

TEMPLETON REPORT

NEWS FROM THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

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How Global Pentecostalism is Changing the World

By Heather Wax—Special Contributor

A few years ago, social scientists started noticing a trend that religious observers had seen for some time: Membership in Pentecostal churches was growing rapidly, especially in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Russia. Hoping to find out why this was happening—and how this growth was transforming these regions culturally and socially—the Center for Religion & Civic Culture at the University of Southern California launched the

[Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative](#), headed by religion professor Donald Miller and funded by [a \\$7 million grant](#) from the John Templeton Foundation. In 2010, the initiative awarded grants to 21 two-year social science projects. This past May, it invited all of the principal investigators to meet in Quito, Ecuador, to discuss their preliminary findings.

Thus far, the projects have revealed that overall, the growth of Pentecostalism, especially in the Global South, remains phenomenal—and for reasons that have as much to do with sociology as theology.

"From a market perspective, Pentecostalism is outperforming the competition, with contemporary music that attracts young people, an emphasis on supernatural healing, loving and caring cell groups in large congregations, and for migrants from rural areas who are living in urban settings, Pentecostal churches are re-creating intimate social relations that resemble the extended family setting that they left," says Miller. "Also, Pentecostal churches generate hope in the teaching of the pastors and their vibrant worship, which is a precious commodity in today's world, but especially in many developing countries."



Photo: Donald Miller

As the number of Pentecostals and charismatic Christians rises, so does their potential political and social impact. A recent Templeton-funded survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life showed that Pentecostals (considered for [survey](#) purposes as a subset of Evangelicals) are as likely as other Christians to support religious involvement in public life. Miller points out that in "areas like Central America, in Guatemala, El Salvador, maybe a third to a half of the population is either Pentecostal or charismatic, so the idea of Pentecostalism being a small sectarian group, that just isn't true anymore."

"Pentecostalism, in its origin, was very much a sectarian religion," he continues, "oftentimes otherworldly rather than connected with issues within their own society, and within our research projects we've seen many, many examples of Pentecostals engaging the world in terms of social ministries."



Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative

Discussions at the meeting focused, in large part, on themes that cut across the various research projects, such as religious freedom and discrimination.

"There are Pentecostal and charismatic Christians living under all kinds of political regimes and, although the climate may be favorable at the moment, there are those who have scars on them from discrimination inflicted by totalitarian regimes," explains William Kay, a Glyndŵr University theologian who is studying Asian Pentecostal-style church growth.

"We did try to talk about the conditions of religious freedom and the way in which Christians might contribute to political dialogue as a way of ensuring that freedom is constantly maintained. Historically, it is very difficult to see how freedom can be guaranteed in the future because political conditions can and do change, especially in societies that are open to influence from outside."

The John Templeton Foundation supports social science research on the growth and impact of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity because it advances Sir John Templeton's interest in assessing the significance of concepts like worship, spiritual capital, and religious entrepreneurship in contemporary life. What's more, says Kimon Sargeant, Templeton's vice president for human sciences, "we know that the Foundation needs to follow Sir John's example of being a global investor, so this project presented us with a great opportunity to focus on global trends."

Gathering the investigators in Quito underscored the fact that the project is designed to encourage research partnerships between anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and economists around the world.

"It's rare that any discipline has all the answers to questions about the nature of prayer or worship or religious change or entrepreneurship," says Sargeant. "Our experience is that, at their best, interdisciplinary projects increase the likelihood of innovative research and the possibility of genuine breakthrough discoveries."

NOTEBOOK

The Philanthropy Molecule

Scientists have known for some time that the brain hormone oxytocin plays a key role in social bonding. They have also established that oxytocin is correlated with acts of generosity towards other individuals or groups. When you give to a particular person or set of persons, your brain rewards itself with a flush of oxytocin, producing a "warm glow" feeling.

Now, a team led by neuroscientist Paul J. Zak, founding director of the [Center for Neuroeconomic Studies](#), has demonstrated that oxytocin increases generosity even when the giver is not donating to persons, but rather indirectly, via institutions. According to their research, oxytocin did not significantly increase the decision to donate among experimental subjects.

But among those who did give, people treated with oxytocin donated 48 percent more than those given a placebo. The income of the test subjects had nothing to do with the amount they gave.

Zak and his team, whose work on this project was funded by [a \\$1.5 million Templeton grant](#), report that theirs is the first study showing that oxytocin "increases generosity in unilateral exchanges directed toward philanthropic social institutions, as opposed to immediate benefits directed at individuals or groups." Study results appear in the July issue of the scientific journal *Hormones and Behavior*.



Paul J. Zak

Islam vs. Science?

Is Islam against science? A select group of scholars of Islam recently gathered at Cambridge University for a Templeton-sponsored discussion on the heated topic. As Steve Paulson writes in the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#), for the Muslim believers present, the challenge science presents to traditional Islamic beliefs is far from abstract.

"Remember, these are human issues," astrophysicist Nidhal Guessoum, a Templeton Foundation trustee, told Paulson. "It's not an experiment in the lab. I'm talking about my students, my family members, the media discourse that I hear every day on TV, the sermons I hear in the mosque every Friday."

Paulson explains that with 60 percent of the world's Muslims under the age of 30, there is a great deal at stake if young Muslims come to believe that they have to choose between science and their faith.

"If evolution gets associated with atheism, you could alienate an entire generation of Muslims," says Salman Hameed, who directs the new Center for the Study of Science in Muslim Societies, at Hampshire College.

Please note that the Templeton Report will not be published during the month of August.

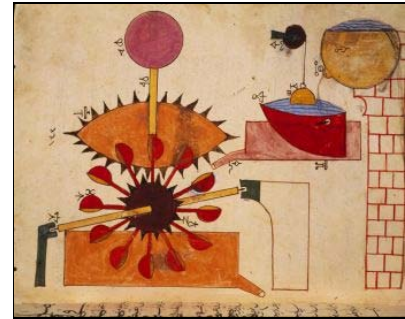


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