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*Lights and challenges
of the ‘Christpill’*

Insights on digital media-driven conversions

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Fig 1. Cinematographic depiction of King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem from the movie ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ (2005), directed by Ridley Scott. This particular depiction has become an online meme and symbol of the Christpill trend, as he represents strong authority, heroism, wisdom, and calm in front of a foreseen tragic fate.

1. Introduction

When discussing the secularization of the West, those who interpret secularization as a pejorative term frequently place their hopes in a reversal of the trend. Grounds for such hope may be found in recent books and surveys discussing a "a surprising rebirth" of Christian religiosity among the youngest social cohorts. (Brierly, 2023) In this paper, we examine what perspectives Christian content appearing on social media and online platforms presents for Western Christian communities and churches.

More specifically, we refer to this process as the **Christpill phenomenon**, which is the tendency of individuals encountering with Christian messages on social media to change their minds regarding previous negative presuppositions on Christianity, even to the point of eventually converting.

If generational study research accurately depicts the information-seeking habits of Gen Y (Millennials) and especially Gen Z, specifically the extent to which their views are influenced by family background versus online activity, then it is reasonable to assume that Christianity as presented on social media significantly shapes their image of the faith. This paper contributes to the considerations churches should take into account when formulating social media strategies; it examines the latest findings on such so-called "quiet revival" and outlines the opportunities and challenges arising from the online missiology of Generation Z and Millennials.

A perceived revival could indeed be interpreted as new masses flocking to the church as followers of Christ. Perhaps a generation has come of age for whom discovering the possibility of a Christian life, including its liturgical, spiritual, theological, artistic, or social aspects, feels exotic and novel. However, it is also possible that what we are witnessing is simply the re-emergence of Christian presence in public spaces and social media after decades of retreat, or maybe just a counter cultural phenomenon which is only dressed in a Christian cloak.

When we assume a Christian revival is taking place due to social media influence, the Christian communities and churches suddenly receiving this attention should remain critical. They must ask:

- What is the true significance of the mediator (the influencer or the memes) in this phenomenon?
- What is the image of Christianity that people are being invited to identify with?
- What exactly does this new audience expect from Christianity?

Millennials are the generation born between 1980-1994. They are known for their tech literacy, although they are not digital natives. They adapted rapidly to the changes of times. In contrast, Gen Z is the first generation which has never really known adult life without smartphones and social media. They are considered the first digital native generation, with an innate ability to use technology effectively (Twenge, 2023).

Regarding Gen Z the scientific discourse usually refers to the cohort born between 1995-2012 sometimes 2015. (Jayatissa, 2023) There is already a vast literature on this still developing cohort, although the last third of the generation has not even reached adulthood. However, as we have pointed out the impact of the smart phones and the social media revolution has had implications which is already traceable between the generations.

Multiple studies have pointed out that a key attribute of Gen Z is that their socialization is happening usually via internet and social media. (Jayatissa, 2023) “According to (Erwin Erwin, 2023) social-media, influencer marketing, and user-generated content play a significant role in shaping the behaviour, preferences, and decision-making process of millennials and Gen Z. These generations have grown up in a digital era where they are constantly connected and influenced by the content, they consume on various social media platforms. (...) They are more likely to question traditional norms and seek alternative lifestyles and career paths.” (Wandhe, 2024) If the statistics on Gen Z are correct, they rely on online interpretations of reality more than any generations before.

Interestingly, generation studies consider Gen Z and Millennials the least religious in US history, moving sharply away from organized worship toward secularism and atheism, though many still seek personal spirituality. (Twenge, 2023) This is also confirmed by the Religious Landscape Survey of Pew Research. (Pew Research Centre, 2025) However public discourse online projects another trajectory. Media figures, writers, podcast host and public intellectuals have begun talking about a reemergence of Christianity.

2. *The 'Christpill' phenomenon*

British columnist Ed West raised a paramount issue during a conversation with Mary Harrington regarding the "Tom Holland phenomenon" (The Spectator, 2023).

When considering exposure to Christian memes—or agnostics like Tom Holland who spread them—the central question is whether one can "meme oneself" into believing. Given the vast amount of Christian content available online, an increasing number of individuals claim to have converted to Christianity from atheism or agnosticism after being exposed to these digital subcultures. As West points out, individuals can "meme themselves" into a belief system by starting with ironic or social engagement that eventually evolves into the genuine adoption of a new worldview.

George Lindbeck, drawing from Wittgensteinian interpretation argues that religion functions like a language, where dogmas serve as the "grammatical rules" of faith. In this view, becoming a believer is not primarily about intellectual assent to abstract propositions, but about being formed within a community through imitation, participation, practice, and immersion in its scriptural narrative. (Lindbeck, 1984) In the long run, this shapes the very experience of believers by regulating what counts as faithful speech, interpretation, and action within the community. Does this mean that by immersing themselves in the aforementioned aspects of the "language" of Christianity, people gradually begin to experience the world through a religious lens?

To illustrate this point, consider the case of Andrew Garfield who, when preparing to play a Jesuit priest, immersed himself in Ignatian spiritual practices and consequently "fell in love with Jesus". Andrew Huberman, a renowned podcaster and Professor of Neurobiology at Stanford University School of Medicine, who had tried out praying to a personal God as if it was being heard (distinct from meditating which he practiced already). Two years after the announcement in the Lex Fridman podcast, he talks confidently about things that are not immanent and claims that he believes believing in a God is rational and has worked for him (Chris Williamson, 2026).

These examples explain why understanding the Christian faith as performative, realizes it through such embodied acts of ritualized practice. (Taylor, 2019) Furthermore, it illustrates that the "un-tabooing" of religious faith in public discourse allows regular people – and even well-known scientists – to encounter Christian practices and messages without dismissing them out of hand. It encourages people to engage with Christianity without being ashamed of it, since many well-known public figures engage with it openly. Perhaps the most famous figure in this movement is Jordan B. Peterson, the Canadian psychologist who has become a global phenomenon. Other outspoken agnostics or atheist intellectuals like Douglas Murray, Tom Holland, Dave Rubin, and Konstantin Kisin belong to this sphere. Often, their intention to reintroduce Christian narratives and values stems from a fear of the "rootlessness" of Western pluralist culture. Alex O'Connor, a prominent agnostic podcaster, describes this phenomenon with a quote from the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, in which Jesus says: "You do not realize who I am from what I say to you, but you have become like the Jews, for they either love the tree and hate its fruit or love the fruit and hate the tree." O'Connor notes that this is a strange phenomenon where people like the fruits of Christianity, but don't even believe in the existence of the tree. (Chris Williamson, 2024) It means that the Christpill phenomenon blurs the boundaries between the supporters of cultural Christianity and the followers of Christ.

These public figures may serve as a "gateway" for atheists and agnostics to discover self-identified Christians like John Lennox, George Janko, Lila Rose, or Bishop Robert Barron. Justin Brierley

recently addressed this issue in his book, *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God*. Brierley has been at the centre of Christian-atheist dialogue during the last decade. He argues that while New Atheism thrived in the early 2000s via "blogs, chat rooms," and "antagonistic Bible memes," the church was initially "caught on the back foot" but has since caught up. Ironically, the harsh attacks of New Atheism contributed to one of the "greatest revival of Christian intellectual confidence in living memory as the church has risen to the challenge", as online apologetics, videos, and resources have equipped the church to move beyond its "cultural Christian" comfort zone (Brierley, 2023).

A study from the University of Birmingham analyzing 'conversion analyses methodology' suggests that social media has significantly contributed to the standardization of the atheistic worldview. Based on a survey "nearly half of respondents (48.0%) reported a general lack of exposure to Christian beliefs, understanding naturalistic Atheism as a culturally presumed perspective." "Negative socio-cultural exposure to and experience with Christianity also contributed to the development of disbelief due to perceived hypocrisy (48.0-50.0%), intolerance (22.0%), negative personal experience (24.0%). (...) Negative cultural stereotypes of Christians seen through technology and media (i.e., social networks, film, art, television) undermining its desirability and plausibility." One of the interviewed subjects stated that his view of Christians was informed by cultural media's negative stereotyping of religious belief of Ned Flanders, an uneducated, unattractive Christian caricature from *The Simpsons*. However, the study also highlights the vital role of digital media in converting people to Christianity. Many converts lacked personal contact with Christians or found that the Christians they knew were unable to answer their questions. Consequently, technology provided a practical resource for investigating Christianity: 22% used internet blogs, 16% watched online debates, and 12% listened to Christian podcasts (Harmon, 2019).

The influencers

Digital Religion Studies explores how users translate religious practices into digital spaces and how the specific forms of new media reshape religious expression. Heidi Campbell, a leading scholar on the intersection of religion and modern media, combines the term of "digital creatives" with religion. (Campbell, 2013) Religious Digital Creatives (RDCs) are hired employees of religious institutions or churches; or entrepreneurs creating social media content or platforms for religious groups. They are usually affiliated to a religious denomination or are themselves ordained members of a church. Christian influencers in this sense are a subgroup of RDCs, being "individuals who intentionally and unintentionally exert influence within religious institutions due to their digital work."

Marshall McLuhan has famously pointed out in 1964, that "the medium is the message", meaning, the way content is shared shapes us more profoundly than the content itself. (McLuhan, 1964) RDCs in this sense are in a power position, because they are mediating, they can finetune theological message by their own personal views. By leveraging specialized technological skills, these individuals create mediated charisma that bypasses institutional gatekeepers, favouring a currency of authenticity over established credentials.

To understand the diversity of these new religious actors, Heidi Campbell proposes a tripartite typology of RDCs. The first one is what Campbell calls a Digital Spokesperson, who is employed directly by the church or religious organizations to manage their online profile and communicate with the public, so their work is strictly bound by institutional communication policies and

hierarchical accountability. The second one are Digital Strategists, who already hold recognized roles within a faith community, such as pastors, theologians, or missionaries, but choose to develop digital expertise to innovate their ministry. They can be online ministers, who use technology for pastoral purposes, or "theoblogians," usually theological scholars or professors, who use the internet to draw an audience around a particular theological interpretation. They possess "hybrid authority," moving between institutional and technological expertise.

Unlike spokespersons, the primary role of digital strategists is not media-focused, but they use technology to amplify their recognized ministry. Persons like Bishop Robert Barron, Father Mike Schmitz, and Gavin Ortlund could be categorized as digital strategists. While the goal of their online ministry is to gain access to a wider audience for the religious message of their denomination, their visibility and self-appointment can also be a threat in a debate with traditional church authorities.

The third group is composed of Digital Entrepreneurs, who are independent, operating outside of official church structures. They can be for profit Christian companies designing religious mobile apps, software or websites, or even running online discussion forums or social media sites equipping the Churches with technological commodities or services, like the Barna Group or Gloop.

Digital entrepreneurs can be Christian podcasters, or internet evangelists like George Janko or Trent Horn. They are driven by a personal vision and rely on "algorithmic authority" (the visibility granted by likes, followers, and prominence) to validate their work. This category includes the creators of the Bible Project, the founders of the Hallow app, and influencers like "Girls Gone Bible" who build massive audiences through their personal interpretation of scripture. Since being formally independent, but are interpreting and conveying Christian message freely, they are in the most unstable relation with the formal church.

Using the categorization of Campbell a possible exceptional case could be made: influencers who use Christian rhetoric to build political and cultural platforms. The Daily Wire hosts like Michael Knowles or Matt Fradd, and the late Charlie Kirk and the Turning Point USA could also be mentioned here. Using Campbell's categorization, these individuals often fall into Jon Anderson's category of "reformer-critics," who are being motivated by a conscious religious or political agenda. This original category perfectly captures an influencer using Christian rhetoric to build a politically affiliated, agenda-driven platform, although most likely for them, the two are completely conflated.

Now, in an analytical tone, the migration of religious life into digital environments led by influencers needs a fundamental re-evaluation of how authority is constructed, performed, and maintained within contemporary faith communities, as well as faced the consequences of the ontological nature of digital media.

In religious digital spaces, authority is no longer granted solely by a static role of being a priest or a pastor or a degree from a seminary; instead, for the most part authenticity is the currency that grants the influencer their authority. (Sheldon 2024), We are not going to discuss the phenomenon of authenticity as Charles Taylor presents it in *The Malaise of Modernity*, which Adorno argued became a commercialized jargon. Rather we are interested in the dialogical nature of authenticity as a tool for establishing authority in online media. For younger generations, specifically Gen Z, institutional ties often serve as a reason for skepticism rather than a source of legitimacy. In 2024 there was a Catholic Social Media Summit during which a survey was made which points out that

consistency and authenticity (60% of respondents) and personal testimony (58% of the respondents) is more important than being connected to a formal Church (17%). (Robinson et al., 2025) This raises a fundamental threat to vertical church hierarchies.

In Media Studies there were arguments to distinguish religious authority from general authority, because it is gained through a reference to the supernatural. To take an example, Michael Knowles in a conversation with Charlie Kirk about the late Pope Francis implied banteringly that when the pope is saying something that you disagree with you turn down the hearing aid. (Charlie Kirk, 2025) One of the main concerns raised on the aforementioned 'Catholic Social Media Summit', is the fact that media tends to democratize or flatten traditional church authority. On the question of whether the Catholic Church should have a say on the kind of content Catholic Digital Influencers create only 35% agreed, while 45% disagreed (Robinson et al., 2025).

Media studies usually draw on Max Weber's and Foucault's definitions of authority. Building on the two types already mentioned, Campbell's framework expands to include algorithmic and dramaturgical authority. Weber, in first place, enlists three forms of authority: legal, where loyalty is given to a legally established impersonal order; traditional, where obedience is given to the person who occupies this traditionally sanctioned position and charismatic, which is based on devotion to an individual who shows a particular characteristic, ideal or exemplary quality that motivates others to adhere to the normative patterns sanctioned by that individual. Weber's theory shows that "authority is established and maintained by leaders because followers buy in and affirm their leadership positions, consciously or unconsciously, by taking part in the social structures they create" (Campbell, 2013). Bryan S. Turner, already in 2007, argued that traditional forms of religious authority are threatened by networked forms of communications and social engagements, and that new forms of online charismatic authority will replace them (Turner, 2007).

In Foucault's view the main currency in society is power, therefore authority is also defined by it. It is omnipresent and all individuals are constantly influenced by it. The discourse influencers establish with their followers creates relations that determine how the parties act. Drawing on Foucault, Hofstede introduces the concept of power distancing, which presents how people relate to the inequality in power share. Using the model, where power distance is high, like in the Catholic church, people accept the power hierarchy more easily, and the cultivation of power is conveyed visibly through symbols and recognized social positions. Where the distance is low, like in smaller protestant churches, members question the power structures more frequently. Influencers, as part of the digital media phenomena rely on low-distance power dynamics, so regarding Christian influencers, they evangelize in a "protestant" way in terms of authority.

Another form of authority to investigate is algorithmic. The fundamental nature of authority is being reconfigured in the digital era, moving from role-based legitimacy to a model governed by "sacred algorithms." We allow and use computer-based rankings and formulas to direct human attention and to consider what information is trustworthy or relevant. We are being offered content for consumption on a value-based ranking by algorithms and prominence in a network. In the online public sphere, the aforementioned source of authority is transferred to the numerical and quantifiable affirmation of the community members within the group. Nevertheless, it is paramount to note that algorithms are not neutral and can be intentionally manipulated by developers (Ndiaye, 2023).

Additionally, Campbell introduces Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach to model authority, by which the authority of an RDC is viewed not as a static role but as a performance enacted on a front stage. Digital platforms provide the stage where RDCs present an idealized self for public consumption, while their authentic self is revealed (or carefully curated) on the backstage. This performative nature of authority means that the RDC is under a constant performance burden. Unlike a traditional priest, whose authority is routinized through office and institution, the RDC's authority is inherently unstable; it must be upheld through constant content creation and interaction. Upholding an authentic image as a Christian can be a burden on Christians practicing repentance openly. If the promised vision or lifestyle is no longer provided, the RDC's mediated charisma can quickly dissipate.

In sum, RDCs' authority is charismatic, low-distanced or "protestantized," performative, and legitimized by algorithms, and so, one of the primary concerns is their potential to become "competitors" to the institutional churches as they are a hermeneutical authority to their follower base. These digital creatives can emerge with greater influence than the official channels of the institutional church, they can unintentionally undermine the very structures of authority they seek to assist. This displacement of hierarchy occurs when an influencer becomes a primary source of orientation for the faithful, bypassing the gatekeepers of traditional theology and liturgy.

On the other hand, the ontological nature of digital media encourages what Lev Manovich calls "meta-realism," where the user is positioned as the "master" with the power to discern, deconstruct, and control reality. This is in sharp contrast to the "old-style realism" of traditional church structures, where the user (or believer) is expected to accept or reject a prescribed narrative. Meta-realism encourages a mindset where nothing is ever final or complete, and everything is open to improvement or revision. This undermines fixed liturgical processes and traditional hierarchies, as the believer is taught to investigate, experiment with, and ultimately change the patterns given by the institution. In the so called networked religion, religious identity is not defined solely by doctrinal alignment but by emotional resonance and storied identity. This shift challenges the top-down authority of traditional institutions, empowering individuals to curate their own spiritual lives based on shared beliefs and peer-to-peer connections. While this democratizes religious discourse, it also risks syncretism and the erosion of theological integrity, as complex concepts are reduced to simplified soundbites designed for virality (Campbell, 2021).

In sum, the reconfiguration of religious authority through digital creatives is a dialectic process that offers both unprecedented missionary opportunities and profound institutional threats. The church must navigate a world where spiritual authority is "hybrid," this means, rooted in sacramental legitimacy (Webers's traditional authority) and charismatic authority, but also co-constructed through algorithmic visibility. In addition, authority is constantly negotiated in the online space, opposite to traditional sources of religious authority. While the "digital transfiguration" allows for reaching the marginalized and meeting people "where they are," it also threatens to hallow out the "long obedience" and contemplative depth of the faith.

Strategic success for religious institutions in this era depends on two primary factors: the formal formation of RDCs and the intentional integration of digital tools into the broader narrative of salvation history. The churches must resist being led by the medium itself, ensuring that its digital presence remains a "sacrament of proximity" that leads followers back to embodied, sacramental

communities. Without this intentionality, the "sacred algorithms" risk reshaping the faith into what is merely profitable and popular.

The memes

Memes are widely acknowledged as cultural units, often understood as the conceptual counterparts to genes in biological reality (Dawkins, 1976; Blackmore, 1999). More concretely, memes function as compressed representations of reality: symbolic packages embedded in stimuli that generate effects within both the observer's conscious and unconscious processes. In a more dynamic sense, memes operate as units of discourse, insofar as discourse can be understood as the circulation of philosophical and ideological positions. Consequently, the proliferation of memes has a tangible impact on individuals' perceptions of reality, despite the prevailing assumption that they constitute merely humorous or trivial internet content (Nigere, 2024).

The symbolic dimension underlying memes as disaggregated units can produce fragmented glimpses of meaning. If this occurs within a cultural environment characterized by a heightened demand for meaning, a condition that is particularly pronounced among current younger generations, memes often function as partial yet influential signifiers within broader processes of sense-making.

Owing to their adaptability, memes are especially suited to media infrastructures designed for the rapid dissemination of information. This adaptability explains their close relationship with digital media and the internet, where they have achieved widespread visibility, particularly through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, YouTube, and Facebook. On these platforms, algorithmic systems curate content based on predicted user preferences, facilitating the formation of digital communities composed of individuals who engage with similar types of memes (Cinelli et al., 2021). In this way, memes not only circulate meaning but also can heavily contribute to the structuring of identities and shared interpretive frameworks in digital spaces (Gal et al., 2015).

The *Christpill* phenomenon, as an emergent form of new media expression, is disseminated largely through memes, which may take the form of static images, audiovisual materials, or more complex symbolic constructions. The communities associated with this phenomenon, particularly among Generation Z, tend to develop their own specialized vocabulary to address concepts and themes related to *Christpill*, a characteristic shared with many other meme-based communities across digital media.

Unlike influencer-driven content, memes are typically produced and circulated under conditions of anonymous or diffuse authorship and, as a result, clear accountability is difficult to establish. Although certain social media accounts specialize in uploading *Christpill*-related material, it is often unclear whether the content originates with the account holder. Instead, *Christpill* memes, like memes more broadly, circulate through repeated downloading and re-uploading across platforms, a process that renders their original source difficult, if not impossible, to trace.

Within *Christpill*-related meme production, three primary categories can be identified: basic *Christpill* image-based memes, *tradwave* meme imagery, and more sophisticated forms of audiovisual content.

Basic *Christpill* memes can be broadly divided into two principal categories. The first consists of explicitly humorous content that seeks to persuade audiences, through irony or ridicule, that Christianity and a traditional way of life are preferable to the values and lifestyles associated with contemporary Western society. These memes frequently rely on comparative archetypes, contrasting “based” or “chad” Christians with “cringe” or “virgin” figures representing atheists, leftists, heretics, or secular individuals.

The second category emphasizes the spiritual and material benefits of Christian life. Such memes commonly draw upon biblical passages or the exemplary lives of saints and other holy figures, presenting them as sources of consolation and guidance in response to the perceived grievances of modern existence.

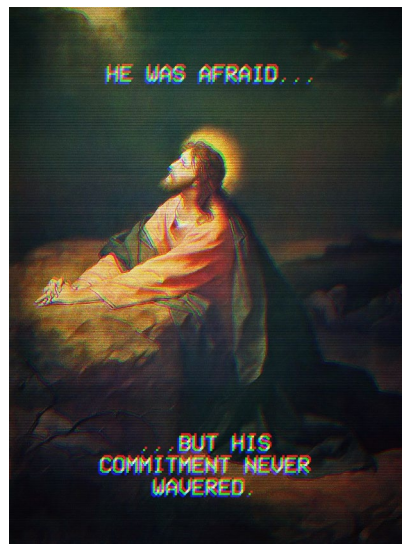
Both categories function as vehicles for the dissemination of specific discursive units, including the affirmation of traditional modes of life; the rejection of modern excess, luxury, and hedonism; the valorization of family life and simplicity, often associated with rural settings; and the encouragement of religious education through the study of the Bible and the life of Jesus and the saints. Additional themes include confidence in confronting critiques of the Christian faith, regular participation in church life, and the cultivation of physical discipline and masculinity (often symbolized by gym culture) as a complement to spiritual development.



Figs 2 to 5. Examples of basic *Christpill* memes. Source: Unknown authorship, found on @trad_west_ account on Instagram.

Tradwave (or *Christwave*) memes represent a more aesthetically complex form of *Christpill* expression. These memes draw heavily from avant-garde digital art movements such as glitch art and vaporwave (or *retrowave*). Glitch art employs visual distortions and digital “errors” to signify the fragility and imperfection of computational systems, often interpreted as a symbolic resistance to the hyper-rationalized and mechanized conditions of modern life in favor of organic human imperfection (Schrey, 2014; Vuger, 2022). *Vaporwave*, by contrast, mobilizes visual and auditory elements associated with the 1980s and 1990s to evoke nostalgia, while simultaneously critiquing the perceived emptiness and commodification characteristic of postmodern culture (Schrey, 2014).

When these aesthetic movements intersect with *Christpill* discourse, they generate visual compositions featuring Jesus, the saints, the Pope, biblical narratives, and other elements of Christian iconography frequently drawn from classical religious art. These images celebrate the Christian aesthetic heritage of European civilization while integrating the stylistic features of glitch art and vaporwave. The resulting synthesis encourages a simultaneous sense of nostalgia and futuristic dystopia, positioning Christianity as a stabilizing spiritual presence within the frenetic and digitalized landscape of postmodern life.



Figs 6 to 10. Examples of glitch-art/vaporwave Christpill memes. Sources: Fig 6: Unknown authorship, found on Pinterest; fig 7: Glitch edit of ‘Christ in Gethsemane’ by Heinrich Hoffmann, unknown authorship, found on X; figs 8 and 9: Unknown authorship, found on Reddit; fig 10: Unknown authorship, found on Facebook.

More sophisticated *Christpill*-related audiovisual content often develops directly from the *tradwave* aesthetic discussed above. One of the most prominent examples of this trend is the so-called ‘*LDA*’ meme trend, in which ‘*LDA*’ refers to “Little Dark Age,” a song released in 2017 by the American indie band MGMT. In a distorted version, typically slowed and reverberated, the song has been widely used as a shared soundtrack for numerous videos across different platforms (Jaspe, 2025). These videos rapidly juxtapose Christian aesthetics drawn from classical religious art with visual elements derived from glitch art and vaporwave, producing an epic and emotionally charged effect that amplifies a dual appeal to nostalgia and action in the face of a perceived uncertain future.

In some cases, these audiovisual compositions are structured around a stark contrast: images depicting what is framed as the moral corruption or decadence of contemporary Western civilization are presented first, followed by scenes rich in Christian symbolism. This visual progression encourages viewers to interpret Christian faith as a remedy for the spiritual and cultural grievances of modern life.

The use of “Little Dark Age” in this context has generated debate, as the same song has also been employed in more secular or nationalist meme cultures to promote idealized visions of national identity in opposition to multiculturalism (Jaspe, 2025). Notably, neither the song’s lyrics nor the intentions of the band MGMT bear any direct relation to these appropriations, however, the phrase “little dark age” lends itself to interpretation as a metaphor for a period of cultural or moral degradation (namely, the present era) that must be transcended. Perhaps more significantly, the song’s musical qualities align closely with the aesthetic logic of *tradwave* content: its electronic composition and stylistic resemblance to 1980s pop music make it particularly compatible with vaporwave-inspired audiovisual production.

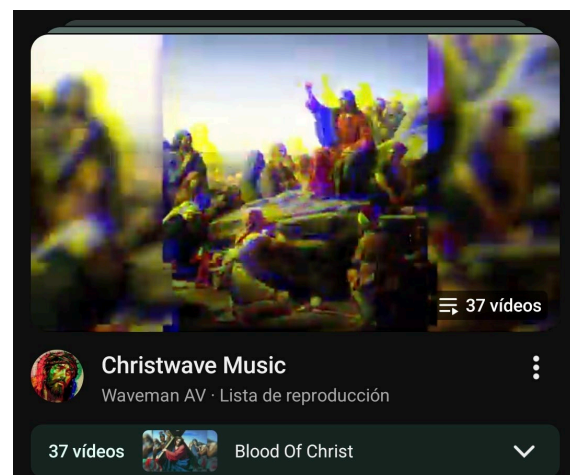
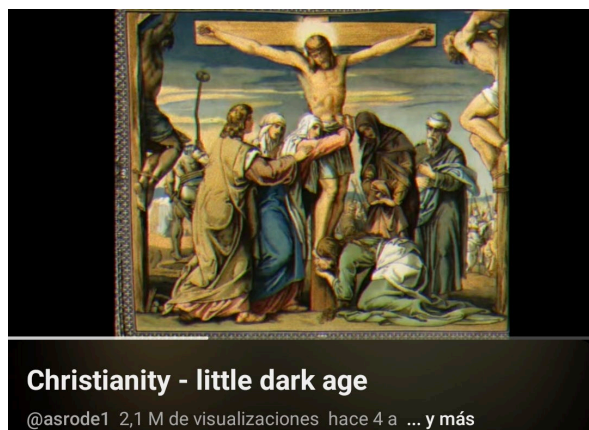


Fig 11. Example of a ‘Little Dark Age’ edit on Youtube, uploaded by @asrode1, with 2,1 million views by January of 2026. Fig 12. Christwave music playlist on YouTube, containing 37 songs as of January 2026, compiled by user Waverman AV.

More broadly, electronic music is a recurrent feature of *tradwave* and *Christpill* memes, as it lends itself to interpretations that oscillate between nostalgia and futurism (Teitelbaum, 2021). From a nostalgic perspective, vaporwave and *retrowave* genres, along with many forms of electronic pop, are designed to evoke “1980s nostalgia.” Within postmodern cultural theory, such phenomenon is

described through the concept of *hauntology*, understood as an engagement with the spectral presence of the past, sometimes as a form of critique or dissent toward the present or as a way to face an uncertain future and avoid death or entropy (Gere, 2016; James, 2024).

From a futurist standpoint, electronic music and aesthetics can be associated with dystopian imaginaries, catastrophic scenarios, or eschatological visions in which Western civilization is imagined collapsing. Within *Christpill* meme symbolism, such a collapse is framed as divine punishment for perceived moral transgressions of the West, including multiculturalism, gender theory, and liberalism. This narrative is often linked to interpretations of the Book of Revelation, in which societal breakdown is not merely an end, but also the precondition for spiritual renewal and for Christianity (and Christ himself) to reclaim a central role in the world.

From a Christian perspective, it is necessary to critically examine the challenges and risks associated with this phenomenon. Digital media functions as a powerful generator of identity and, in doing so, it may replace lived and transcendent meaning with simulated forms of meaning that present themselves as self-sufficient (Singer, 1991; Ren, 2025). When access to Christianity is primarily mediated through *Christpill* memes, religious understanding risks remaining confined to a predesigned and reductive representation of the faith, one that fails to convey the full depth and complexity of Christian theology.

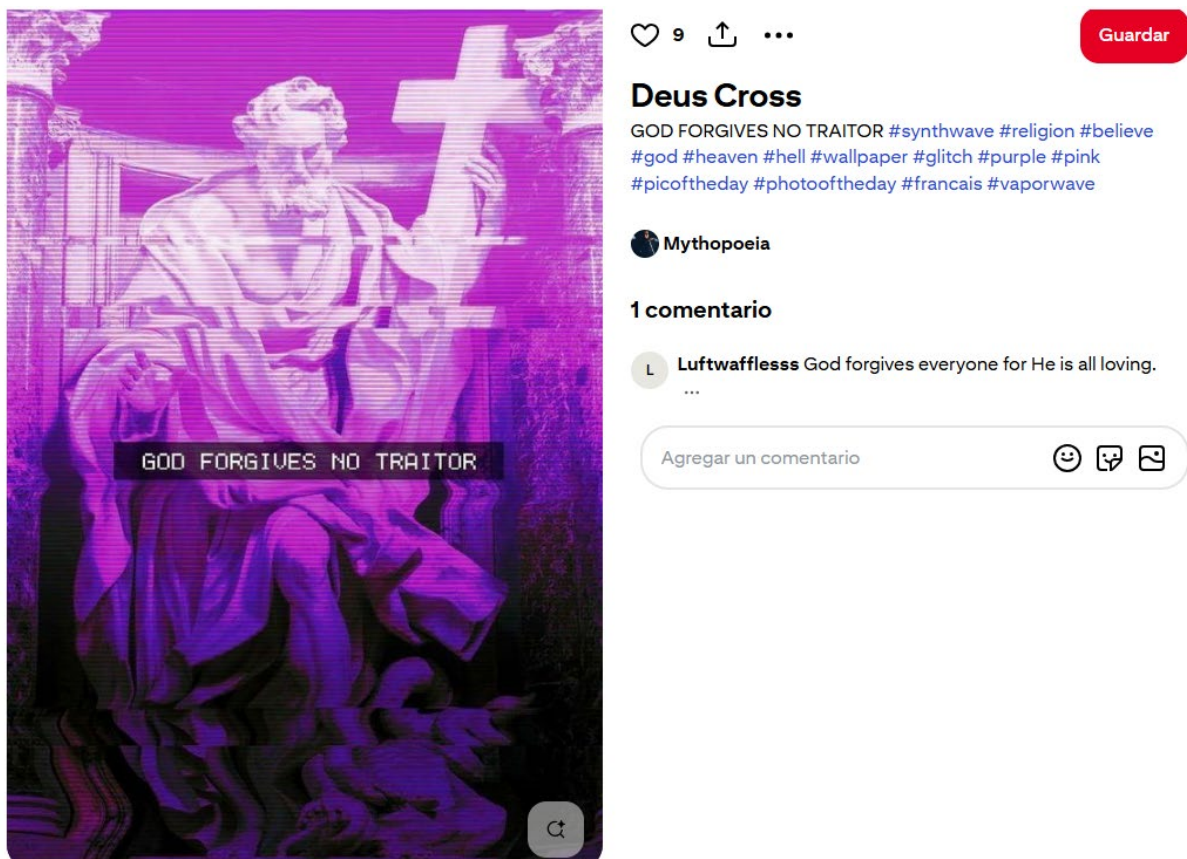


Fig 13. Example of a doctrinal contradiction in *Christpill* memetics. The picture displays the text ‘God forgives no traitor’, another user comments: ‘God forgives everyone for He is all loving’. Source: Unknown authorship, uploaded by user Mythopoeia on Pinterest.

Under these conditions, Christianity could be reshaped to accommodate the psychological and cultural needs of a generation actively seeking meaning, while disproportionately emphasizing certain aspects of the faith and marginalizing others that are equally, if not more, central.

The most severe challenge perhaps is the effect the new media (both memes and social media influencers) poses to the practice of Christian faith. Neurologically, the pace of digital media warps the user's sense of time and displaces the deep, embodied interactions required for spiritual development. Research from Harvard Medical School suggests that digital technology trains the brain for immediate sensory gratification and superficial use of time, leading away from the contemplation necessary for religious life. Social media is different to the static old media, because it was precisely created with the goal in mind to control the brain for profit. It is finely tuned to manipulate the brain to maximize the attentional engagement (Robinson et al., 2025).

Using such tools to evangelize to the maximal audience possible, should be done keeping in mind depoliticization their effect on the brain. The study from HMS shows that "digital technology (...) fundamentally changes how we engage with reality. By accelerating the pace of information transfer and fragmenting our attention, digital devices promote a utilitarian view of time, training us for immediate sensory gratification and technocratic productivity. Similarly, it flattens our spatial environment, stripping away the rich sensory experiences and interpersonal interactions that scaffold the functioning of our brains and minds." (Robinson et al., 2025).

McLuhan argued that we often deliver catechesis as if it were a nut we give a person to swallow without first breaking the shell. This manner of catechizing, according to McLuhan, "doesn't give [people] a taste for doctrine but only makes them swallow it" (Campbell, 2021).

3. *The 'Christpill' as a political issue*

Much of *Christpill* discourse overlaps with that of the New Right. Consequently, not only contemporary political leaders associated with this movement, but also historical figures aligned with similar ideological positions, are frequently portrayed within *Christpill* narratives as defenders of Christianity and exemplary models to be emulated.

At a first level of analysis, it is reasonable to acknowledge that the *Christpill* diagnosis concerning the opposition between Christian values and progressive or leftist governance resonates with observable developments. In several countries characterized by liberal hegemony, there has been an increasing restriction, marginalization or even criminalization of Christian faith within public and institutional spaces (Persecution.org, 2024; Mountford, 2024; Care.org, 2025). From this perspective, the perception of conflict articulated by *Christpill* communities must not be dismissed outright.

The central concern, however, lies in clarifying the function of *Christpill* as a cultural and media phenomenon: namely, whether it serves primarily as a conduit through which Generation Z is drawn closer to religious belief and practice, or whether it operates chiefly as a pathway toward political identification that merely adopts religious language and symbolism.

This question does not admit a simple or definitive answer, as religious convictions may legitimately and coherently inform political positions. The risk, however, lies in the dynamics of rapid and

uncritical radicalization often associated with sustained exposure to online content (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2023). Within such dynamics, Christianity may be reduced to a form of political activism, instrumentalized as a marker of identity or opposition rather than lived as a comprehensive spiritual tradition, and it is this reduction what warrants critical attention.

In conclusion, one of the challenges Christianity faces in relation to the *Christpill* phenomenon concerns the authenticity of the conversions and forms of religious identification it may facilitate. This challenge requires a clear distinction between genuine faith, grounded in theological understanding and lived spiritual practice, and forms of political or cultural identification that appropriate Christian symbols primarily as instruments of political activism. While such activism can be legitimate within the political sphere, and Christian values are indeed meant to be reflected in political decisions and institutions, this does not constitute the core of Christianity in its whole complexity.

4. A „gender gap” in the '*Christpill*'?

Although it is difficult to identify a single moment marking the emergence of modern feminism, given that both liberal and Marxist traditions had long been developing its conceptual foundations, we will focus on the postwar period (1945–1990). Particular attention is given to the contributions of Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, and Betty Friedan, whose work proved especially influential during the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Central to this phase of feminist thought was the notion of liberation from what it names as “patriarchal structures”, a project closely associated with sexual freedom and the rejection of traditional moral frameworks centered on chastity and purity. This moment also promoted the ideal of a childfree life and a critique of the normative model of womanhood defined by marriage and motherhood (Echols, 1989). Within this context, access to contraception and the legalization of abortion became central political issues: while contraceptive use has become widely normalized in many societies, abortion remains a subject of ongoing contestation.

Postmodern, or deconstructionist, feminism emerges from thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristeva. This approach is characterized by a strong anti-essentialist orientation and a critical stance toward fixed or “natural” categories of identity (Staunton, 2019). Consequently, the very definition of “woman” is discussed and even dismissed. Earlier feminist efforts to free women from socially imposed roles related to family and social position are, within this framework, extended and radicalized.

Issues such as free abortion (without limitations in terms of reasons or weeks of pregnancy) and the recognition of so-called “transgender women” become central in postmodern feminism, as they exemplify both the rejection of normative moral expectations and the destabilization of gender as a stable and binary category. From this perspective, traditional Christian conceptions are regarded as incompatible with postmodern feminist premises and are therefore dismissed right away.

In a very clarifying tone, American philosopher Mary Daly, who was also a pioneer in so-called “feminist theology,” stated directly: *“There is a bond, then, between the significance of the women’s revolution as Antichrist and its import as Antichurch. [...] the Antichrist has a natural correlative in the coming of the*

Antichurch, which is a communal uprising against the social extensions of the male Incarnation myth.” (Daly, 1973, p. 140)

The consequences of postmodern feminist discourse can be observed both in contemporary social media in current political polarization. Social media platforms, through which the *Christpill* itself also circulates, have become key sites of sexual-based polarization. Within these spaces, discourses of female “empowerment” can be easily intertwined with the valorization of self-display, vanity, and narcissistic tendencies (Casale & Banchi, 2020). At the same time, young men are frequently portrayed through stigmatizing narratives, such as being labeled “incels” or as responsible for a purported “male loneliness epidemic.” (Sparks et al., 2024; Orchard, 2025)

Parallel to this, a childfree lifestyle oriented toward personal pleasure and constant self-actualization is frequently promoted, while platform-based forms of self-produced sexual content have become an increasingly normalized means for some young women to obtain levels of income and social mobility that would otherwise be difficult to achieve (Adamsen, 2021; Sanchez, 2022), thereby enabling lifestyles oriented to consumption and luxury.

In reaction to this environment, media content targeting young men has emerged that mirrors this polarization by constructing women as a socially disruptive or morally deviant force that must either be regulated or avoided altogether. This discursive framework has contributed to the development of online movements such as *Men Going Their Own Way* (MGTOW), which advocate for male withdrawal from romantic or familial relationships (Arriola, 2024). Within these communities, most women are perceived as being shaped by postmodern feminist ideologies, leading to the conclusion that disengagement from women constitutes a rational or self-protective strategy.

At the political level, these cultural tensions are reflected in growing sexual-based polarization across several countries in the West. Young men have shown an increasing tendency to align with emerging right-wing or “new right” political movements, while young women more frequently align with left-wing or radical left positions (Campbell et al., 2023; Miloslav, et al., 2026). The latter are often strongly informed by postmodern feminist frameworks and typically emphasize both unrestricted access to abortion and “transgender rights” as central issues.

Taking these considerations into account, and acknowledging the methodological difficulty of establishing a direct correlation between the *Christpill* phenomenon and measurable religious conversion, it is still possible to advance two hypotheses concerning female attitudes toward contemporary Christianization movements emerging within social media environments.

The first hypothesis follows logically from the preceding theoretical framework: insofar as postmodern feminism has become a dominant interpretive lens among young women, they are likely to be underrepresented in *Christpill*-related communities and conversion patterns. This relative absence may be explained by the perception of Christian moral and anthropological principles as fundamentally opposed to prevailing twenty-first-century discourses of female “empowerment”.

The second hypothesis proposes that, even where conversions among young women do occur, they are more likely to take place within liberal or progressive branches of Christianity. Alternatively, such conversions may be associated with rhetorical misinterpretations of Christian

doctrine that downplay or omit traditional theological and moral elements in order to render the faith compatible with the postmodern lifestyle and value system previously described.

Just as an example of the last scenario, in 2025, a female pornographic performer used her social media to announce and broadcast her re-baptism in Christian faith while preserving, at the same time, her platforms and activities in the pornographic business. When questioned about the reasons and sincerity of her re-conversion she declared: *“I’m definitely not claiming to be a traditional Christian at all. Obviously, I’m not against gay marriage. I am also pro-choice. So I definitely don’t have, necessarily, traditional values. But that doesn’t mean to say that I can’t be Christian. I would just hope that the Christian community welcomes me, because I guess everyone’s relationship with God is bespoke to them.”* (Hudgins, 2025)

Both just mentioned hypotheses will be discussed after exploring the data introduced in the next section.

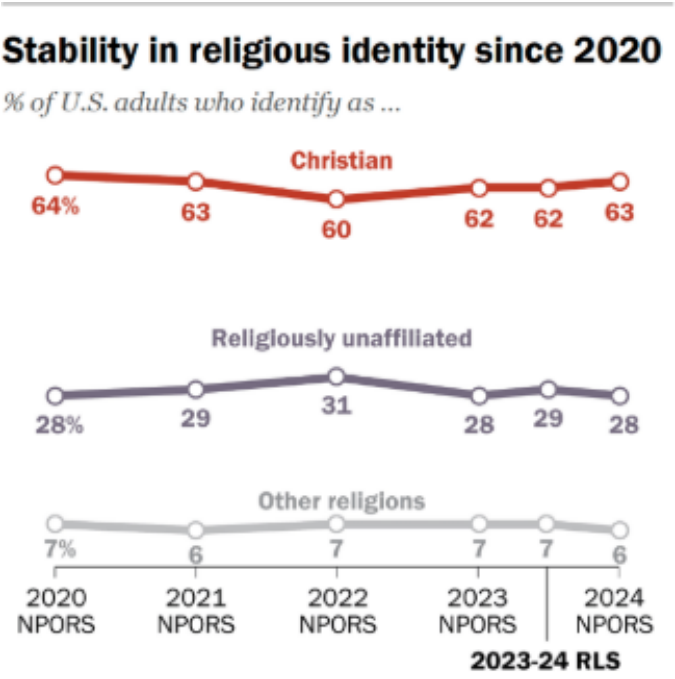
5. *Christian revival and church attendance: a critical look upon the numbers*

When discussing the rise of Christian media content providers and consumers, an important question arises: can this resurgence also be observed in church life? After decades of statistics documenting the decline of Christianity in Western Europe and North America, some voices are now claiming that a Christian revival may be underway. In the following, we will examine the most relevant data regarding this apparent break in the long-standing consensus and then consider whether it is related to the online “*Christpill*” phenomenon.

One of the main studies in this field is the Religious Landscape Study (RLS) conducted in the U.S.A by the Pew Research Center. The study analyzes data collected in three waves between 2007 and 2024, with its most recent release published in 2025, which suggests that a long-term downward trend in Christian affiliation may be easing or temporarily plateauing.

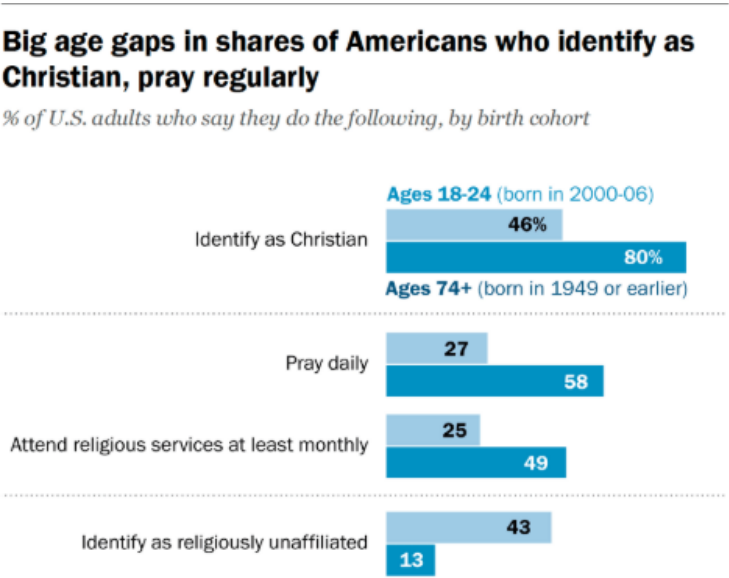
The first wave in 2007 recorded that 78% of U.S. adults identified as Christian, while 16% described themselves as religiously unaffiliated (adults who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular” when asked about their religion). In the years that followed, Christian affiliation declined steadily, accompanied by a corresponding rise in the share of the unaffiliated population.

By 2022, the proportion of Christians had fallen to 60%, and by 2024 it rose to 63% of the adult population. At the same time, the religiously unaffiliated had increased to 31% in 2022 and fell to a still significant 28% in 2024. Overall, since around 2020 both trends have stabilized: the Christian share has been hovering within this range, and the growth of the unaffiliated appears to have plateaued as well.



Graph 1: Stability in religious identity in the USA. Source: Pew Research Center, 2025.

If we distinguish between nominal Christians and practicing Christians, a similar pattern appears for the latter. Currently, 33% of U.S. adults report attending religious services in person, and 44% say they pray at least once a day. Although both measures have declined significantly since 2007, they have remained relatively stable over the past four years.



Graph 2: Regular pray gaps among Christians in the USA. Source: Pew Research Center, 2025.

Generational differences remain crucial when assessing the future of Christianity in the United States. While a slowing decline or plateau can be observed at the level of the total population, younger generations consistently show lower levels of both identification and practice compared to older cohorts. If future generations follow the current patterns of Generation Z, demographic

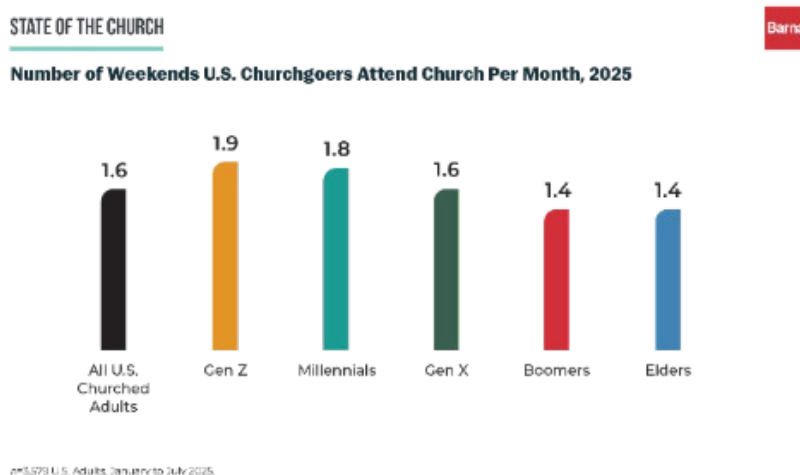
replacement alone will gradually reduce the Christian share of the US population to approximately 46%, all else being equal (*ceteris paribus*).

One potentially hopeful sign, however, is that the youngest cohort (born between 2000 and 2006) and the second youngest cohort (born in the 1990s) report similar levels of Christian identification and monthly religious service attendance. This could suggest a possible slowing of secularization from one generation to the next.

The Bible Society commissioned a large-scale survey conducted by YouGov to examine changes in Christian belief and practice between 2018 and 2024 in the United Kingdom. The results, published in 2025, generated debate about the possibility of a Christian revival among Generation Z in that country. However, since then the Bible Society has withdrawn the survey.

Similar indications of a possible generational shift have been reported in the United States by the Barna Group. In a 2025 article, Barna stated that “for the first time in decades, younger adults — Gen Z and Millennials — are now the most regular churchgoers, outpacing older generations, who once formed the backbone of church attendance.” (Barna, 2025)

According to the report, the average Gen Z churchgoer attends church 1.9 weekends per month, while Millennial churchgoers attend 1.8 times per month, frequency that exceeds that of older generations. It is important to note, however, that Barna’s analysis refers specifically to the attendance frequency of those who already identify as churchgoers; it does not measure the overall proportion of each generation attending church (Ghaedi, 2025).



Graph 4: Church attendance across generations in the USA. Source: Barna, 2025.

Beyond the United States and the United Kingdom, similar signs of renewed Christian vitality have been reported in parts of Europe. In France, the Conference of Bishops announced a 45% increase in adult baptisms compared to 2024. In Finland, longitudinal survey data collected annually since 2019 among 12,000 to 23,000 confirmands (representing approximately 25–43% of all confirmands; around 75% of Finnish youth attend confirmation classes) show notable patterns in belief. In the most recent data, 64% of boys and 52% of girls affirmed belief in the resurrection of Jesus. These figures approximate the levels recorded in 2008, when 56% of both boys and girls

believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. After 2008, however, a marked secularizing trend had been observed, reaching a low point in 2013 when only about 39% of boys and girls expressed belief in the resurrection (Korhonen, 2025). The recent figures therefore suggest a return to earlier levels after a period of decline in that country.

Despite these developments, critics have raised methodological concerns. While the opt-in surveys mentioned attempt to ensure representativeness by matching demographic quotas or applying statistical weighting, many rely on so-called “opt-in” samples. In opt-in surveys, respondents are not randomly selected. Instead, participants are recruited through mechanisms such as online advertising, self-enrollment, or email lists, and individuals volunteer to take part. Critics argue that this recruitment method may limit the extent to which findings can be generalized to the broader population.

Not all scholars interpret recent developments as evidence of a Christian revival. British social scientist David Voas (University College London) has pointed out that church attendance rates in the UK still remain below pre-pandemic levels. Data from the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, based on a random sample of approximately 3,000 respondents, comparable in methodological rigor to the Pew Research Center’s approach, show no clear sign of a revival. Among all adult respondents, the proportion who both identify as Christian and attend church at least once a month declined from 12% in 2018 to 9% in 2024 (Hackett, 2026).

Similar patterns appear in the UK Labour Force Survey (LFS), which surveys around 20,000 randomly selected households. Because households are randomly selected and individuals cannot apply to participate, this is not an opt-in survey. According to LFS data, among 18–34-year-olds the share identifying as Christian fell from 37% in early 2018 to 28% in 2025 (Hackett, 2026).

A similar note of caution has been expressed in the United States. Ryan Burge, a Protestant pastor and political scientist, argues that reversing long-term religious decline, especially given generational replacement, would require a massive shift. He estimates that roughly 10 million Millennials would need to reaffiliate with religion, followed by another 18 million members of Generation Z, in order to offset demographic trends (Burge, 2025).

Taken together, the evidence suggests that current signals of revival remain tentative and contested. Methodological differences produce markedly different results, and it is likely that a clearer picture will only emerge over the coming years. Regardless of whether a revival is underway, several important trends can already be identified and merit closer examination.

One notable trend highlighted in the Pew Religious Landscape Study (RLS) is the relative strength of more conservative Christian denominations in recent years. In the United States, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), which represents the more conservative branch of the Presbyterian tradition, experienced a 31% increase in membership in recent years and has maintained a compound annual growth rate of 2.2% since 1980 (Burge, 2025).

The RLS data also indicate that the long-term decline in Christian identification is not evenly distributed across the political spectrum. The decrease has been significantly more pronounced among political liberals than among conservatives, suggesting that religious disaffiliation is closely

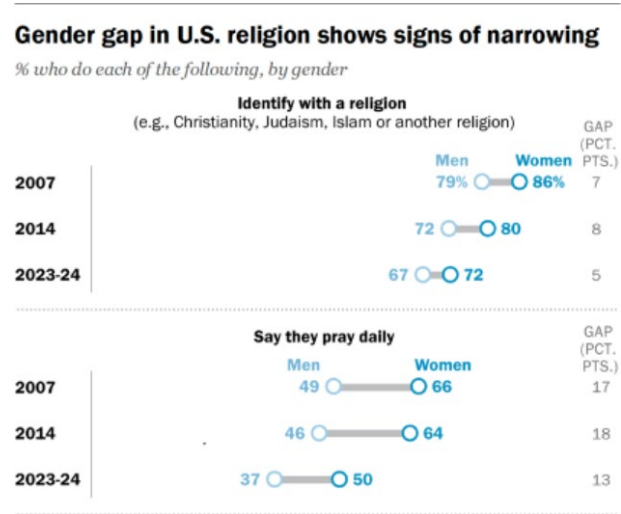


intertwined with broader cultural and ideological shifts, which is coherent to the idea of a possible connection between the political New Right trend and the spread of narratives relating the preservation of or conversion to Christian faith.

Long-term decline in Christianity is much more pronounced among political liberals than conservatives								
% of U.S. adults who ...								
Among ...	... are Christian				... are religiously unaffiliated			
	2007	2014	2023-24	Change between 2007 and 2023-24	2007	2014	2023-24	Change between 2007 and 2023-24
Men	74%	66%	59%	-15 pct. pts.	20%	27%	31%	+11 pct. pts.
Women	82	75	66	-16	13	19	27	+14
White	78	70	62	-16	16	24	31	+15
Black	85	79	73	-12	12	18	22	+10
Hispanic	84	77	67	-17	14	20	27	+13
Asian	45	34	33	-12	23	31	33	+10
College graduate	73	64	58	-15	17	24	31	+14
Less than college	80	73	64	-16	16	22	29	+13
Northeast	76	65	58	-18	16	25	30	+14
Midwest	80	73	64	-16	16	22	30	+14
South	83	76	68	-15	13	19	25	+12
West	71	64	55	-16	21	28	35	+14
Conservative	89	85	82	-7	9	11	13	+4
Liberal	62	52	37	-25	27	36	51	+24
Moderate	77	69	61	-16	17	25	30	+13

Graph 5: Decline in Christianity across political positions in the USA. Source: Pew Research Center, 2025.

Another important issue in discussions about a possible Gen Z revival concerns the aforementioned gender differences. Regarding the United States, the Pew RLS includes a chart indicating that, considering all generations alive, women have shown higher levels of Christian identification and religious activity than men, however, such gap has been narrowing over time. According to analysis by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), this narrowing is largely due to declining religiosity among young women rather than increasing religiosity among young men, which could be explained by the theoretical framework developed in the previous section. Between 2013 and 2024, the proportion of religiously unaffiliated among women aged 18–29 rose from 29% to 40%, an enormous increase of 11 percentage points, while the corresponding figure for men remained relatively stable at around 36% (Public Religion Research Institute, 2025).



Graph 6: Religious gender gap in the USA. Source: Pew Research Center, 2025.

In sum, Strong generational gaps persist, and demographic replacement alone could continue to reduce overall affiliation dramatically. At the same time, denominational shifts, political polarization in religious decline, and gender dynamics indicate that even if a revival is emerging, it is uneven, socially patterned, and far from reversing broader secularization trends.

6. *Challenges and conclusions*

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge two principal limitations of this study. First, a comprehensive investigation into the actual impact of the *Christpill* phenomenon on real-life religious conversions is still lacking. Second, the data compiled for this research is limited to a selection of significant countries and does not encompass the entirety of Christian-majority nations or Christian minorities worldwide. Nevertheless, the information collected allows us to identify six major challenges arising from the *Christpill* phenomenon that should be addressed by religious authorities as well as by other decision-makers concerned with the social and civic life of Christian societies. The first challenge is that the *Christpill* phenomenon highlights one of the most serious issues affecting current generations in the Western hemisphere: the loss of meaning and the growing need for spirituality. This existential void is often filled by a wide variety of practices and beliefs, some of them highly unconventional or eccentric. The urgent desire for religious life among younger generations represents both an opportunity and a risk for the Christian worldview. On the one hand, it creates openness to renew religious commitment; on the other, insufficient or misguided learning of Christian doctrine may lead to significant misunderstandings when it is not guided by sound teaching. In this sense, the greater the absence of faith in post-secular societies, the more extreme or extravagant the positions that may be adopted by individuals who feel deprived of meaning.

The second challenge is closely related to the first and concerns the superficial nature of Christian learning as conveyed through both types of *Christpill* media, influencers and memes. The oversimplification of Christian doctrine can be explained by the very ontology of digital media, the decentralized performance-driven logic of influencers, and the postmodern character of meme production and dissemination. All these factors tend to reduce religious content to consumable digital stimuli, encouraging the adoption of a performative Christian identity that is often aimed at satisfying immediate psychological needs rather than fostering the genuine transmission of Christ's message.

The third challenge concerns the broader crisis of authority, a defining feature of the postmodern era that affects all forms of institutional legitimacy. In the case of religious authority, the decentralization and horizontal diffusion of Christian content through influencers and memes results in a de facto "protestantization" of Christian learning, whereby doctrine becomes open to individual interpretation and selective appropriation. This dynamic allows users to embrace only those aspects of Christianity that are personally comfortable or convenient. In this context, it becomes necessary for established religious authorities to reaffirm and strengthen their traditional role of authority, credibility, and legitimacy.

The fourth challenge concerns the political instrumentalization of Christianity for partisan purposes, a tendency most visible within sectors of the contemporary Western new right. In this context, Christianity is reduced to a form of local support for specific parties and political leaders,

a reduction that is often encouraged by those same actors and their sympathizers, at times reaching positions that approach heretical limits. Such a process forms part of the broader loss of the authentic meaning of spirituality, which is replaced by its transformation into a merely performative identity. This does not imply that Christians should remain silent or passive in the face of abuse, censorship, or persecution, particularly when these occur under progressivist or leftist governments, nor that they should refrain from engaging in public debates on issues such as abortion, gender ideology, or the defense of the rights of workers and the poor. However, it remains necessary to exercise discernment in temporal and political matters, maintaining spiritual conscience at a distinct and higher level that must not be subordinated to partisan interests.

The fifth challenge concerns the so-called “gender gap,” namely the unprecedented increase in disbelief among women, especially within younger generations. Contemporary waves of feminism not only promote sexual liberation, abortion, and the rejection of the Christian understanding of femininity but also seek to discard all essentialist conceptions of gender grounded in classical anthropological thought. This tendency has been reinforced by the convergence between the *Christpill* phenomenon and masculinist online communities, producing a vicious cycle of mutual rejection between the sexes. Within this dynamic, Christianity risks becoming conceptually confined to an exclusively masculine framework, one that is portrayed as demanding the total subjugation of women and their exclusion from social life.

The sixth challenge lies in the excessive confidence with which some analysts interpret recent data suggesting that Millennials and members of Generation Z are rediscovering Christianity. As shown by available data from Europe and the United States, the decline in religious belief may have slowed, but the figures remain far from indicating any true reversal of the long-term processes of secularization and atheization in Western societies. This situation must be considered alongside two aggravating factors. First, the speculative superficiality of digital media-driven conversions, as previously discussed. Second, the demographic replacement of the more religious generations projecting a long-term decline in Christianity in the West.

All these challenges converge on the question of what should properly be understood as a revival, particularly in religious terms. This necessarily involves reflecting on the distinction between quantity and quality. Christian revival is often measured in quantitative terms, such as the number of people attending church or receiving baptism, rather than in qualitative terms, such as the depth of understanding of Christian doctrine or the authenticity of faith a changed life in Christ. While numerical growth is undoubtedly significant, qualitative formation is fundamental. An increase in numbers accompanied by a low level of doctrinal understanding or genuine belief risks producing a false perception of the real condition of Christianity.

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