such as in New York, and it may only be a matter of time before they become law. "Sooner or later, a state prosecutor will apply such legislation to clergy and the courts will have to consider them under the Free Exercise clause and whether it defends clergy-penitent privilege," he said. The symposium participants were of the view that increasing polarization on religion in the U.S., and especially the growth of non-affiliated Americans ("nones"), was likely to lead to less allowance for clergy confidentiality, especially on such a sensitive issue as sexual abuse. For nones, who tend to be Democrats and hardline church-state separationists, especially on issues of gender and sexuality, "the idea that clergy should get a pass [as far as being exempt from sexual abuse reporting laws] will seem increasingly unreasonable."

"The clergy-penitent relationship makes sense only in a society upholding religion," Movsesian added. By the same token, such anti-religious animus may unify and mobilize religious groups and individuals to stand up for their rights, something that took place in the California case. Frank Beckwith of Baylor University said that "legal tests derive from the wider culture" and that in the legal literature there has been a shift, with the view that "religion isn't unique" gaining prominence. While Beckwith said that the new legislative and legal challenges have targeted the Catholic Church, another speaker, Phillip Bettencourt of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said the use of legislation and litigation to address abuse cases is also becoming apparent in the Southern

Baptist Convention, as the denomination faces its own upheaval over clergy abuse in the wake of widely publicized cases that were reported in the media last year. The church body has initiated programs and conferences to address the concerns of abuse survivors, but Bettencourt said ministry to such victims may be complicated, in a culture where there is growing anti-religious sentiment, by litigation challenging the balance between the free exercise of religion and the compelling interest to intervene in church matters.



Christians retain strong edge as classical education diversifies and goes public

Classical education based on studying the “great books” of the pagan and Judeo-Christian traditions is now championed by a growing number of Christian homeschoolers as well as taking on a more public face, according to reports. Once the province of elite private schools, classical education caught on among an unlikely group of Protestants in the 1990s as a way to fight secularism and serve as an alternative to liberal and more multicultural public schools. Louis Markos writes in *Christianity Today* (September) that the classical school movement was first shaped by the conservative Calvinist (and Christian right) pastor Douglas Wilson in Idaho, but has since spread beyond his controversial ministry to a variety of Catholic, Protestant, and secular schools in the U.S. and abroad, with their curriculums now accepted and adapted by many colleges and universities. Between the Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS), the Catholic-based Institute for Catholic Liberal Education, and several secular classical education networks (which came later than their Catholic and Protestant counterparts, though they still hold to the Judeo-Christian tradition), these schools represent well over 100,000 students.

According to Markos, the leading edge in the classical education movement is held by homeschooling and “cooperative” schooling Christians (the latter combining homeschooling with attending school a few days a week). Many homeschooling families and cooperatives also go on to form their own classical schools. At the same time, the movement has also gone public, working through charter schools as well as building ties with colleges and universities, which themselves

have taken up teaching the classics and training teachers in classical education. These schools can range from mainstream evangelical colleges such as Biola University and Houston Baptist University to secular conservative ones like Hillsdale College and St. John's University, as well as to the Catholic University of Dallas and even the Muslim Zaytuna College. In another article on classical schooling in *National Affairs* (Fall), Ian Lindquist looks at why classical schools have such wide appeal for believers and argues that it is due to their countercultural stance in a secularizing culture combined with their maintenance of a "civic-minded attitude toward their communities" oriented toward the transcendent virtues of the "good, the true, and the beautiful." He also cites the strong professionalism of teachers and the connections between families and their strong involvement in the associations that start these schools as reasons why religious communities have been attracted to this option.

(*Christianity Today*, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188; *National Affairs*, <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/classical-schools-in-modern-america>)



Latino Catholics make common cause with evangelicals on pro-life issues while seeing division in their own ranks

Evangelical Christians and Latino Catholics are increasingly cooperating on pro-life issues, though there are emerging divisions among the latter that may complicate this alliance, writes J. D. Long-Garcia in *America* magazine (September 16). The pro-life alliance between the two groups could be seen in rallies this past summer at the state capitol building in Providence, as they sought to challenge Rhode Island's Reproductive Health Care Act that codified *Roe v. Wade* into state law. This alliance should not be surprising considering both groups' pro-life commitments. A recent survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found that most Hispanics who said they were affiliated with a religion were also pro-life, including 58 percent of Hispanic Protestants and 52 percent of Hispanic Catholics. Overall, Hispanics were the only race or ethnicity where a majority of respondents thought that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. By contrast, 41 percent of non-Hispanic white Americans and 42 percent of white Catholics showed

largely pro-life views. But the divide among Hispanics on this issue is more complicated. Among younger Hispanic Catholics (ages 18 to 24), 55 percent said abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Although 59 percent of Hispanic immigrants took a pro-life position, 57 percent of Hispanics born in the mainland United States supported legal abortion. Additionally, 53 percent of Hispanics born in Puerto Rico said that abortion should be illegal in most or all cases.

Long-Garcia reports that while first-generation immigrants tend to be pro-life, their children become much more secularized as they move to higher education. Parishes' pro-life ministries, tending to be run by elderly white ladies from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, have difficulty involving young adults. And parishes that are predominately Latino do not always engage in specific pro-life outreach, according to Gina De Los Santos, a parish engagement strategist. The parish groups tend to be focused on prayer or devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. She adds that culturally, Latinos are more likely to identify as pro-family than as pro-life. The term "pro-life" has only really become known in the community in the last 10 years. At the same time, a number of studies have found that many Latino parents are uncomfortable discussing certain subjects with their children, like sex, pornography and abortion. Despite the PRRI study's finding that 45 percent of all Hispanic Americans support legal abortion, there is still stigma attached to it in the Hispanic community, evident in telenovelas where women who have abortions are portrayed as villains.

(*America*, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/08/28/why-are-hispanic-catholics-pro-life-what-politics-cant-explain>)



“Heretical pope” thesis (re)emerges, with dilemmas for conservative Catholics

While the theory that the pope could fall into heresy had been confined to extreme fringe groups during the pontificates of John Paul II and (even more so) Benedict XVI, it is currently gaining new life in conservative Catholic circles, writes Pierre Charles (Brest University) in the traditionalist Catholic quarterly *Catholica* (Summer). Conservative Catholics attempted to claim at first that Pope Francis was actually in line with his predecessors and that comments attributed to him had been taken out of context or misunderstood. As concerns grew among conservative Catholics, several cardinals and bishops made critical statements while remaining cautious and merely expressing doubts or addressing questions to the pope. Then in March, Athanasius Schneider, auxiliary bishop of Astana, Kazakhstan, published an analysis on the website *Rorate Caeli* entitled “On the question of a heretical pope,” explaining how the Roman Catholic Church might be dealing with such a situation on the basis of canons and history (and rejecting in principle the idea of deposing a heretical pope, but not ruling out some future ecumenical council defining rules for

dealing with such a case).

On April 29, some 20 (mostly English-speaking) Catholic academics and theologians published a statement solemnly accusing Pope Francis of heresy. However, Charles remarks, those now openly promoting the thesis of a heretical pope fail to speak in one voice and disagree among themselves on various arguments. Moreover, they face the challenge that none of the seven theses supposedly reflecting heretical views by the pope that they have summarized have been formally taught as such by Francis. It thus proved easy for him to answer that those theses did not accurately express his thinking. According to Charles, the challenge for the pope's critics is to develop new types of apologetics for dealing with a papacy that is introducing deep changes, with formal statements being ambiguous enough to allow for different interpretations.

(*Catholica*, 18 rue Anatole France, 37540 Saint Cyr sur Loire, France - <https://www.catholica.presse.fr/>; article by Bishop Athanasius Schneider in *Rorate Cæli*: <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2019/03/important-guest-op-ed-bishop-schneider.html>)



Buddhist temples struggle and change as “merit economy” dissolves in North America

Many Buddhist temples in North America have suffered financially because traditional Buddhist financial practices based on the concept of merit have weakened considerably, writes Jeff Wilson of the University of Waterloo in the *Journal of Global Buddhism* (Vol. 20). In an issue devoted to Buddhism and economics, Wilson looks at changes occurring in the traditional economics that have supported Buddhist religious life until recently, which involved laypeople donating money and goods to Buddhist temples and monasteries in exchange for a share of the spiritual merit believed to be accumulated by clergy and monks through their specialized religious practices and services. Because the priest and monk were seen as divinely chosen and gifted, they were believed by the laity to be powerful producers of merit and thus were able to draw a lot of donations to support their religious institutions. Although this merit-based economy is still in place in part of Asia and even in North America, Wilson observes that it is rapidly being altered or dissolved in much of the West. He provides case studies of a temple in southern Ontario and another one in British Columbia, finding that the former has maintained financial stability through a merit-based system that supports a large staff of monks and priests offering a wide array of religious services and material (statues) for veneration and donation to a large and fast-growing following. Meanwhile,

the temple in British Columbia, mainly consisting of white converts, stressing meditation, and based on membership fees and fundraising, is in the throes of financial distress (having to fire its abbot), even though it has built a wide network of practitioners and established an impressive online system for teaching and building community.

Wilson writes that the dilemma in this loss of merit economies stems from the fact that while Buddhist resources are costly, the North American Buddhist community is not as wealthy as other religious minorities. Buddhists on average trail behind Hindus, Jews, and Muslims in wealth, sharing an economic status closer to Southern Baptists, Adventists, and Pentecostals. Even more than changes in ritual, gender relations, racial composition, and social activism, “the jettisoning of the central, pervasive, and economically crucial notion of merit is potentially the biggest and most significant transformation in certain Buddhist groups and networks that operate primarily outside of Asia.” New sources of income, “sometimes requiring significant investments of labor and capital, may become necessary—one example is the network of shops and publishing ventures established by the Triratna Buddhist Community (based in the United Kingdom).” What Wilson calls “post-merit Buddhism” is leading to new practices and effects in Buddhist communities, including the recasting of monastics as experts, something closer to lawyers and professors, rather than merit producers holding a special supernatural status.



This is leading to a devaluing of monasticism (and celibacy) and monks’ replacement with a class of lay professionals who may be “nominally ordained but live in family-bound patterns essentially the same as other members of society.” This may lead to “post-Buddhist professionals” who teach aspects of Buddhism in relation to secular forms of psychotherapy and who offer their services for fees, thinking of practitioners more as clients in a competitive marketplace.

The loss of the merit-based economy will also diminish the value and need for sacred relics, scriptures, pilgrimages, and practices such as sutra chanting, which served as nodes between “mundane and invisible spiritual worlds wherein devout practitioners could receive merit in return for their worship.” Lastly, without merit, the notions of karma and rebirth may collapse, orienting Buddhists to the present life alone, which will require a “dramatic reimagining... The reality of powerful buddhas, saints, and gods becomes suspect, and, worse yet, irrelevant.”

(*Journal of Global Buddhism*, <http://www.globalbuddhism.org/jgb/index.php/jgb/>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

- **The first large-scale study of clergy working outside of congregations finds that this trend has not changed greatly over the past four decades, although today such clergy tend to be**

female, live in a city, and have an advanced degree. The study, published in the *Review of Religious Research* (online in October) and conducted by Cyril Schleifer and Wendy Cadge, analyzed data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey from 1976 to 2016. While the researchers were surprised by the stability of the proportion of clergy working outside congregations on a national scale—15 percent—the percentage was found to be higher in the northeast and western regions of the U.S. This may be because of the higher cost of living in these areas leading clergy to take extra-congregational jobs. But Schleifer and Cadge note that the lower religious involvement in these regions may also have driven down the demand for congregational clergy. Another trend of interest concerns the family characteristics of these clergy; single male clergy are almost three times more likely than married male clergy to work outside of congregations, while there is a decreasing proportion from earlier years of married female clergy with children in such settings (although married female clergy without children and single female clergy with children are the most likely to land in such positions).

(*Review of Religious Research*, <https://link.springer.com/journal/13644/61/3>)



● **Political secularization “took place gradually over the long nineteenth century, accelerated after World War II, and peaked in the 1970s or 1980s,” remaining stable ever since, according to a study in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (September).** Political scientist Davis Brown, defining “political secularization” in this context as referring to the degree to which nations show a declining religious influence in their political life, finds that most of the secular changes took place several decades ago. The most noticeable decline took place between the years 1957 and 1963. In terms of the adoption of a specific “atheist government ideology,”

Brown finds that secularization begins in 1881, peaks a century later, and then modestly declines. Starting in 1978, there was a modest increase in governments' favoring of religion. Brown compiled a "Government Religious Preference" data set, measuring governments' favoring or disfavoring of 30 religious denominations, including atheists, from the 1800s to 2015. The data set offers the first long-term quantitative measurement of political secularization. Against claims that the world's nations have seen a process of "deseccularization," Brown sees few signs of such religious revitalization occurring in politics. Rather, the world seems neither to have significantly secularized nor deseccularized since 1992. In fact, it may be the case that "preferred and non-preferred religions have reached stalemate in an ongoing contest in which each is trying to overcome the will of the other," Brown writes.

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/14685906/current>)



● **Residents living in religiously diverse communities in Africa show less intolerance toward their LGBTQ neighbors than those in more homogenous neighborhoods, according to a new study.** In the research, published in the journal *Politics and Religion* (online in October), Sarah K. Dreier, James D. Long, and Stephen J. Winkler used cross-national Afrobarometer survey data from 33 countries that included an index of religious concentration according to districts. They found a 50 percent increase in respondents' likelihood of expressing tolerance toward their homosexual neighbors in more religiously diverse neighborhoods compared to more homogenous areas. Tolerance toward homosexuality was measured by such variables as active opposition to having a homosexual as a neighbor. The researchers controlled for such variables as the presence of

specific religious affiliations within diverse religious communities, respondents' religiosity, and other factors at the national or more local or individual levels (including just greater social tolerance in general).

LGBTQ tolerance was also not just a byproduct of greater exposure to sexual minorities due to city living or greater access to information about them. The researchers theorize that living in religiously

diverse areas exposes residents to different religious and moral worldviews, possibly engendering a "greater openness to social out-groups [that] community members would have otherwise rejected." They conclude that identifying religious diversity as a promising venue for tolerance provides a window of opportunity and a challenge to policy-makers and activists concerned about patterns of intolerance and violence against LGBTQ people, though they caution that religious diversity alone is unlikely to change the landscape for such sexual minorities quickly because of the slow-changing nature of religious affiliation.



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

Catholic monasticism in Africa gains independence while encountering new challenges

As membership in Catholic monasteries shifts away from their foundations in Europe to Africa, these institutions are becoming increasingly independent and more involved in community development while also facing new questions of sustainability, writes Isabelle Jonveaux in the journal *Religions* (vol. 10). The growth of new foundations for monasteries in Africa and Asia has taken place as European monasteries have faced closures amidst the gradual aging of members. The



monasteries in Africa tend to have younger members, with an average age of 42 compared to 62 in European monasteries. Linked to these demographic changes, "a new phenomenon can be observed—long-established European communities no longer send members to their foundations abroad but call members of these foundations home to overcome the aging and reduction of their communities." In Italy, for instance, 42 percent of cloistered communities currently include foreigners, according to Jonveaux.

One challenge in some parts of Africa is to establish the identity of monasteries as separate from other religious organizations. They are often asked to provide social ministry to people in need and these new monasteries have stepped in to play community development roles, even being recognized by governments and politicians for such work, writes Jonveaux. The fact that the mother-daughter relationship between the monasteries is fraying with the declines in the European

communities is leading the African ones to install their own leadership (though more in the male than in the female orders). Regional transnational networks for liturgical resources and education are being developed. The main challenge for these monasteries' independence is finding a way to be self-supporting. Many of the aging monastics and nuns serving in Africa receive pensions from Europe, and this form of monastic economy will need to be replaced.

(*Religions*, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/9/513>)

Japan's new funeral practices signal social changes and new ways of dealing with death

The switch to nuclear families in urban settings has led to significant changes in funerary practices in contemporary Japan, according to Marianna Zanetta (University of Torino, Italy, and École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris) at this year's CESNUR Conference in Torino, which **RW** attended in September. In Japanese traditions, it is important to have relatives who will perform memorial rites for the dead, which focus on their purification and gradual entrance into the ancestor society. Since the process can last up to 33 or even 50 years, this involves a need for family continuity. But, as part of intense cultural transformations following World War II, the demise of the ideal of the extended family, the abandonment of rural areas for bigger cities, and declining fertility rates since the 1950s (from 4.32 in 1950 to 1.46 in 2015) have meant that a continuity of relatives to take care of the memorial rites is no longer assured.

Consequently, since the 1980s funerals have become much shorter and not necessarily Buddhist, Zanetta reports. They have been transformed from communal events with many participants into very private events. This has been accompanied by a growth of funeral industries and families' becoming dependent on professional undertakers. New public and private cemeteries take care of the entire, shorter and simplified, process. Until the late 1990s, death as something to be approached on an individual basis was still unpopular, but it has been spreading since then. This comes along with new burial practices. For instance, Zanetta finds that demand for the scattering of ashes, which used to be considered disrespectful, has been growing since the 1990s, noting that "[whoever] chooses the scattering of ashes has full control over his or her afterlife, without obligations towards ancestors or descendants." Another new practice is tree burial, currently quite popular, which appeared for the first time in the late 1990s. In a society in which ancestor worship was quite important, these developments indicate a new, privatized approach towards death and afterlife.



French Orthodox parishes following Russian tradition reunite with Moscow Patriarchate

A majority of the clergy and parishes of the Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox Churches in Western Europe, headquartered in Paris, has decided to unite with the Moscow Patriarchate, thus effectively bringing to an end divisions within the Russian Orthodox diaspora that had grown in the decades following the Bolshevik Revolution and the exile of many Russians. In 2007, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) had decided to reconcile with Moscow, and the news service *Orthodoxie.com* (October 7) reports that the Paris archdiocese is now following a similar road. During most of the years since 1931, the archdiocese had been under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (Ecumenical Patriarchate), enjoying a special status of internal autonomy, and had been elevated to the rank of an exarchate in 1999. Besides its French stronghold, it had parishes in Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and the British Isles. In November 2018, however, the Holy Synod revoked its status and declared that the parishes should be absorbed into the local dioceses of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This was resented by many faithful, who felt that the specific identity developed in the archdiocese over the years—leading some of its members to see themselves as seeds of a future local Orthodox church—would be diluted in the process.

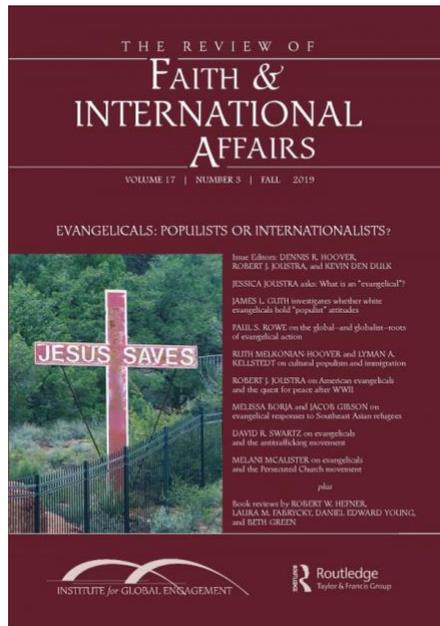


Different options were then explored, with few people favoring the decision of Constantinople. On September 7, an assembly reached a vote of 58 percent in favor of joining the Moscow Patriarchate, with the current Archbishop John (Renneteau) strongly supportive. While it did not reach the required majority of two-thirds of the delegates, the archbishop and a majority of the clergy decided to go ahead with the move. At the time of this writing, a majority of the parishes have followed, while others remain undecided or have decided to join the local dioceses of the Ecumenical Patriarchate or—in a few cases—the Romanian Patriarchate. For the Moscow Patriarchate, this represents a final symbolic step in completing its reunion with the Russian Orthodox diaspora. It remains to be seen how long three church administrations under the same Moscow Patriarchate will coexist in the same territory—those parishes under Moscow, those under ROCOR, and now those under the archdiocese. For the time being, it is likely that not much will change. Sooner or later, however, a merger is likely to take place. It also remains to be seen whether the Moscow Patriarchate would then revive an effort started by the late Patriarch Alexy II in 2003 to create a largely autonomous Metropolia of Russian Orthodox churches in Western Europe, which would represent an important step in the search for a governance structure for church life in countries outside the Orthodox world.

(*Orthodoxie.com*, <https://orthodoxie.com/en/archdiocese-of-russian-churches-of-western-europe-officially-received-into-moscow-patriarchate/>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ The rise of the narrative of persecuted Christians around the world not only encourages American evangelicals to help victims abroad, but is also linked to a process of their seeing themselves as victims, part of a global community under attack, writes Melani McAlister (George Washington University) in an issue of *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* (Fall) devoted to the topic, “Evangelicals: Populists or



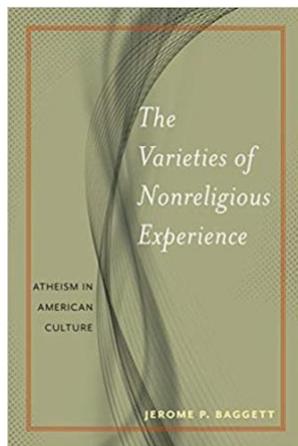
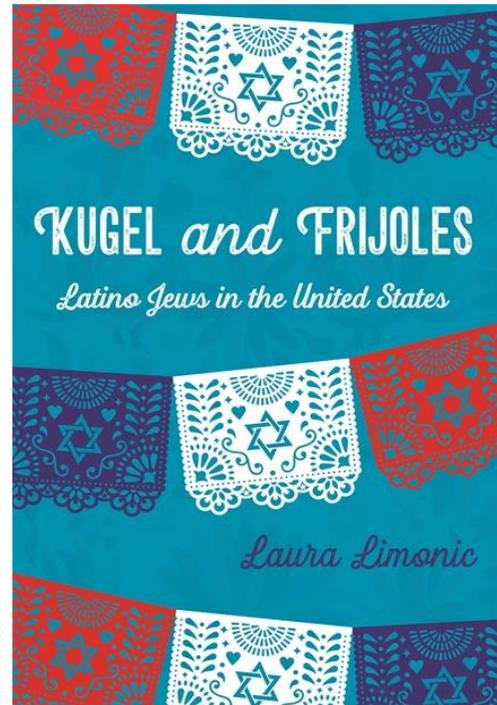
Internationalists?” The narrative continues a long Christian tradition—both in Protestant and Catholic cultures—of paying attention to martyrs and suffering Christians. After World War II, attention was drawn to a specific, new kind of persecution, that of the “suffering church” under communism in China and the Soviet Union. But the current discourse started after the end of the Cold War, McAlister writes, with a vision to bring the gospel to what was presented as the least evangelized part of the world—the “10/40 Window,” that part of the world between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, where Christians were a minority surrounded by Hindus, Buddhists or Muslims. “In the 1990s, the persecuted Christians movement was energized by, and played a key role in supporting, the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), which established a set of instruments that paralleled human rights provisions.”

The discourse on persecuted Christians presents Christianity as the most persecuted religion and does not always pay the same attention to the persecution endured by adherents of other religious faiths.

There are often links to individuals or groups with an anti-Muslim agenda, eager to show Muslims as oppressors. Even in those areas where there are various ethnic, political and social factors leading to the suffering of Christians in a Muslim environment, the focus will frequently be on “Muslim persecution of Christians,” according to McAlister. The author concludes that the persecuted Christians movement shows “how international awareness and connections can coexist with populist orientations of besiegement and hostility,” allowing American Christians to see themselves as part of a global community of victims (and one might add that this now goes beyond the shores of North America, with the theme present in evangelical congregations around the Western world). The issue also includes articles on whether evangelicals are populists (based on an analysis of the 2016 U.S. elections), on the global roots of evangelical action, on evangelicalism and immigration, and more historical topics. For more information on this issue, visit: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rfia20/current>

■ The growing population of Latino Jews in the U.S. and the way they negotiate their ethno-religious identity in an environment of American pluralism is the subject of sociologist Laura Limonic’s new book *Kugel and Frijoles: Latino Jews in the United States* (Wayne State University Press, \$34.99). Limonic based her study on interviews and participant-observation in the Boston, Miami, and New York City areas, as well as in Argentina. She estimates that there are between 148,000 and 225,800 Jews of Latino background in the U.S., with the highest concentrations in South Florida. While it might be assumed that Latino Jews would emphasize their Jewish identities, Limonic finds that they more often maintain an “in-between” status, not feeling particularly at home among American Jews or Hispanic-Americans. The author finds that, like other immigrants, Latino Jews may choose to emphasize one part of their identity at different times for strategic reasons. More recent immigrants may emphasize their Latino identity for the purpose of affirmative action and other diversity programs, while others may stress their Jewish ethnicity-religion to assimilate into the white American majority and avoid the racial stigmatization that Hispanics face.

In the sections on religion, Limonic reports that Latino Jews are not particularly religious or attached to synagogues in their home countries, although they do rely heavily on Jewish cultural institutions for support and social ties in these mostly Christian countries. In coming to America, they tend to differ from American Jews in their closer connection and involvement in institutions such as Jewish day schools. But on other measures, such as loyalty to Israel and their political affiliation, Latino Jews tend to assimilate to the American Jewish levels of support and political preferences. Latino Jews, however, do become more religiously involved in the U.S., even if they might object to the more non-traditional expressions of Judaism in America, such as mixed-gender seating and the presence of women rabbis in synagogues (in Latin American countries, the predominant movements in Judaism are Orthodox and Conservative, with the latter more traditional than Conservative Judaism in the U.S.). There has also been an increased rate of synagogue membership among second-generation Latino Jews (almost triple the percentage of first-generation Latino Jews). Such religious involvement has influenced the organizational and social culture of the synagogues they attend. In the Latino Jewish bastion of South Florida, a number of synagogues cater to this group, with some individuals splitting their time and resources between American and Latino congregations. Interestingly, Limonic finds that the Hasidic Chabad movement is more likely to organize around and attract “panethnic” Latinos (from different Latino nations), with New York’s burgeoning Jewish Latin Center being a notable example.

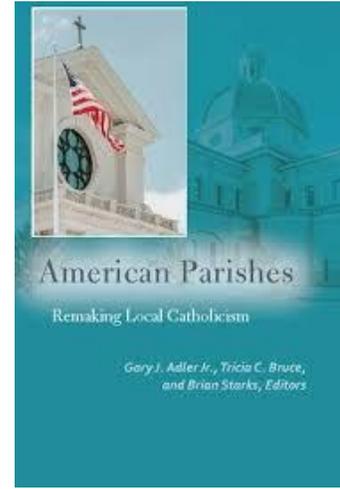


■ *The Varieties of Nonreligious Experience* (New York University Press, \$30), by Jerome P. Baggett, adds to the burgeoning literature on secularism and non-religion by examining the life stories and attitudes of American atheists. The book, based on over 500 interviews, follows in the tracks of recent research showing the growth of atheist organizations and activism (linked to the belief that atheism will increase along with the non-affiliation trend) as well as the more general finding that many of the negative stereotypes about atheists, as being less compassionate or concerned with morality and ethics, or hostile toward believers, don’t hold up very well. The book seeks to act as an exercise in “cross-cultural” bridging between atheists and believers, showing that both sides have significant misconceptions of the other. For all their diversity, Baggett finds that there are several components to an atheist identity, most notably the idea that religion and science are inevitably in conflict and that religious faith is regressive and backward-looking. Baggett portrays his atheist interviewees as uniquely moral, with a high degree of intellectual integrity, but challenges them and the wider atheist movement to be just as critical of society and its institutions as they are of conventional religion.

■ *American Parishes: Remaking Local Catholicism* (Fordham University Press, \$30), edited by Gary Adler Jr., Tricia C. Bruce, and Brian Starks, provides a close-up look at this vital middle ground of American Catholic life that has received surprisingly little sociological scrutiny compared with individual Catholic practices and attitudes and more macro patterns in global Catholicism. In the introduction, the editors argue that too much attention to statistics and wider trends in Catholicism has brushed over the unique dynamics and structural qualities of parish life, which, unlike in Protestant congregations, mediate between local and national or global Catholic life and cultures. The differences between Catholic parishes and Protestant congregations, which are often the main subject in the burgeoning field of “congregational studies,” are spelled out in the contribution by Nancy Ammerman. Using her religious ecology model, she writes that

parishes are no longer bound by official church geography (which required Catholics to attend the parishes of their residential neighborhoods) and are being complicated by the growth of church mergers, closings, priestly shortages, and the new pluralism which requires that more attention be given to cultivating local resources in an environment where choice becomes a significant factor in parish participation and belonging.

That accent on pluralism and choice is evident in several of the chapters, most notably Kathleen Garces-Foley's contribution on how parishes can serve as both homes for various Catholic identities and "hubs" for far-flung networks of active Catholics. The latter reality is clear from the way that especially committed Catholic young adults (from both conservative and progressive camps) often navigate and piece together their own kind of Catholic life based on a menu of local parishes, Catholic university organizations, and diocese-wide activities. Other noteworthy chapters include an overview of parish trends by Gary Adler, where he finds parishes growing older and more Hispanic. They are also growing more theologically conservative and more political, yet are less charismatic in worship. A concluding chapter features a provocative interview with sociologist John A. Coleman, who turns his eye to his own parish.



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

The Witness is an example of an online support group becoming an offline community. The group for black Christians feeling marginalized in their mainly white churches started on Facebook as The Reformed African American Network. It was meant to serve as an online resource for those opposed to how their predominantly white and evangelical churches approached such issues as Black Lives Matter, the Trump election, and the 2017 Charlottesville march. From there, a podcast and, more recently, nationwide tours and a conference were launched, with a publishing platform in the works, all giving shape to the idea of a "Black Christian collective." Jemar Tisby, the president of the group, echoes other observers in saying that there has been a "quiet exodus" of blacks and other minorities from white churches over the 2016 election. He adds that "A lot of us feel lost; we're looking for a community. We're in between." The rapid growth of the Witness may reflect a shift among black evangelicals from objectives of racial reconciliation to racial justice, though the organizers hold that both goals are important. (Source: *Christianity Today*, September 23)

