

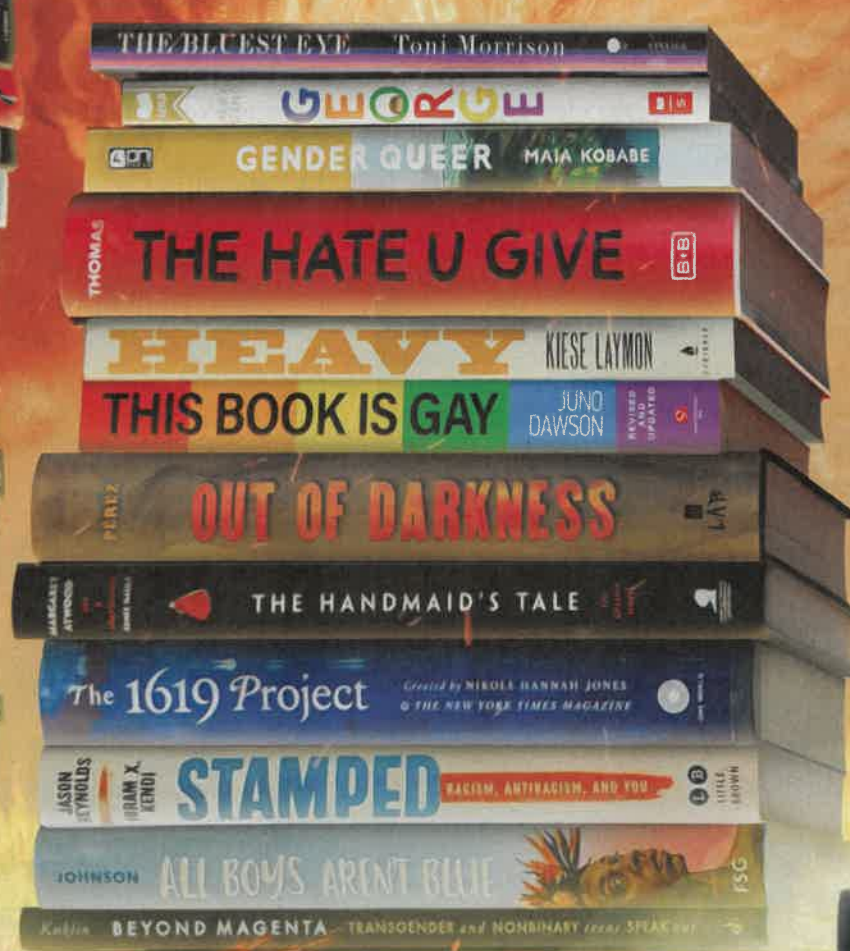
PW

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY®

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Shaping the Future

Religion publishers aim to jump-start critical conversations in 2023

By Emma Wenner

What do climate change, Christian nationalism, and spiritual wellness all have in common? They are the most prevalent topics among new religion and spirituality books publishing throughout 2023.

Explorations of each subject are part of greater efforts to start conversations and even answer some of today's hardest questions, according to publishers in the category.

Discussing a general attitude of the current moment, Jenn Gott, v-p and publisher of HarperCollins Christian Publishing's gift books division, says, "We are coming out of a time of rampant anxiety and fear." Noting that titles on the publisher's frontlist are specifically designed to be evergreen, she adds, "Our books acknowledge the stress that the world holds—and provide meaningful inspiration, and often practical guidance, to living in an unpredictable world."

Interest in how religion intersects with care for the Earth is not new, but it is ever increasing as weather patterns worsen and global temperatures rise. Matt Zepelin, acquisitions editor at Buddhist press Shambhala, points out that fear and anxiety compound concerns for the environment today. "With younger folks experiencing unprecedented rates of mental health issues, not least due to the climate crisis, we're looking for writers who can speak with daring and nuance to the spiritual and emotional needs of millennial and Gen Z readers," he says. "I think we'll continue to see Buddhist books that help people cope with climate grief and anxiety, thereby relieving suffering and promoting eco-friendly action."

Religion has also long played a role in politics, and Ethan McCarthy, associate editor at IVP, expects a need to publish titles to reflect contemporary issues. "The coming election cycle is going to keep political questions of various kinds in the front of people's minds, and the ongoing Christian nationalism discussions are in need of careful engagement," McCarthy says. "At the same time, we want to avoid being too reactionary, or letting the market drive our publishing program. We want to try to set the conversation in thoughtful ways, not just follow trends or try to catch waves."

At Broadleaf, acquisitions editor Weaver-Zercher says she's most excited about upcoming books by "journalists, pastors, therapists, activists, and thinkers who illuminate the world, question its systems, and paint rich portraits of its inhabitants." Broadleaf's frontlist for 2023 includes titles "in categories spanning religion and spirituality, personal development, and social justice" that offer an "immense moral vision and commitment to telling important stories in captivating, immersive ways."

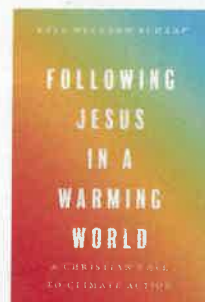
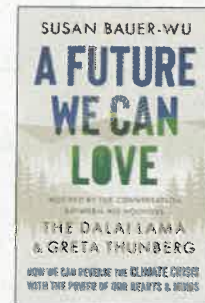
Taking on a changing climate

Books on the relationship between faith and care for the Earth will multiply in the months to come. "The planet is in crisis, people are feeling this deeply, yet so many of us are afraid to talk about it or don't know how," Shambhala's Zepelin says. Shambhala is offering *A Future We Can Love: How We Can Reverse the Climate Crisis with the Power of Our Hearts and Minds* by Susan Bauer-Wu (June), which features contributions from the Dalai Lama and Greta Thunberg. "As two leaders of very different ages and backgrounds committed to the protection, healing, and flourishing of Earth and all its beings, their coming together shines a very special light in the darkness and makes the conversation more inviting," Zepelin says.

Also from Shambhala, *How to Live in a Chaotic Climate: 10 Steps to Reconnect with Ourselves, Our Communities, and Our Planet* by LaUra Schmidt, Aimee Lewis Reau, and Chelsie Rivera (Aug.) introduces 30 practices—including journaling, dancing through grief, and loving-kindness meditations—intended to help readers cope with "eco-anxiety" and other challenging emotions, according to the publisher.

Coming from IVP in February, *Following Jesus in a Warming World: A Christian Call to Climate Action* by Kyle Meyaard-Schaap demonstrates how Christians can lessen the suffering of those impacted by pollution, deadly disasters, and other results of climate change. IVP's McCarthy describes the book as "a hopeful vision for convicted climate action, not out of a misplaced hope to somehow 'save the world' but as a function of our love for the world as faithful disciples of Jesus."

Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: Peace, Reconciliation, and Care for Creation (Notre Dame Univ., Apr.) addresses climate change as well as ecumenical dialogue, human rights, and more in 11 collected statements of the 270th archbishop of Constantinople. Author and theologian John Chrystavgis edited the volume, which features an



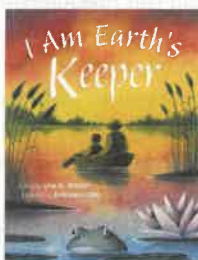
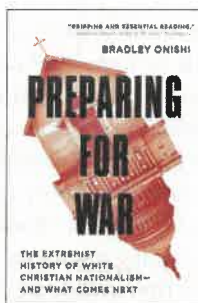
introduction by John I. Jenkins, president of the University of Notre Dame. “Patriarch Bartholomew has a way of awakening his listener and reader to empathy but also, and crucially, to action,” Jenkins writes. “He is, in that way, not only a spiritual leader, a moral force, but also a global educator of souls.”

Climate Change and Original Sin: The Moral Ecology of John Milton’s Poetry by Katherine Cox (Univ. of Virginia, June) explores Milton’s view that environmental problems were initiated by human sin, and that “fearsome spiritual agents” such as storms and earthquakes are a penalty for those sins, according to the publisher. The book also offers a look at how notions of climate and climate change have developed since the 17th century.

Paraclete is offering a rhyming call to action for children in *I Am Earth’s Keeper* by Lisa M. Hendey (Feb.). Featuring illustrations by Italian artist Giuliano Ferri, the picture book encourages readers to treasure all life around them and imagine ways to care for the natural world.

Understanding Christian nationalism

Among several upcoming books on politics and religion, three delve specifically into the past, present, and future of Christian



nationalism, including efforts to pass laws that reflect such a view of Christianity and its role in political and social life. *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism—and What Comes Next* by Bradley Onishi (Broadleaf, Jan.) traces the Christian nationalism movement—which the author calls the new religious right—from Southern California during the 1960s and ’70s to now, in places like Idaho and neighboring states.

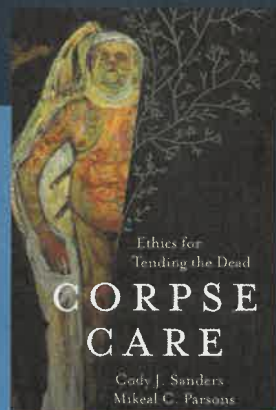
Onishi, a religion scholar and former evangelical, and a Japanese American who grew up in white churches, wrote the book in response to the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. The book strives to expose the “hidden history of how the disturbing logic and misplaced nostalgia of various iterations of white Christianity wedded itself to nationalism and racism and xenophobia, culminating in the January 6 insurrection,” says Weaver-Zercher at Broadleaf. She adds,

“Readers who are still trying to figure out the shape and heft of white Christian nationalism, and where it might be headed, will want to read this.”

Also in January, Eerdmans is publishing what it describes as “a polemic against white Christian nationalism in 21st-century

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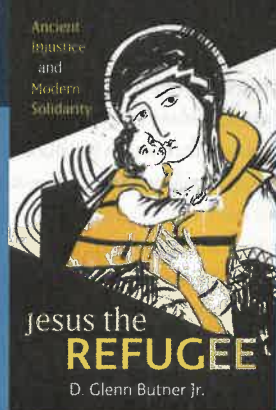
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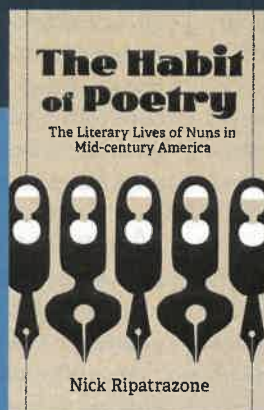
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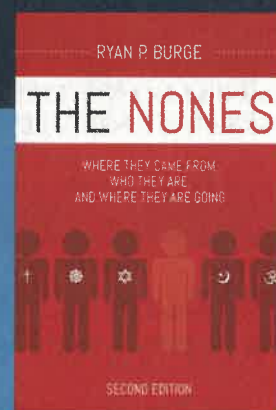
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America” in *Resisting Apartheid America: Living the Badass Gospel* by Miguel A. De La Torre. The book examines systemic racism in both American politics and Christianity, and charts a rise in political violence. De La Torre, a professor of social ethics and Latinx studies at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, is the author of more than 40 books, including most recently *Decolonizing Christianity: Becoming Badass Believers*. “With an eye on the past, this book clearly sees we are heading toward the reemergence of a violent apartheid society,” he writes in *Resisting Apartheid America*. “It not only seeks to understand this phenomenon but engages in its resistance.”



In another look at history, *Christian Nationalism and the Birth of the War on Drugs* (NYU, July), by religious studies professor Andrew Monteith, chronicles how American Protestants began to link drug use with immorality over a century before Nixon declared there to be a war on drugs. The author urges readers to recognize the religious origins of that war and reconsider the damages the conflict has caused.

Strengthening the spirit

Spiritual growth is an evergreen topic for publishers in the religion category, and 2023 is no exception. Several books focus on empowerment through emotional healing, health and wellness practices, and community building as sources for fortifying one’s faith. Among these titles are direct responses to the social injustices and political strife of today, such as in *Sage, Huntress, Lover, Queen: Access Your Power and Creativity Through Sacred Female Archetypes* (Inner Traditions, July), by yoga and meditation teacher Mara Branscombe. The book explores seven feminine archetypes that appear in the modern psyche, and it “is for all readers ready to ignite potent transformation within,” Branscombe says. “The path of the new feminine way is a shift away from our current political, social, and economical structures. To read this book with an open, curious mind is an act of both compassion and courage.”



From Weiser, *Heal the Witch Wound: Reclaim Your Magic and Step into Your Power* by Celeste Larson (Apr.) features rituals, journal prompts, affirmations, and other tools aimed at helping pagans, energy workers, occultists, and other spiritual individuals find a way forward after experiencing marginalization or shame for their beliefs. *The Book of Common Courage* (HarperCollins Gift, Jan.) by therapist KJ Ramsey collects the prayers, poems, and blessings geared toward readers “walking through seasons when hope feels hard,” according to Gott, HCCP Gift’s publisher. It represents what the publisher is looking for most in forthcoming books: “Real stories that illuminate real experiences, infused with hope and beauty,” Gott says.

More to come

Looking beyond 2023, publishers anticipate a greater number of books that call on readers to find courage and take action in countless areas, including climate care and politics.

“It will be really interesting to see how Buddhist writers, younger ones especially, position themselves as climate change continues to worsen—a situation that calls for both deep acknowledgement of what’s already happened and urgent action to prevent the most tragic outcomes,” Shambhala’s Zepelin says. “We see no end to the need for books that offer the opportunity for individual spiritual development that matures into wise social engagement.”

At Broadleaf, Weaver-Zercher notes, “White Christian nationalism will remain a force to be reckoned with in our politics and common life for the foreseeable future, and understanding its logics and longings will help us figure out how to respond to it.” ■