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Campus ministries see new challenges lasting beyond the pandemic

Under the pandemic, religious leaders who work in higher education are facing new challenges that may endure even beyond the drastically changed conditions they and students will encounter in the fall, reports *The Revealer* magazine (July 14, 2020). As universities suddenly ended their in-person classes, campus religious leaders had to determine quickly how they were going to support students through grief and anxiety and provide them with a sense of community. Kate Breslin writes that college students experienced “an unprecedented spike in depression, anxiety and loneliness” during the first months of the pandemic. It is not difficult to imagine why students had a challenging time. Instead of going on spring break, many students faced the upheaval of moving off campus with limited notice and, in turn, leaving behind the support structures that helped them.” At the University of Chicago, the Office of Spiritual Life made their programs equally accessible by the click of a button. Chaplains changed the categories on their campus page to prioritize resources for students with problems in the switchover to remote learning. Students could join a twenty minute still meditation or go to a regular virtual check-in with Spiritual Life staff via Zoom. An increase in anxiety and depression that exceeded the capacity of mental health services, also brought chaplains into this area of need, as well as pastoral counseling. The need to support students was greater than ever.

The communal dimensions of religion on campus obviously changed with the onset of the pandemic, but chaplains sought to connect often isolated students with rituals and service from a distance. But now chaplains are trying to figure out the logistics of prayer and other spiritual practices on campus as many colleges reopen in the fall. One chaplain asks, “How many students would be able to participate in that? Are we going to have to have two or three services that we don’t pass that limit or what is going to be limited? And then usually when we pray, we stand next to each other. But some mosques are resuming prayers now and they are now...praying six feet away from each other while it was always shoulder to shoulder. It’s just the new reality. We have to adjust to it.” Breslin concludes that students returning to campus this fall, either online or in-person, “will find a different religious life experience than the one they saw one year ago. Every religious leader working in higher education I met shared the same message: there is no going back to the way things were before the pandemic. Campus ministries have changed remarkably in the past several decades to meet the needs of religiously, culturally, and sexually diverse student populations. The lessons learned in the pandemic have become the blueprint for how to meet the needs of college students in the twenty-first century.”



New wave of anti-Catholicism seen in vandalism of churches, Catholic symbols?

Catholic churches, statutory, and other symbols are being targeted in a new wave of anti-Catholicism in the U.S., reports Francis X. Rocca in the *Wall Street Journal* (July 22, 2020). In just the last month, there has been more than a rash of church arsons, priests attacked, defacements and destruction of statues of the Virgin Mary and Saint Junipero Serra, and Satanic symbols and profanity scrawled on church buildings from California to North Dakota to New York. There have been reports of an increase in anti-Catholic vandalism and arson in Europe [see RW, Vol. 34, No. 8] in the last few years, a concern revived with the recent arson of St. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Nantes, France, though the sources and motivations for such attacks. The most violent incident involved the Queen of Peace Church in Ocala, FL., where a man set fire to the church while parishioners were inside. This spate of attacks coincided with the George Floyd protests and the toppling of several statues of Serra in California. Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami said the vandalism surrounding the Serra statues may have caused a “broken window effect” where other protestors felt they had permission to target other Catholic symbols and buildings.

In *The Week* magazine (July 22, 2020), Matthew Walther writes that he first attributed the recent acts of vandalism against Catholic figures, buildings, and symbols to similar incidents involving “post offices or court houses as generic symbols of authority.” But these acts of vandalism, which Walther writes has little to do with any protest movement, are difficult to place in any other category than hate crimes against Catholicism as a religion. He argues that these actions are taking place in a political context marked by animosity to Catholicism and suspicious about its organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus, and some aspects of its social teachings (on abortion and contraception). He concludes that “Revealing among other things risible ignorance of the almost impossibly rich diversity of images of Christ and His Mother, activists who call for the destruction of millions of pieces of religious art find their views presented as a meaningful contribution to discussions about race relations.” On the website of the conservative *Spectator* magazine (July 27, 2020), Samuel Gregg notes that the recent spate of vandalism has also included other religious buildings and symbols—particularly synagogues. This is related to the growth of anti-Semitic hate crimes, but Gregg argues that targeting religious buildings is also related to a “general breakdown in public order,” which was one of the factors cited in the European church arsons. But it is also the result of the “woke left” in challenging what they see as “Euro-centric” versions of history, especially in the cases of the vandalism of the St. Junipero Serra statues.

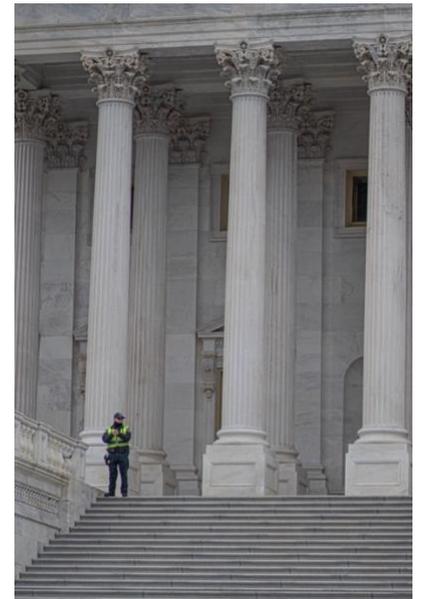


End of term court rulings will keep culture wars simmering while offering religious refuge

The ending of the recent term of the Supreme Court signaled new directions that the court is likely to take on social issues, with direct implications for religious freedom and the continuing culture wars, writes Mark Mousavian in a blog for *First Things* magazine (July 15, 2020). Debates about sexuality, gender, and equality often lurk in the background of the Court's religious liberty cases, even when the cases do not address those topics expressly. This was certainly the case with *Bostock v. Clayton County*, where the Court held by a vote of 6-3 that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which forbids employment discrimination based on "sex," covers homosexual and transgender status. Both critics and defender noted how the case, putting sexual behavior and gender identity on the same footing with biological sex, will likely leave the door open to further disputes about the meaning of sexual discrimination in the workplace. In the decision, Justice Gorsuch did note that religious freedom would be protected in applying such strictures.

Mousavian adds that second ruling, *Our Lady of Guadalupe School*, in which teachers at Catholic schools claimed to be the victims of illegal age and disability discrimination, "was a clear application of an earlier landmark case known as *Hosanna-Tabor*. In a decision by Justice Alito, the Court reaffirmed the ministerial exception and held that it covers church personnel regardless of their formal titles, as long as the personnel perform functions the exception is meant to shield from state control." A similar ruling in the third case involving *Little Sisters of the Poor v. Pennsylvania*, the latest in the long-running contraception mandate litigation, also provides a measure of religious freedom to believers dissenting from practices they see as conflicting with their faith. Mousavian concludes that in one way or another, the cases reflect the "wider cultural conflict between progressives and the traditionally religious on the meaning and consequences of equality—especially with respect to sexuality and gender. Taken together, they suggest the Court is prepared to acquiesce to the dominant progressive consensus while allowing religious institutions some space to dissent."

(*First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/07/the-roberts-court-attempts-a-compromise>)



Neo-Sikh 3HO movement feels reverberations from sex abuse charges against founder

While rumors of sexual misconduct by the late founder of the neo-Sikh and yoga movement 3HO (Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization), Yogi Bhanjan (1929-2004) had circulated for years, such accusations are now being considered very seriously and are impacting the movement, writes Stacie Stukin in *Los Angeles Magazine* (July 15, 2020). A new self-published book with revelations from a now 77-year old former disciple, Pamela Saharah Dyson (Premka Kaur Khalsa), who used to be part of Yogi Bhanjan's inner circle, has encouraged other women to speak about their experiences, including alleged rapes. A dedicated website was launched by

3HO and associated organizations in February. Its first post stated that “credible allegations concerning sexual misconduct by Yogi Bhanan have come forward.” This comes at a time Kundalini yoga as taught by Yogi Bhanan has become quite popular, while other 3HO-related businesses continue to flourish, such as the Yogi Tea brand and Akal Security. It is difficult at this point to foresee the consequences those developments will have. Quoted by Stukin, historian Philip Deslippe doubts that Yogi Bhanan’s reputation can survive the onslaught. At some prominent Kundalini yoga studios, “portraits and sayings [of Yogi Bhanan] have been removed from the walls.”

An independent investigator has been entrusted with the task of investigating the alleged abuses. An organization called An Olive Branch was formed in 2011 as a project of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh for providing services to organizations dealing with ethical misconduct on the part of religious leaders, as “a neutral third party, inspired by the tradition of Buddhist teaching that stretches over 2,500 years.” An Olive Branch also provides training services and mediation services. The report on the allegations of abuse linked to Yogi Bhanan is expected to be released in the near future. No religion is immune these days to critical reassessments of the figure of once highly respected spiritual masters whose legacy becomes criticized due to the revelation of abuses. From Buddhist teachers to the founders of various Catholic movements, there has been a wave of such cases in recent years. Often, the abuses involved attempts to rationalize or legitimize them from a spiritual angle. It remains to be seen what the long-term impact will be on these organizations and on individual followers, since those are movements built on the charisma of what seemed to be inspiring figures. The multiplication of such cases does not seem to be conducive in promoting blind trust toward spiritual masters.



(Website of the Siri Singh Sahib Corporation Collaborative Response Team:

<https://www.ssscresponseteam.org>)

*(Website for the book by Pamela Saharah Dyson, *Premka: White Bird in a Golden Cage: My Life with Yogi Bhanan*: <https://www.premkamemoir.com>)*

(Website of An Olive Branch: <https://www.an-olive-branch.org>)

CURRENT RESEARCH

● **A study of 110,000 sermons by over 5,500 American religious leaders finds that they routinely contain political messages, with mainline Protestants most likely to deliver such sermons, with evangelicals’ preaching being far less predictable than expected.** The study, conducted by political scientists Constantine Boussalis, Travis Coan, and Mirya Holman, confirms the entanglement between religion and politics in the U.S., including within congregational life, but sheds light on the actual political content of sermons. They note that the sermons studied were posted by pastors on the SermonsCentral and thus is a convenient rather than a random sample of these sermons. Writing in the journal *Politics and Religion* (online in

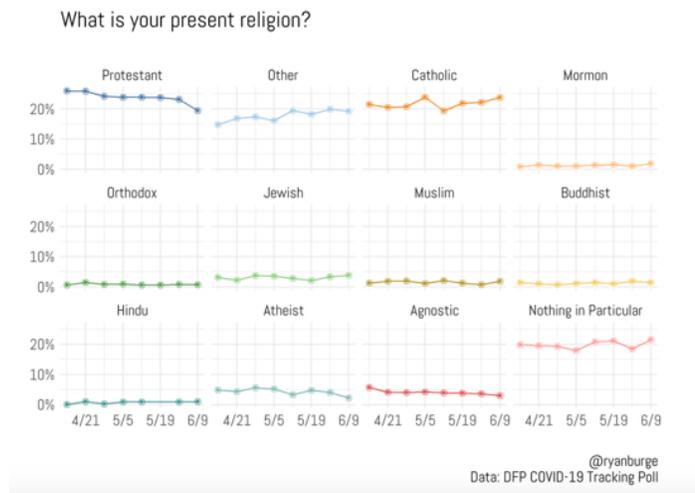
July, 2020), the researchers find that 37 percent of the sermons preached by the large sample of clergy in the dataset they collected feature a political subject; 71 percent of the pastors delivered at least one sermon with political content. Among the most popular political topics included the economy, homosexuality, abortion, war, and welfare, with mainline clergy most likely to discuss



politics in their sermons. Unexpectedly, evangelicals were not found to be more active in preaching on abortion, nor were they less active on abortion. Mainline pastors were more likely to preach about homosexuality.

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

● **Data tracking religious identification over the course of the pandemic in the U.S. finds a small but steady decrease in people claiming such affiliations, write political scientists Ryan P. Burge and Paul Djupe in the *Religion in Public* blog (July 7, 2020).** The researchers use polling data from Data for Progress between April and June that included questions on religious identification. The surveys find that there has been a five percent drop of people claiming a Protestant identity over the period from April 16 to June 9, 2020. There was no similar drop among Catholics. Burge and Djupe focus on how those no longer claiming a Protestant identification chose the “other” category, suggesting these people have not necessarily left behind a religious identification or even left their Protestant congregations. Just over 50 percent of those choosing the “other” identification were evangelical. They note that the “others” have become 15 percent more Democratic than Republican, while Protestant have become 14 percentage points more Republican. The researchers conclude that the growth of negative views about President Trump may have “taken a bite out of the religious identity of his most fervent supporters—people not on board with Trump’s politics are taking refuge in other religious homes.”



(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2020/07/07/are-people-changing-religion-in-the-pandemic/>)

● **It is well known that the coronavirus has disproportionately affected ethnic and racial minorities, but new research in England and Wales reports that this pattern may also include religious minorities, particularly the Jewish community.** The newsletter *Counting British Religion* (July 1, 2020) notes that anecdotal reports and speculation early in the pandemic noted that Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities had higher rates of mortality from the virus in much of the UK than other groups. The Office of National Statistics recent release of three reports on Covid-19-related deaths from England and Wales from March to May confirms



these suspicions. The religion segment of the report links 37,956 Covid-related deaths to religious and other demographic characteristics of the deceased. The study concluded that “For the most part, the elevated risk of certain religious groups is explained by geographical, socio-economic, and demographic factors and increased risk associated with ethnicity. However, after adjusting for the above, Jewish males are at twice the risk of Christian males, and Jewish women are also at higher risk. Additional data and analysis are required to understand this excess risk.”

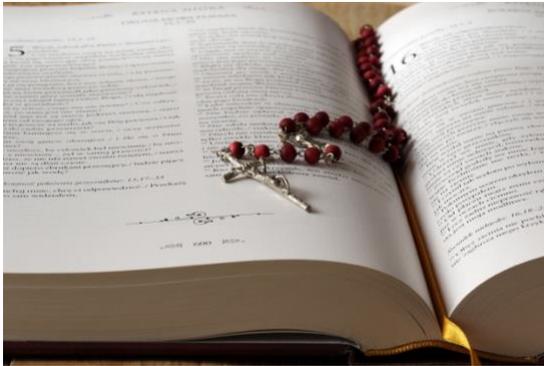
(*Counting Religion in Britain*, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/counting-religion-in-britain-june-2020/>)

● **When looking at levels of religiosity rather than religious affiliation, a recent study finds that political corruption tends to be greater in more religious countries.** The study, published in the *Review of Religious Research* (online in July 2020), used data from multiple countries and from different time periods to determine whether religiosity is more important than religious affiliation in relation to corruption. Past studies have found that religious diversity and specific religious traditions might discourage corruption, but little has been done on the degrees of religious devotion in societies and their levels of corruption. Authors Omer Gokcekus and Tufan Ekici look at the World Values Survey from 77 countries, focusing on different societies’ frequency of attendance and the importance of God and levels of corruption as measured by the International Country Risk Guide. The researchers find that more religious countries tend to have higher corruption levels even after taking religious affiliation into account and controlling for other variables. What these results say about how religion relates to corruption are unclear, they conclude. It may be that religion has an “opium effect,” blinding people to the corruption around them; or it may be that people become more religious in corrupt societies as they seek a refuge from such public behavior.



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

● **As a consequence of the stability of the Catholic population in the United Kingdom, contrasted with the decrease in proportion of Anglicans, “Britain will in a sense likely become a Catholic country once more in the coming years”, writes journalist Filip Mazurczak in *The Catholic World Report* (July 14, 2020).** He hastens to add that a majority of society is likely to remain unchurched, but what may still happen is that the Roman Catholic Church could become the country’s largest religious body. In London, there are already more Roman Catholics than Anglicans. According to new research for the Christian thinktank Theos, summarized in *The Guardian* (June 24, 2020), “the biggest Christian denomination in London is Catholicism (35 percent of the Christian population), followed by Anglicanism (33 percent).” Pentecostals make up seven percent and Orthodox Christians six percent. Similar to what can be observed in some other areas of Europe with a previously majority Protestant population (e.g. cities such as Zurich or Geneva), in terms of percentage, the decline in religious affiliation is more pronounced among mainstream Protestants than among Roman Catholics.



Moreover, immigration helps Roman Catholicism to compensate losses, something that is obvious to observers of attendance at Catholic Masses in Britain. This is caused not only by non-European immigrants, but also by people coming from Catholic areas of Central and Eastern Europe. According to results of the British Social Attitudes survey, published in 2018, the number of British people identifying with the Church of England more than halved between 2002 and 2017, falling from 31

percent to 14 percent, while those described as Roman Catholics have remained stable at around eight percent. As early as 2007, there were more Catholic than Anglican churchgoers in absolute numbers, Mazurczak reminds readers. Even if Anglicans continue to decrease and if Catholics might then become the largest religious body in Britain at some point in the future, this should not hide the fact that they represent less than a tenth of the total British population and that they would remain a minority in a country with a large percentage of unaffiliated people.

● **New estimates of Anglicans in Africa suggest that Uganda rather than Nigeria is the center of African Anglicanism, writes Andrew McKinnon in the *Journal of Anglican Studies* (18).** It has been widely held that Nigeria had the most Anglicans in Africa, with estimates of over 18 million believers, but on the basis of four nationally representative surveys, McKinnon writes that the proportion of Nigerians who identify as Anglicans “is much lower than is usually assumed (about four percent of Nigerians, or 7.6 millions persons in 2015).” While the church has grown, he adds that the evidence shows that the growth has been at the same pace as the population (not unimpressive considering the competition from Pentecostal churches). McKinnon finds that Anglicans in Uganda amount to about 27 percent of its population, though it is lower than estimated by the country’s Census. McKinnon concludes that the discrepancy between



the Census and these representative surveys suggests that the proportion of Ugandans who identify as Anglican is in decline, “even if absolute numbers have been growing, driven by population growth.”

(*Journal of Anglican Studies*, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-anglican-studies>)

Iranian asylum-seekers in UK converting, revitalizing Christianity

A steady movement of Iranian refugees into the United Kingdom is finding support from church groups and in many cases converting from Islam to Christianity, reports the *Christian Century* (July 1, 2020). The Iranian asylum seekers are usually processed in the south of England and then settle in such northern cities as Liverpool and Sunderland, where they find their way to churches and their outreach and social service programs. Although a total of Iranian asylum-seekers is not provided in the article, the Migration Observatory at Oxford University reported that they are the largest source of claimants of all refugees, numbering over 3,000 applicants in 2018. Most of the asylum-seekers are moving because of the corruption and political oppression in Iran. The Iranians, mostly Shiite Muslim when they arrive in the U.K., find little welcome among predominant Sunni Muslims, and resonate with Christianity and its teaching on end-times and are open to dreams as conveying spiritual messages like many Christians throughout the world.



Clergy report that younger Iranians are especially interested in Christianity with no memory of the Islamic revolution but feel disenchanting with life in Iran. Yet these young people are used to theology being debated in Iran and show a biblical and theological literacy and interest that stands in stark contrast to secularized and indifferent British youth, writes Jason Byasse. The Church of England, like other mainline churches, is ambivalent about celebrating conversions from Islam and

do not have a national office for outreach to Muslims. Another issue is trying to weed out insincere conversion among asylum seekers who may be seeking to find favor with immigration officials. For that reason, churches have placed greater demands on these immigrants, such as not allowing baptism until the asylum seeker attends all the sessions of an introduction to the faith, such as Alpha. Along with the Shiite practice of discerning dreams for spiritual meaning, other traditions that Iranian converts have brought into the churches includes the communion practice of serving consecrated bread and wine as part of the meal the church serves.

(*Christian Century*, <https://www.christiancentury.org>)

Radical preachers in the Balkans and Albanian diaspora turn to religious nationalism

Since the emergence of the self-described Islamic State in 2014, a number of second-generation young men and women from the Balkans raised in the West joined jihadist organizations, and it appears that key radical religious leaders in the Balkans played a crucial role in the radicalization and recruitment process, but also in attempting to give a new orientation to Albanian nationalism, writes Ebi Spahiu in a report released by the *Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)*, July 7, 2020). Out of 1,100 foreign fighters from the Balkan region who joined the war in Syria and Iraq, between 2012 and 2016, 450 to 500 were ethnic Albanians, primarily from Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia. Thousands of people from various origins volunteering for “jihad” have caused concern to the governments of a number of countries, including those in the Balkans, but little attention has been paid to the connections of the latter with their diasporas in Western Europe. It is true that communities with roots in the Balkans have been less prone than their Middle Eastern counterparts to embrace the jihadist cause. But they have not been immune from this influence, and this is also the case for the Albanian diaspora, which is the focus of Spahiu’s report.

What she observed is that radicalization took place in the adopted countries, but that the influence of preachers from the Balkans was significant. Compared to the Bosnian diaspora, radical Islam is a more recent phenomenon among people of Albanian origins. This changed partly through the promotion of Salafism and some concepts of jihadism by radical preachers who visited diaspora communities, sometimes creating divisions within them, and who also happen to be active on social media. Interestingly, those preachers seem to have attempted to play the Albanian nationalist card in their talks, but also to fuse it with Islam, by showing Islam as the best “guardian for Albania and Albanians” against foreign enemies. They attempt to transform the agenda of Albanian nationalism into a religious ideology. Still, a majority of the Albanian diaspora remains secular. But Spahiu believes that the lack of outreach from the governments of Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia to their Muslim diaspora in providing cultural, religious and educational services leaves a vacuum which is often filled by local communities with their own resources, a space that can also be exploited by ideological religious groups.

(The full report can be downloaded here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/07/07/the-rise-of-religious-radicalisation-among-diaspora-albanians/>)



Radical Orthodox groups in Moldova target both church and state

Politicized believers in Moldova represent independent Orthodox actors challenging the mainstream church from below, and their influence should not be overlooked, writes Anastasia Mitrofanova (Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation) in a pre-published article (June 30, 2020) in *Religion, State & Society*. The article is based on ethnographic research, since the radicals produce few documents. Driven by a sense of apocalyptic times ahead and expecting the rule of the Antichrist to come soon (sometimes to the extent of hoarding food in underground shelters), radicals adopt an ambivalent behavior toward the structure of the Orthodox Church. A priest interviewed by Mitrofanova insists on remaining part of the canonical church (a self-governing Metropolitanate under the Russian Orthodox Church), but also claims that Patriarch Kirill promotes heretical teachings. He has actually stopped commemorating Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Vladimir during the liturgy, but neither he nor other priests holding similar views have been banned or defrocked. Some observers feel that radical clergy intimidates the church leadership, but the restraint of the church leadership in dealing with those priests and their followers may also be explained by the fact that they are seen as a welcome counterbalance against more liberal Orthodox circles.

Actually, as much as internal church issues and alleged heretical statements by the Patriarch, social and political issues appear to be core concerns of radical Orthodox groups. Developments unwelcome in the eyes of Orthodox hardliners tend to be associated with “Europe,” opposing the “European path” to the “Orthodox land.” “Like everywhere in post socialist Europe (...) the issue of LGBT rights in Moldova has become a symbolic point for political differentiation,” Mitrofanova writes. Even secular politicians do not necessarily want to be associated with support for “gay rights.” The Orthodox radicals have also raised issues such as bar codes and machine-readable ID cards as “the Seal of the Antichrist,” but this does not matter to most of their fellow citizens. While the official views of the Orthodox Church may converge with those of the radicals on some issues, the church would refrain from anything resembling anti-state activities. In response to Pride parades, for instance, Orthodox radicals attempted to confront them on the street, while Orthodox mainstream organizations chose the path of organizing alternative events in support of the traditional family. In contrast with church leaders, the radicals—driven by their faith and perceiving violence as mere self-defense—are not willing to bargain or to engage into negotiations with state authorities through conventional channels, Mitrofanova adds. “Orthodox radicals have become a persistent political factor in Moldova, able to influence government policies and legislation,” she concludes.



(*Religion, State & Society*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/crss20>)

Anti-cult activism helping to enforce religious restrictions in Russia

The anti-cult movement has had significant influence in Russia since the government adopted a series of amendments which enhanced the scope and penalties of previous religion and anti-extremism laws in 2017, according to a July report from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). The law targets sharing religious faith, or extending invitations to religious services, as illegal missionary activity if they take place outside of officially registered spaces (including in private homes or over the internet). The practical consequences of this law have led to activism against such faiths as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Alexander Dvorkin, a Russian anti-cult leader, has been the most active in this field, spending years lobbying for strong measures against groups he frequently refers to as "totalitarian cults" and "destructive sects." He claims the Jehovah's Witnesses maintains strict control over every aspect of its members' lives in a Stalinist mode. The organizational base of Russia's anti-cult movement is the Saint Irenaeus of Leon Information-Consultation Center (SILIC), which is under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church. Using such terms as "totalitarian sects," Dvorkin has incorporated Western anti-cult ideas, including brainwashing and deprogramming into the post-Soviet context.



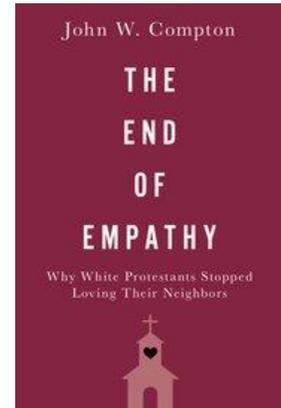
Russia brought along its "restrictive religious regulation framework when it invaded Crimea in 2014, including the symbiosis between anti-cult ideas and national security," according to the report. Groups illegal in Russia but allowed in Ukraine, such as the Muslim Tablighi Jamaat (JT) or Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), have been charged with terrorism, even for only organizing meetings on Islamic philosophy. The Russian Federation's return to Soviet-era religious regulation has had a spillover effect in many countries of the FSU, especially in relation to Muslims in Central Asia. The online newsletter *Bitter Winter* (July 18, 2020), which focuses on religious freedom, reports that Dvorkin's anti-cult activity has extended to China's campaign to restrict new religious movements, such as the Church of God Almighty. "Dvorkin has regularly supported the CCP in its repression of movements labeled as *xie jiao* ('evil cults'). Dvorkin went repeatedly to China and Hong Kong to offer his support to the persecution of Falun Gong, to deny that the CCP is harvesting organs from prisoners of conscience, and to applaud the repression of The Church of Almighty God. In turn, the CCP has supported Dvorkin's campaigns against the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, and 'imported' them to China."

(The USCIRF report can be downloaded here,

https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Anti-Cult%20Update%20-20Religious%20Regulation%20in%20Russia.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3WXNvgX7g1W0urjWKbFI_H_Jue8ChTXlsSipAdc1BNtLCzMAyGvA6Ruw; *Bitter Winter*, <https://bitterwinter.org/>)

Findings & Footnotes

■ The subtitle of the new book, *The End of Empathy* (Oxford University Press, \$34.95), which asks “Why White Protestants Stopped Loving Their Neighbors,” is intended to provoke, but author John W. Compton has written a fairly nuanced historical study on the loss of Protestant social influence in America. Compton uses primary and secondary sources to document the continual weakening of American religious institutions that promoted concerns, leaving the field open to secular activism and “entrepreneurs of the religious right.” The political scientist opens the book with an account of the vitality of religious reform movements receiving wide support from mainline churches in the early 20th century on such issue as child labor, civil rights and other economic initiatives. Compton stresses that such social concern was not chiefly the province of only church and denominational leaders but rather these issues found remarkable resonance among rank-and-file church members. He argues that the strong institutional culture and authority of these churches and denominations strongly influenced its members’ social and political views and behavior.



The waning of such authority in the 1960s and 1970s under such forces as individualism and suburbanization (illustrated by an interesting account of the failure of mainline activism in the early 1960s on integration in California), led to the loss of a distinctly religious politics and the emergence of a situation where it is increasingly politics that determines religion rather than the other way around; even in mainline churches, most clergy are careful not to raise controversial issues in the fear of losing more members. Meanwhile, Compton writes that evangelicals lack the authority and infrastructure to shape their members’ minds on political and social issues. Thus, several attempts to revive liberal evangelical concern—such as immigration and environmental activism—has been largely an elite affair, with most members having little sympathy for such measures, as shown by the overwhelming support for Donald Trump in the 2016 elections. Compton concludes that “Left to their own devices, believers increasingly self-select into congregations populated by fellow partisans, and ministers increasingly mirror the ideological convictions of their congregants.”

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

The COVID-19 lockdown has pushed the pagan festival, **Witchfest USA** in New York City, to a new level of technological sophistication and expertise. Witchfest USA is hosted annually by the NYC Wiccan Family Temple, founded by Reverend Starr RavenHawk, and began in 2012 as a fundraising event for the temple to purchase its building. Modeled along the lines of the Witchfest in the UK, the American festival was scheduled to take place in early July. However, the pandemic crisis in New York forced the city to either cancel or postpone public events. The festival attracts people from wider communities and the event was growing as more leading community leaders from various pagan traditions shared their expertise in the street under tents for free, with vendors and performers adding color to the festivities

This year's Witchfest USA offered participants 69 workshops by 36 presenters from all corners of the U.S. and the world, such as Selena Fox and Phyllis Curott, along with performers sharing their talents, vendors selling their merchandise, and events such as a kids' corner, a DJ dance party, and ceremony—all done through live-streaming via Zoom. The workshops and other events created a more intimate environment, where there were opportunities to have short conversations between the presenters and the approximately 325 attendees. A Witch Pride Parade started in 2017 with the aim of increasing the public understanding and acceptance of the community also went online. Acclaimed community leaders such as Rev. Laurie Cabot HPs, the Official Witch of Salem MA, posted the messages to the parade, accompanied by almost an hour long parade of messages by more than 60 leaders, later posted on YouTube. Next year, the Witchfest USA is aiming to offer a combination of both online and physical events with the opportunity for the community to come together and with a hope that more of the public will have the chance to join the event. As a contribution to the society, the Witchfest USA has been raising money for charitable organizations, all given in the name of #WitchesGivingBack. — *By Ayako Sairenji, a Tokyo-based researcher and writer.*

