

## **Biden presidency highlights Catholic politics and political significance**

President Biden's publicly visible faith and the polarized views of him among American Catholics reflect both a struggle within the faith over its direction and a political struggle over the Catholic vote. In a feature article in *Time* magazine (April 12/April 19), Brian Bennett notes that while they were formerly a reliably Democratic constituency, growing divisions among Catholics have made them a key target for both major parties, with Republicans seeking to win over Hispanic Catholics in particular as part of their effort to expand their voter base beyond older whites. This is part of the reason Biden has been trying to strengthen ties to Catholic faith-based organizations by making the case that his administration has been working on behalf of favored policies like alleviating poverty, aiding refugees, and stopping executions. Catholics made up 20 percent of voters in the 2020 election and roughly half voted for Biden.

While claiming to separate his personal beliefs from his policies in the case of abortion and LGBT rights, Biden is much more public about his Catholic identity than was President John F. Kennedy, his one Catholic predecessor. His reliance on his faith as a personal resource and moral guide is readily evident in his regular and longstanding devotional practices (as well as his overcoming the tragic losses of his first wife and two children), and he publicly avows it. But combined with his support for some policies opposed to church doctrine, Bennett writes that many top bishops and conservative Catholics see him as embodying "a more liberal version of the faith that poses a threat to the future of the church in America." Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, who has suggested Biden should be denied Communion for his stance on abortion, reflected a cynical view of his visible personal faith, accusing him of "attempting to confuse people about Catholic teaching by trampling on the sanctity of human life while presenting himself as a devout Catholic." Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez, head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said that the contradiction between Biden's outward faith and policy positions "creates confusion among the faithful about what the church actually teaches on these questions."

With the church in America having suffered a net loss of five million members over the last decade, according to Pew, these views reflect conservatives' diagnosis of the exodus as due to a



Source: Eric Haynes (Creative Commons).

lack of clarity in church teachings. Liberals, on the other hand, believe the church has not been evolving quickly enough. Biden's type of approach highlighting the valuable role of faith in one's life has been embraced by Pope Francis as a way to make the church more relevant in a changing world. Notwithstanding the criticism he has received from conservatives, some members of Biden's inner circle think his sincere personal devotion could bring more American Catholics to the church and help them find common ground.

But while Biden's Catholicism is distinct, it is also part of a religious left with different expressions—from Barack Obama's mainline Protestantism to the black-church liberation theology of newly elected Georgia senator, Raphael Warnock, not to mention progressive forms of Judaism, Islam, and alternative spiritualities. *The New Republic* (April 15) notes that one of the persistent challenges for the religious left is "navigating such a motley assortment of faiths while recognizing that spiritual sustenance and political perseverance often come from plumbing the depths of a tradition." For instance, Warnock's black liberationist faith and activism may have helped mobilize the religious black electorate, but his spiritual appeal is "rooted in a particularistic faith that can't necessarily scale up into a force capable of wielding the influence" of anything like the postwar ecumenical religious consensus of the 1950s, or even the civil religion of the early 1960s and the civil rights movement. "A campaign like Warnock's, by contrast, took place in the midst of religious fragmentation and disaffiliation—the rise of the nones, the spiritual but not religious," Matthew Sitman writes. Thus, Biden's liberal Catholicism and these other streams of the religious left not only have to contend with each other but "operate in tandem with a broad liberal left that is rapidly secularizing." —*This article was written with Brian Bartholomew, RW's copy editor*

## Choral music's road to recovery long and uncertain

Choirs were one of the first casualties of the pandemic, and both their potential for being superspreaders and their loss of status in churches will likely prevent their full restoration in American religious life anytime soon. The *New York Times Magazine* (April 1) chronicles the story of one chorus in Washington state that was said to be one of the first superspreaders in the early days of Covid, while also describing how religious and secular choral music has been affected by the pandemic. In general, church-based choirs have fared better than more independent secular choruses, but a survey of 337 choruses by Chorus America found that half had seen their budgets drop by at least 40 percent. Even with wide vaccine distribution, Chorus America does not yet support large, unmasked gatherings. And even before the pandemic, choirs were being phased out by many churches and replaced by pop-inspired praise bands.

Craig Adams of the Gospel Music Association says that some “church pastors in the evangelical church have seen this as an opportunity during the pandemic to go ahead and make that move, make that switch [away from choirs].” He adds that the response has been divided between congregants who find choirs “culturally irrelevant” and those who value them as integral to the church and its theology. The way that Covid has affected African American and other minority



Photograph by William Swartz, Denver, Colorado USA (Creative Commons).



communities more than others will also affect “what kinds of choral music come back and when,” writes Kim Tingley. The National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, with 1,200 mostly African American members, canceled its national conference this year and last, and is actively seeking alternatives to in-person performances, since many members are elderly and not eager to move back into live settings. The group, like other choirs and choruses, has introduced remote socials and recorded presentations, as well as offering advice to choir leaders on precautionary measures against the virus.

## Slavic evangelicals undergo generational transition and target America for revival

In a reverse mission strategy, Russian and other Slavic evangelical churches are growing in the U.S. as they reach beyond their immigrant base and seek to bring revival to other Americans, writes Adam Morris in *Charisma* magazine (April). Across the country, “pockets of Slavic Christians are building churches and spreading the gospel from their new home base. Most of them are Pentecostal or Baptist. The highest concentrations of Russian-speaking believers are in Jacksonville, Florida; Sacramento, California; Seattle; Boston; Philadelphia; St. Louis; and Dallas.” Morris writes that the enthusiasm and seriousness of these Slavic evangelicals have inspired their American counterparts, who have faced discouragement given the effects of Covid and the aftermath of the 2020 elections, especially as they have found growth through conversions rather than transferring believers from one church to another. One church leader from Belarus at Philadelphia’s 800-strong Word of Life Church says that “Slavic churches can pray for hours without music and a cozy atmosphere,” and that they focus on prayer and action.

The Slavic churches are undergoing a succession of leadership as the older leaders who experienced communism are retiring. Most of the churches planted in the U.S. by Slavic evangelicals in the 1980s and 1990s are undergoing this transition, and the process has been marked by tension and conflict. But the younger generation that was born in the U.S. tends to combine the fervor of the older generation, with its emphasis on miracles and deliverance from demons, with its own experiences of the spirituality and faith of the American church, Morris writes. Young leaders like Meesh Fomenko, Vlad Savchuk, and Andrey Shapoval emphasize both the freedom of



Source: *Vernon Morning Star*.

American churches and the passion of the Slavic churches. Shapoval's annual Kingdom Domain conference serves as a hub for these young Slavic American leaders.

(*Charisma*, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746)

## CURRENT RESEARCH

● **The case of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick's sexual abuse, and its cover-up by his fellow bishops and clerics, reflects less a singular instance of clerical misbehavior than a vulnerable episcopal system in which "bad actors find it more or less easy to operate, survive, and thrive."** So write sociologist Stephen Bullivant and psychologist Giovanni Radhitio Putra Sadewo in the *Catholic Herald* (April 18), based on their study of episcopal networks surrounding McCarrick. The former archbishop of Washington, DC, McCarrick is the most prominent church leader to be charged with sex abuse in recent years, even as he enjoyed widespread acceptance and respect from the Vatican (where he served in various positions) and the American Catholic leadership. Bullivant and Sadewo describe overlapping webs of associations among the episcopal subordinates in the "serving networks" of McCarrick and his mentors, New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman (who has been accused of abuse himself) and Cardinal Terence Cooke. This doesn't mean that all of the bishops in these networks were complicit or even knowledgeable of McCarrick's (or Spellman's) actions, although several were.



Theodore Cardinal McCarrick (source: World Economic Forum, 2008 - Creative Commons).

Bullivant and Sadewo write that these serving networks show the "relative ease with which a single, influential kingmaker—a McCarrick, that is—can 'stack the episcopate.' Many of these will, inevitably, be his own protégés and favorites, who are in turn more likely to help out their fellows, and to have a collective stake in protecting their patron, whether from loyalty or naked self-interest." The authors point to the recent investigations into Michael Bransfield, the ex-bishop in West Virginia who was expelled for allegations of sexual abuse, as supportive of the

patterns they outline. He was also a protégé of McCarrick, who performed his consecration as bishop. Bullivant and Sadewo conclude by warning readers to “make no mistake, McCarrick wasn’t the first, and we strongly doubt Bransfield will be the last.”

(*Catholic Herald*, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/how-mccaricks-happen/>)

● **In the largest study conducted to date on vaccine acceptance and religious groups, a Public Religion Research Institute survey finds that faith-based influences are present in varying degrees among vaccine-hesitant communities.** The survey found more than one in four (26 percent) of those Americans who are hesitant to get a Covid-19 vaccine, and even eight percent of those who are resistant to getting the vaccine, reporting that a “faith-based approach” supporting vaccinations might get them to change their position. These approaches included a religious leader encouraging acceptance of vaccines, congregational forums on the issue, a congregation serving as a vaccine site, and a fellow believer receiving the vaccine. Such approaches might be especially relevant to Protestants, who have higher rates of vaccine hesitancy and refusal. Hispanic Protestants are particularly likely to be vaccine hesitant and resistant (42 percent and 15 percent, respectively), but nearly three in ten white evangelical Protestants (28 percent) are vaccine hesitant, and an additional one in four (26 percent) are resistant to getting a vaccine shot. Black Protestants are divided along similar lines (with 32 percent hesitant and 19 percent resistant). But church attendance plays different roles among black and white evangelical Protestants. Among blacks, attending religious services is positively correlated with vaccine acceptance, while only 43 percent of white evangelical Protestants who attend religious services frequently are vaccine accepters compared to 48 percent who attend less frequently.

*Religion Unplugged* (April 22) reports that the organization Data for Progress has been polling on vaccine acceptance by faith tradition since January, asking respondents if they had received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. While the share of the American public receiving at least one dose just about doubled every month as the vaccines were rolled out and became more widely available, disparities emerge when the sample is broken down into the three largest religious groups, white evangelicals, white Catholics, and the religiously unaffiliated. Ryan Burge



Source: Qapta.es.



notes that “white Christians were significantly more likely to get the vaccine than the general public between January and April. In the latest wave of the survey, nearly 60 percent of white Catholics had been vaccinated and just about half of white evangelicals said the same. It was the religious ‘nones’ that were lagging far behind, with only 31 percent indicating that they had received one dose.” This is in contrast to the 44 percent of the general public that reported getting at least one dose by April. Of course, the nones are a diverse group, made up of atheists, agnostics, and those indicating that their religious affiliation is “nothing in particular,” and the latter’s vaccination rate in particular has lagged behind the general public’s, with only 28 percent having received at least one dose by April, compared to 40 percent of atheists and agnostics. Among those Americans who have not been vaccinated yet, the overall share saying they are unlikely to ever get the vaccine has increased, up to 53 percent by April, and when it comes to religious tradition, there seems to be little significant variation in this hesitancy. “Taken together, there’s not compelling evidence here that any religious factor is either driving up or tamping down willingness to get the vaccine,” Burge writes.

(The Public Religion Research Institute’s survey can be downloaded at: <https://www.prri.org/research/prri-ifyc-covid-vaccine-religion-report>; *Religion Unplugged*, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/4/22/data-shows-evangelicals-and-catholics-more-likely-to-get-vaccine-than-nones-and-general-public>)

● **A new study published in the journal *Social Forces*, based on data from over 20,000 United Methodist congregations between 1990 and 2010, finds that racial diversity inside a church is associated with higher average attendance, especially when the church is located in a white neighborhood.** The study finds that while the United Methodist Church is



Source: Harbor Genesis Christian College.

predominantly white, its racially diverse congregations show more vitality than its white churches, even though the denomination as a whole is experiencing declining attendance. “If the Methodist pattern is true of other denominations, pursuing racial diversity is a strategy for growth,” said Kevin Dougherty, associate professor of sociology at Baylor University and the lead author of the study. Since the 1970s, church growth specialists have held that successful churches are racially and culturally homogeneous, and even more recent studies have found that attracting and keeping a mix of different races within a congregation can be challenging.

●**The changing relationship between religion and politics may be a significant driver in the growth of African Americans who are abandoning organized religion, writes sociologist Musa al-Gharbi on *Interfaith America* (April 16), the website of the Interfaith Youth Core.** Since recent studies have shown that unaffiliated African Americans continue to hold religious beliefs and even engage in religious practices much more than their white “none” counterparts, why are they leaving religious institutions in the first place? Al-Gharbi writes that “non-black Americans tend to be much more insistent in a separation between religion and politics. When preachers push political views that are inconsistent with their partisan affiliation, they tend to abandon the faith, and often seem to elevate politics in the aftermath as a replacement for religion. For African Americans, the opposite dynamic seems to be at play—many may be leaving because contemporary black churches are not political enough.” While most blacks are not strongly on board with progressive politics, “they do want their religious leaders and institutions to be out front in helping to address the social problems they have to reckon with in



Source: Black Perspectives.



their day to day lives. Yet, there has been a shift within black churches in recent decades—a pivot away from the social gospel and towards the focus on individual faith and prosperity characteristic of many sectors of white Christianity,” al-Gharbi writes.

As a result of this shift, blacks appear to be increasingly alienated from religion. Such an abdication of leadership on the part of faith leaders “seemed to be particularly acute during the contemporary campaigns for racial justice and the Covid-19 pandemic, leading many to explicitly question the continued relevance of black religious institutions for the times we are living in.” But, interestingly, when blacks leave the church, they become significantly more likely to vote Republican, while whites show an opposite pattern, becoming much more likely to vote Democrat after drifting from religion. “The black church and the Democratic Party have long been strange bedfellows – and it looks like growing shares of African Americans are losing faith in both institutions, viewing *neither* as sufficiently responsive to their values, priorities and interests.” Religious Americans of most faith traditions have been seen moving towards the GOP over the last four years. But the six-percentage-point drop in religious affiliation among African Americans may also help explain the significant gains Republicans made among voters of color in 2020—even if the GOP seems to have taken up a “strategy of attempting to suppress or neutralize our votes,” al-Gharbi concludes.

(*Interfaith America*, <https://ifyc.org/article/black-americans-crave-deeper-integration-religion-and-politics>)

- **The share of atheists in Russia has doubled over the past four years, reports Victoria Ryabikova in *Russia Beyond* (April 15).**

According to an opinion poll by the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM), the proportion of atheists has grown from 7 percent in 2017 to 14 percent in 2021. However, 66 percent of Russians still consider themselves to be Orthodox, with the percentage being higher among those over age 35. Seventeen percent report attending religious services during the period of Great Lent before Easter. And while a number of young people turn to atheism, there are also some who turn away from atheism to faith, Ryabikova remarks. Nevertheless, the apparent relatively rapid increase in the percentage of atheists deserves attention. Many among those who are older admit that the legacy of the Soviet period with its



Source: Atheist Republic.

atheist propaganda has contributed to shaping their beliefs. For younger people, on the other hand, the embrace of atheism is a matter of choice, especially when they have been raised in religious families and then given up faith.

Perceived contradictions between science and religion seem to come into play when young people start asking themselves questions. Other people are reported to resent the public role and influence of the Orthodox Church. An expert on religious affairs, Vyacheslav Terekhov, agrees that a negative image of the church, stemming from media portrayals and state attempts to use it as an ideological tool, is a factor for some people who turn to atheism, but remarks that the growing number of atheists has not reached a critical level and “is not an indicator of the collapse of the church as an institution.” One should wait to see if the trend identified by the recent poll is confirmed. Meanwhile, some priests agree that the new popularity of atheism among segments of the younger population raises a missionary challenge for the church, and stress the need to develop better ways of convincingly presenting the message of Orthodoxy beyond broadcasting religious services (360° [in Russian], March 23).

(*Russia Beyond*, <https://www.rbth.com/lifestyle/333670-more-and-more-russians-are-becoming-atheists>)

## Critics of measures against Covid-19 in Germany less Christian than expected

The worldviews supporting protests against measures (such as the compulsory wearing of masks) for preventing the pandemic in Germany appear to be more strongly influenced by alternative religious beliefs than by evangelical and right-wing ones, writes Kai Funkschmidt in *Zeitschrift für Religion und Weltanschauung* (2/2021). Funkschmidt



Frankfurt. Fourth manifestation against the Corona restrictions. June 7, 2020 (source: 7C0 | Flickr - Creative Commons).

summarizes the converging conclusions of two recent, unrelated reports—one (not meant for public release) prepared in November by the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), the

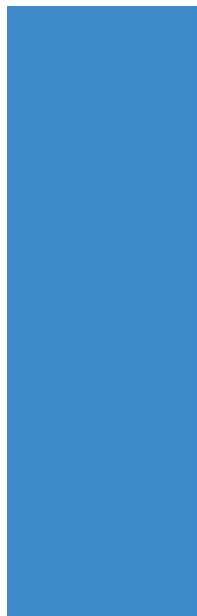
other released in December by a team of sociologists at the University of Basel, Switzerland. The BKA report stresses that the protests gather a heterogeneous political and religious milieu in which a wide range of beliefs and symbols appear.

According to the data gathered by the University of Basel researchers, 23 percent of the German protesters in their sample had voted for the Green Party, 18 percent for the left, and 15 percent for the right-wing AFD in the last German elections. But only 1 percent intended to vote for the Greens and up to 27 percent for the AFD in the next elections, indicating a shift to the right, although it should be added that a striking majority of 61 percent intended to support small, fringe parties. Among Austrian and Swiss protesters, the percentage of those with initial right-wing sympathies was markedly higher. At the religious level, active Christians seemed to make up a small minority among the protesters. On the other hand, there was strong sympathy for holistic and spiritual thought as well as support for alternative healing methods.

(*Zeitschrift für Religion und Weltanschauung*, <https://ezw-berlin.de/>; Oliver Nachtwey, Robert Schäfer, and Nadine Frei, “Politische Soziologie der Corona-Proteste,” December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/zyp3f>)

## Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt seeing steady defections

Egypt's Islamist organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, is facing a pattern of defecting members who are publicly speaking and writing about the group and facing few restrictions in doing so, writes Mustafa Menshawy in the journal *Religions* (12). In the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the election of Mohamed Morsi as



the country's president in 2012, the once-powerful Muslim Brotherhood has faced strong restrictions, including violent repression, as well as the defection of members. There have long been defections from the Muslim Brotherhood in its almost 100-year history, often under the penalty of apostasy, but the recent cases have spanned generations and rank-and-file and leadership positions. In an analysis of exiting members' autobiographical writings, which have



gained publicity in Egyptian society in recent years, as well as in-depth interviews with these former members, Menshawy, from the University of Manchester (UK), finds several factors at work in these defections. He finds that disengagement from the movement became easier as members became disillusioned with the political maneuvering of its leaders and were won over by the hopes of the Arab Spring protests and by the realization that there were other Muslim voices and interpretations of Islam. “Furthermore, a part of the change is the shift in accessibility. The Brotherhood can no longer disseminate its dominant ideology across the ranks of what is meant to be a well-organized, hierarchically-shaped movement. Almost 50 percent of its members are ‘inactive,’ according to some estimates.”

(*Religions*, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/3/198>)

### **Female Islamic leaders in Indonesia take on prominence during the Covid-19 crisis**

The pandemic has given female Islamic authorities (*ulama perempuan*) and female religious organizations in Indonesia an opportunity to stand out by developing creative ways of addressing gendered aspects of the crisis, write Mirjam Künkler (Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study)



Source: Aid to the Church in Need.

and Eva F. Nisa (Australian National University) in the Spring 2021 issue of *The Newsletter of the International Institute for Asian Studies* (IIAS). Female representatives of several Muslim organizations have been asked to serve on the national Covid-19 task force and have advocated on issues affecting women. These leaders have paid special attention to the vulnerability of women and girls facing both domestic violence and economic hardship. With the support of female Islamic organizations, they have been eager to provide spiritual and sanitary guidance (informational programs) as well as practical support (e.g., supplying face masks and hand sanitizers, fundraising for those in need, and launching a telephone hotline through the young women's wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, a major Muslim organization).

As everywhere, digital media has become a key communication tool for that work. The authors mention virtual Islamic study gatherings “during which topics are presented through the lens of Islamic gender justice.” There have also been campaigns for boosting people's confidence “by heeding medical protocols and maintaining spirituality through the recitation of prayers.” Moreover, female Islamic leaders and organizations have been active in countering false claims about the disease and have mobilized herbal medicine sellers in remote areas to circulate information on hygiene among poor groups with little access to commercial medicine.

(*International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter*, <https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter>)

## **China brings rural village preservation effort into line with its anti-religious campaign**

China is increasingly targeting rural areas of the country in its anti-religion campaign, according to the newsletter *Bitter Winter* (April 20). Much of this rural crackdown on what is considered illegal religious activities is being conducted through the country's “Beautiful Village” policy, where model rural villages are awarded with this designation if they meet criteria for preserving historic structures and local ecologies. The policy is part of a broader agenda to create a “new socialist countryside” and show foreign countries China's concern for the environment. However, “under the banner\_of preserving history what is really happening is a ‘museumification’ of religious buildings. They are protected or even restored, but holding religious rituals there becomes forbidden, and they are converted into museums, sometimes displaying contents connected with the glories of the local Communist Party, which have nothing to do with the previous functions of the building,” writes Liu Wangmin. “Beautiful Villages” also have to follow the yearly directives of the “Central Documents” of the Ministry of Agriculture, focusing on the three precepts of “listen to the Party, love the Party, and follow the Party.”

Wangmin adds that “Beautiful Villages” are to be free of illegal religious activities. The 2021 Central Document of the Communist Party calls for an intensification of the “crackdown on illegal religious activities in rural areas and overseas religious infiltration activities, and [a] stop

[to] the use of religion to interfere with rural public affairs.” This document calls for the elimination of “feudal superstitions,” a code word for Feng Shui and divination. Such directives are not new, and were also included in the Central Documents of previous years. But Wangmin adds that “legal” religions are also a victim of the Beautiful Village policy. Villagers in the province of Henan told *Bitter Winter* that to be awarded the “Beautiful” designation, “local authorities ask that no religious activity at all survives in the village. One villager reported that some village chiefs in fact cheat and declare that religion has been eradicated in their villages while this is not true.”

(*Bitter Winter*, <https://bitterwinter.org/rural-settlements-ordered-to-intensify-crackdown-on-religion>)



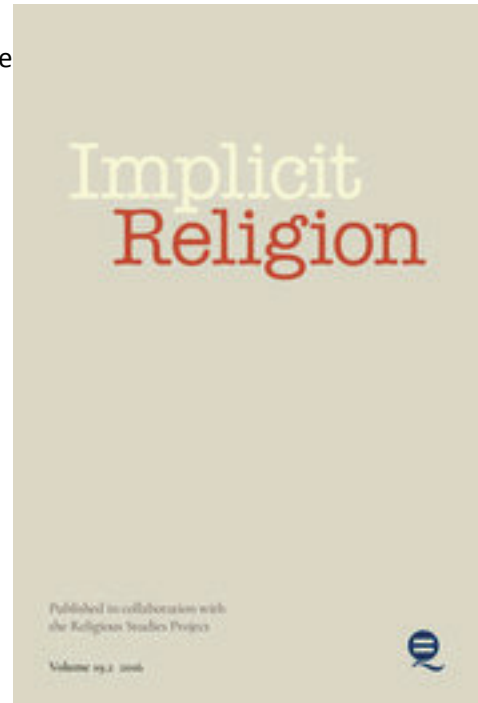
Source: <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1616957>

## Findings & Footnotes

■ The current issue of the journal *Implicit Religion* (23:2) is devoted to “new directions in the study of scientology,” and shows how less attention is being given to the Church of Scientology proper and its decades-long controversies and more to its offshoots, known as the Free Zone, and to non-institutional aspects of the movement. The issue, which is adapted from the proceedings of a conference, opens with



a roundtable discussion between specialists of new religious movements (NRM) covering issues such as the aforementioned non-church kinds of Scientology (the Free Zone is less a movement than a space, often online, of alternative teachings and practices), the church's reluctance to maintain its well-known strategy of suing critics, and the continuing dilemmas of studying a controversial group still considered as a dangerous cult by many. As with many NRM specialists, the participants disagree with the "cult" label given to Scientology and its members, while being critical of the lack of openness by its leaders and incidents of abuse in the church. Many of the contributors engage with the recently published book *Among the Scientologists* by Donald Westbrook, which reflects this newer research agenda. This can be seen in Bernard Doherty's lead article, where he focuses on the religious teachings of Scientology as much as its practices. Respondents to Dougherty's article write on a wide range of issues, including France's longtime crusade against Scientology attempts to reconcile Scientology's scholarly critics with less polemical NRM scholars, while isolating those virulent critics who continue to demonize the religion. *For more information on this issue, visit: <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/IR>*



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

**1) The Archdiocese of Quebec** has recently changed over to "missionary status," a reflection of its declining parishes and numbers, but it is using its designation to stress evangelism and a more countercultural stance. Led by Cardinal Gerald Lacroix, the archdiocese is undergoing a reorientation away from an establishment church model and towards that of a "field hospital" church, which is a model Pope Francis has advocated. The archdiocese has been steadily losing hundreds of churches in recent years, as they are demolished or converted into mixed-use facilities, and the numbers of baptisms has dropped, particularly during the pandemic. The new model would mean fewer Sunday Masses and priests, and "smaller meeting rooms where laypersons would animate the liturgy of the Word and be a sign of God's love for humanity by their personal and collective [action] for the common good," in the words of Frederic Barriault, a researcher at the Jesuit-run Center for Justice and Faith in Montreal. Rather than evangelization in a conservative Catholic mode (as has been advocated under previous papacies), Barriault looks to young people, raised during the rapid secularization of the province, who are "rediscovering the prophetic heritage of Catholic social activists involved in labor, feminist, ecological and decolonial struggles." Even if attendance at Mass is far from the norm, 64 percent of people in Quebec still self-identify as Catholic. (**Source:** *America*, April)



Basilica of Sainte-Anne de Beauré - Quebec, Canada (© 2009 Jeffrey James Pacres | <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jjpacres/3768471950>)

**2)** The proliferation and failure of prophecies recently issued in Pentecostal and charismatic circles has led to the release of a four-page statement of **“prophetic standards”** by a segment of leaders to help correct abuses in the movement.

The failed prophecies have mainly concerned predictions on the re-election of Donald Trump and the failure to foresee the outbreak of Covid-19. The statement, released in late April, is the work of 85 leaders within the “prophet movement,” which teaches that the biblical offices of apostles and prophets are still in existence today. The statement calls for leaders issuing public prophecies to apologize and take responsibility for wrong and misleading prophetic “words.” It



Glasgow  
Prophetic  
Centre

Source: Global Prophetic Alliance.

also calls for prophets to have their prophecies evaluated and to be held accountable by peers in the ministry. Observers say the group issuing the statement, led by evangelist Michael Brown and Bishop Joseph Mattera, took the diplomatic route of not naming names. But the majority of prophetic leaders did not sign on, including the most prominent ones, such as Kenneth Copeland, Cindy Jacobs, and Dutch Sheets. This is not the first attempt to reign in the abuses of the prophetic movement, as similar efforts to increase accountability were tried in the 1990s. Critics of the statement say such an effort will have the effect of boxing in prophecy and over-policing prophets. (Source: *Religion Unplugged*, April 29)

**3)** Through the crowdfunding project **#karavanen**, Salafi Muslims in Sweden are engaging in a novel form of outreach and fundraising. Crowdfunding, a collective effort of many individuals who network and pool their resources to support initiatives started by other groups or people, is a new method of outreach by Muslims. #karavanen is the brainchild of Islam.nu, an organization of Salafi Muslims who seek to spread a “pure” form of Islam throughout Sweden. Islam.nu runs Instagram posts promoting books it publishes and what it calls “convert kits” given to new Muslims, which include a prayer book, hijab (if it is a woman), a prayer rug, and argan oil. The theme of fighting Islamophobia and “hate” is also employed in this campaign. Muslims are asked to support the distribution of new books and the convert kits by contributing money to a direct debit account, to which they can donate on a monthly basis. The campaign has been largely successful, with Islam.nu’s Facebook page said to be getting as many “likes” as the Church of Sweden’s page. The campaign has been successful both in strengthening existing ties among Salafi Muslims and spreading a particular school of Islam among new and old Muslims in Sweden, as well as enlisting other institutions, such as mosques and travel agencies, to distribute the material for them. (Source: *Religions*, issue 12)

